



Stories are meant to be theatre of the Mind.

Sometimes, I admit, I Peel like the images in these stories spoil that experience a bit.

On the other hand, sometimes it strikes Me that the theatre could use a little help. Some set dressing, as it were. Especially if the events in the story are so bizarre that the Mind has difficulty picturing them.

FRIGHT GALLERY

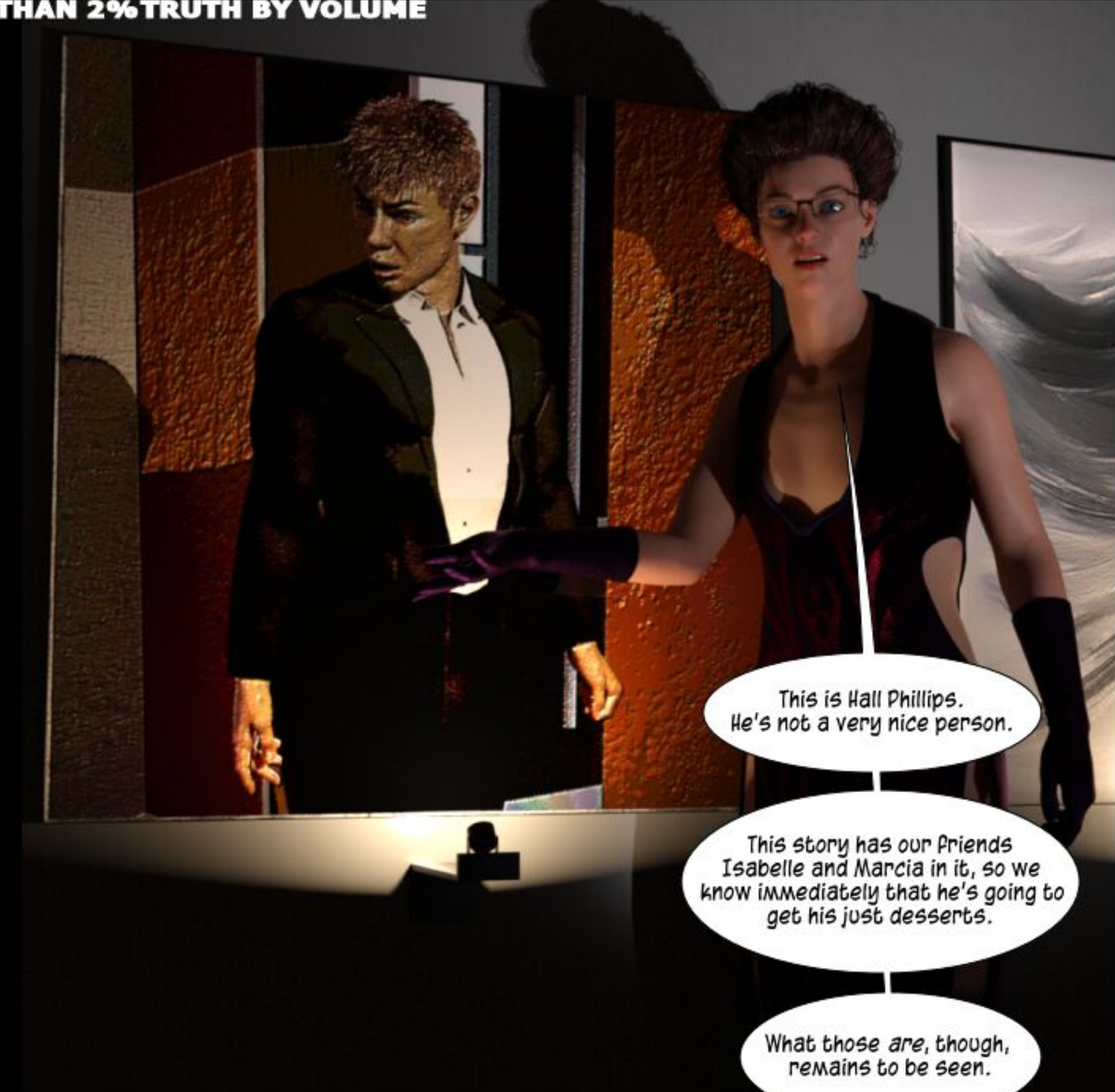
STORIES AND IMAGES BY TRILBY

* CONTAINS LESS THAN 2% TRUTH BY VOLUME



Every picture, or set of pictures, in this gallery has a story within it, waiting to be told. Most of these stories are strange, and many aren't pleasant. It's that kind of gallery.

There are Par too many stories here to tell in a night -- or even a year -- but I've picked a Pew I think will intrigue and entertain you.



This is Hall Phillips. He's not a very nice person.

This story has our Friends Isabelle and Marcia in it, so we know immediately that he's going to get his just desserts.

What those are, though, remains to be seen.



Who the Puck are you?



Uh ... I'm Kate, Mr. Phillips. Your new assistant?

The agency sent me this morning. Ms. Baird said I should just go ahead and start ...

Like hell.



Agency's lost their goddamned Minds, sending you.

You think I'm going to let someone like you sit out here? Whoever sits at this desk represents me. She's the first thing people see. They form impressions.

They form an impression of you, they'll probably run away screaming.

Get out.

But, sir, I--

Out.

If you can pry your lard ass from that chair. I see it barely fits.

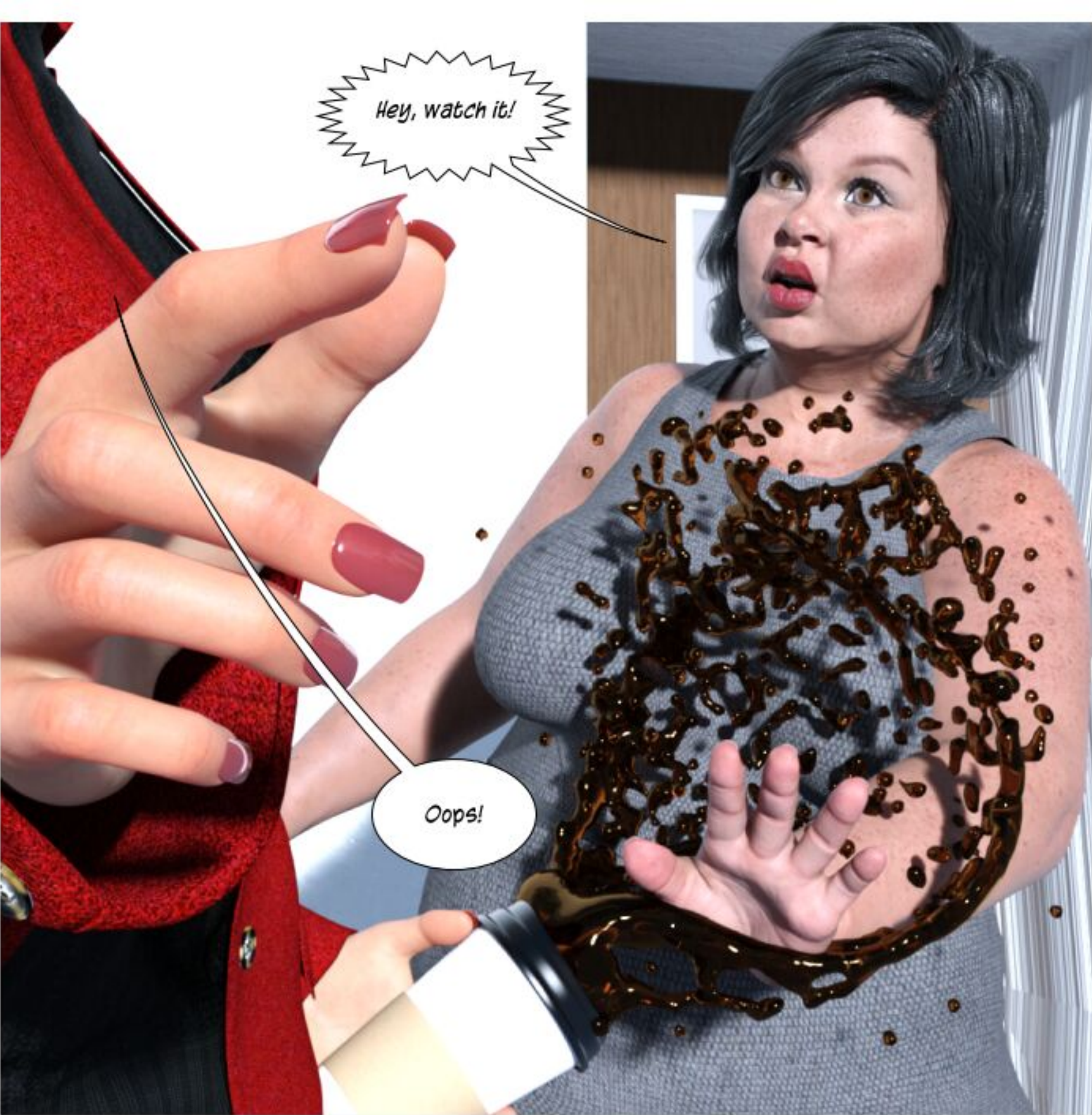
Don't bother telling the agency to send someone else. I'm going to go call them right now.



And I'm going to ask them what the Puck they were thinking, sending you on any job!

Do you ever look in a mirror? I wouldn't send you to clean toilets!

Get out!!



Hey, watch it!

Oops!



Sorry! It was just so hard to get past your enormous ass!

WHAT?!

Have a nice day!

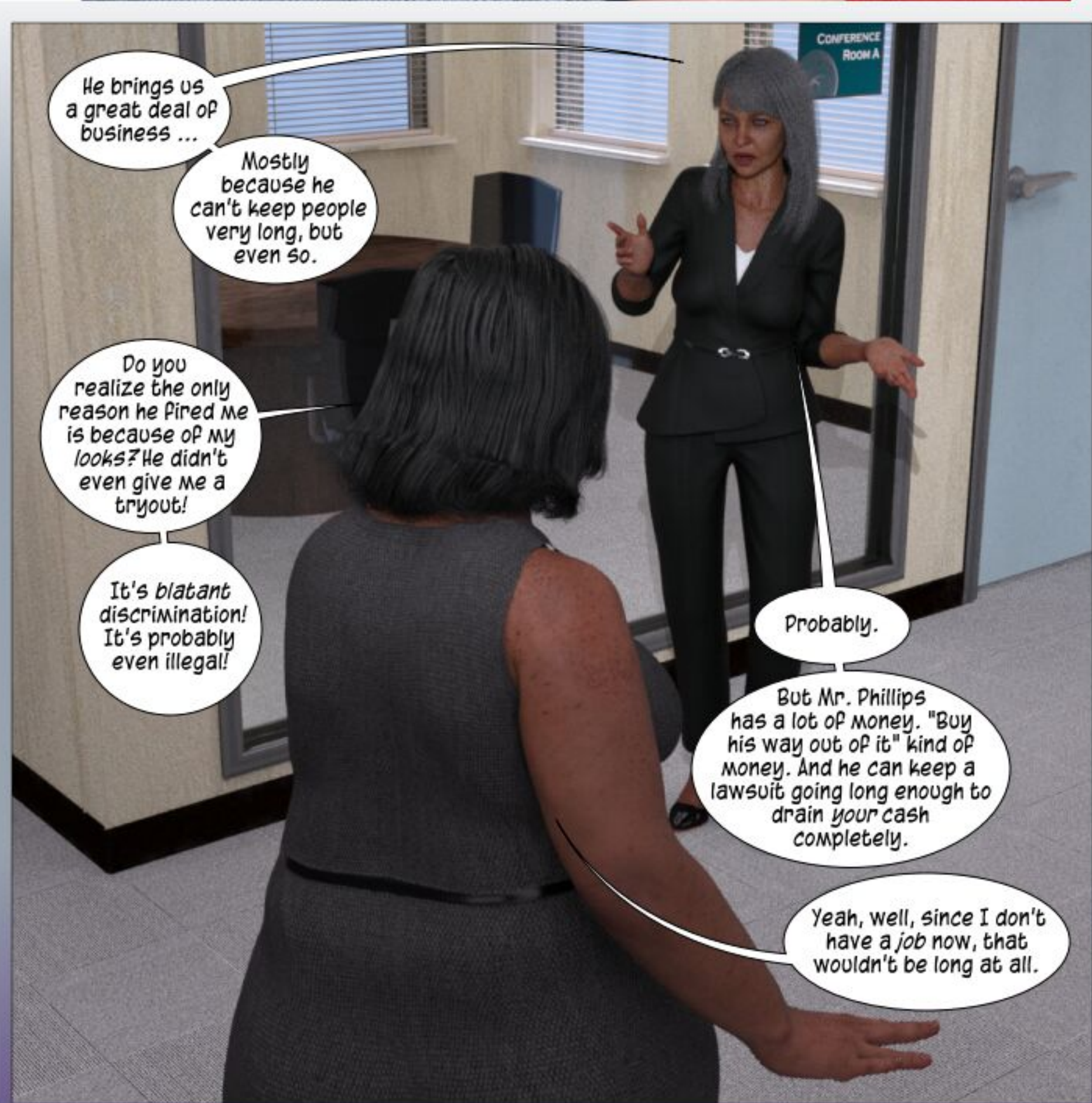


You're dropping me? WHY??

It wasn't MY decision, I assure you, Ms. Steadman.

Mr. Phillips called my boss. He said he was going to refuse to work with the agency at all if we kept "that cow you sent."

In any capacity. He made that clear.



He brings us a great deal of business ...

Mostly because he can't keep people very long, but even so.

Do you realize the only reason he fired me is because of MY looks? He didn't even give me a tryout!

It's blatant discrimination! It's probably even illegal!

Probably.

But Mr. Phillips has a lot of money. "Buy his way out of it" kind of money. And he can keep a lawsuit going long enough to drain your cash completely.

Yeah, well, since I don't have a job now, that wouldn't be long at all.



It's totally unfair! He shouldn't be able to just destroy somebody's life like that!

Sure, but you're smart enough to know a lot of things are unfair.

What I need to know is, what exactly are you coming to us for? Are you looking for recompensation, or are you looking for revenge?

I'm looking for justice.

Justice is hard, though. It usually requires something from everyone. If you want to go that way, you won't get to be a bystander.

Here, try this on those coffee stains.

I'm OK with that. What do I have to do?

Given what you've told me, I think this is the best way to go.

What is it?

It's salt. Very special salt. Don't mix it up with the regular kind.

A few grains in his food -- no more! -- at every meal he eats.

All right, but how am I going to get it into his food?



Yes, that's the next question. We need to get you into a position of close contact with him, somehow.

Can you cook?

Huh? As a matter of fact, yes. ... Very well, actually.

Problem solved, then. I was just checking. He's looking for a combination cook and housekeeper.

Oh, that's perfect! Exactly what we need.

He's not going to let me work for him!



He just fired me! As soon as I walk in the door he'll recognize me and --

Bet you a buck he won't.

I know his kind. He didn't bother to put your face or your name in his head. He dismissed you as worthless immediately and didn't store a damned thing about you.

But we can change you a little, just in case. Maybe redo your skin a bit, if you're OK with that. Give you some prumper hair for camouflage.

And if he catches the name, just say that must be somebody else.

MEANWHILE ...



MMMh ...
damn, Edie.

And I thought you'd
lost your mind. Sex
instead of dinner!

Sex is
better for you
than dinner.

Anyway, I figured
you'd want to do it one
more time before I left. I
have to be at the airport
in an hour.

Yeah.
-- sigh --
Do you really
have to go?

One day we'll
discuss both giving
up our jobs and
staying home to
Puck all day.

Till then,
though, this
Chantel
spokesmodel thing
is the best gig I'm
likely to ever
get.

So if they want
me on a two-month
tour, they get a
two-month tour.

You'll just
have to save it
up for when I
get back.

TWO DAYS LATER.



Knock, knock ...

I don't know why you
always say that, Lillian. If
you want to knock before
letting yourself in, actually
knock.

What's up?

I've gone far
beyond the call of
duty and found you a
housekeeper.



This is Kate
Steadman, Hall. She has
all the qualifications you
want and comes highly
recommended.

She ... uh ...

Ms. Steadman,
excuse us. I need to
talk to Ms. Bowers
privately for a
second.



Lillian, she's as
big as a house!

Oh, Hall, she
is not.

And what
difference would it
make if she were? I
know you're shallow, my
dear boy, but this is not
a public-facing
position.

What if I
have guests?

You don't
entertain.

More to the point, I am your
lawyer, not your P.A. You don't have a
P.A. right now because you keep firing them,
and I'm only doing this for you because not
having any assistance is making you
even more difficult than usual.

Skilled help doesn't grow on
trees, Hall. If you don't want to hire
her, that's your business, but you'll
have to find someone on your own.
This is all you get from me.



So ... ah ... let's
try a temporary
arrangement first.
Two weeks?

Thank
you, sir.
I'd like to know
your food
preferences, and
any allergies you
have. For when I
make your
meals.

No need. I'm
on a special diet.
I'll show you the
ingredients.

Hall doesn't eat,
dear. His lover has
given him bad ideas.

Lillian ...

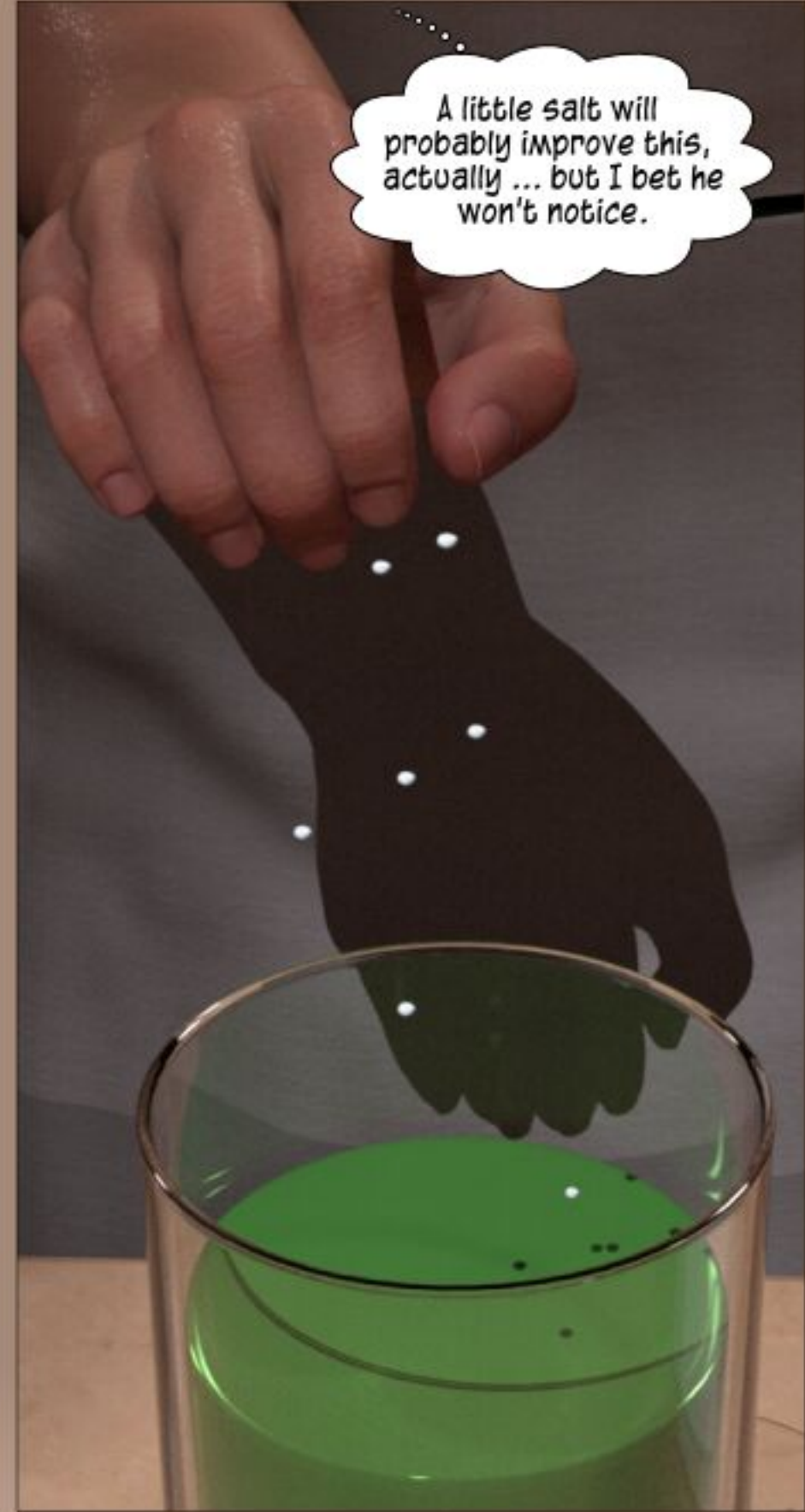
Don't mind me. I
was just leaving.

THAT EVENING ...



Gawd.
This looks gross and
smells worse. Does he
really live on this stuff?
Why'd he even ask for
somebody who could
cook?

Well, she said
use some on any food
he eats ... I guess we
have to count this as
food ...



