

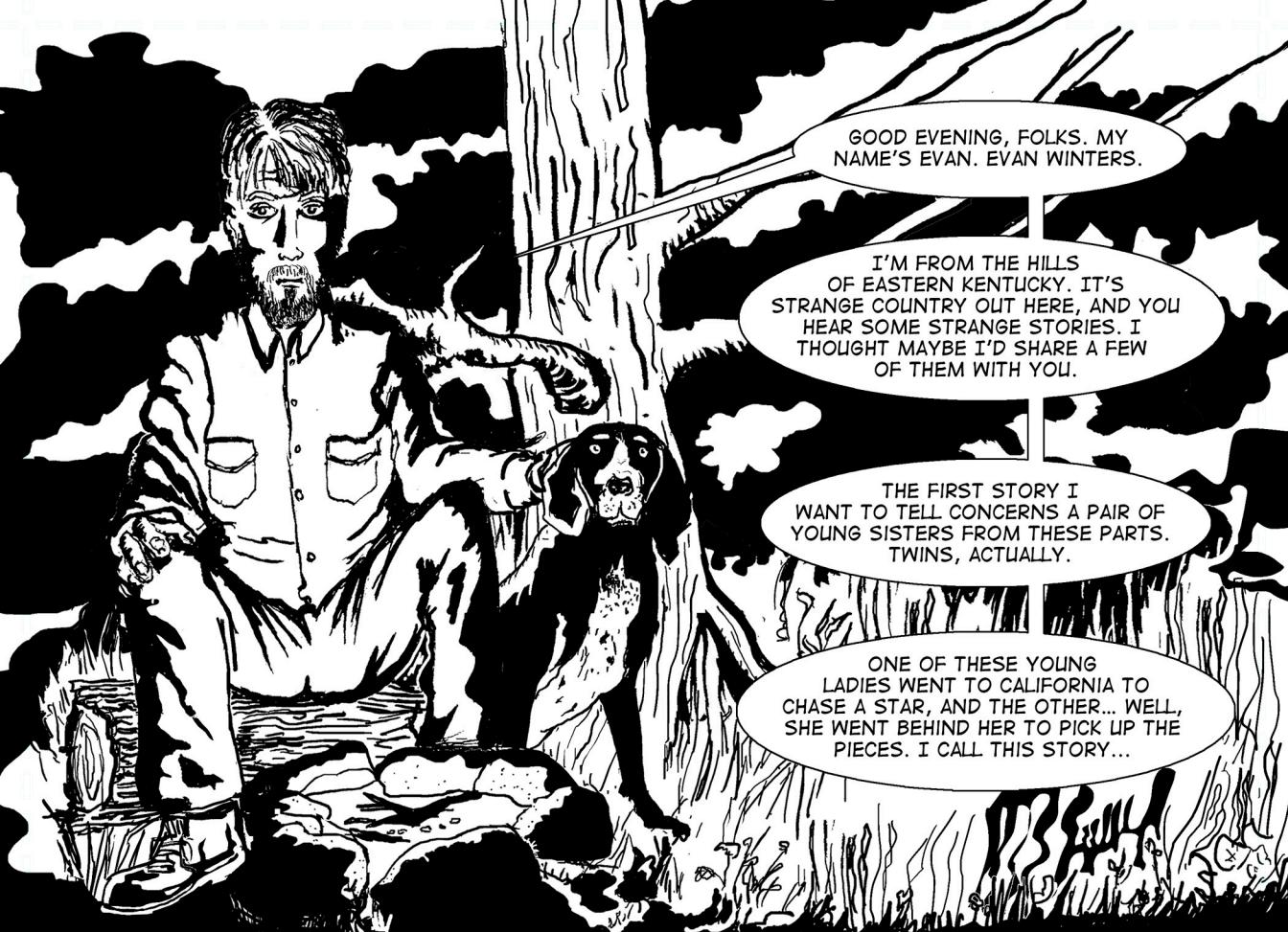
# A WINTERS TALE

-ISSUE ZERO-



STORY  
EVAN  
WINTERS

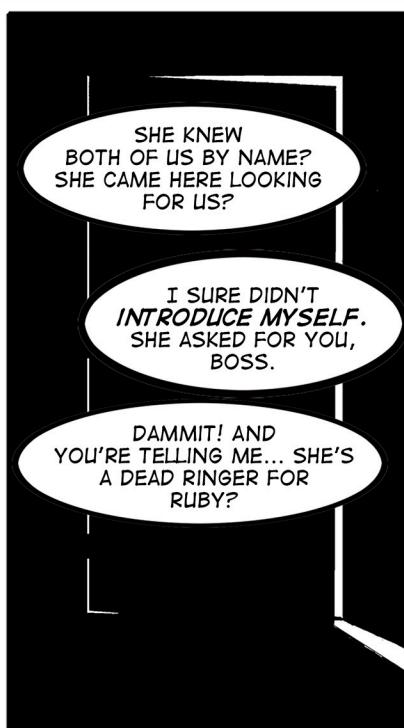
ART  
BRIAN  
HOCEVAR



# THE FAMILY BUSINESS

STORY  
EVAN  
WINTERS

ART  
BRIAN  
HOCEVAR







CAN'T LIE, DARLIN'.  
YOU GOT ME CURIOUS TO  
HEAR WHAT THE HELL YOU HAVE  
TO SAY FOR YOURSELF. BUT  
FIRST, LET'S TAKE STOCK  
OF THE SITUATION.

THESE ROPES LOOK  
PRETTY GOOD. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT,  
SWEETHEART: DANNY TIES A STURDY  
KNOT. TRICK OF THE TRADE.

DAMN. GUESS  
HE POPPED YOU GOOD,  
HUH? LET ME CLEAN  
THAT UP.

PRETTY OR NOT,  
I'M NOT GONNA BE ABLE TO  
HELP YOU IF YOU PISS DANNY  
OFF TOO MUCH.

SERIOUSLY, SISTER,  
YOU GOTTA SEE THAT THERE  
AIN'T REAL GOOD ODDS TONIGHT  
IS GONNA END TOO  
WELL FOR YOU.

PRETTY FACE  
LIKE YOURS. SHAME TO  
BUST IT ALL UP.

MAYBE NOT.

BUT LIKE I  
SAID, JIM, ALL I  
WANT IS A CHANCE TO  
TALK TO YOU FACE-TO-  
FACE. TELL YOU A  
LITTLE ABOUT  
LISSA.

AFTER THAT...  
WELL, THEN WE'LL  
SEE WHAT WE  
SEE, RIGHT?

ALL RIGHT, DOLL.

TALK TO ME.

I'M FROM  
BIRKVILLE, KENTUCKY,  
A LITTLE FARMING TOWN JUST  
OUTSIDE OF COALTON.

COALTON?  
NEVER HEARD OF  
IT, DOLL.

OH, NO SURPRISE  
THERE. COALTON'S JUST  
A LITTLE INDUSTRIAL TOWN ON  
THE OHIO RIVER. NOTHING BUT  
A STOP ON I-64 FOR  
MOST FOLKS.

AND BIRKVILLE? HECK, THERE ARE  
NO FREEWAY EXITS TO BIRKVILLE.

MY PARENTS WERE NEIGHBORS GROWING  
UP. BOY AND GIRL NEXT DOOR.  
HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEARTS.