A little salt will
probably improve this,
actually ... but I bet he
won't notice.

LATE THE NEXT AFTERNOON.

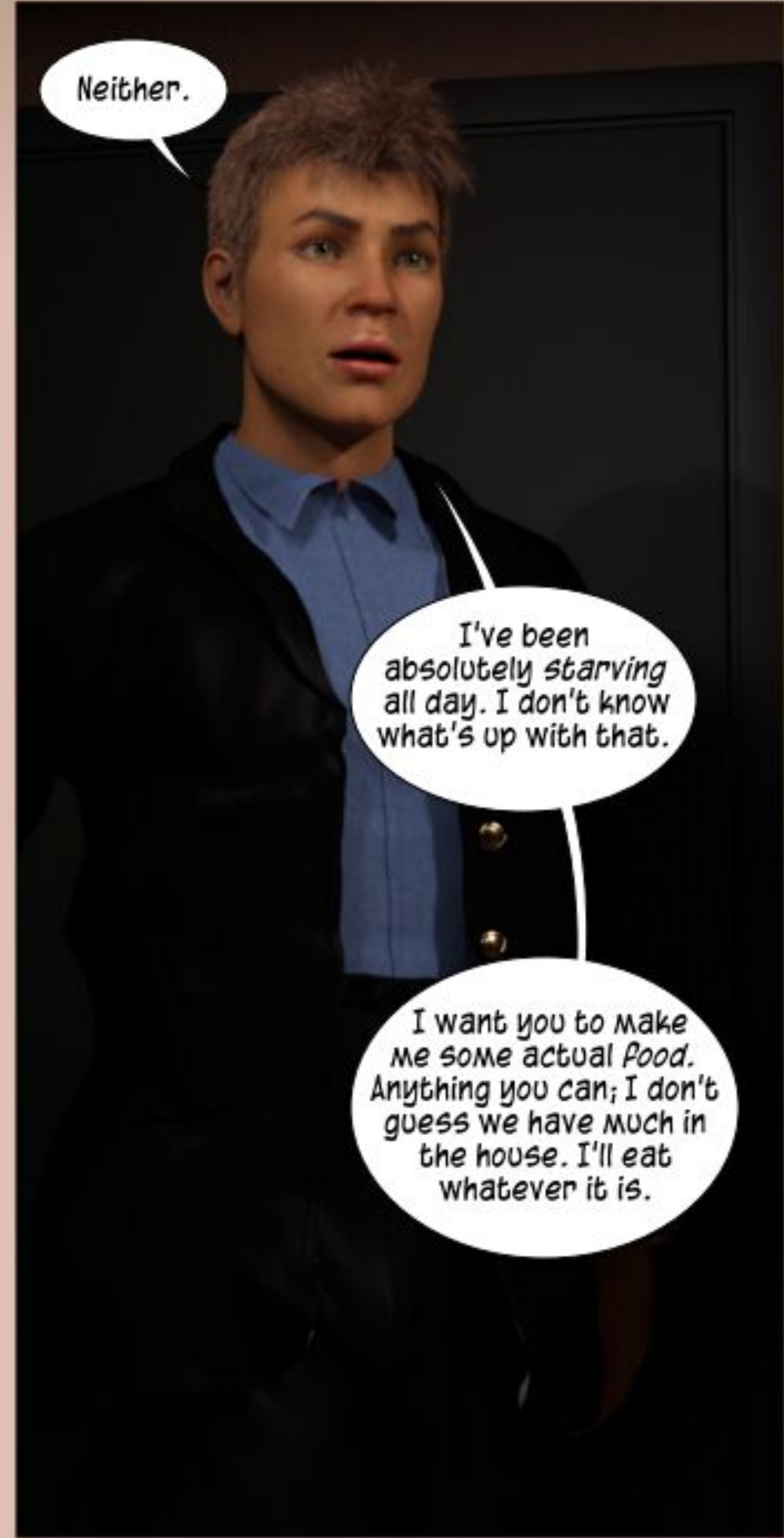


Kate ...

Oh!
Good evening, sir. I
didn't expect you
home just yet.

Not to worry,
though, I can
have your dinner
ready in just a
moment.

Would you like the
spirulina or the acai
tonight?



Neither.

I've been
absolutely starving
all day. I don't know
what's up with that.

I want you to make
me some actual food.
Anything you can; I don't
guess we have much in
the house. I'll eat
whatever it is.



Yes, sir!

I'll get
started on it
right now.

TWO MORNINGS LATER.



That was delicious, Kate.

Start the day off right, eh?

Thank you, sir.

Uh, Kate ...

I don't have anything today, so I think I'll be coming home for lunch. Sorry to spring it on you ...

Not a problem, sir! It'll be ready.



And then maybe not go back to the office after lunch ... and get in a good long workout.

Feeling a little bloated ...



Have a good day, Kate!

You too, sir. Are you here for lunch?

Yes, I think so.



Lunch was excellent, Kate. Definitely worth skipping that meeting for ...

I'm going shopping again this afternoon. Any requests for dinner?

Surprise me.



Might be home a bit early tonight, Kate.

-- burp -- I really need to try to get back into my exercise routine ...



Been skipping leg day ... and arm day ... and chest day ...

When he said in the meeting we were swallowing the competition, I didn't know he meant he'd actually eaten them.



Sir! I didn't know you meant this early ...

No ... uh ... sorry. I didn't. Something came up.

I think I'm going to work from home for a while. They don't actually need me there in person most of the time.



Sir! Dinner's ready!

Mmm, and it looks great.



Hall? Are you in here?

Did you forget I was back tonight? Oh my GOD!!



Edie, I ...

Who is that, Hall? What is all this? What have you done to yourself???

She's my housekeeper ... I don't know what you ...

I can't believe this. I leave for two months and look at you! I can't ... you can't seriously expect me to be seen with you, looking like that?

I've got to go.

A MONTH LATER.



When you pull yourself back together, call me.
If you do.

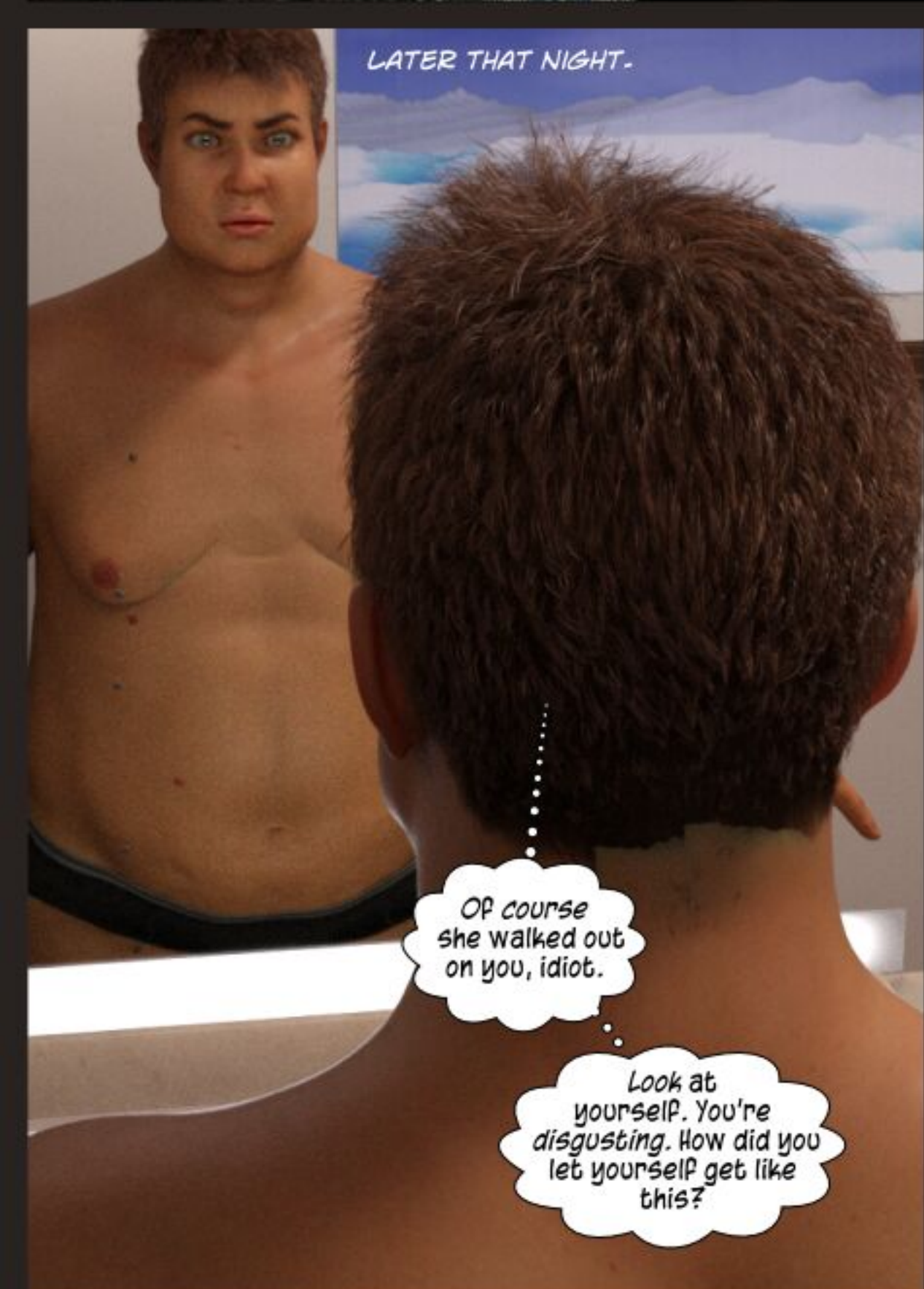
But, Edie ...



I'm sorry, sir.

I just ...
I ...

... I need to eat something.



LATER THAT NIGHT.

Of course she walked out on you, idiot.

Look at yourself. You're disgusting. How did you let yourself get like this?



It's your fault! It's your food! You know I can't resist it and you're trying to make me huge!

I was thin and sexy and had a hot supermodel girlfriend, and we made out like rabbits, and now look!

Now the only people who might fuck me are people who look like you!



You know, I was coming up here to see if you wanted me to go to bed with you. Because you seemed like you needed it.

But if you're going to say things like that, forget it.



No, wait!

Please! I'm sorry. I do need it.

... I need you.



TWO WEEKS LATER.



Now, it's really important to eat them while they're still warm, and a little gooey in the middle ...

-- hrrrrh --

Take a nice big bite.



Knock, knock.

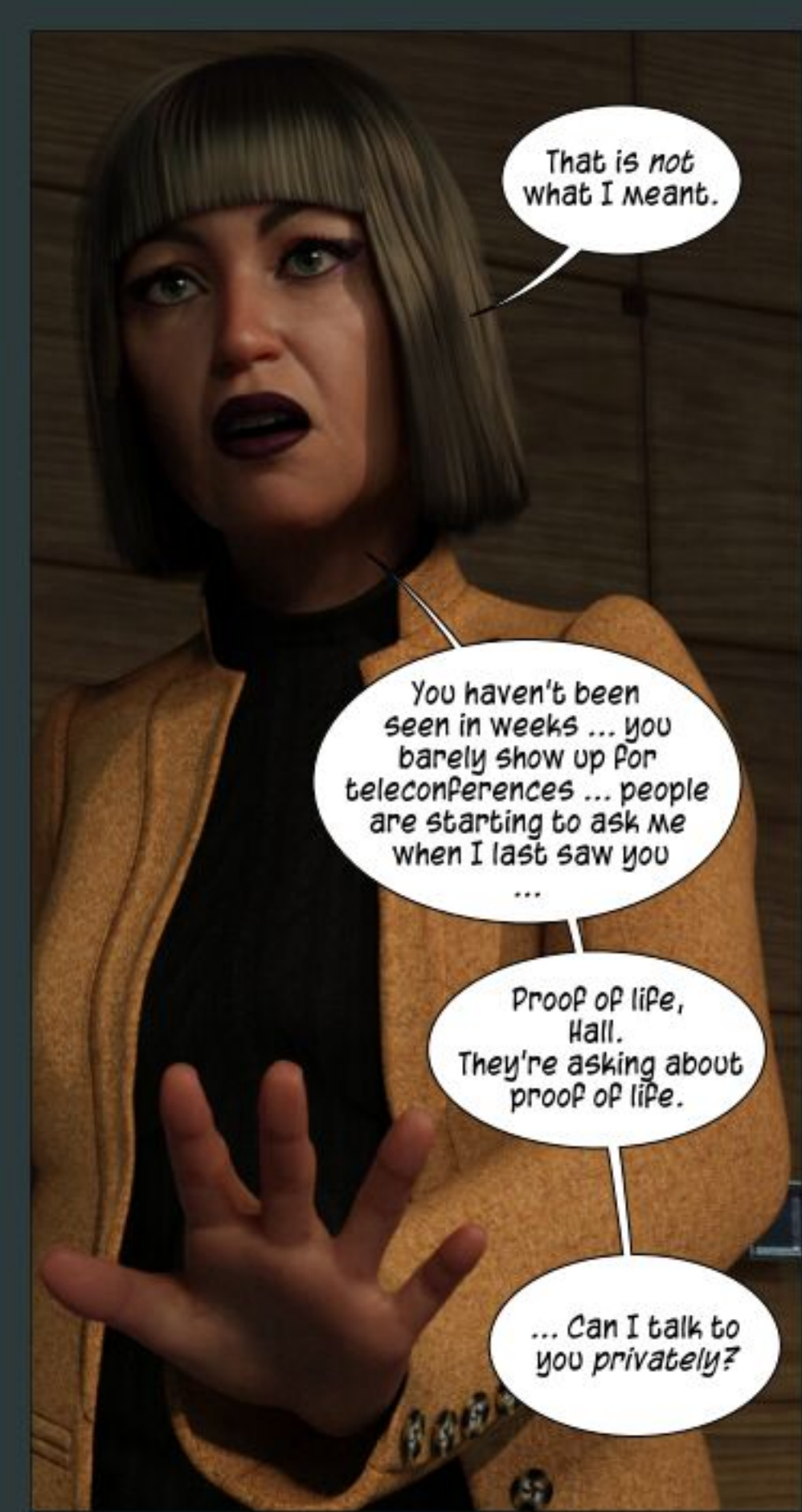


Hall! What are you doing?

--hgh--
C'mon, Lillian, that's a really dumb question.

We're having sex.

And eating cookies.



That is not what I meant.

You haven't been seen in weeks ... you barely show up for teleconferences ... people are starting to ask me when I last saw you ...

Proof of life, Hall. They're asking about proof of life.

... Can I talk to you privately?



Look, I know I recommended her. But if this is her doing ... then she's not good for you. This is not the way you want to go.

You need to get her out. If you don't think you can do that, then you need to get out. At least until you can get some distance.



LATER ...

She's right.

I'm never going to get loose of this while I'm here ... I need to be somewhere else for a while ... I can try to deal with her later ...

Damn it, is there anything in here I can still wear?



So you're just going to run?

And I thought maybe you loved me. I was beginning to think you might get a happy ending after all.

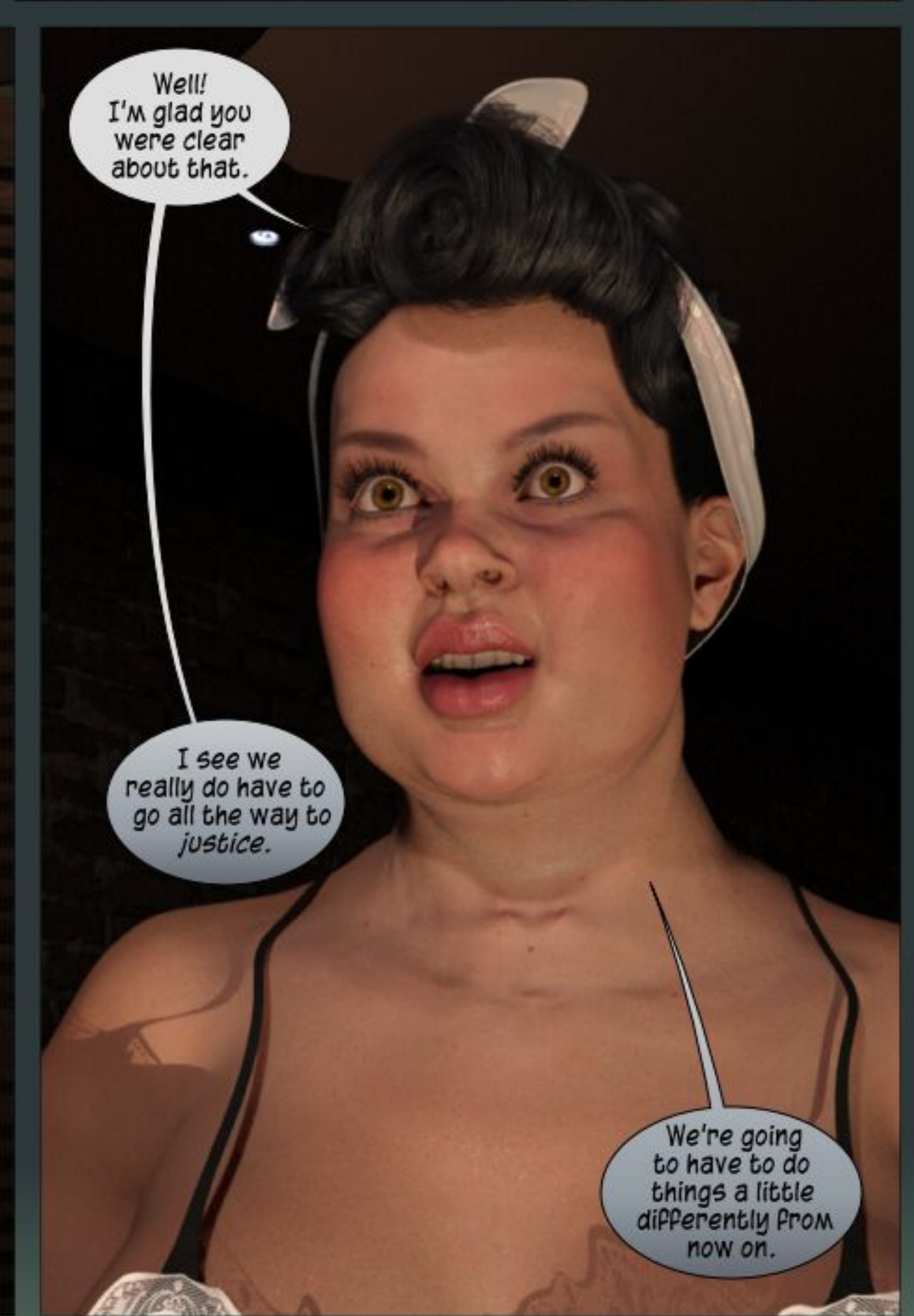
Together, both satisfied with what we had ... guess not.



I ...
No!!

No, I don't love you! I'm never going to love you!

I might need you, but I'm never going to love someone like you! Even if you make me look like this!



Well! I'm glad you were clear about that.

I see we really do have to go all the way to justice.

We're going to have to do things a little differently from now on.

TWO MONTHS LATER.



They're firing me?

They're not firing you! They've been very pleased with your work.

But they're not renewing your contract, no. They want to go with a look that's considerably younger.

Younger?
What, twelve?

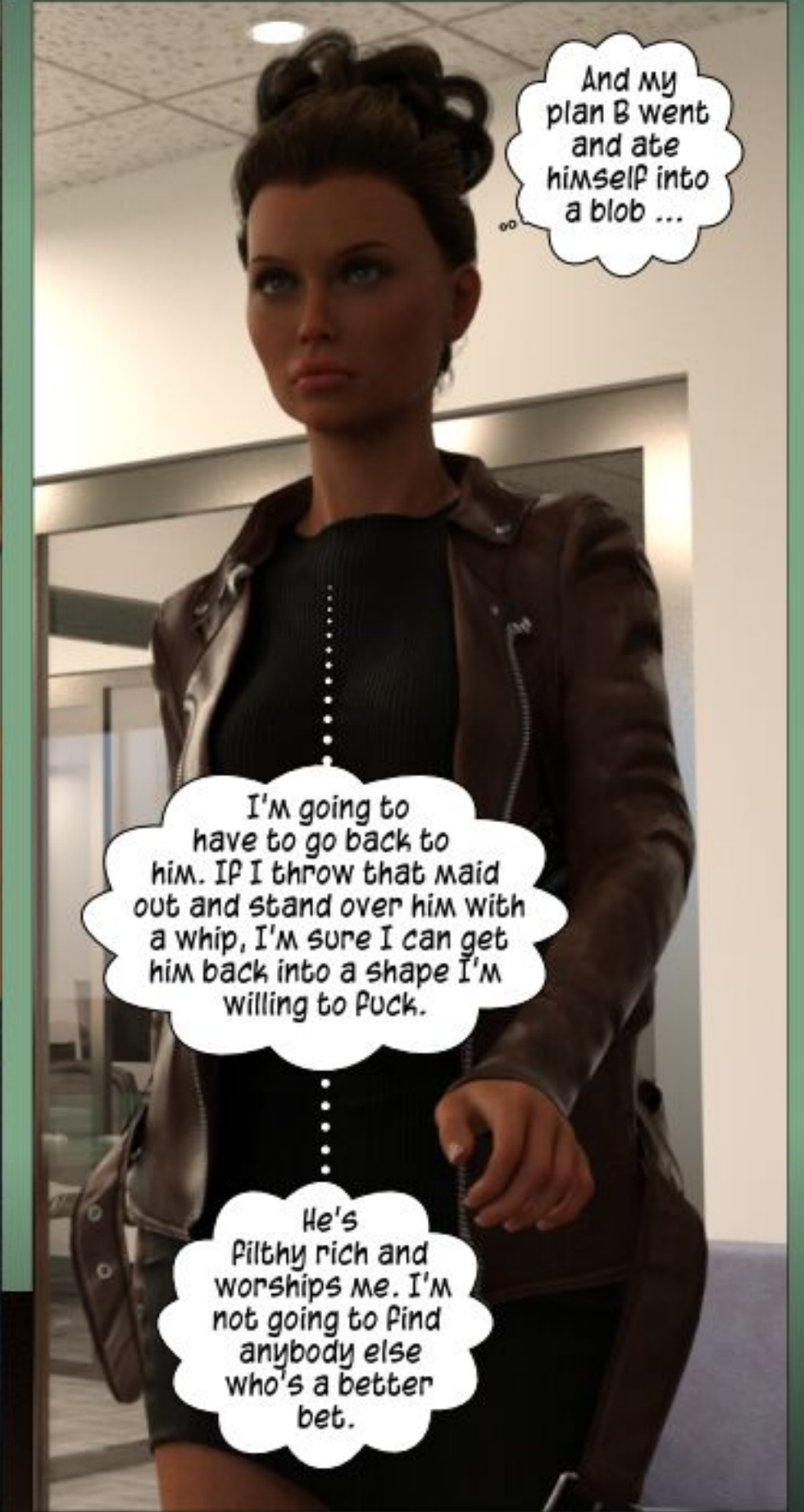
Now, Edie ... you know that's unfair. They just think there's a market in sixteen-to-eighteen-year-olds they aren't reaching. No one is calling you old.



Everybody's doing this now. They look at that younger audience and they all worry they're leaving money on the table.

Give it about five years and the cycle will come round again. I've seen it before.

In five years I'll be nearly forty, and I'll be competing with a fresh crop of twenty-year-olds, Jean. That doesn't help a bit. I need to be banking money now.



And my plan B went and ate himself into a blob ...

I'm going to have to go back to him. If I throw that maid out and stand over him with a whip, I'm sure I can get him back into a shape I'm willing to Puck.

He's filthy rich and worships me. I'm not going to find anybody else who's a better bet.



Hall?

Are you in here?

Edie??



Hall, what--?
My god!
Can you even move?

Edie, she won't stop! She feeds me all the time and I can't do anything about it!

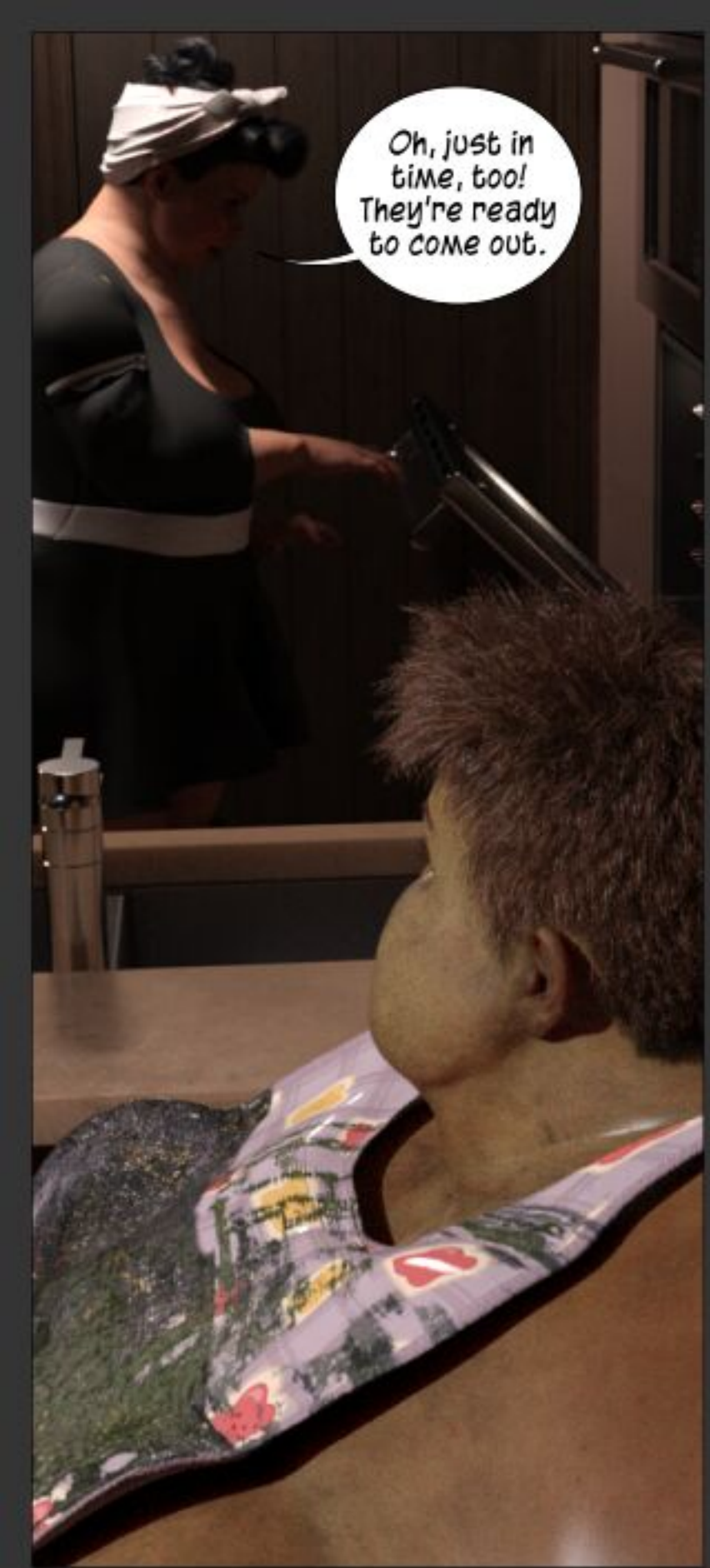
You've got to help me! I don't know what, but you've got to get me out of this somehow!

I'm back, sweetie!



Oh, shit!
Hide, quick!
If she sees you I don't know what she'll do!

You can sneak out while she's feeding me ... but try to find a way to help me! Please!



Oh, just in time, too! They're ready to come out.



Don't those look delicious? And they're all for you!

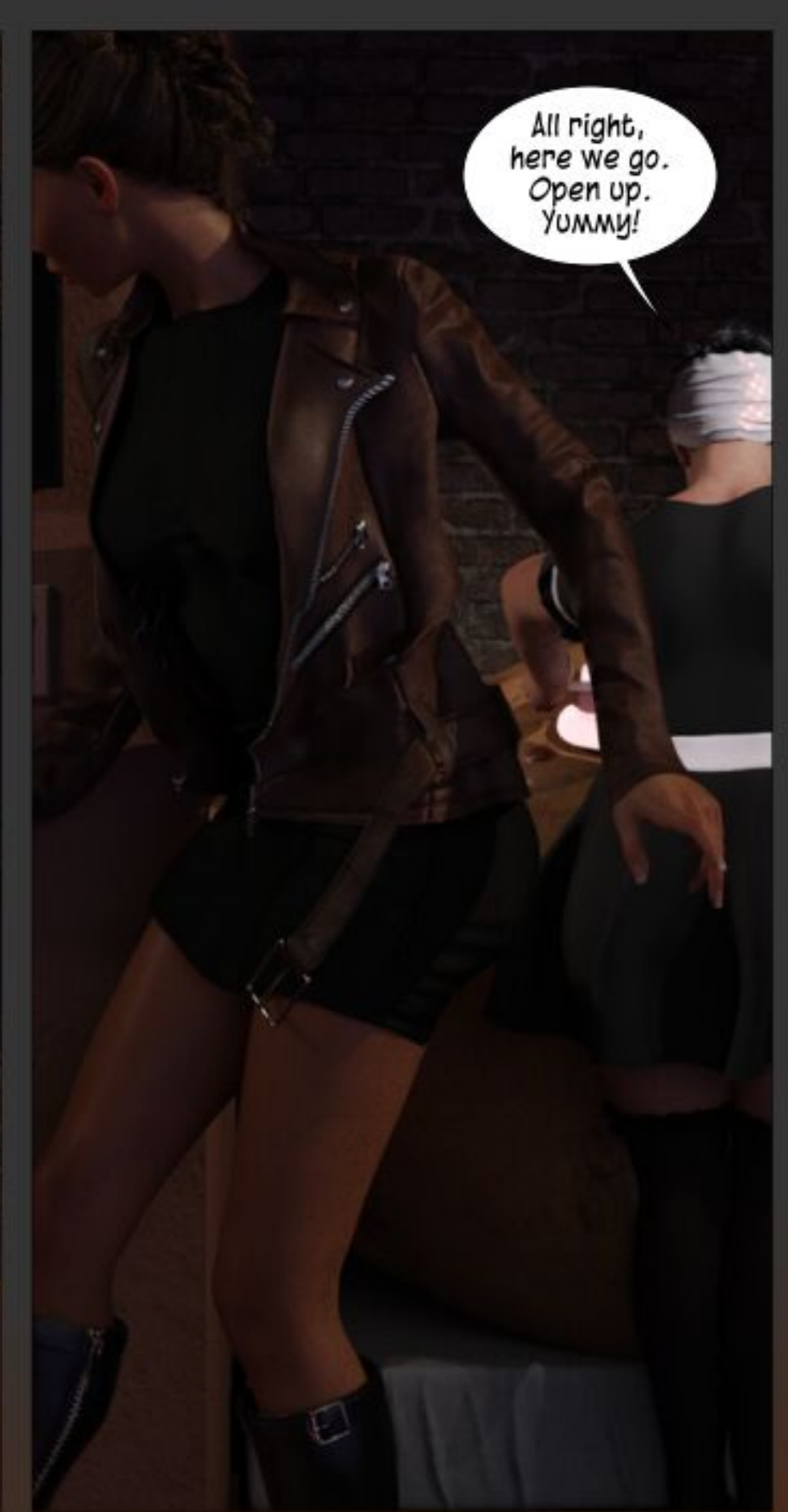
But first we need to clean up that face. One meal on it at a time!

And you need a Presh bib. You're becoming such a messy eater ...

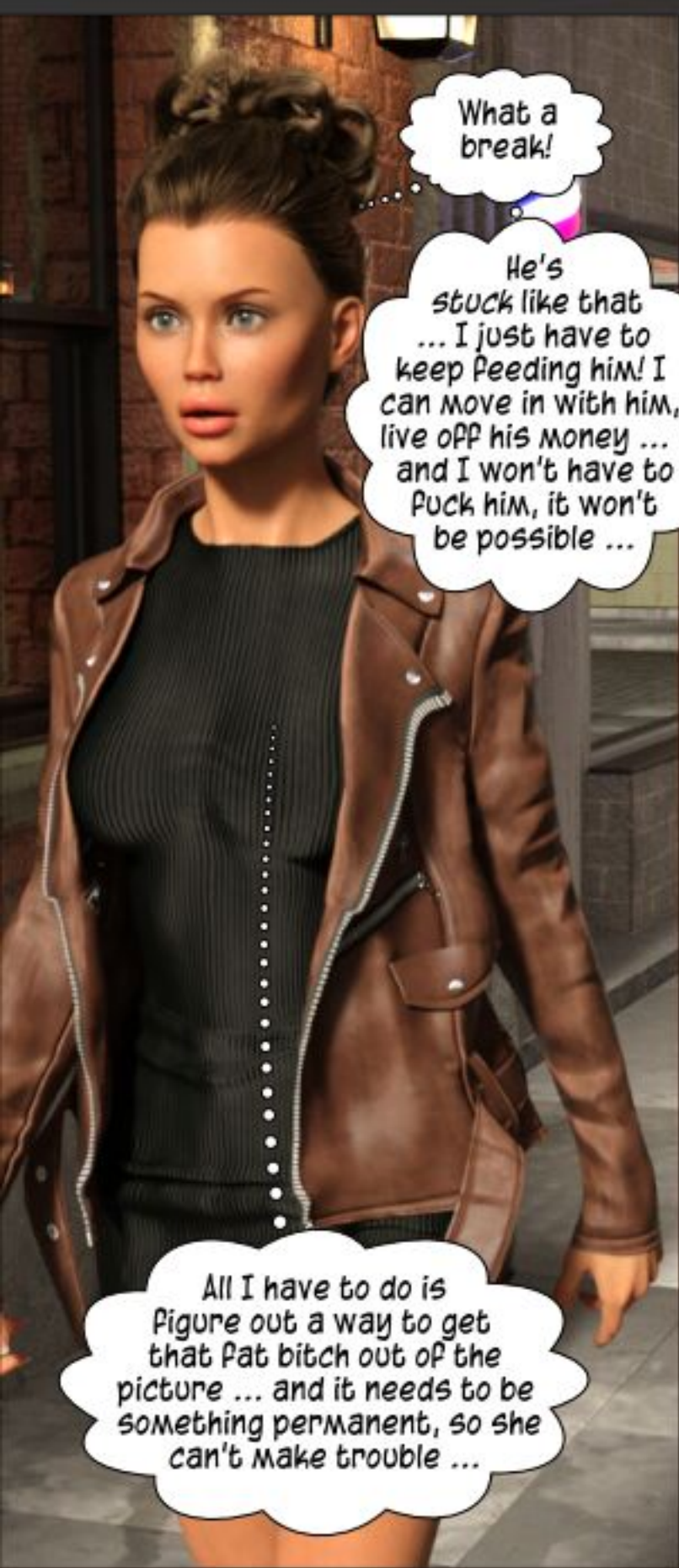


Mrggh!

Oh, don't make a Puss.



All right, here we go. Open up. Yummy!



What a break!

He's stuck like that ... I just have to keep Peeding him! I can move in with him, live off his money ... and I won't have to Puck him, it won't be possible ...

All I have to do is figure out a way to get that fat bitch out of the picture ... and it needs to be something permanent, so she can't make trouble ...



AND SO, TWO DAYS LATER ...



AAAGH!!



You know, it's all fun and games until someone gets shot.

Don't move, Kate! We're going to get you to a hospital!

oarg ...



Hello?

Is someone there?

If you're there, help me!



Oh, you poor thing.

No food all day. You must be starving.

You really did love her, didn't you?

And she must have loved you at least a little, or she wouldn't have tried to kill me.

Well, never mind that now.

I've got a surprise for you! Hold on, I'll bring it in.



My friends weren't happy about what she did, so they helped out.

Look, now you can have your Kate and Edie too! -- giggle --



Now, it's going to take you quite a while to eat all this.

But it's OK. We have all the time in the world.



Open wide.



When I said he was going to get his just desserts, perhaps you didn't realize I was being literal.



Incidentally, there was no mind control or mind manipulation of any kind in that story. The effects of Isabelle's special salt were purely physiological.

You may find that difficult to believe, given Hall Phillips' behavior.



Some people just want to be cared for.

Some people just want to care for someone.

If they manage to find each other, they might live happily ever after ...

... as long as neither of them is in denial about who they are and what they want.



Our next story is also about someone who may not know what she wants.

Her name is Jen Trulo, and she could really use a change of lifestyle.



A copy of myself? That's, uh ... Don't you think that's a little ... extreme?

You're the one who is always saying how hard it is keeping up with everything in your life. Work, home, kids --

I mean, you're *Pried, Jen*. I hadn't wanted to bring it up before, but ...

Oh, thanks a lot.

Come on. I don't know if anybody else here notices, but I do. I've known you a long time.

OK, but a clone?

I mean, I've heard about them, but, honestly, I just figured that was bullshit ...



It is absolutely for real. Just between us ... I got one last year.

Seriously?

Seriously. They're not cheap, but she's been worth it. She does all the home stuff and I do the work part. And Zach's thrilled because he's always got someone to pay attention to him.

You know, sometimes you make Zach sound like he's your child, not your husband.

Don't get me started. Anyway, it's for real, and you should go take a look. I'll give you the address.

Well, I guess it can't hurt to find out more ...



They're not actually clones. A clone would be grown from your own tissue. But everybody wants to call them that.

They're more like robots ... but not metal and plastic. We're pioneering in bio-electronics. These are flesh and blood. They eat, drink, sleep ...

That's ... uh ... amazing.

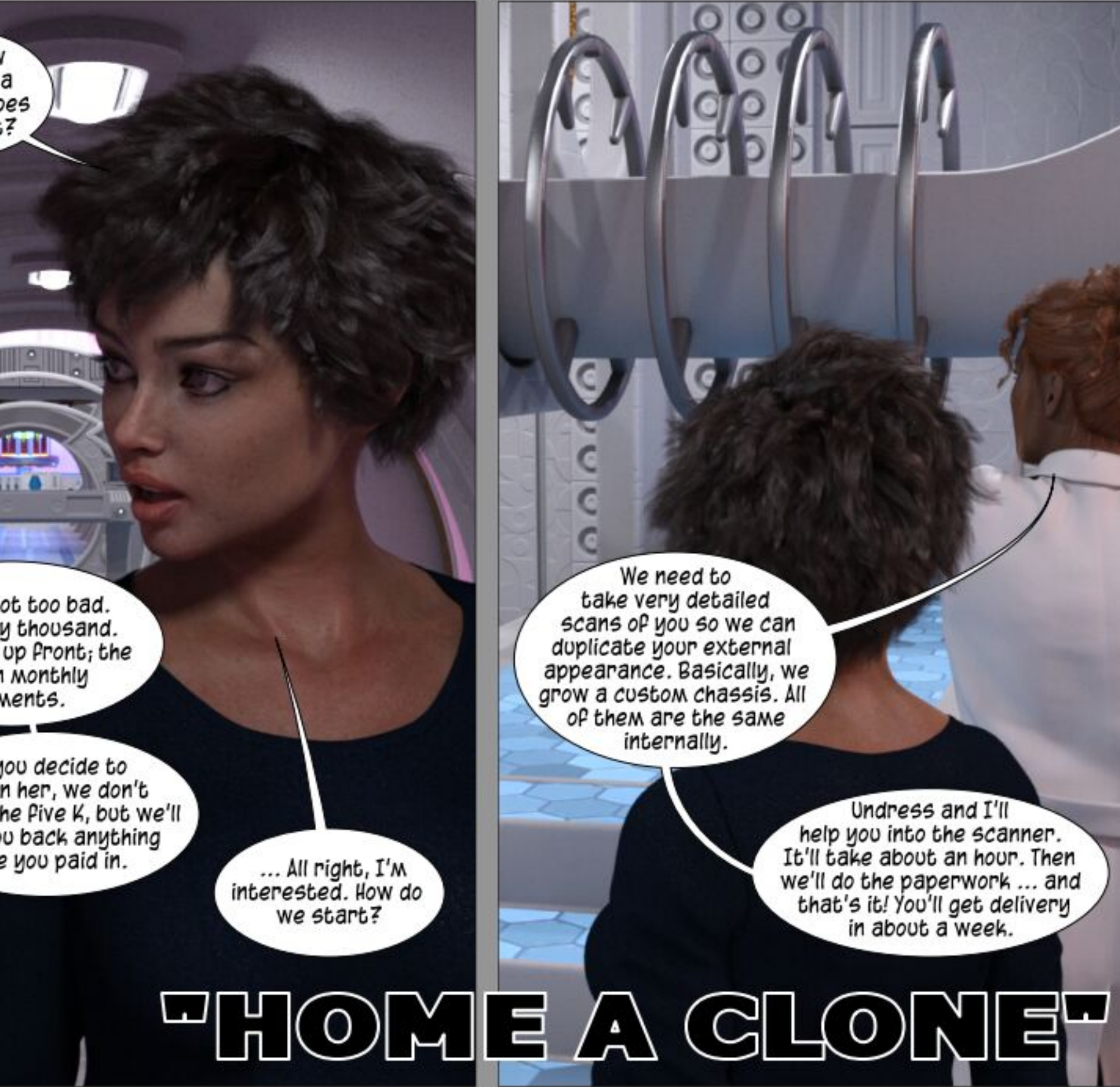
Yes, but not very practical. Industry wants robots that don't need to eat or sleep.

Domestic duplicates are pretty much the only thing we've come up with to use them for.

Why the duplicate part, though? Why not just make domestic robots?

Well, there's a problem with acceptance. We have to make their exteriors look perfectly human, or people have trouble interacting with them. Uncanny valley and all.

So why not model on real people? I mean, your family is a lot more likely to accept a helper robot that looks like you than one that looks like ... a robot.



And how much of a fortune does this cost?

Oh, it's not too bad. About fifty thousand. One-tenth up front; the rest in monthly payments.