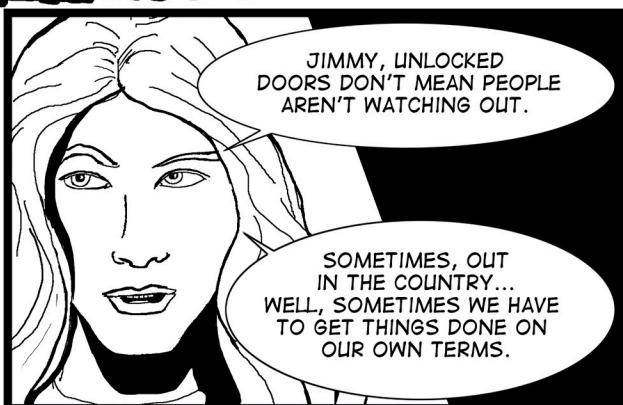
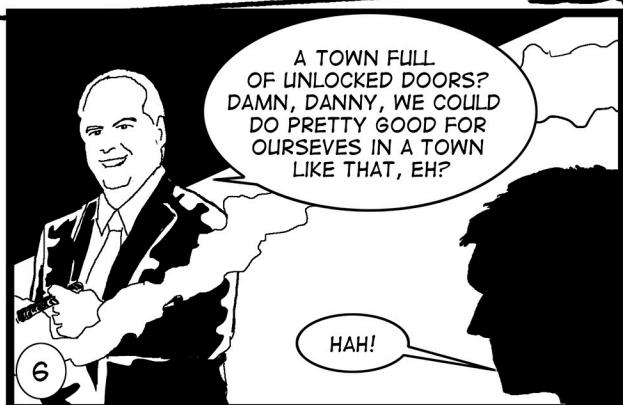
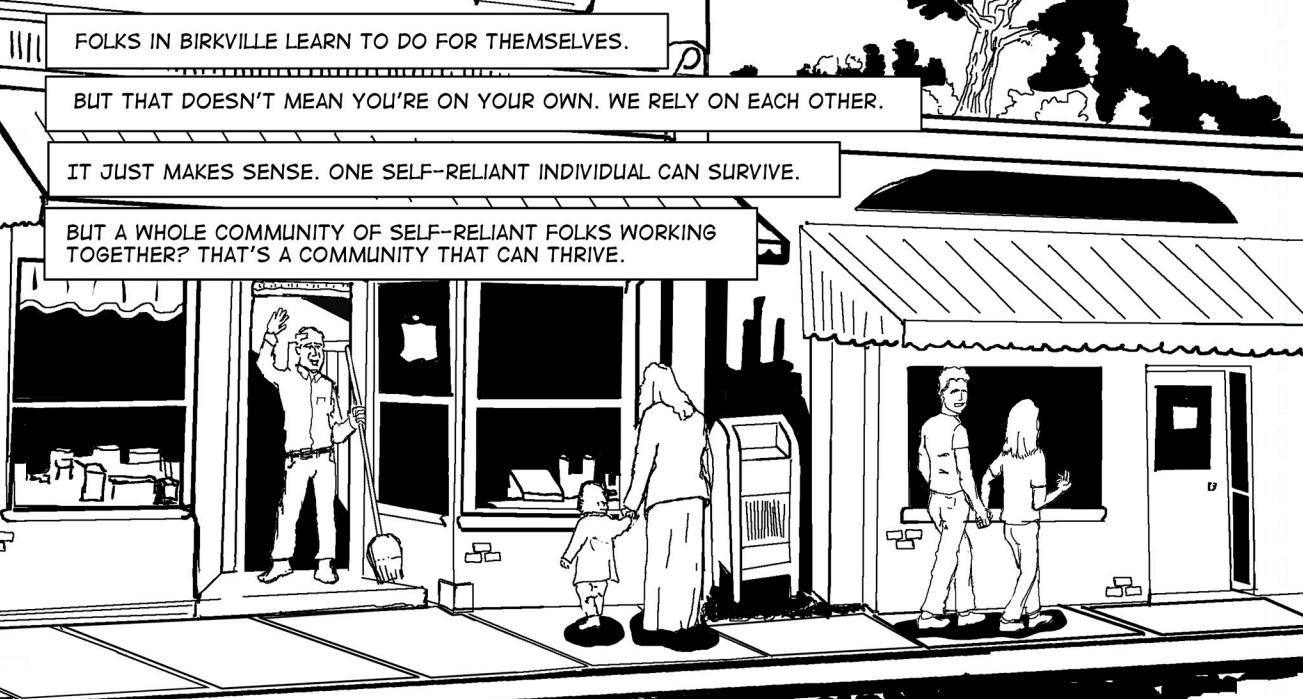
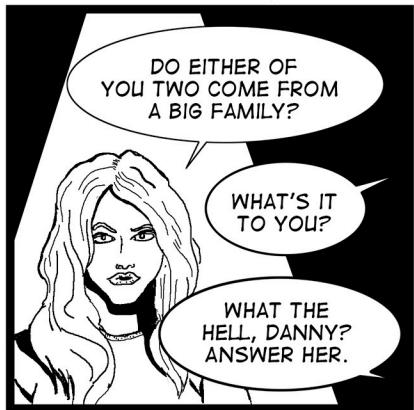
THEY WERE MARRIED SOON AFTER  
THEY GRADUATED, AND THEY STARTED  
A FAMILY RIGHT AWAY.

MARK CAME FIRST. IN A FEW  
YEARS, ALONG CAME JAKE. THEN A  
WHILE LATER, THEY HAD ALEX.

BUT DADDY, HE HAD HIS HEART SET  
ON A GIRL. SO THEY TRIED ONCE  
MORE, AND PRESTO!

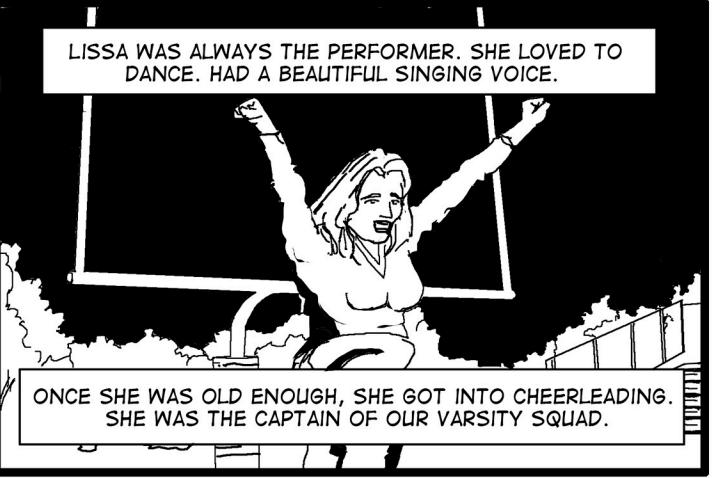
THREE SONS. STRONG-WILLED. A  
LITTLE WILD. HAD IT BEEN UP TO MA,  
THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE FAMILY.

TWINS. LISSA AND ME.



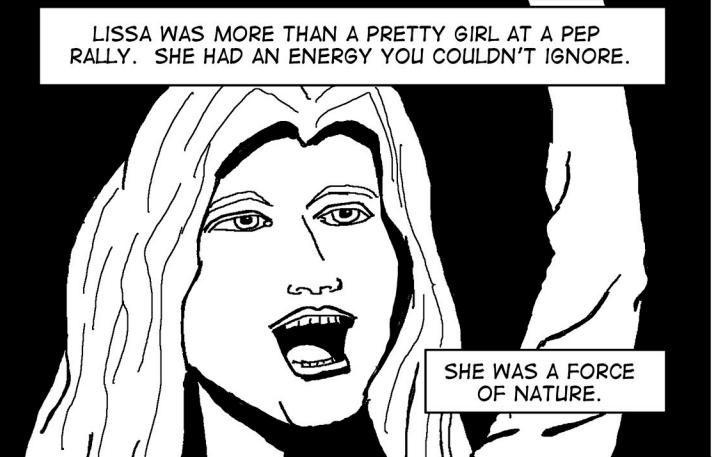


LISSA AND I MAY HAVE BEEN IDENTICAL TWINS, BUT IN SOME WAYS, IT WAS HARD TO IMAGINE THAT WE WERE EVEN RELATED.



LISSA WAS ALWAYS THE PERFORMER. SHE LOVED TO DANCE. HAD A BEAUTIFUL SINGING VOICE.

ONCE SHE WAS OLD ENOUGH, SHE GOT INTO CHEERLEADING. SHE WAS THE CAPTAIN OF OUR VARSITY SQUAD.