If you decide to return her, we don't refund the five K, but we'll give you back anything else you paid in.

... All right, I'm interested. How do we start?

We need to take very detailed scans of you so we can duplicate your external appearance. Basically, we grow a custom chassis. All of them are the same internally.

Undress and I'll help you into the scanner. It'll take about an hour. Then we'll do the paperwork ... and that's it! You'll get delivery in about a week.

"HOME A CLONE"

ABOUT A WEEK LATER.



Oh, my goodness! I didn't know she was going to come like that ...

And it's just you moving it?

She's on a grav dolly, ma'am. A baby could move it.

Where are we going?

The spare bedroom, I guess ... if you think you can get her up the stairs ...

Stairs'll be no problem. Question's whether there's room for the install. Let's have a look.



Well, I had to punch a couple of holes in the wall ... and reFit the lid a little ... but she's in.

Also had to take down the closet doors, of course.

Is she dead?

She's asleep, dipshit.

We weren't using that closet anyway.

Suze! Language!

And don't call your brother names.



Now, she might prefer to sleep in it. They tell me it's very restful.

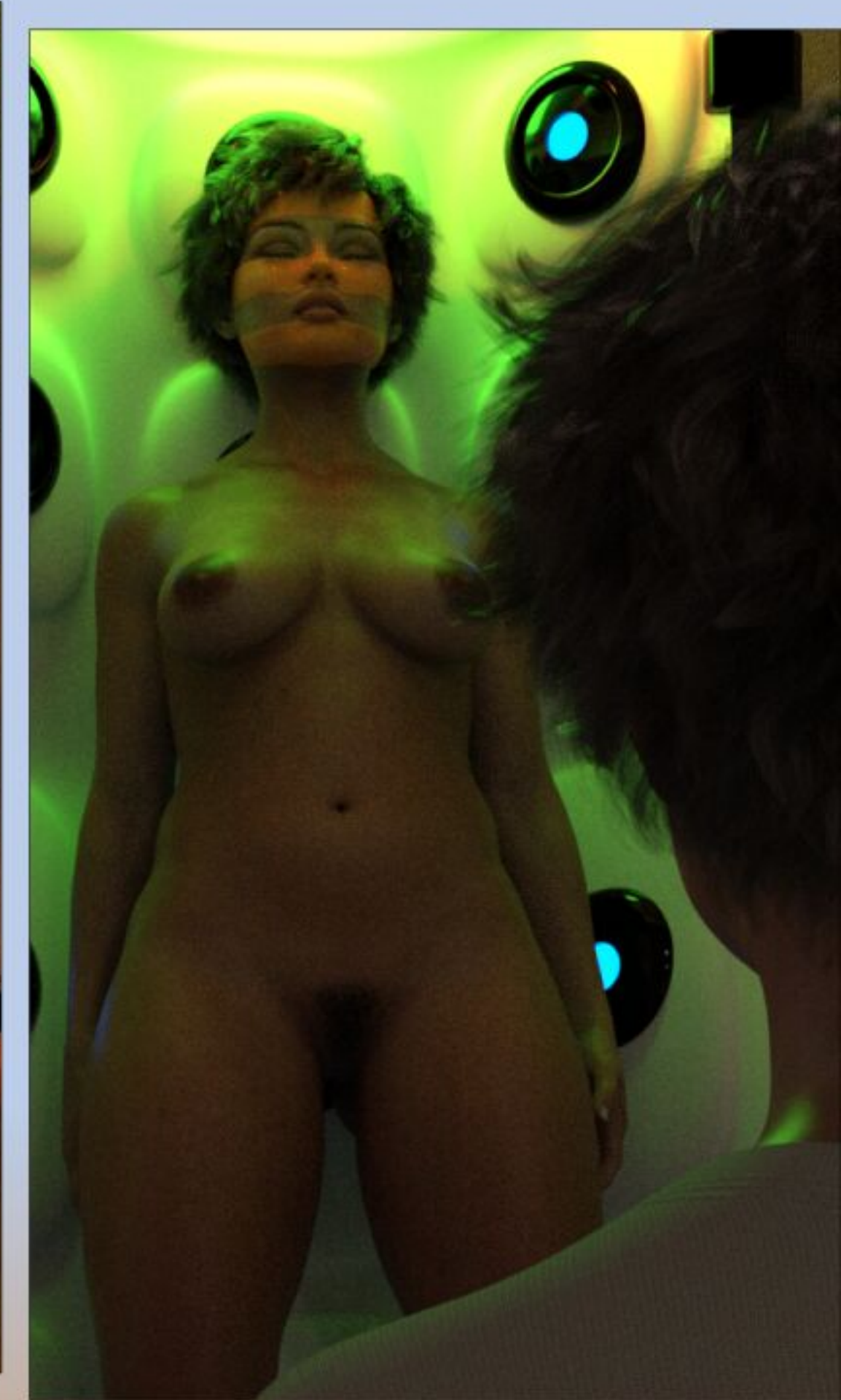
This is so cool ...

Don't touch it!

Just remember, if she goes in and she doesn't set an alarm on the console, she won't wake up on her own. You have to wake her.

And though her body slows way down when she's in it, she does still need to eat and drink, and pee, and all that. So don't let her stay in there more than two or three days at a time. You don't want her to starve.

Kids! That's your mother's! Come out of there!



Hello, Jen.



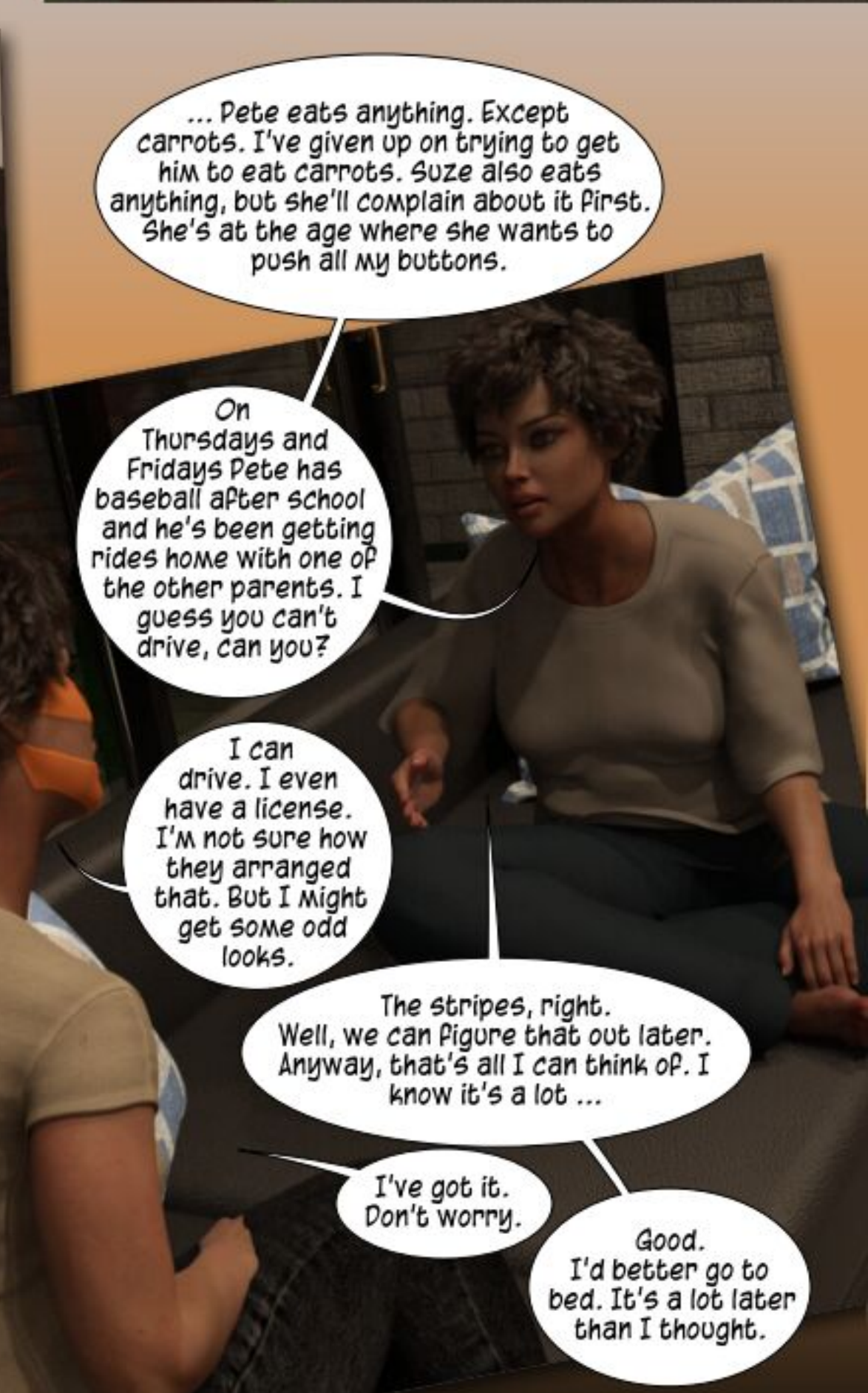
This is super confusing. We can't call you both the same name.

Well, she's Jen 1 and I'm Jen 2. How's that?

What happens if we just say "Mom"?

You get whichever one's closest.

Go set the table, please.



... Pete eats anything. Except carrots. I've given up on trying to get him to eat carrots. Suze also eats anything, but she'll complain about it first. She's at the age where she wants to push all my buttons.

On Thursdays and Fridays Pete has baseball after school and he's been getting rides home with one of the other parents. I guess you can't drive, can you?

I can drive. I even have a license. I'm not sure how they arranged that. But I might get some odd looks.

The stripes, right. Well, we can figure that out later. Anyway, that's all I can think of. I know it's a lot ...

I've got it. Don't worry.

Good. I'd better go to bed. It's a lot later than I thought.



David, I think this is going to work! I wasn't sure, but now I actually think it's going to turn out great!

Well ... uh, good!

I mean, I don't really understand ... but it's your money, and if you think it'll help ...



So, seeing as how you're feeling so good about all this ... Uh ... do you want to ...?

-- sigh --

I suppose so ...

Well, try not to sound so enthusiastic!



I'm sorry, honey. You know it's not you.

I just don't have the energy a lot these days ...

Maybe once she starts taking some of the load off, things will get better. Maybe I won't be tired all the time.

THE NEXT MORNING.

I don't even know how I'm running so late! Did everybody get Fed?

It's Fine, Mom.

We had pancakes!

Pancakes? Goodness!

You're going to spoil them.

A bowl of cereal isn't enough to start the day on.

You should eat something too. I've got more batter in the Fridge.

Not enough time, sorry. I'm just going to grab some coffee for the car.

Oh, by the way, I may have to work late tonight. I'll call.

THE DAYS PASS ...

Keep the Fingers of your other hand curved in. You never want your Fingertips out.

Keep the knife hand in one place; Move the food to the knife, not the other way 'round.

What's this?

She's teaching me to cook!

Suze is helping make dinner tonight.

Pete, you had something you wanted to ask your mother?

Oh, yeah! We're having a night game on Friday! Will you come?

It's probably their only night game of the year, and they're trying to get Family to attend who might not be able to come to day games ...

Oh ... I'm sorry, Pete, but I can't.

I have to work late that night.

Oh, here you are.

David has agreed to go to Pete's baseball game.

Great.

... What's wrong?

They didn't warn me about this problem when I got you.

You're a lot better at all this than I am.

The house is spotless; you cook much more than I ever did; the kids think you're great ...

You even got Pete to eat carrots, for god's sake!

Well ... the house is clean partly because I convinced David and the kids that they needed to help out.

It was never fair, in a house where both parents work, to have you doing all the home labor, y'know. And it's their house too. The kids are old enough to understand that.

I cook a lot because I like to cook, and I want to make sure everybody has good food to eat.

And the secret to carrots is to cut them into really tiny pieces and add brown sugar. Also, Pete liked that Suze made them because he thinks his sister walks on water.

The point is, if you neglected all that, it's because you just had too much to do! You couldn't give it that kind of attention! I mean, that's why I'm here -- to do the things you couldn't quite get to.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER, JEN COMES HOME FROM AN ESPECIALLY LATE NIGHT AT WORK.

Kids are asleep by now ... well, Pete's asleep, and Suze is in her room hoping nobody will notice she's still awake.

David is surely still up, reading in bed ...



At least put something on.

I don't see why.

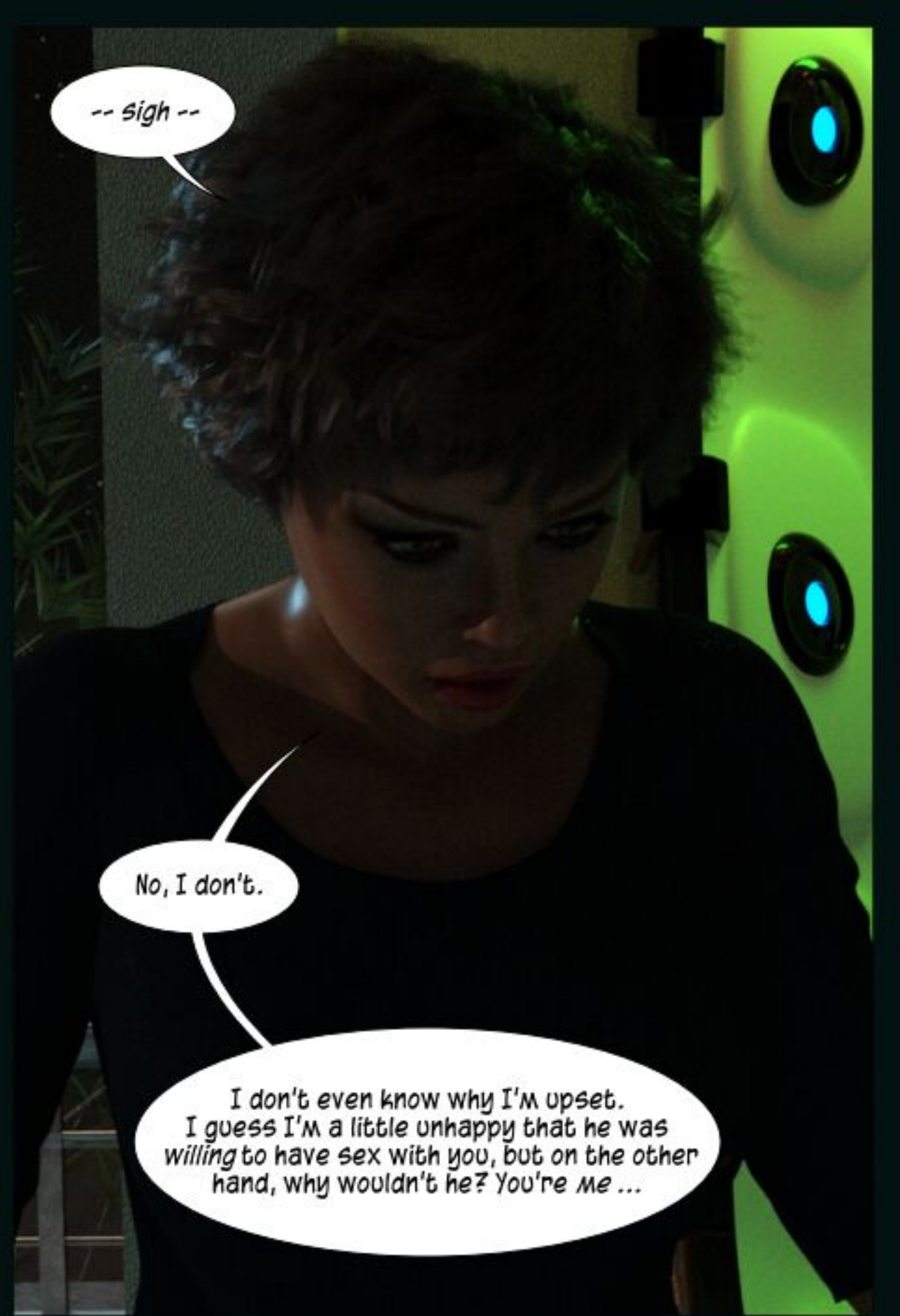


So David's also one of the "things I couldn't quite get to"?

Well, isn't he?

That's -- uh -- That's cruel.

Cruel to whom? I mean, you don't want to have sex with him, do you? You have excuses, but it doesn't seem like you really want to.



-- sigh --

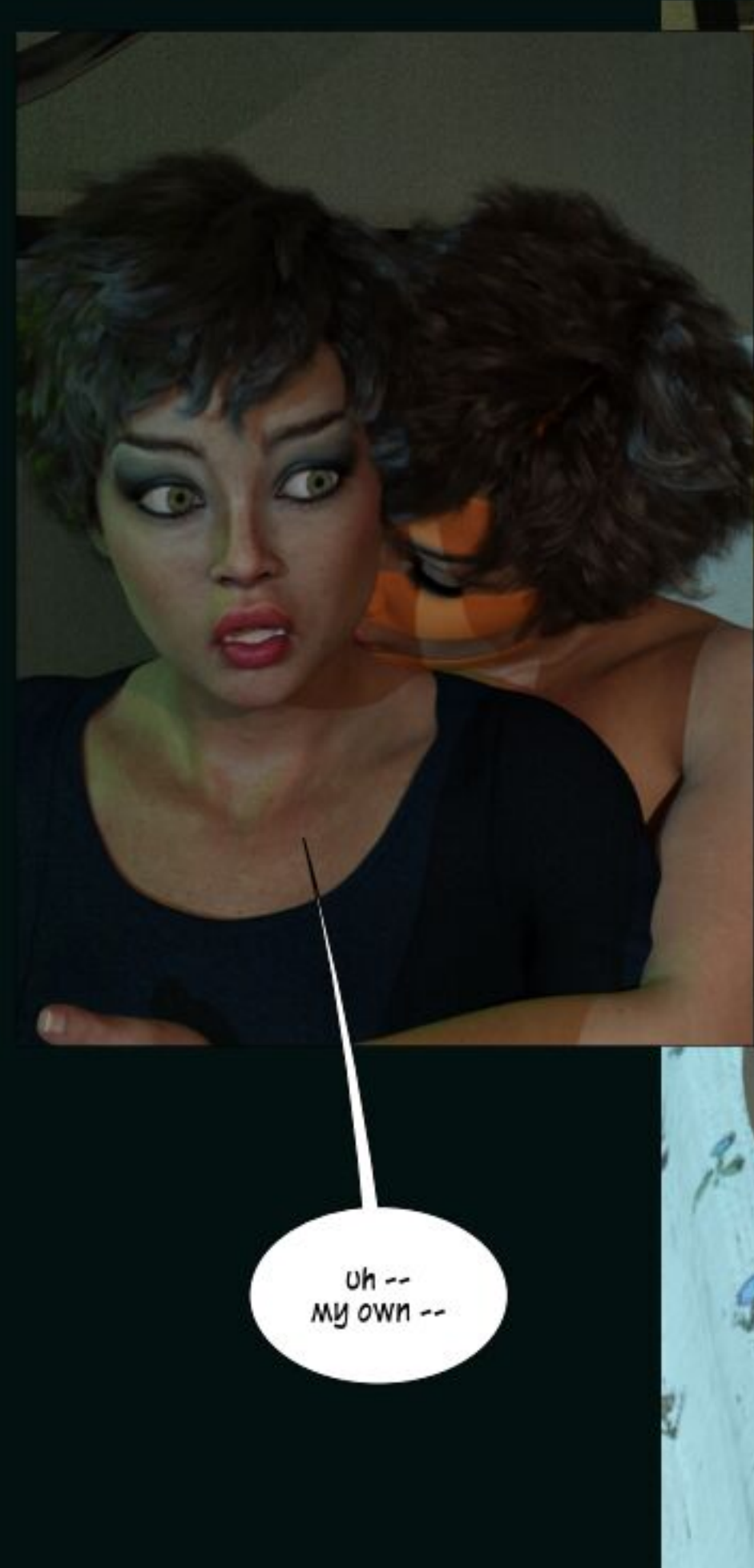
No, I don't.

I don't even know why I'm upset. I guess I'm a little unhappy that he was willing to have sex with you, but on the other hand, why wouldn't he? You're me ...



I guess what's really bothering me is I don't know why I don't want to have sex with him ... I still love him ... I'm pretty sure I still find him attractive ...