LISSA WAS MORE THAN A PRETTY GIRL AT A PEP RALLY. SHE HAD AN ENERGY YOU COULDN'T IGNORE.

SHE WAS A FORCE OF NATURE.



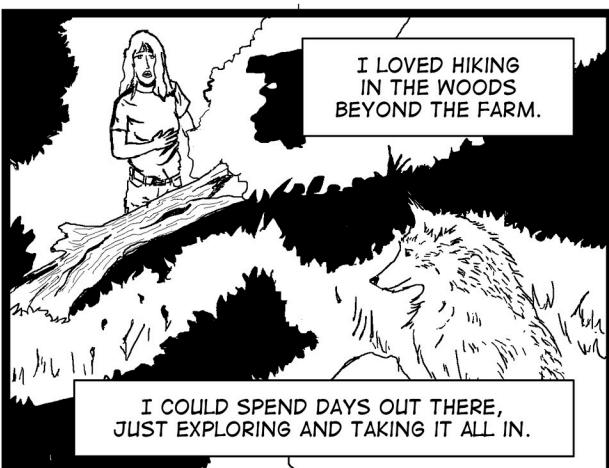
ME? I WAS QUIETER. MORE INTROSPECTIVE.

AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, I'VE LOVED BOOKS AND READING.



BOOKWORM, HUH? A PRETTY GIRL LIKE YOU? SHAME.

OH, I CARED ABOUT MORE THAN JUST BOOKS.



I LOVED HIKING IN THE WOODS BEYOND THE FARM.

I COULD SPEND DAYS OUT THERE, JUST EXPLORING AND TAKING IT ALL IN.



MAKE NO MISTAKE: MY SISTER AND I WERE ALWAYS CLOSE. BEST OF FRIENDS.

YET IN SOME WAYS, THERE WERE WHOLE WORLDS BETWEEN US.

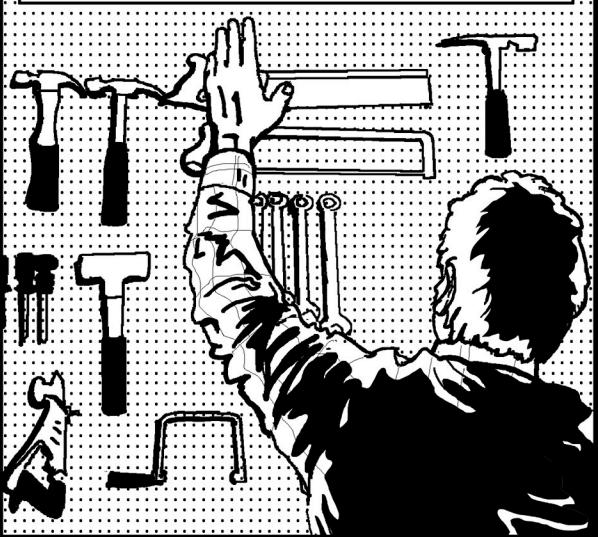


SO IT WAS THE SUMMER BEFORE OUR SENIOR YEAR THAT PA TOOK US TO THE BARN FOR OUR FIRST SLAUGHTER.



I WAS NERVOUS, FOR SURE. BUT LISSA? SHE'D BEEN DREADFUL QUIET ALL MORNING, KNOWING WHAT WAS COMING.

NOW OUR FATHER... HE'S A LOVING MAN. BUT HE CAN BE DEAD SERIOUS AS WELL. SERIOUSNESS WAS ALL HE HAD FOR US THAT DAY.



HE'D SHOWN US HOW TO GET THE JOB DONE MORE THAN ONCE BEFORE, SO WHEN HE WALKED UP TO LISSA AND HANDED HER THE BLADE, HE HAD ONLY ONCE LAST PIECE OF ADVICE:

"DON'T LOOK THE ANIMAL IN THE EYE...."

"...JUST DO WHAT NEEDS BE DONE."

LISSA NEVER EVEN TOUCHED THE KNIFE.

SHE RAN.

PA... HE DIDN'T CHASE HER.

OUT OF THE BARN, UP THE BACK STAIRS. SHE LOCKED HERSELF IN HER BEDROOM.

HE NEVER PLANNED TO FORCE US TO CARRY ON THE FAMILY BUSINESS. HE JUST HAD TO SEE WHAT WE HAD IN US. I DON'T THINK LISSA SURPRISED HIM MUCH AT ALL.

I WENT TO LISSA'S ROOM. SAT WITH HER A WHILE. LET HER TALK THINGS THROUGH.

SHE WAS EMBARRASSED, YEAH, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING MORE. I THINK SHE'D KNOWN FOR SOME TIME THAT HER LIFE WAS GOING TO TAKE HER AWAY FROM BIRKVILLE.

IT'S NO SMALL THING COMING TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR HOME AND MAKE A NEW ONE FOR YOURSELF.

SO I TURNED THE CONVERSATION TO THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR. HER PLANS. SHE WAS GOING TO TRY OUT FOR THE SCHOOL PLAY THAT YEAR. I LET HER TALK ABOUT THAT.

I JUST GAVE HER MY EAR FOR A WHILE. LET HER TALK ABOUT HER DREAMS.

THEN I WENT BACK DOWN TO THE BARN.

I FOLLOWED MY FATHER'S INSTRUCTIONS.

I DIDN'T LOOK THE ANIMAL IN THE EYE.

I DID WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE.



THAT'S TWO YEARS GONE NOW.

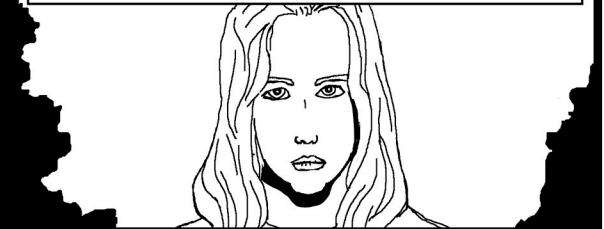


SENIOR YEAR FLEW BY. LISSA GOT A SUPPORTING ROLE IN THAT PLAY. SHE WANTED THE LEAD, SURE, BUT SHE PUT EVERYTHING INTO THAT PLAY.

BY THE TIME SHE TOOK HER LAST CURTAIN CALL, SHE HAD HER PLAN SET IN HER MIND. SHE WAS GOING TO BE AN ACTRESS.

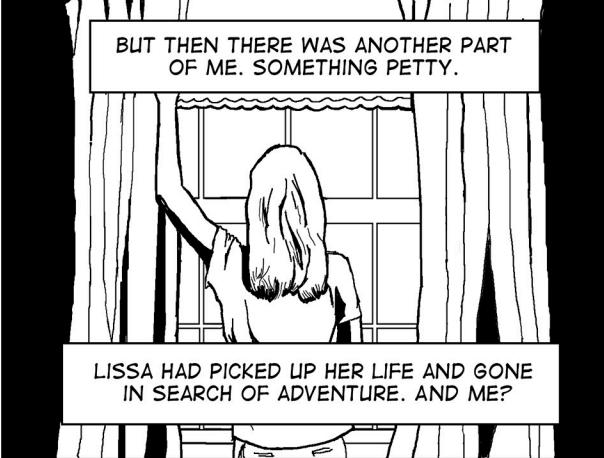


SO OF COURSE IT WAS NO SURPRISE WHEN, JUST A FEW WEEKS AFTER GRADUATION, LISSA PACKED HER BAGS, HOPPED A GREYHOUND AND HEADED WEST TO CALIFORNIA.



HOW I MISSED HER! ESPECIALLY THAT FIRST SUMMER! WE'D NEVER BEEN APART THAT LONG I WAS SURPRISED HOW MUCH IT HURT.

BUT WHEN SOMEONE YOU'RE THAT CLOSE TO GOES AWAY, IT'S AS IF YOU'VE LOST A WINDOW INTO YOUR WORLD.



BUT THEN THERE WAS ANOTHER PART OF ME. SOMETHING PETTY.

LISSA HAD PICKED UP HER LIFE AND GONE IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE. AND ME?



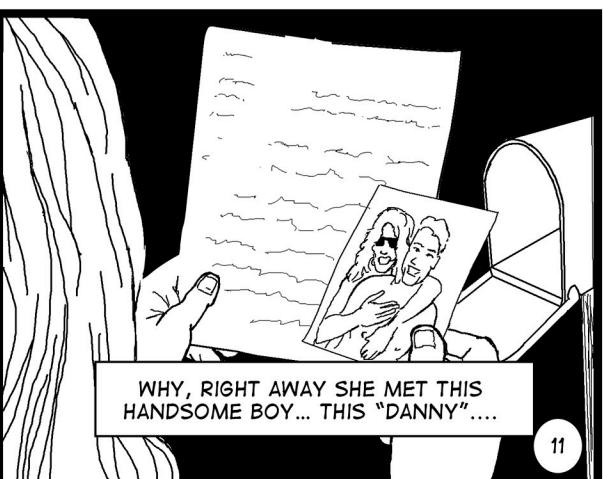
I HAD STAYED BEHIND. AND FOR WHAT? TO WATCH THE SEASONS ROLL BY WHILE I LEARNED THE FAMILY BUSINESS?

WHERE'S THE ADVENTURE IN THAT, MR. SCANLON? I SUPPOSE I WAS AT LEAST A LITTLE JEALOUS.

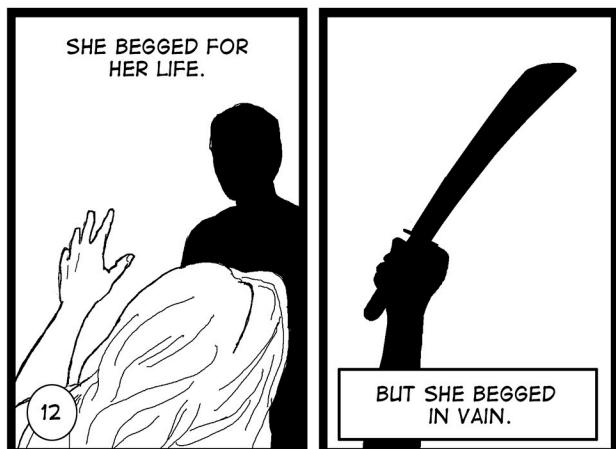
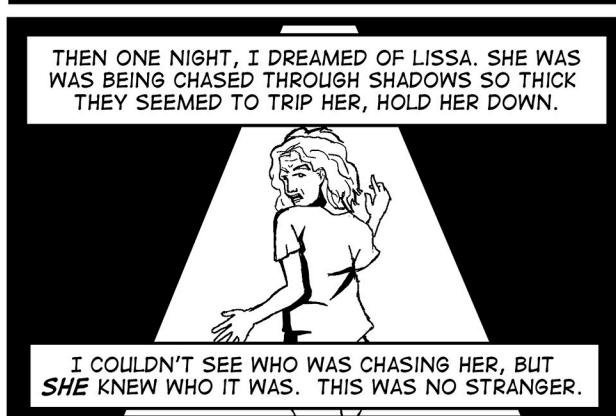
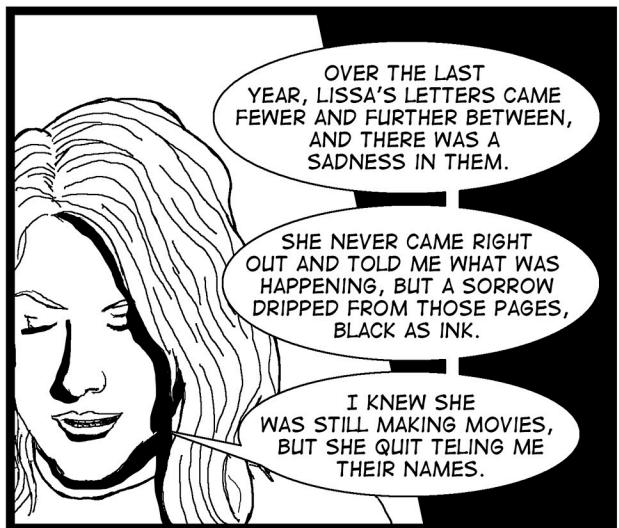
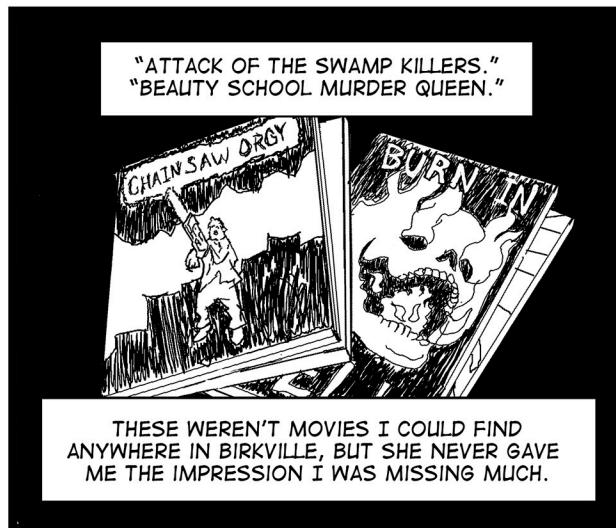
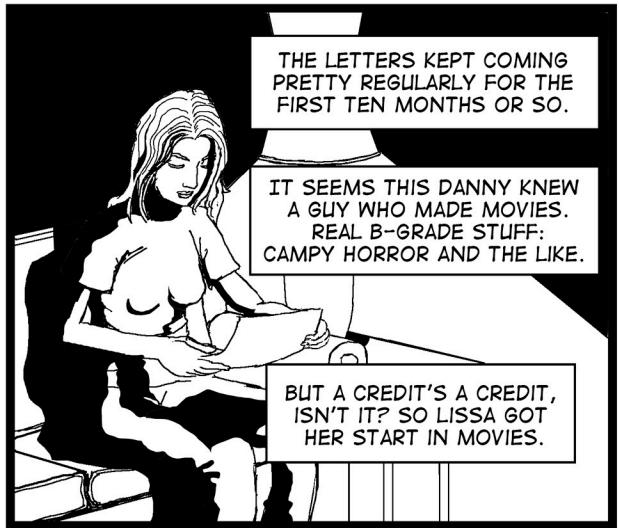


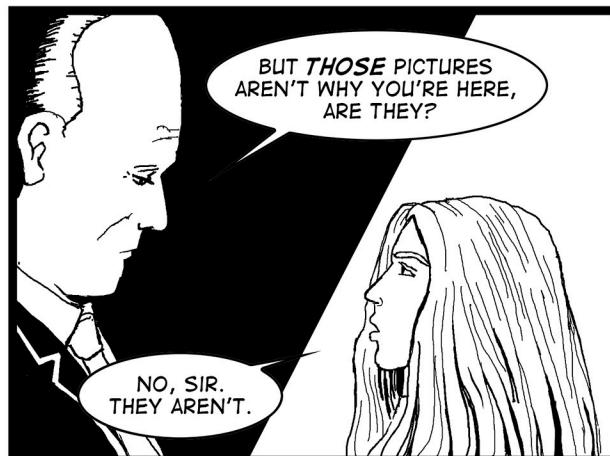
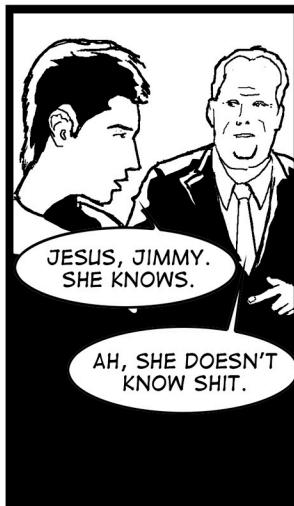
AND WHO WOULDN'T BE JEALOUS WHEN THOSE LETTERS STARTED COMING IN. DID YOU KNOW SHE WROTE LETTERS, DANNY?