It's frustrating! I don't know my --



uh -- my own --

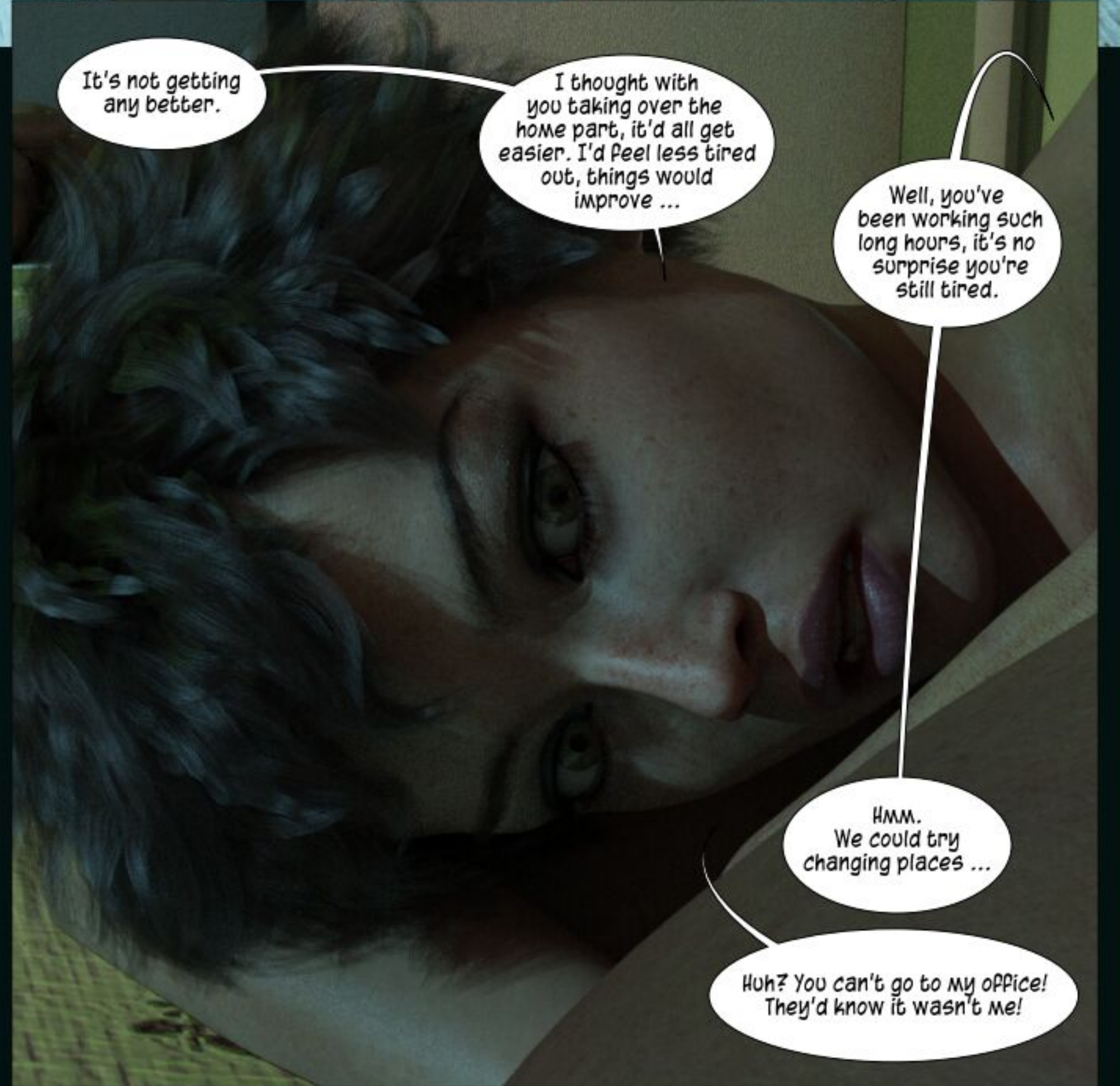


MUCH LATER THAT NIGHT.

Jen?

MMMM?

... I have a problem.



It's not getting any better.

I thought with you taking over the home part, it'd all get easier. I'd feel less tired out, things would improve ...

Well, you've been working such long hours, it's no surprise you're still tired.

Hmm. We could try changing places ...

Huh? You can't go to my office! They'd know it wasn't me!



What, because of the stripes?

This is a mask. A sticker. They make us wear them because some people have weird ideas.

Go see if you can take off what's left of your makeup without waking David. Bring some rubbing alcohol back with you.



See? I reapply the adhesive, you put it on ... and suddenly we're each other.

If that's what you want.

I mean, it won't hurt to try it for a while ...



But you can't just take my place at work! I've been there for years ... there's all kinds of things you'd need to know ... it'd take ages for me to teach you all of it.

I have a solution for that too. Let me go dig them out of my kit.



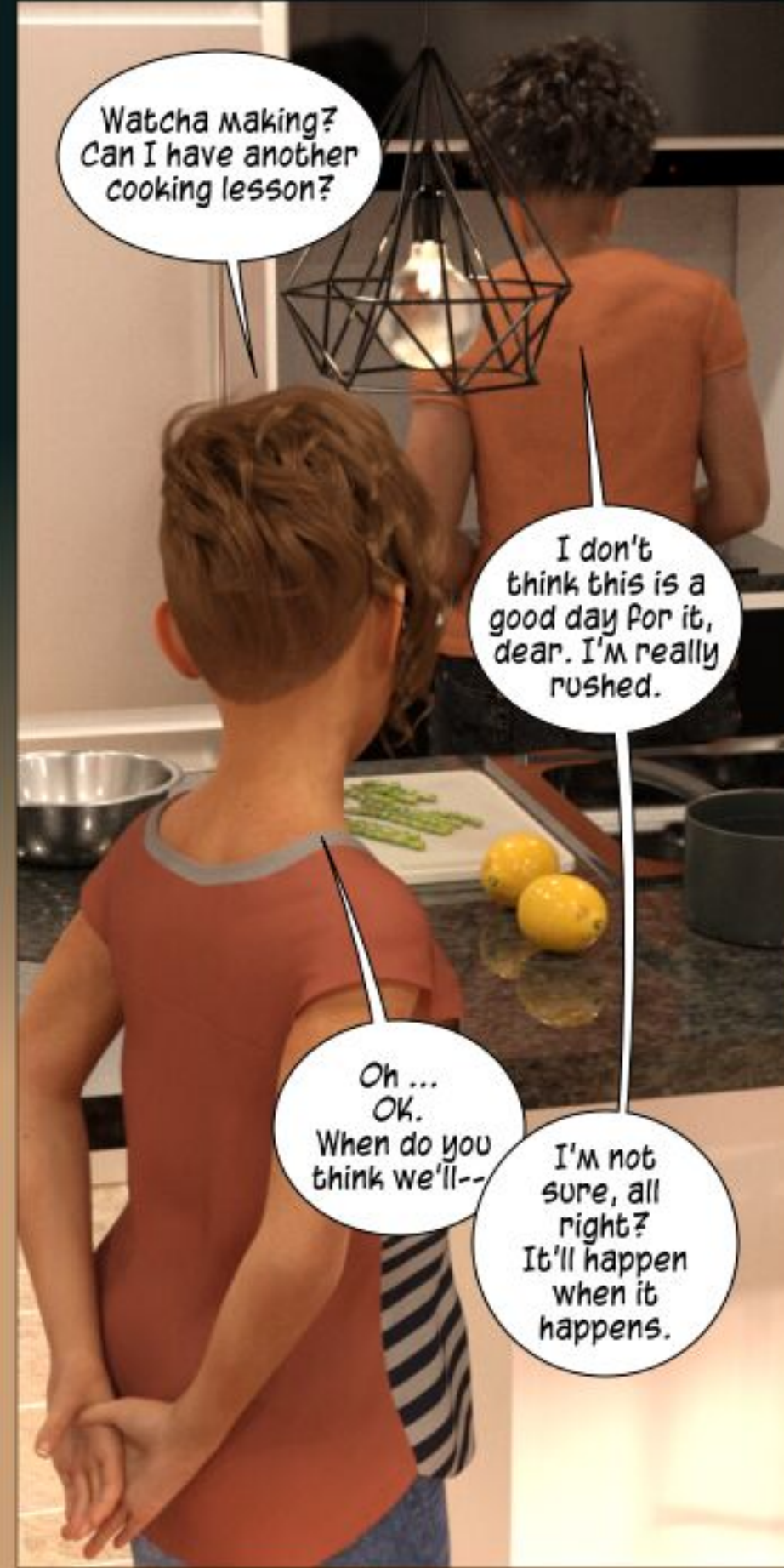
Now, what I'll do, I'll ask you questions about your workplace and your co-workers and so on, and as you think about all those things, the information will go straight into my head.

We have these just for this kind of situation.

Uh ... OK. This isn't going to give me brain damage or anything, right?

No. It's just like if you were telling me all those things. Only a lot faster.

A FEW DAYS PASS ...



Watcha making? Can I have another cooking lesson?

I don't think this is a good day for it, dear. I'm really rushed.

Oh ... OK. When do you think we'll--

I'm not sure, all right? It'll happen when it happens.



I'm home, everybody!

I stopped at the bakery and got dessert.

Jen, do you need any help with dinner?



It's weird.

They switched places. Duh.

It doesn't work like that, dipshit!

Suze.

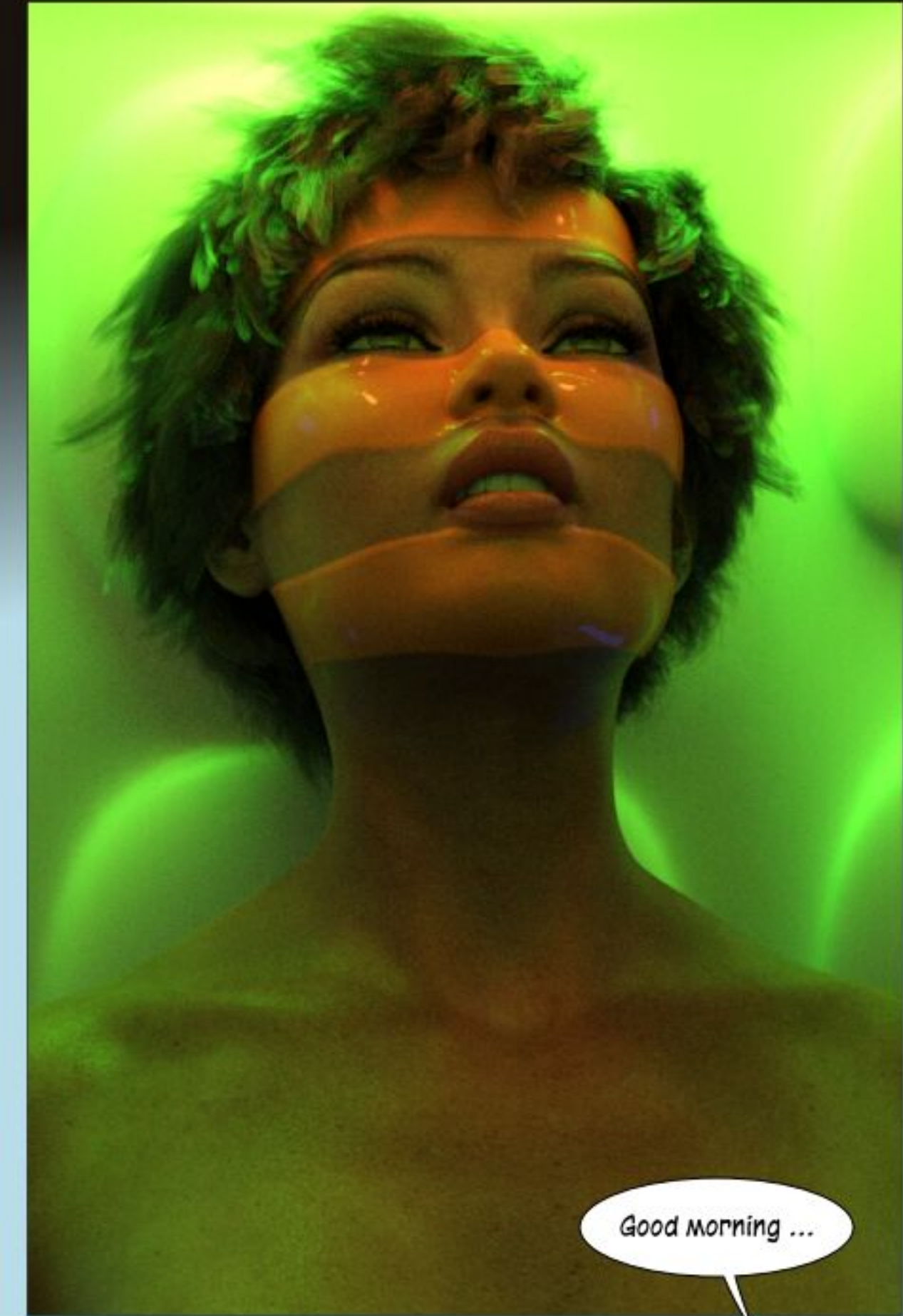
Sorry, Dad.

Besides, your brother has a point.



LATER.

Good night, Jen! See you in the morning.



Good morning ...



If you're going to use it, you should set a timer, or you won't wake up. I noticed you weren't up, so I came to check.

Sorry ... I wasn't even sure it would work for me.

I brought you a robe. I need to go finish getting dressed now. The kids aren't downstairs yet.



Hey! ... Are you all right?

Huh?

Yeah.

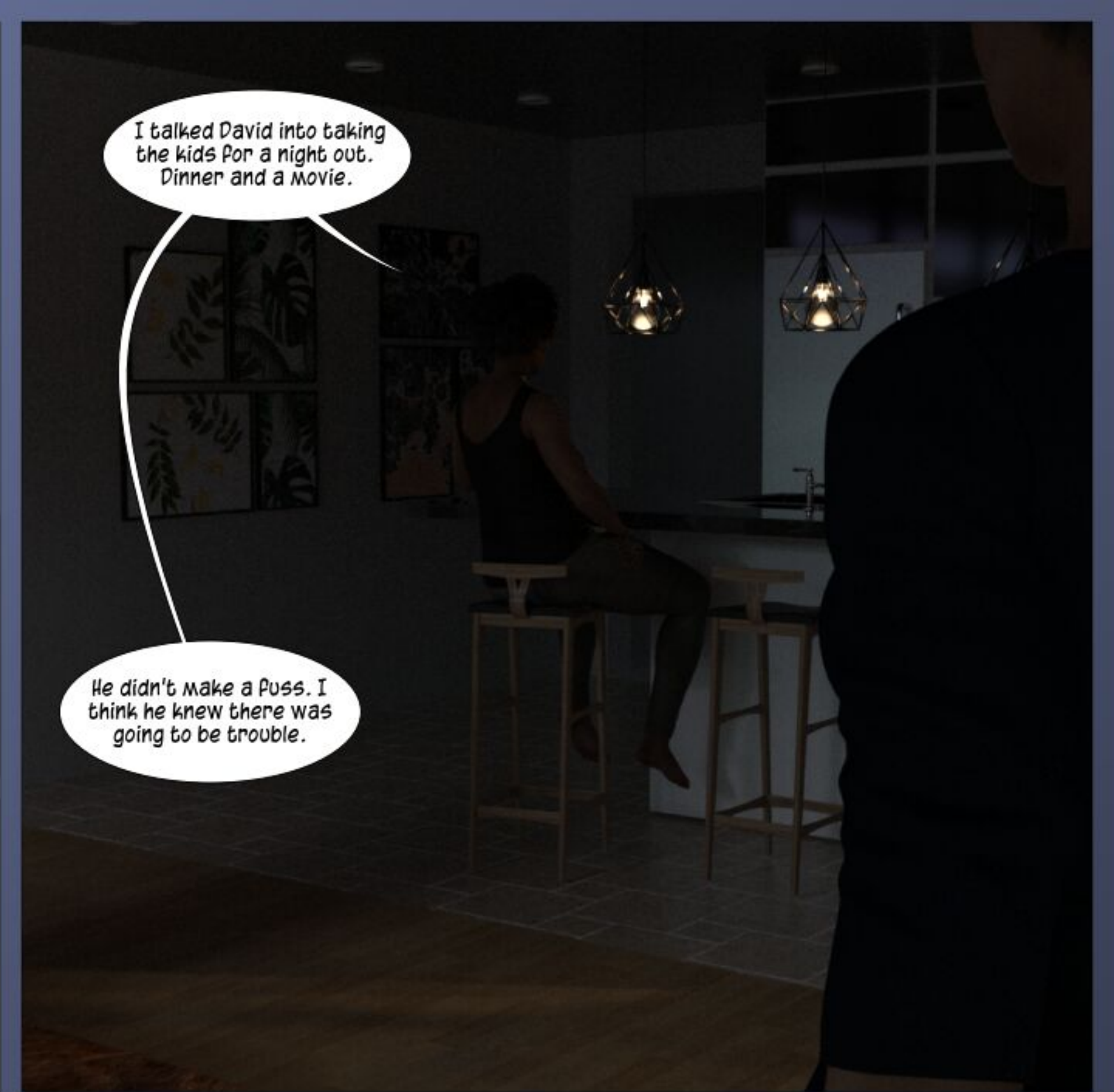
I'm fine.



I'm home, everybody!



Hello?



I talked David into taking the kids for a night out. Dinner and a movie.

He didn't make a Puss. I think he knew there was going to be trouble.



I realized this morning I couldn't take it anymore. I need to go back to work ...

And then I found out I can't remember work! I can't remember anything about what I do! I can't remember my co-workers' names ... I can't even remember some of their faces! It's all gone!

You took it from me! You took it out of my head! You're trying to take everything from me so you can replace me!

How long before I can't remember my children's names, Jen? How long before I forget David? How long before I forget myself?



It doesn't work like that!

Look ... I can believe you've purged the information, but you have to understand ... that wasn't the helmets!

You lost it because your brain didn't want to keep it! You taught it to me and your brain said, "Well, won't need that anymore," and dumped it.

You taught me how to do your job, and you were relieved you wouldn't have to do it, and you were happy to be done with it!

And you're not going to lose any of the other stuff ... unless ...



Don't you touch me!

Jen, listen to me. I suspected from the beginning, but I wasn't sure until I started going to your office.

You never needed to work those late nights. No one else there even knows you did. You weren't working. You were trying to put off coming home.

You're not interested in your job anymore ... but you're also not interested in your home life. That's why you're having problems now. You're not interested in your kids, your husband ... any of it.

No ... that's not --

That's why you're scared your mind will dump all that. Because you know that if it could, it would.



oh my god i'm such a horrible person.

No, you're not.

What's wrong with me? There's nothing bad about my life. I've got a good job, a good husband, reasonably good kids ... We've got a nice house and we're not hurting for money and --

-- and none of that matters a bit. It happens. It doesn't mean you're horrible.

I -- uh -- I'm not sure I believe that.



Would you like to go upstairs?

... yes.



LATER.

But what do I do now?

I think there's only one solution, really.

I figure, what you need is to be companion to a woman who's not in any kind of relationship and is lonely. Someone who wants you for sex and adventures.

I'll pass along instructions. They're good people. They'll take care of you.



You mean ...

Is that even possible?

Sure. We're different inside, but not that different. They can grow you a new exterior. Just like they'd do for me if you sent me back.

Like I said, they're good people. They want everybody to be happy. It's a special request, sure, but they'll do it if we ask them to.



Jen?

They will --

I mean -- They are going to ... wake me up, right?

Of course.



You're returning her?

Mmm. They'll be here to pick her up in a few hours.

We'll have to patch the holes in the wall ourselves. I'll call someone.

But why? I thought she was working out for you -- making your life better and all ...

Because we don't need her anymore.

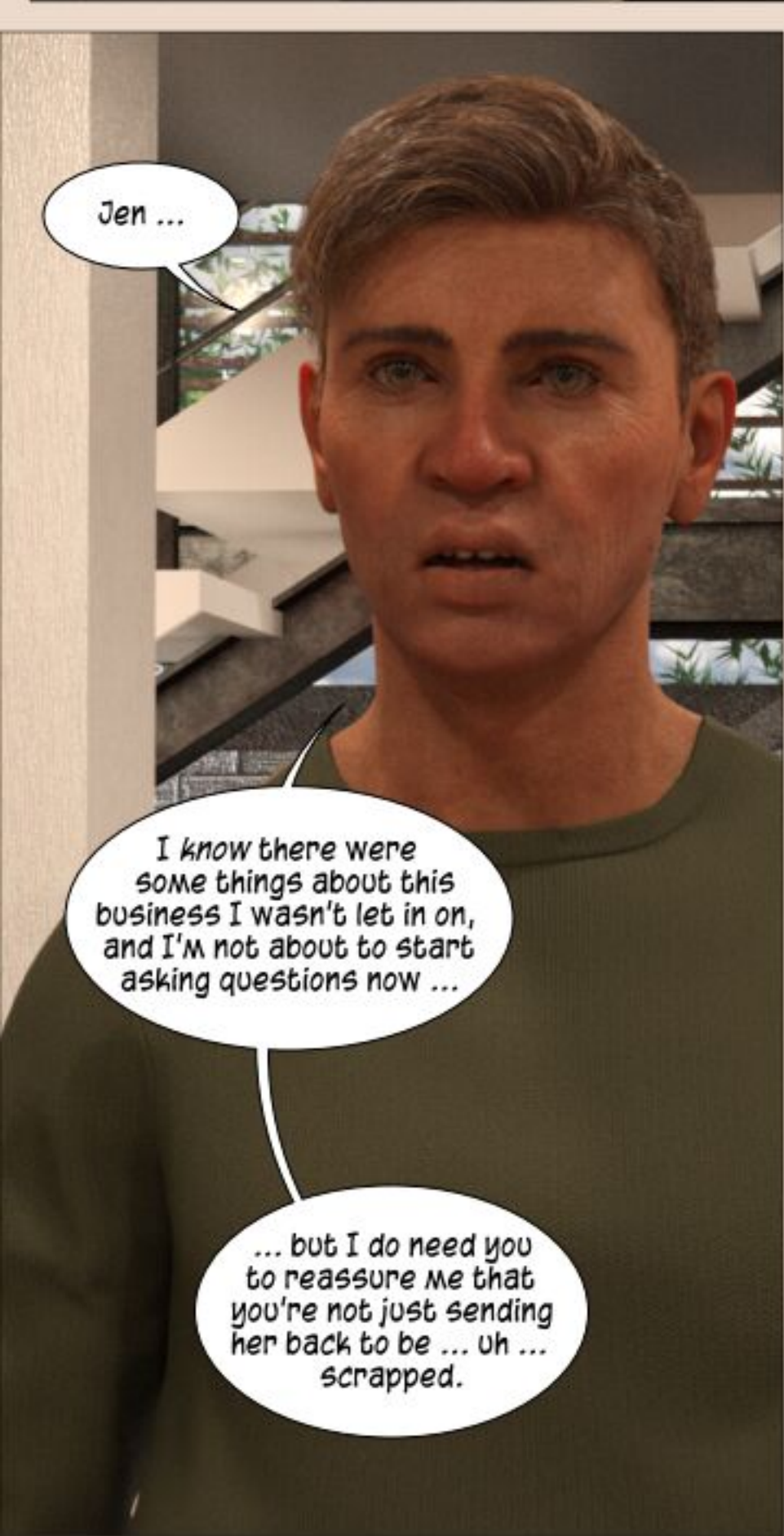


With you and the kids helping out, the load here at home isn't nearly as bad, and I have some time to relax ... and I've pushed back at work for more reasonable conditions there ...