REAL PAPER LETTERS. SHE WAS JUST OLD-FASHIONED, I SUPPOSE. BUT WHAT A HIGH TIME SHE WAS HAVING!



WHY, RIGHT AWAY SHE MET THIS HANDSOME BOY... THIS "DANNY"....





YOU EVER HEARD OF RESEDA?

CAN'T SAY I HAVE.

HEH. CAN'T SAY I'M SURPRISED.

IT'S IN LOS ANGELES, BUT THIS ISN'T SUNSET STRIP OR RODEO DRIVE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

RESEDA'S JUST A SPRAWL OF APARTMENT COMPLEXES, DISCOUNT STORES AND TRACT HOUSES OUTSIDE THE GLITZ OF THE CITY.

IT'S ABOUT AS GLAMOROUS AS A ROOT CANAL.



GROWING UP IN RESEDA, I WAS FASCINATED WITH THE MOVIES. I MEAN, HOLLYWOOD WASN'T THAT FAR AWAY. A KID COULD DREAM, RIGHT?



I LOVED ALL KINDS OF MOVIES. MONSTER FLICKS. WESTERNS AND SCI FI.

AND GANGSTER MOVIES. MAN, I LOVED GANGSTERS!

BUT SEE, I GREW UP POOR. NOT HOMELESS POOR, BUT POOR ENOUGH.

NOW WHERE I COME FROM, IF YOU AIN'T GOT MONEY, YOU BETTER FIND SOMETHING TO TRADE ON.

I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH LUCK IN SCHOOL, WASN'T A NATURAL ATHLETE, AND HEY, THIS MUG OF MINE WASN'T GOING TO WIN ANY AWARDS. SO I MADE MYSELF LEARN MY LESSONS ON THE STREET.

I LEARNED HOW TO FIGHT.



HOW TO HUSTLE.

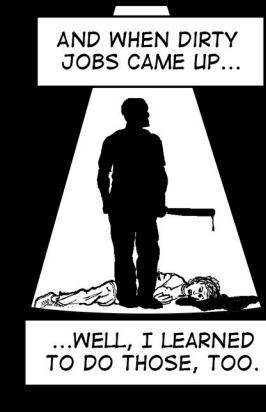
I LEARNED TO PICK THE RIGHT FRIENDS.



GREASE THE RIGHT PALMS.

AND WHEN DIRTY JOBS CAME UP...

...WELL, I LEARNED TO DO THOSE, TOO.



BY THE TIME I WAS IN MY TWENTIES, I WASN'T POOR ANYMORE.

I'D FIGURED OUT WHAT I COULD TRADE ON.

I'D MADE A POSITION FOR MYSELF, AND EVERYBODY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD KNEW IT.

IF YOU ASKED, THEY'D HAVE SAID I WAS A GANGSTER.

I'VE ALWAYS JUST THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS A BUSINESSMAN.



AND BUSINESS WAS GOOD! I MADE A LOT OF MONEY OVER THE YEARS, BUT I NEVER LOST MY LOVE FOR MOVIES. WHAT CAN I SAY? I'M JUST A KID AT HEART.

THEN I MET DANNY. HERE'S THIS YOUNG GUY IN OUR ORGANIZATION COMING UP FROM THE STREETS, JUST LIKE I DID BACK IN THE DAY.

BUT THIS GUY! I TOOK ONE LOOK AT HIM AND THOUGHT, "HELL, THIS GUY COULD BE IN MOVIES."

EVENTUALLY IT HIT ME: I HAD ALL THE CASH I'D NEED TO BANKROLL A MOVIE. WHAT THE HELL WAS STOPPING ME?

"SORORITY CAT FIGHT." THAT WAS THE FIRST PICTURE. THEN "CAT FIGHT 2." SIMPLE PICTURES. NOTHING TOO FANCY. BUT WHAT THE HELL? WE WERE MAKING MOVIES!

SO WE MADE A HANDFUL OF PICTURES. BUILT UP A STABLE OF TALENT. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, YOUR SISTER TURNED UP.

SHE HAD SOME TALENT, SURE, AND DAMN, DID THE CAMERA LOVE THAT GIRL! HELL, SHE FIT RIGHT IN.



I STILL DON'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW WE ENDED UP SHOOTING PORNO. IT STARTED WITH WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A HORROR PICTURE. A SILLY VAMPIRE FLICK.

BUT THERE WAS A LITTLE MORE COKE ON SET THAN USUAL. ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER, BY THE TIME WE WRAPPED, WE WERE PORNographers. DONE AND DONE.

WE WENT ON FOR A BIT THAT WAY. IT WASN'T HIGH ART, BUT LORDY, LORDY, HOW THE MONEY ROLLED IN. AND IT WAS EASY MONEY.

BUT LIKE ANYTHING ELSE, YOU CAN MAKE IT EVEN MORE PROFITABLE WITH THE RIGHT BUSINESS MODEL. THE RIGHT HOOK.

TURNS OUT SOMEBODY ELSE HAD JUST THE HOOK WE NEEDED. LUCKY BREAK, I GUESS. SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA HUSTLE, AND SOMETIMES THE GOODS FALL IN YOUR LAP.

THIS CONTACT, HE'S A... SERIOUS MAN. AND HE HAD A SERIOUS PROPOSITION. ONE HE DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE OVER THE PHONE. SO I TOOK A LITTLE TRIP OUT TO SIN CITY.

IT ALL STARTED WHEN I GOT A CALL FROM A CONTACT OUT IN LAS VEGAS,

YOU EVER BEEN TO VEGAS, SWEETHEART?

NEVER ANYWHERE NEAR IT.

FUNNY TOWN, VEGAS. CHEESY PLACE, IN A WAY. YOU GOT THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF THE STRIP LURING IN EVERY JOE SIX-PACK LOSER WHO WANTS TO RIDE THAT HIGH ROLLER FEELING AS LONG AS THEIR PAYCHECKS HOLD OUT.

BUT BEHIND THOSE LIGHTS, YOU GOT A LOT OF SHADOWS, AND JUST A HANDFUL OF MEN SWEEPING ALL THOSE PAYCHECKS INTO THEIR COFFERS. BUSINESSMEN? GANGSTERS? ONCE THE DOLLARS GET BIG ENOUGH, NO ONE IS ASKING.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE MEN WHO CALLED ME TO THE DESERT. HE'D SEEN MY SKIN FILMS, YOU SEE, AND HE HAD A HANKERING FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE... MORE EXTREME.

AS I SAID, THIS WAS A DANGEROUS MAN. HE HAD APPETITES THAT EVEN A GANGSTER WOULD FIND UNSAVORY. HE WANTED SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL. SOMETHING THAT HAD TO BE MADE TO ORDER. SOMETHING STARRING HIS FAVORITE ACTRESS.

SEEMS YOUR SISTER HAD MADE HERSELF A FAN.



I WOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT IF THE MONEY HADN'T BEEN... CONSIDERABLE.

BUT MONEY... WELL, MONEY WASN'T AN OBJECT.

SO I GOT MYSELF THE PAYDAY OF A LIFETIME.

AND YOUR SISTER... WELL, SHE GOT HER STAR TURN, SWEETHEART.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT'LL GIVE YOU ANY COMFORT TO KNOW WE USED DRUGS. SEDATIVES. WE AREN'T TOTAL BARBARIANS.

... MY... MY GOD....



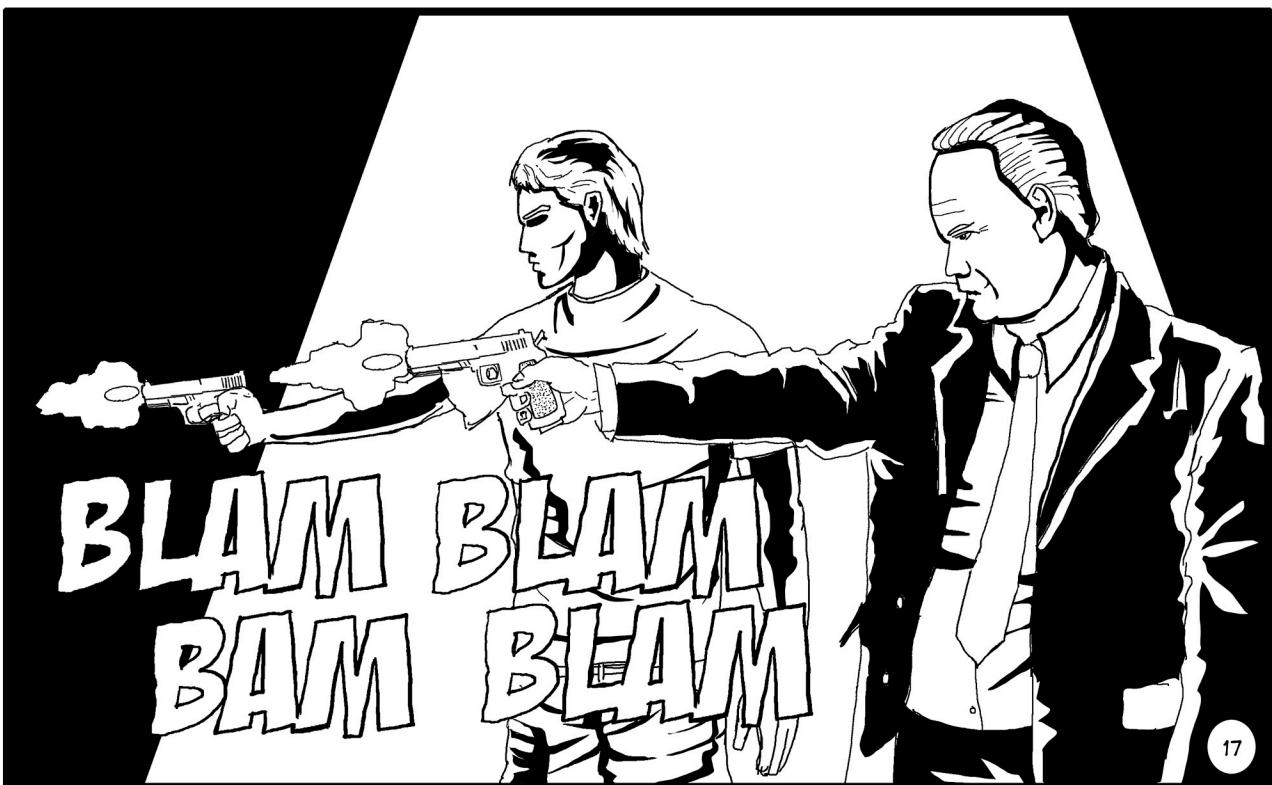
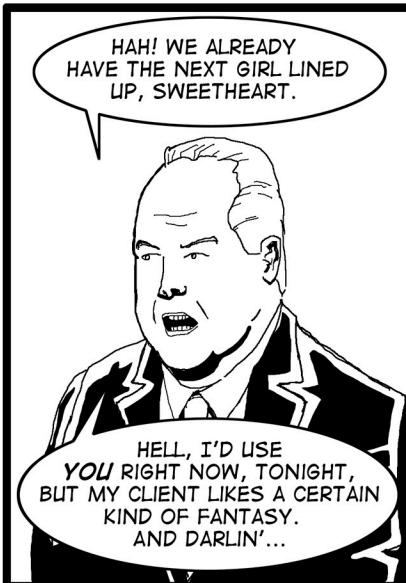
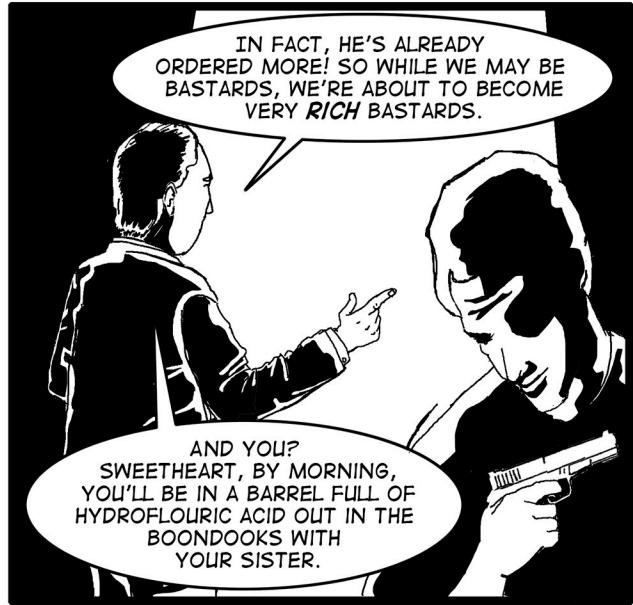
YOU DIRTY BASTARDS! WHAT KIND OF ANIMALS ARE YOU?

THERE'S A GOOD BIT OF TECHNICAL CHALLENGE TO IT, DARLIN'.

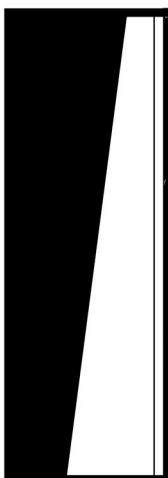
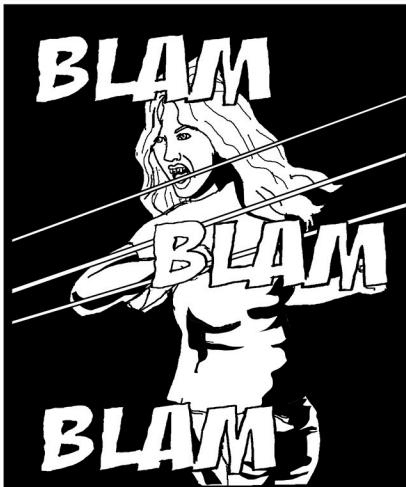
YOU GOTTA GET IT ALL IN ONE TAKE.