I'm not stressed anymore. In fact, I'm very happy.

So did we get the good one or the bad one?

Ssh!



Jen ...

I know there were some things about this business I wasn't let in on, and I'm not about to start asking questions now ...

... but I do need you to reassure me that you're not just sending her back to be ... uh ... scrapped.



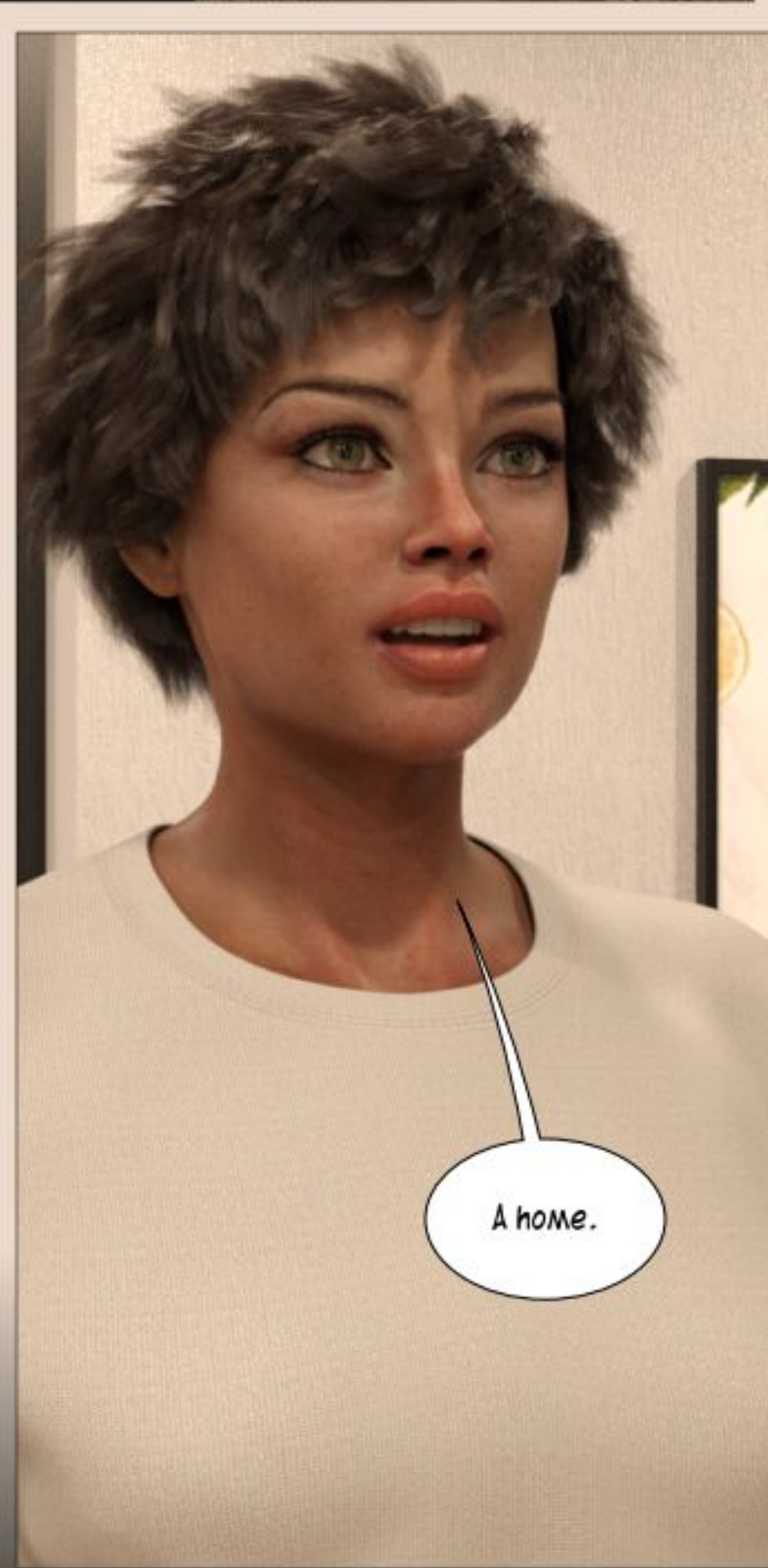
Oh, honey, no! I wouldn't do that. They wouldn't do that. She's a person.

She ... wasn't happy with this situation. They'll find something better for her.

Trust me, it's all going to be fine. Everybody is going to be fine.

You get what you want; the kids get what they want; she gets what she wants, and I get what I want.

Mmm. And what is it that you want? Because lately I haven't been sure about that.



A home.



You may have assumed that was leading somewhere considerably more sinister.

I can see why you'd jump to that conclusion, but we felt something gentler was in order.

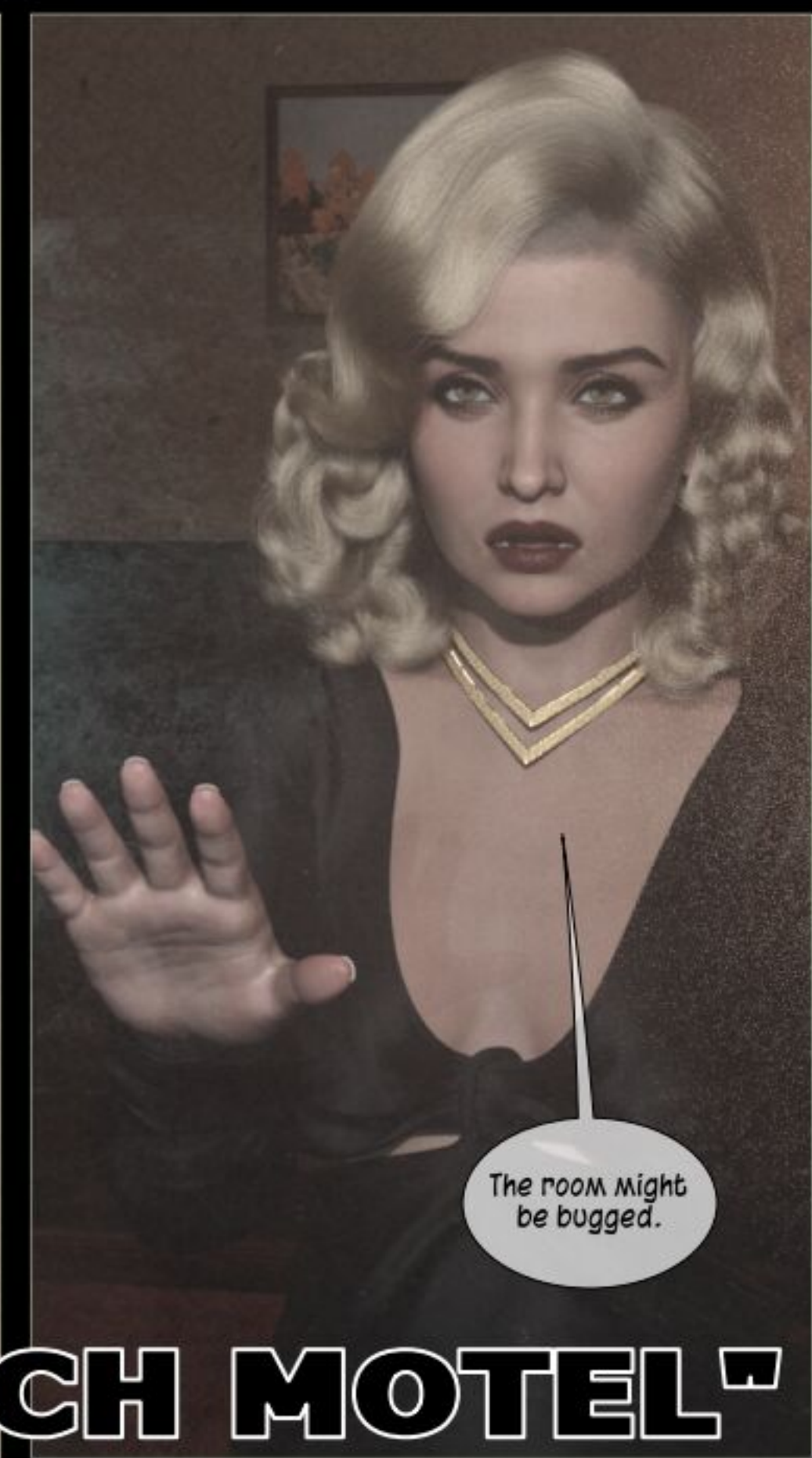
After all, if you want to see people attempting to devalue and eliminate other people through abuse of technology, you can just go read your daily news.



Besides, in a few minutes you may be thankful for the soft landing in that one.

Because our final story is not gentle, and not pleasant.





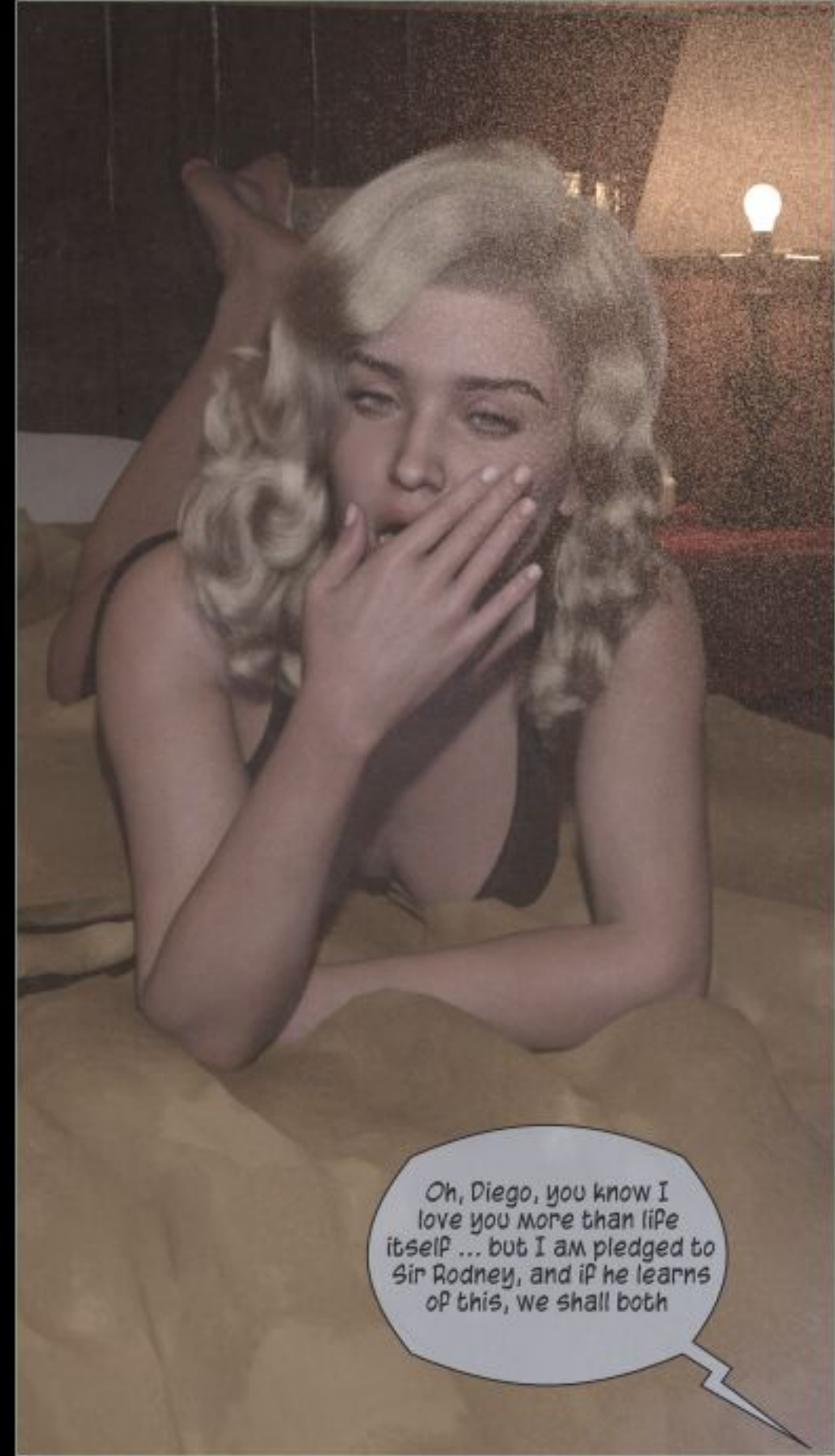
The only thing open was a gas station. Not great, but it's Food.

I figure it'll take me a few days to get--

Wait! Not in here. Let me step outside.

The room might be bugged.

"ROACH MOTEL"



Oh, Diego, you know I love you more than life itself ... but I am pledged to Sir Rodney, and if he learns of this, we shall both

Are you nuts?



It's only two kilos. You can hide it *anywhere*. You could just about stuff the damned things into your bra.

That's not the point!

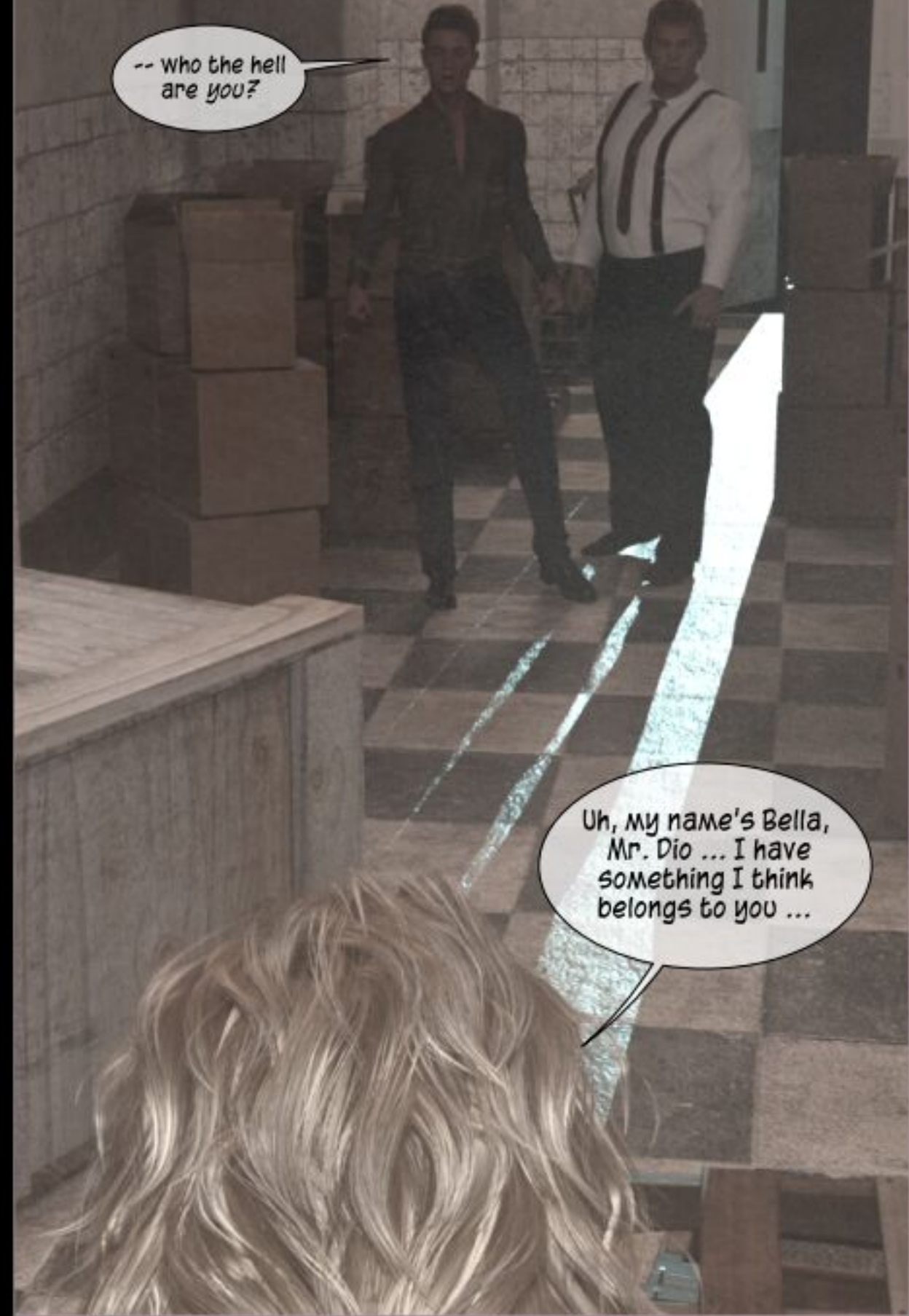
That shit is trouble! I don't want it around. I'd have to take it home to hide it -- I don't want to carry it. *Anywhere*. Bad enough you bringing it in here!

Bella, c'mon. We've known each other a long time. We're Friends. We trust each other.

Would I do something that would put you at risk?

And you know how much the cops like to bust us! They haul me in for soliciting, I pay a fine. They catch me with *that*, I go to jail.

Less than a day. I'll take it back tomorrow afternoon.



I don't know, Jimmy! I can't figure out where it's happening, but we're definitely coming up short.

Well, we need to find it and fix it in a hurry, before Papa gets wind and --

-- Who the hell are you?

Uh, my name's Bella, Mr. Dio ... I have something I think belongs to you ...



Danny Blake wanted me to hold onto it for him ...

And we can check that right now.

... Jimmy! Haven't seen you down here in a while ...

... but I know Danny works for you as a runner, and this just doesn't smell right, and if he's stealing from you I'm damned if I'm getting in the middle of it ...

Well, how about that.