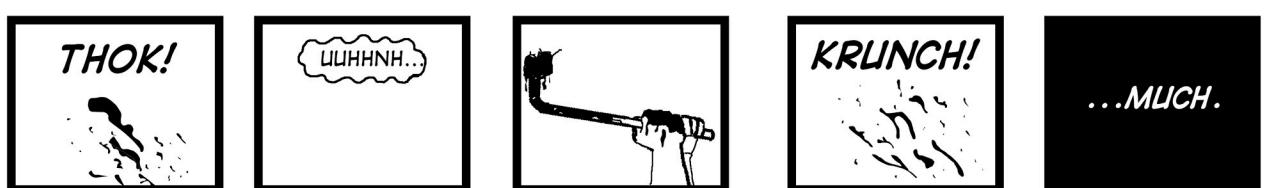
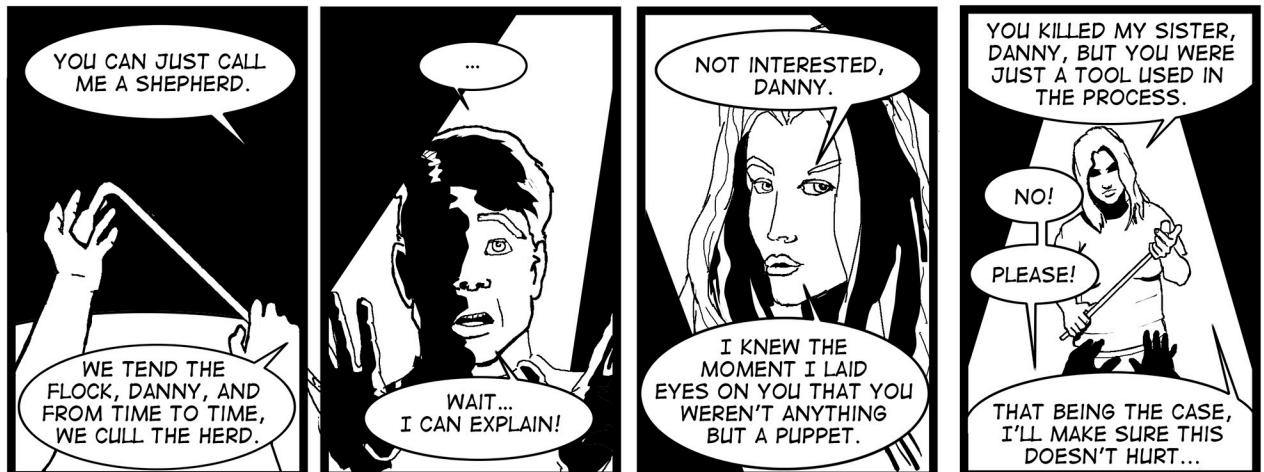
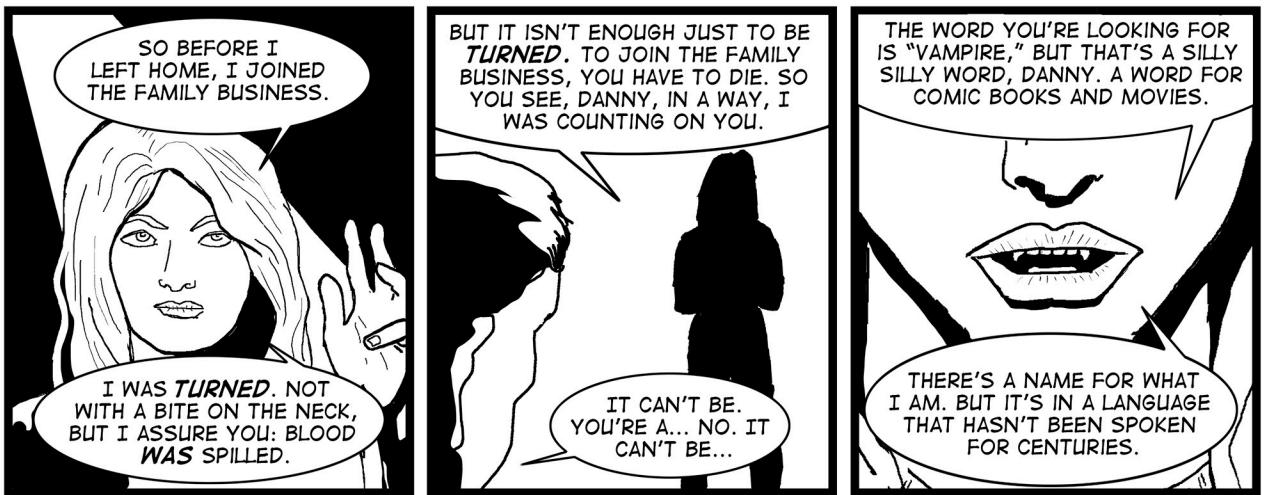
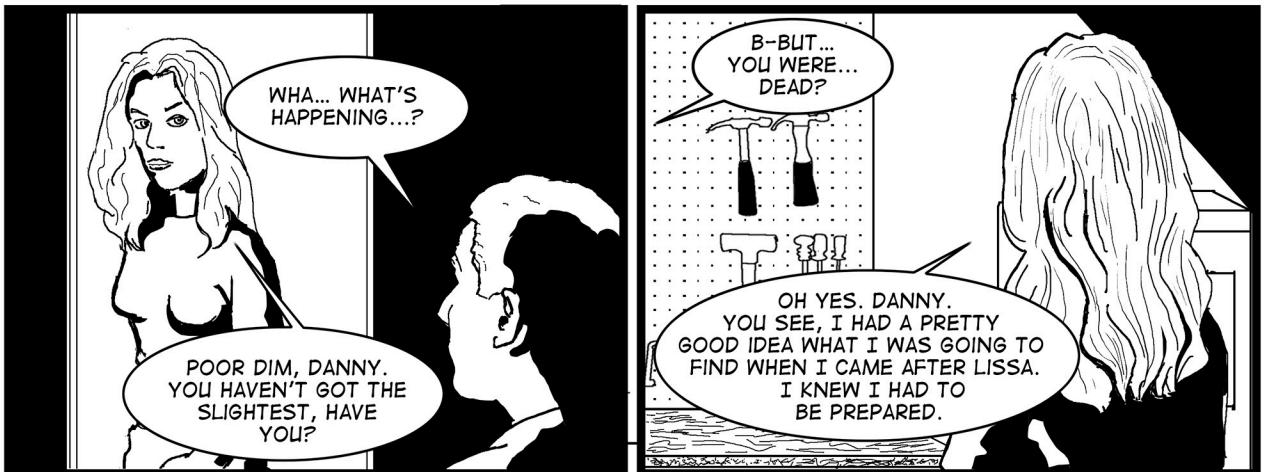
ANIMALS? HARDLY. IT WAS A TRICKY PROJECT, YOU KNOW? REQUIRED A LOT OF KNOW-HOW.

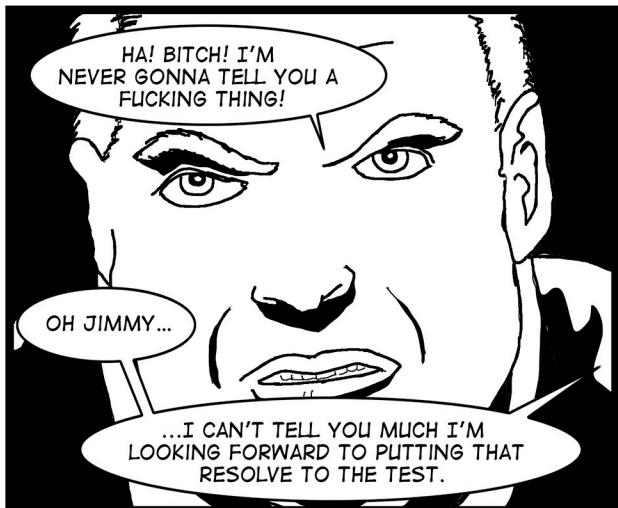
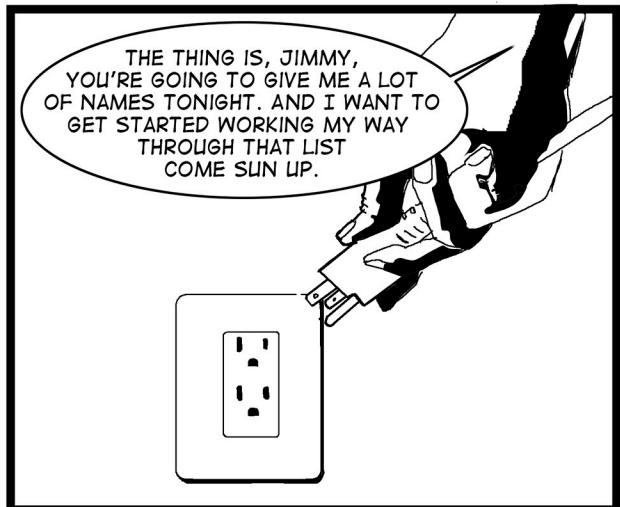
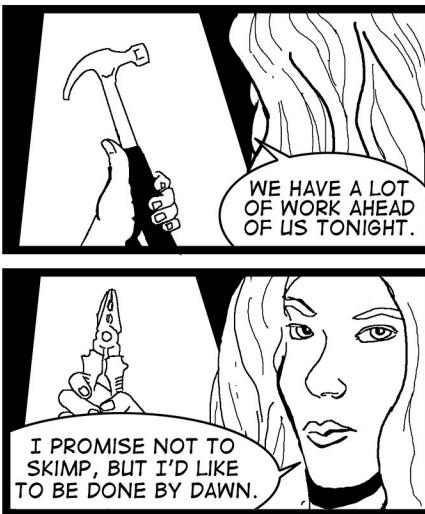
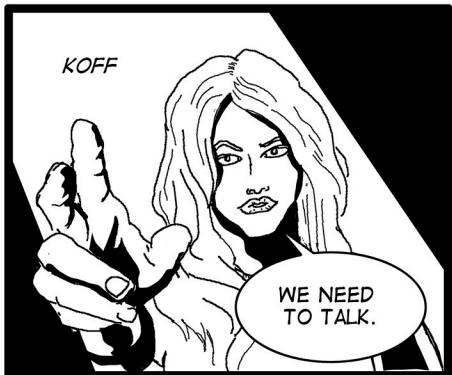
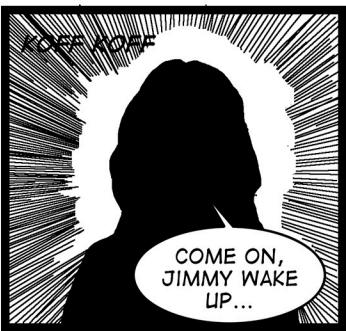














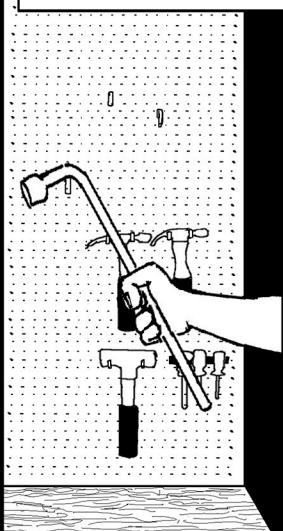
ANNA WORKED ON JIM ALL NIGHT.

SHE WORKED ON HIM AS HE FOUGHT TO REMAIN SILENT.

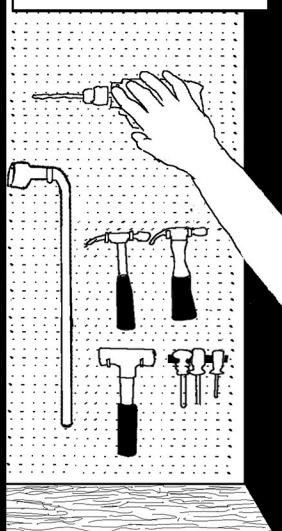
SHE WORKED ON HIM UNTIL HE BEGGED TO TELL HER EVERYTHING.

SHE WROTE IT ALL DOWN.

THEN SHE WORKED ON HIM SOME MORE.



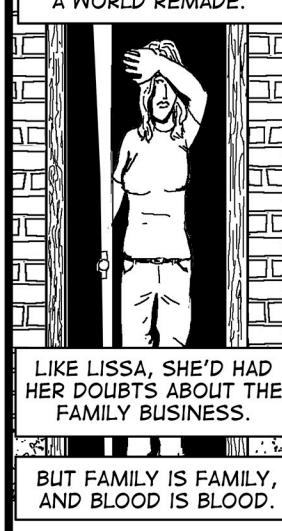
COME MORNING, SHE FINISHED HER WORK.



SHE CLEANED UP HER MESS...



...SHE PUT EVERYTHING TO RIGHTS...



AS SHE STEPPED INTO THE MORNING LIGHT, ANNA SQUINTED AT A WORLD REMADE.

LIKE LISSA, SHE'D HAD HER DOUBTS ABOUT THE FAMILY BUSINESS.

BUT FAMILY IS FAMILY, AND BLOOD IS BLOOD.



ANNA SUPPOSED THE SEEDS OF HER FATE HAD BEEN SOWN BY FORCES BEYOND HER CONTROL.

BY LISSA.

HER FATHER.

BY JIM, AND THE OTHERS LIKE HIM THAT SHE WOULD SOON BE MEETING.

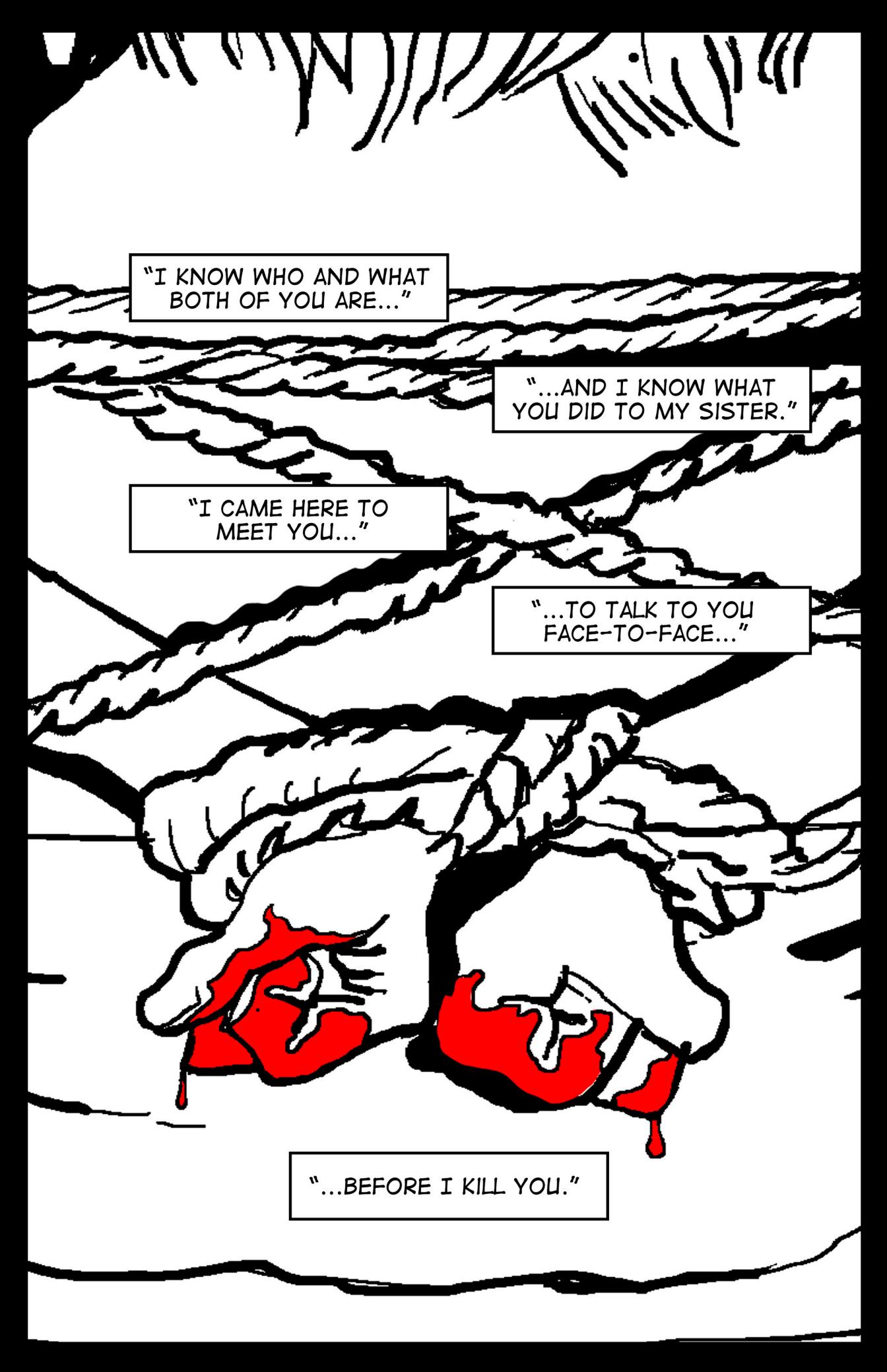
BUT ANNA WAS A CLEVER STUDENT, AND SHE HAD STUDIED HER CRAFT DILIGENTLY.

SHE WAS READY TO REAP WHAT OTHERS HAD SOWN.



SHE KNEW IT WOULD BE A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST.

END.



"I KNOW WHO AND WHAT  
BOTH OF YOU ARE..."

"...AND I KNOW WHAT  
YOU DID TO MY SISTER."

"I CAME HERE TO  
MEET YOU..."

"...TO TALK TO YOU  
FACE-TO-FACE..."

"...BEFORE I KILL YOU."