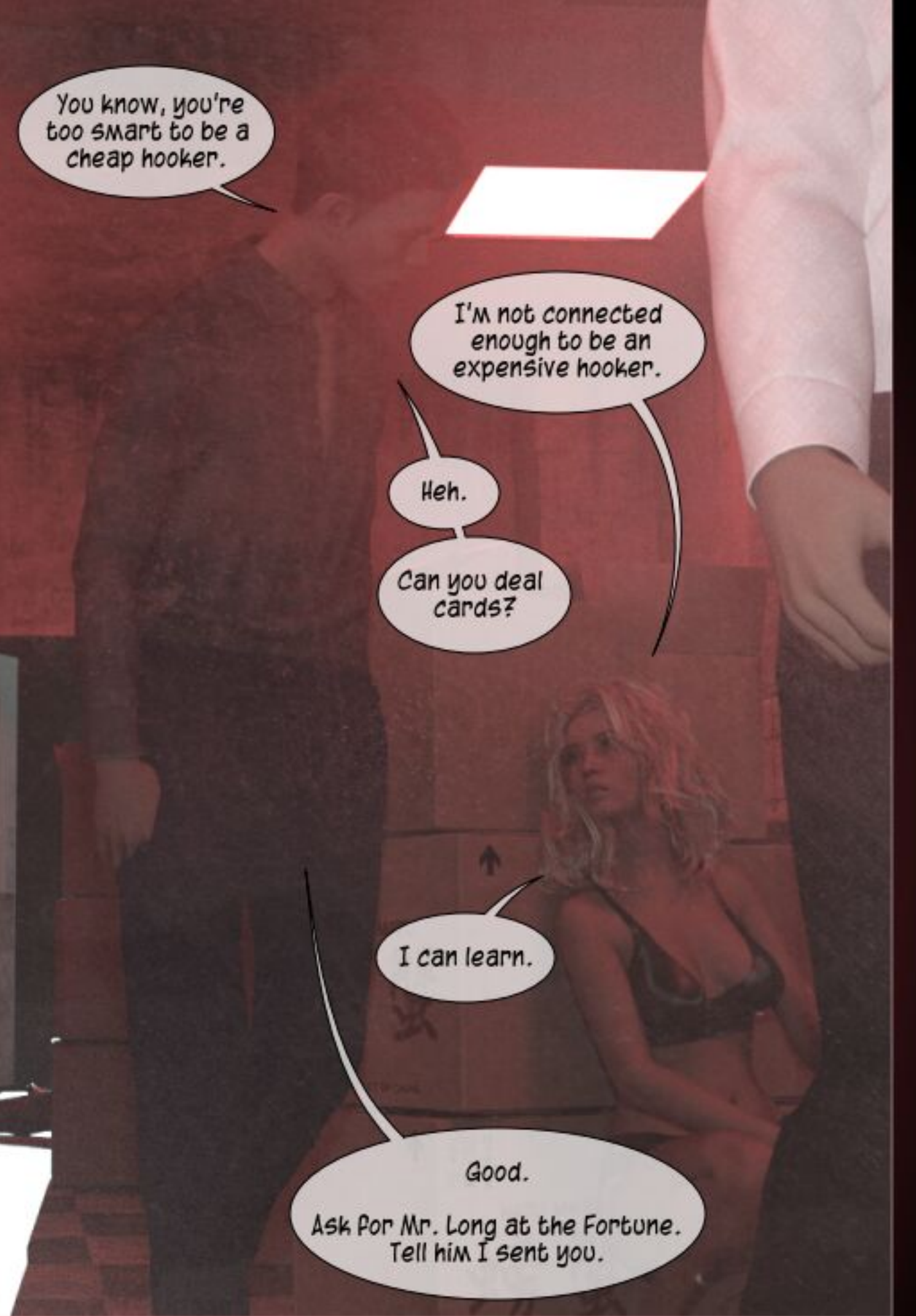
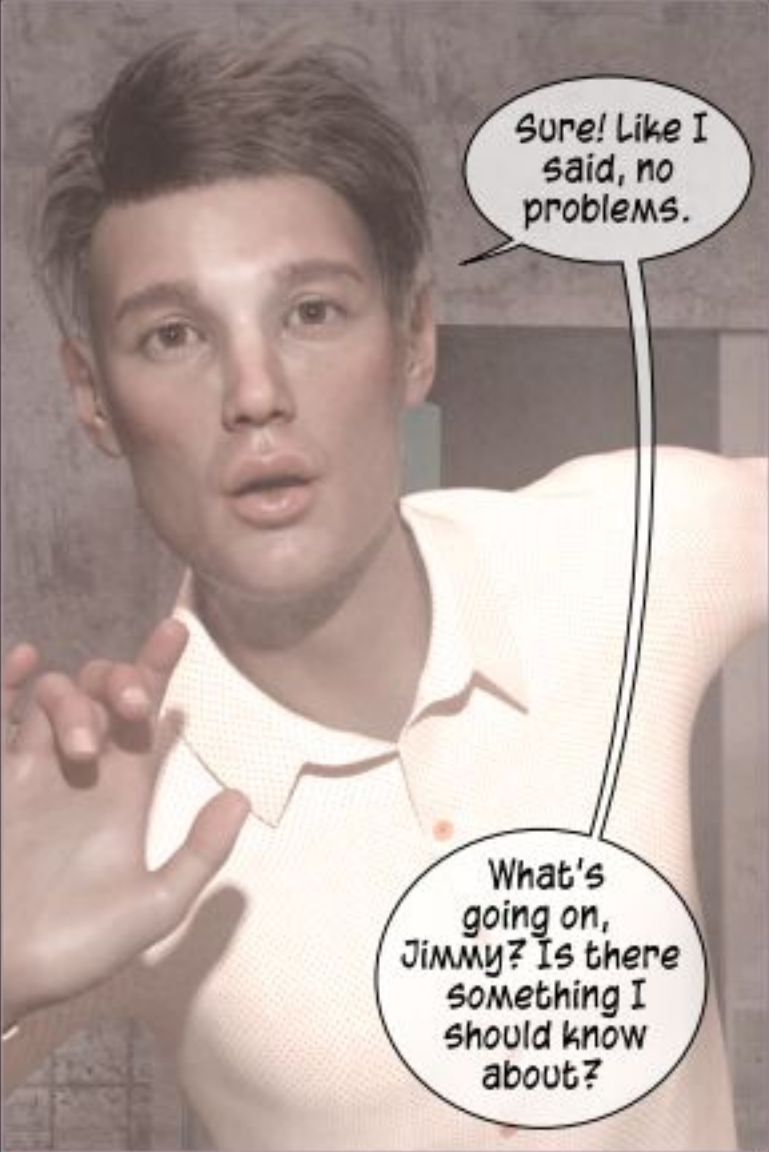
You might just have solved a mystery for us. If you're telling the truth.

Get out of sight! Quick!

Blake. All done with yesterday's load? No problems?

Nah, there never are. It's a smooth route.

So the entire load got delivered and paid for, then?



Sure! Like I said, no problems.

That's what I've been trying to find out.

Jimmy, no! It's not --

You know, you're too smart to be a cheap hooker.

I'm not connected enough to be an expensive hooker.

Heh.

Can you deal cards?

What's going on, Jimmy? Is there something I should know about?

See, Augie and I couldn't figure which of you sonsabitches would be dumb enough to try to steal from me.

But I guess now we know.

NOOOO!!

I can learn.

Good. Ask for Mr. Long at the Fortune. Tell him I sent you.



I hope you're satisfied.

AAAAAAA!

Incredible catch from Yaquez to end the inning! The score remains two-two, with three innings left to play. We'll return after these messages.

Bad dream?



Girl, are you trying to commit suicide by polysorbate? You're not going to make it more than a few days if this shit is all you're eating ...

Sugar? How -- What are you doing here?

You, uh, you don't look so good ...

... and no clean-up Puss! Just toss the whole thing in the trash.



Of course I don't. I'm dead. You see how good you look once you're dead.

Black Flag Roach Motel: Roaches check in, but they don't check out!

Dead? But that's not -- What --

No. I'm imagining this. It's a hallucination. Or I'm still dreaming ...

Tell yourself that if it makes you feel better.



I'm dead, and it's your fault.

You don't have the slightest idea what's coming, but I do.

I'm here to watch.

That's if I don't just decide to strangle you right now and avoid the--

Get off me!
No!
Get away!
Get --



...



Sleep. That's what I need. If I can just get some solid ...



Bella! Get up!

First quarter economic indicators are down, possibly indicating we're entering a recession. Coming up, an interview with



Can't believe you let me sleep that late, Sugar ...

Aw, but you looked like you needed it so badly.

Also, that was the fourth time I tried to wake you up.



-- MMMh --
Try to have a good day anyway, OK?

Hey, you want to order Chinese tonight?



Damn it, Augie, why don't you give me some good advice for a change?

No, I know I can't do anything about him ... why do you think I'm pissed off? If I could do something about him, I'd do it!



Oh, hey, it's my favorite dealer!

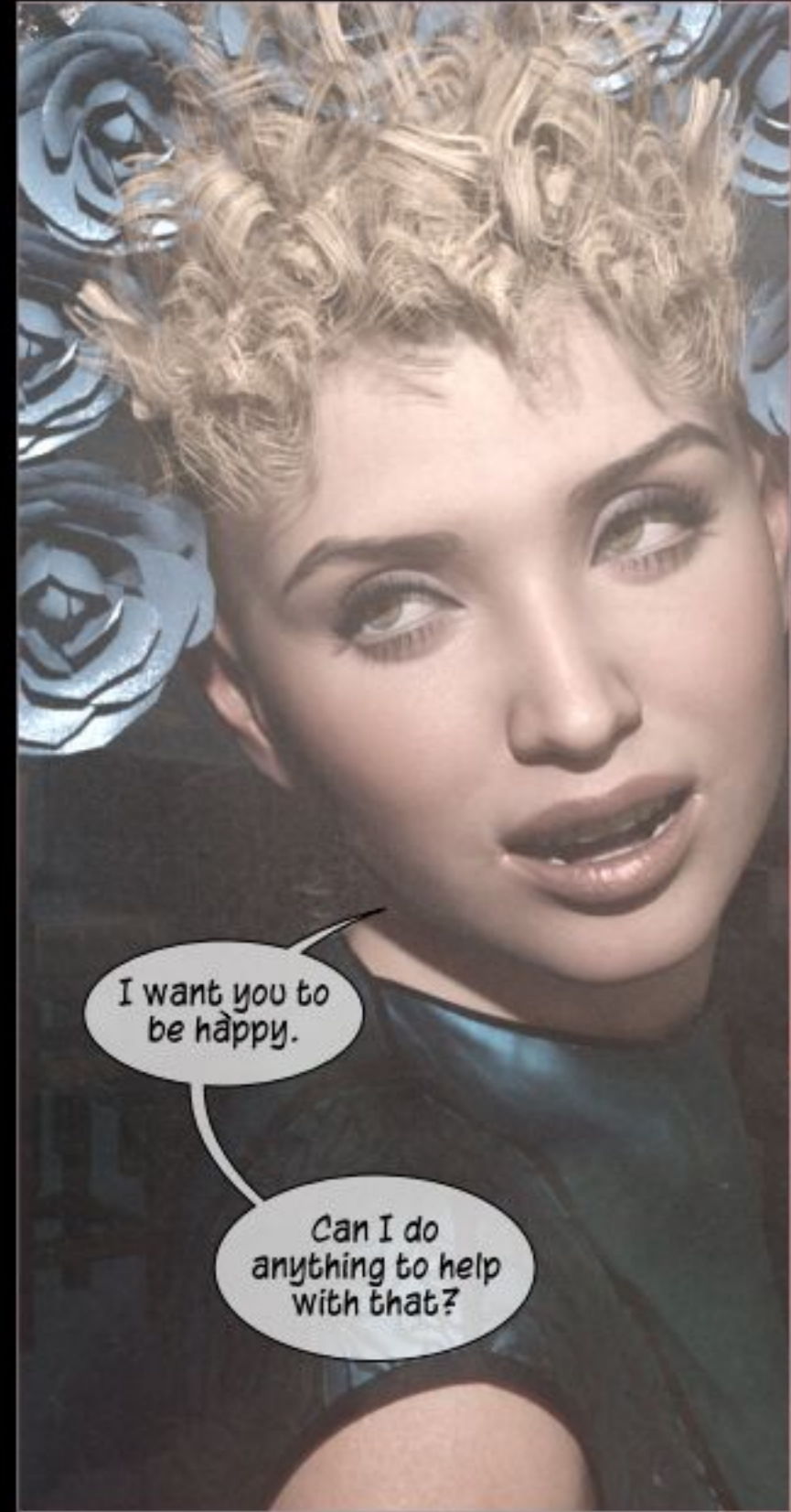
Good Morning, Mr. Dio.

Call me Jimmy, would you?

Sure. Is everything OK? I heard some of that. You were yelling.

Just business. Nothing you need to worry about.

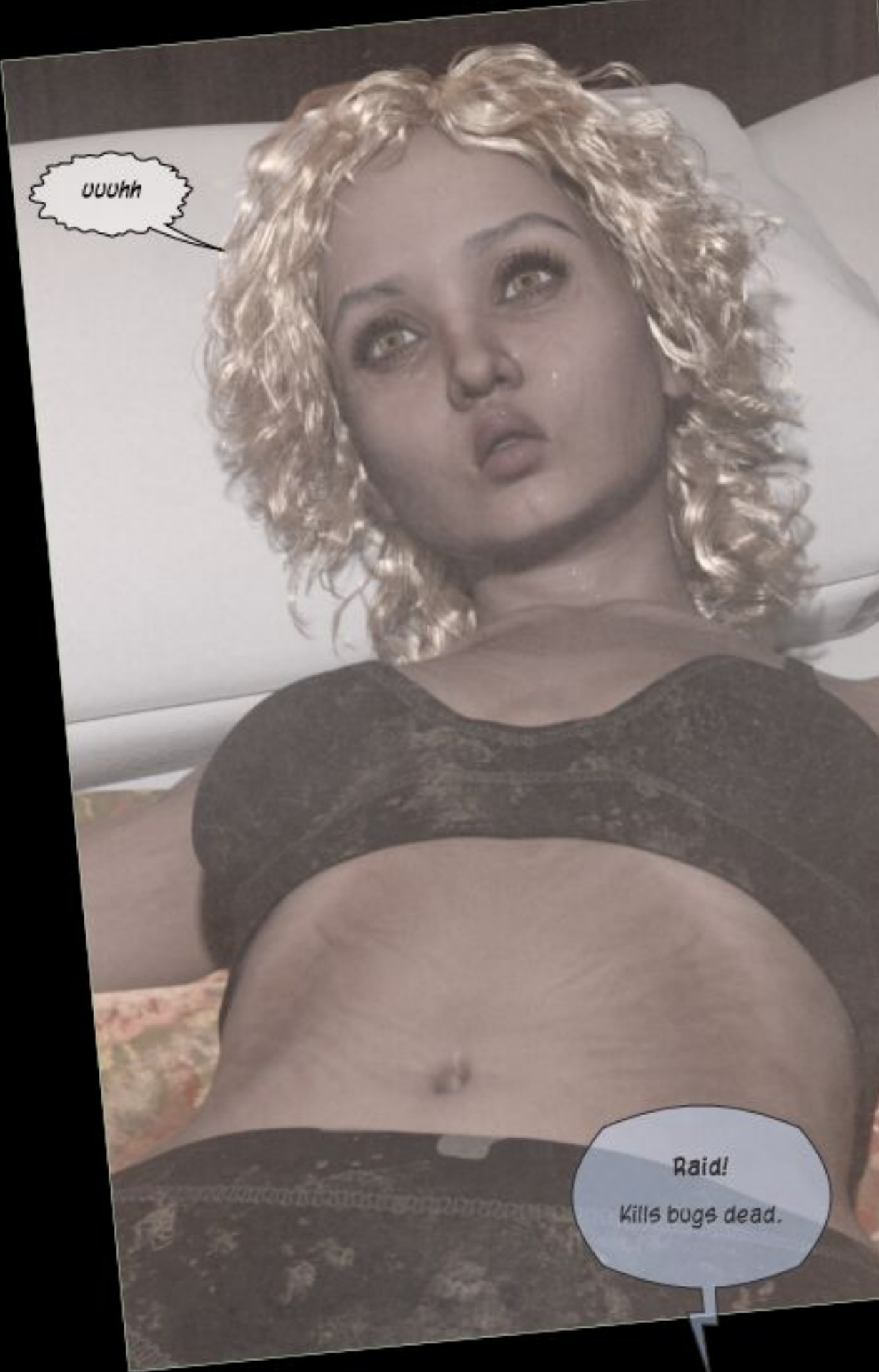
Oh, I'm sure it's not ... but you sounded unhappy.



I want you to be happy.

Can I do anything to help with that?



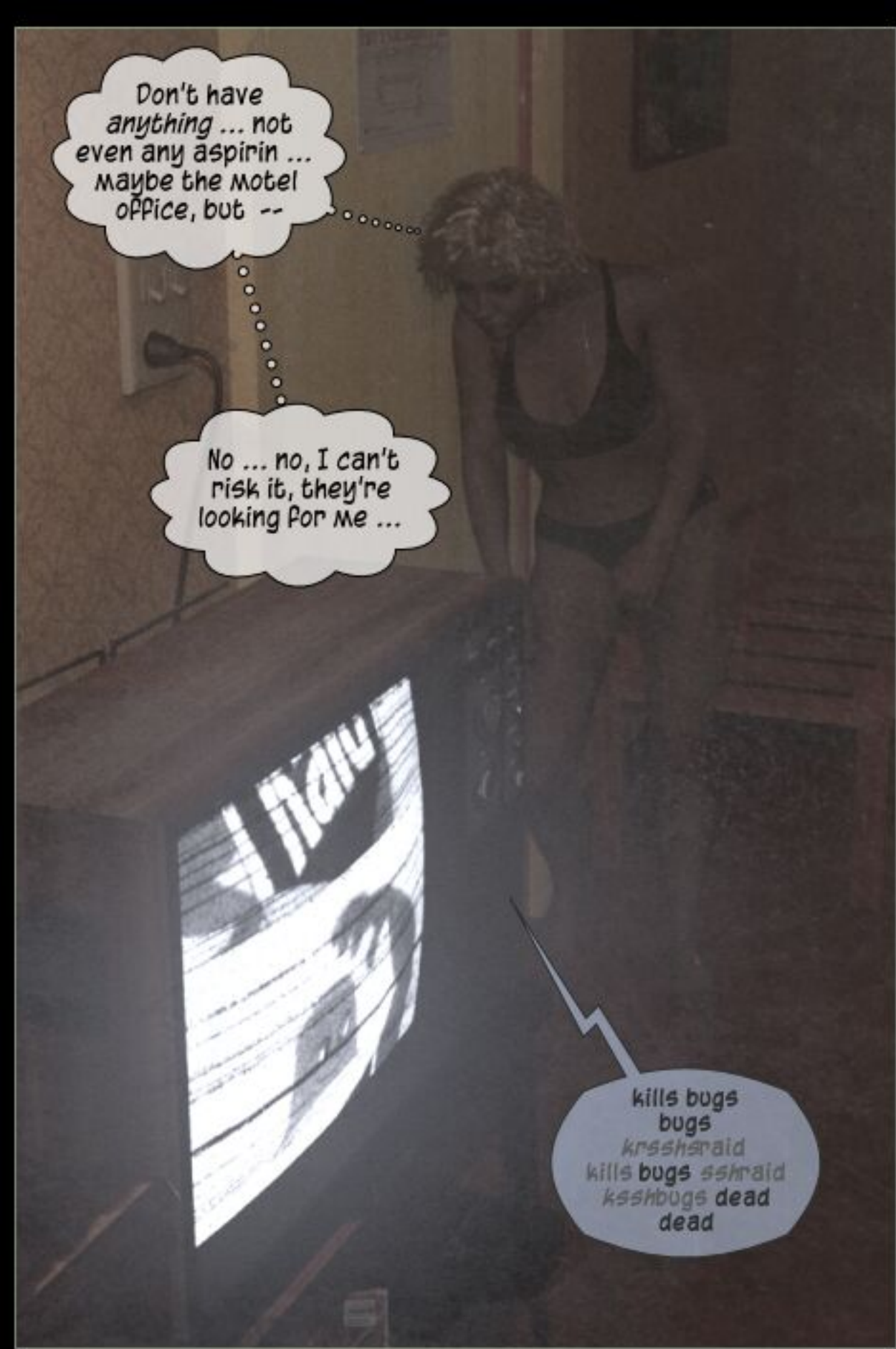




Food poisoning.

That's got to be it. Some of that gas station crap's probably been sitting there for years.

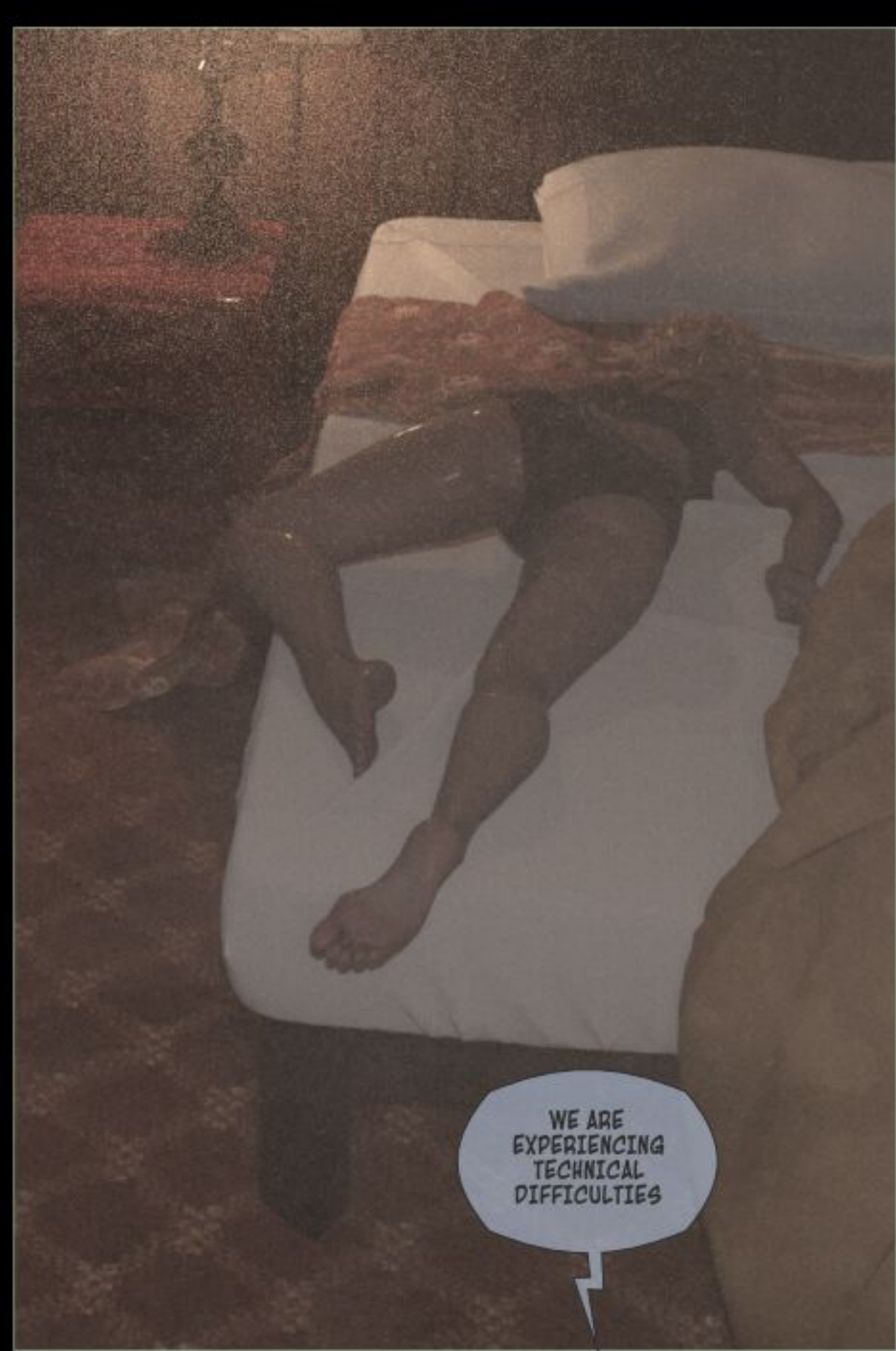
ough ... what do I do?



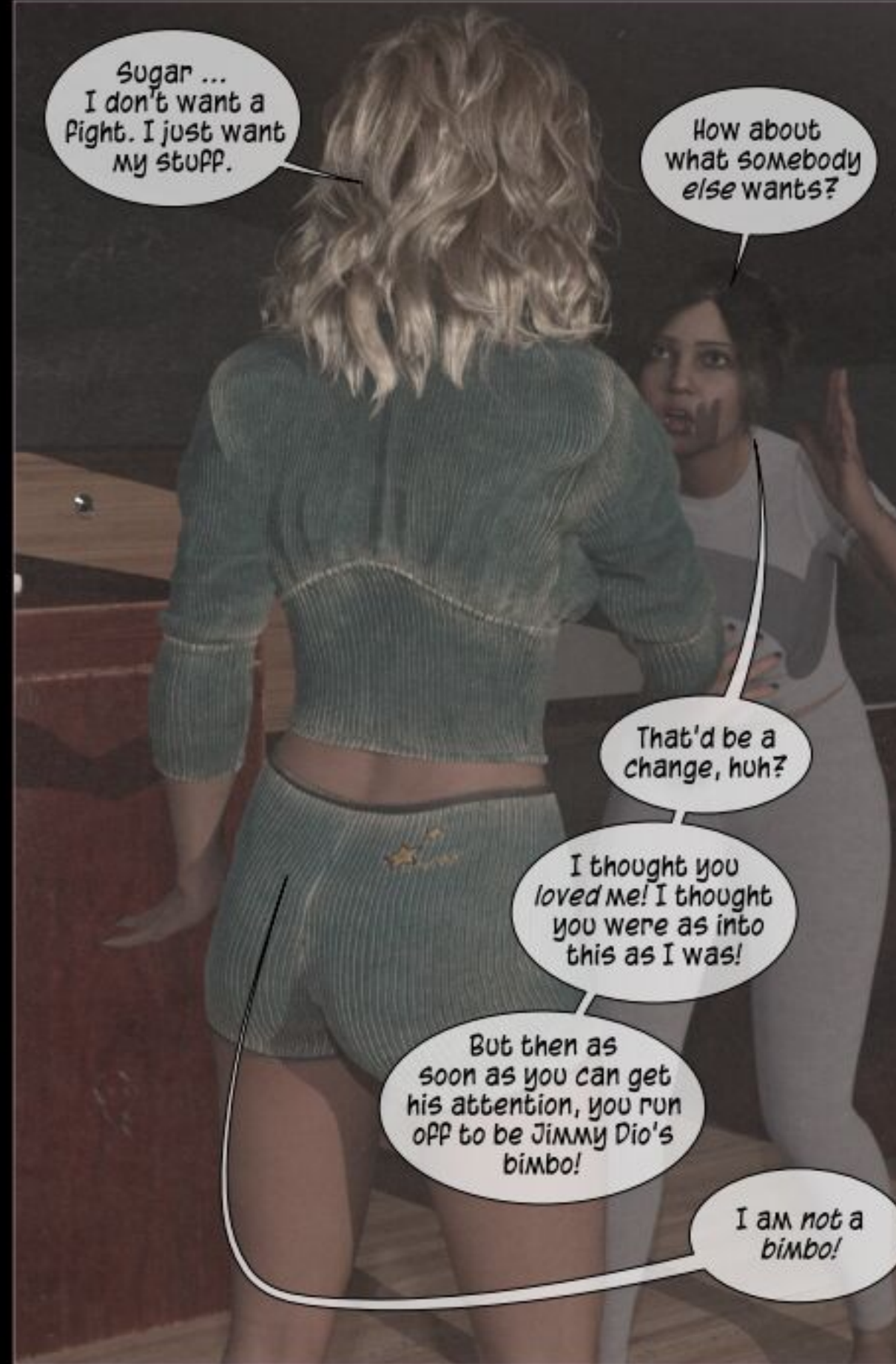
Don't have anything ... not even any aspirin ... maybe the motel office, but --

No ... no, I can't risk it, they're looking for me ...

kills bugs
bugs
kssshaid
kills bugs sshraid
kssshbugs dead
dead



WE ARE EXPERIENCING TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES



Sugar ... I don't want a fight. I just want my stuff.

How about what somebody else wants?

That'd be a change, huh?

I thought you loved me! I thought you were as into this as I was!

But then as soon as you can get his attention, you run off to be Jimmy Dio's bimbo!

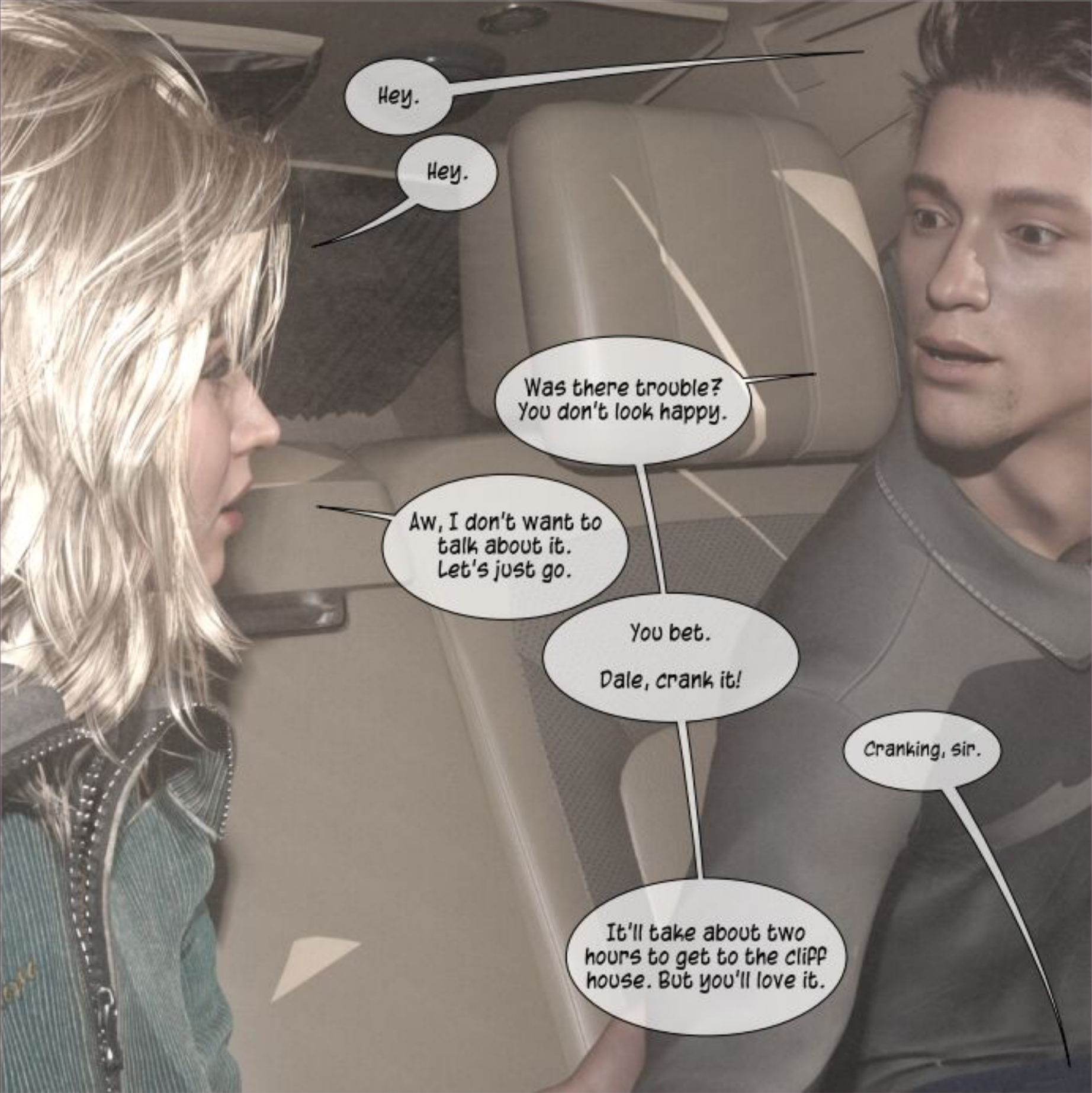
I am not a bimbo!



Bella, you can't just use people!

It's gonna catch up with you one day, you know. Maybe real soon.

You can't trust any of the Dios. They're all bad. And if someone finds you floating in the bay in a month, you'll have deserved what you got!



Hey.

Hey.

Was there trouble? You don't look happy.

Aw, I don't want to talk about it. Let's just go.

You bet.

Dale, crank it!

Cranking, sir.

It'll take about two hours to get to the cliff house. But you'll love it.



I have a little problem.

I'm not supposed to get involved with employees. Papa's got a thing about that, and I sure don't want to piss him off right now.

I mean, we could try to keep it on the down low ... or ...

I was wondering if you were interested in a different position.

I'm interested in all kinds of positions.







He talks about things with you and takes your advice. Not bad.

Mr. Dio!

If I'd done more of that, my marriages might have lasted.

You might as well call me Papa. Everybody does.

Besides, he's trying as hard as he can to make you part of the family.



But there's family and family.

My son Ron was killed in prison. I just pound out today.

Some shitheel who thinks he's somebody stabbed him.

I'm going to find that asshole and I'm going to make him beg me to kill him before I cut him into pieces.

If I find out that either you or Jimmy had anything to do with Ron being sent to jail, you're going to wish I was that kind to you.



And being family won't help you.



I'm just worried, is all. He didn't sound like he was fishing. He either knows or he suspects.

Well, he's a lot of things, but he's not stupid.

He's never liked me, anyway. Even with Ron dead he'll probably find some way to screw me over completely before he dies.

I... I hate to ask... but should we consider... doing something about it?

I don't think I can kill him. He is my dad.

Oh, god, no, I didn't mean that. I was wondering if we could hand him to the FBI or something.



He keeps a secret set of books. One of his side operations. The Peds would love those.

I'm not supposed to know about them, but I do, and I can get to them.

But we'd have to find a mule.

Anybody who hands those to the Peds, they're going to want to ask a lot of questions.

It can't be me, and I don't think you want it to be you either.



Let me handle that part.

I know someone I can get to do it.

If I tell her the right things.



Bella, I'm running late, I haven't done my makeup yet... and I don't want to talk to you!

I don't care what it is! There's nothing you can tell me that I'd --

You were right, sugar.

OK, maybe one thing.



Jimmy's horrible, and his father is worse! I don't know what I was thinking... and now I can't get out!

If I leave, they'll find me and do something... I don't even want to think about it. The only way I can get free of them is if I get them busted.

I have evidence that would do it, but I can't use it myself. They'd know. They watch me.



So instead you want to risk me?

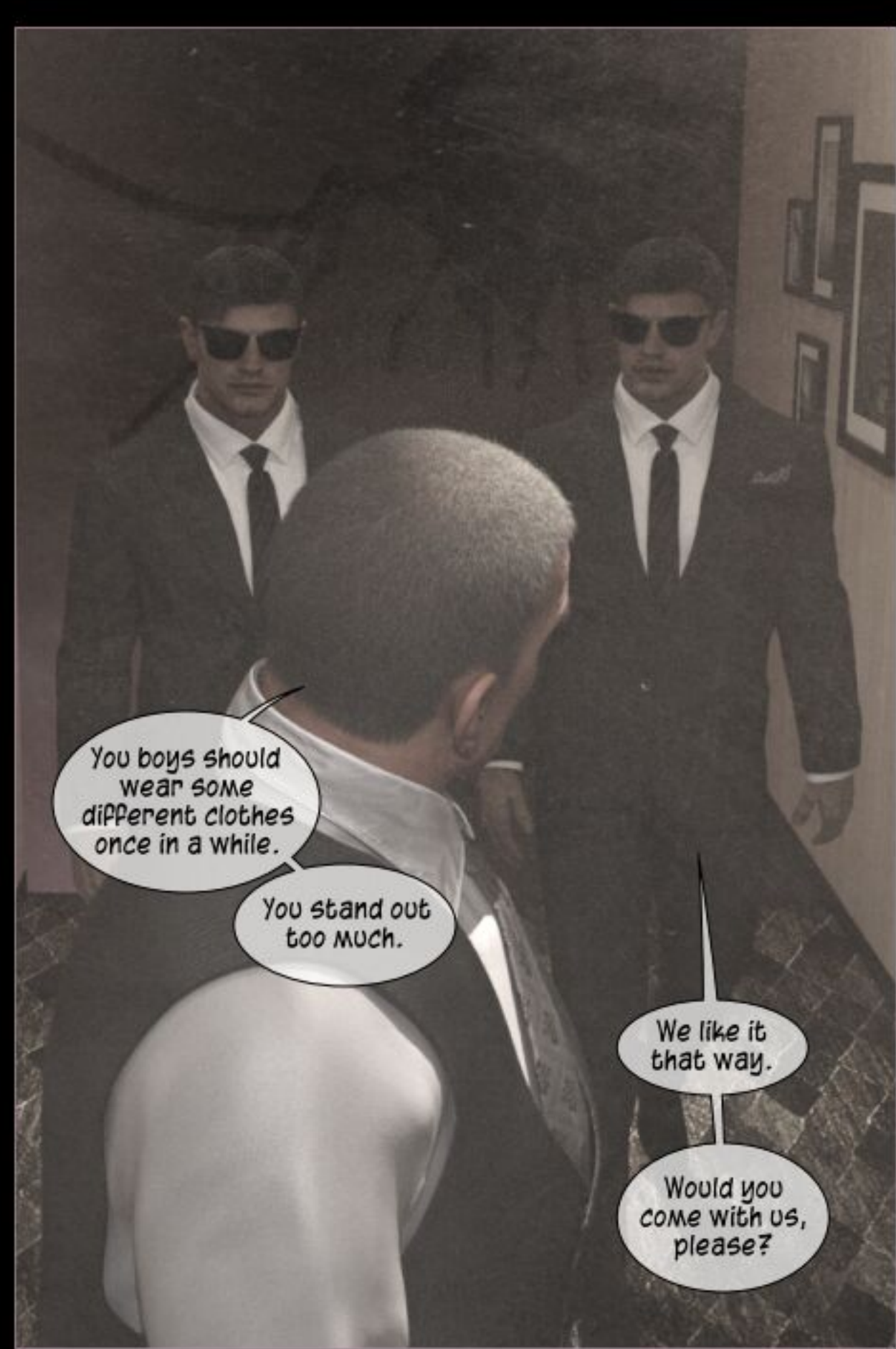
It's not like that! They don't have any idea who you are.

They'd never guess you'd have this stuff. How could they? How could you even get at it? They won't be looking for some random person --

And you're sure they'll go to jail?



Mr. Dio?



You boys should wear some different clothes once in a while.

You stand out too much.

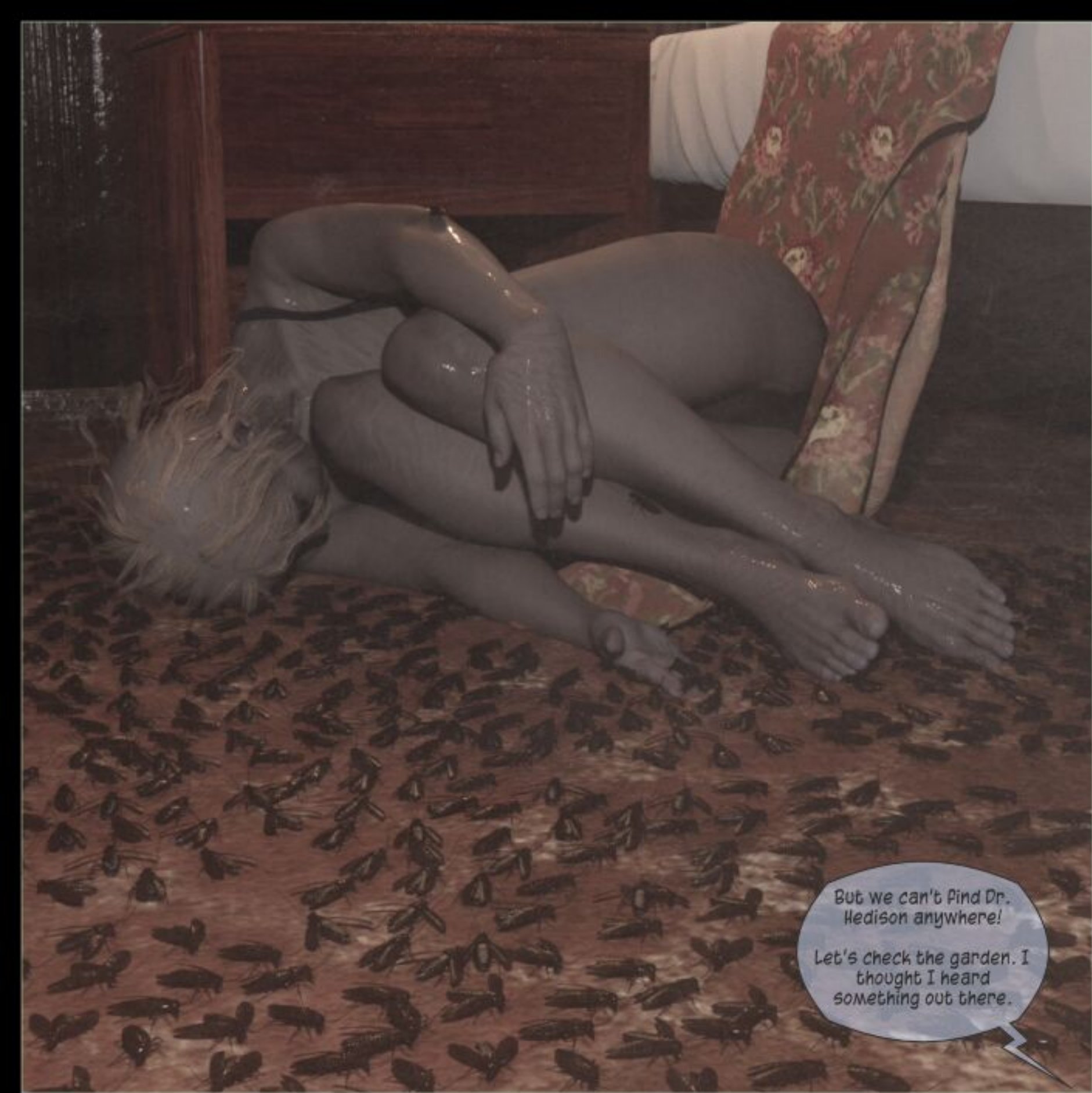
We like it that way.

Would you come with us, please?



You've got nothing.

We'll be discussing that.



But we can't find Dr. Hedison anywhere!
Let's check the garden. I thought I heard something out there.



Aaahh!
Get off!!

They like you!



Gotta get out ... can't take it anymore ...

That's a really bad idea.

I don't care if Dio is looking for me.

Oh, it's not just Dio. The FBI is looking for you too.



... check in, but they don't check out!

The FBI? Why?

Why do you think? When I died, that got their attention. Now they want anybody who might have anything.

You're a "person of interest."

Sugar, how did you die? What's that got to do with all this?



You really don't know, do you?

When Papa Dio bought his way out, the first thing he did was find out my name from the guy he paid off.

He shot me four times and dumped my body in the bay.

The FBI was probably pretty pissed off about that.



Oh, god.

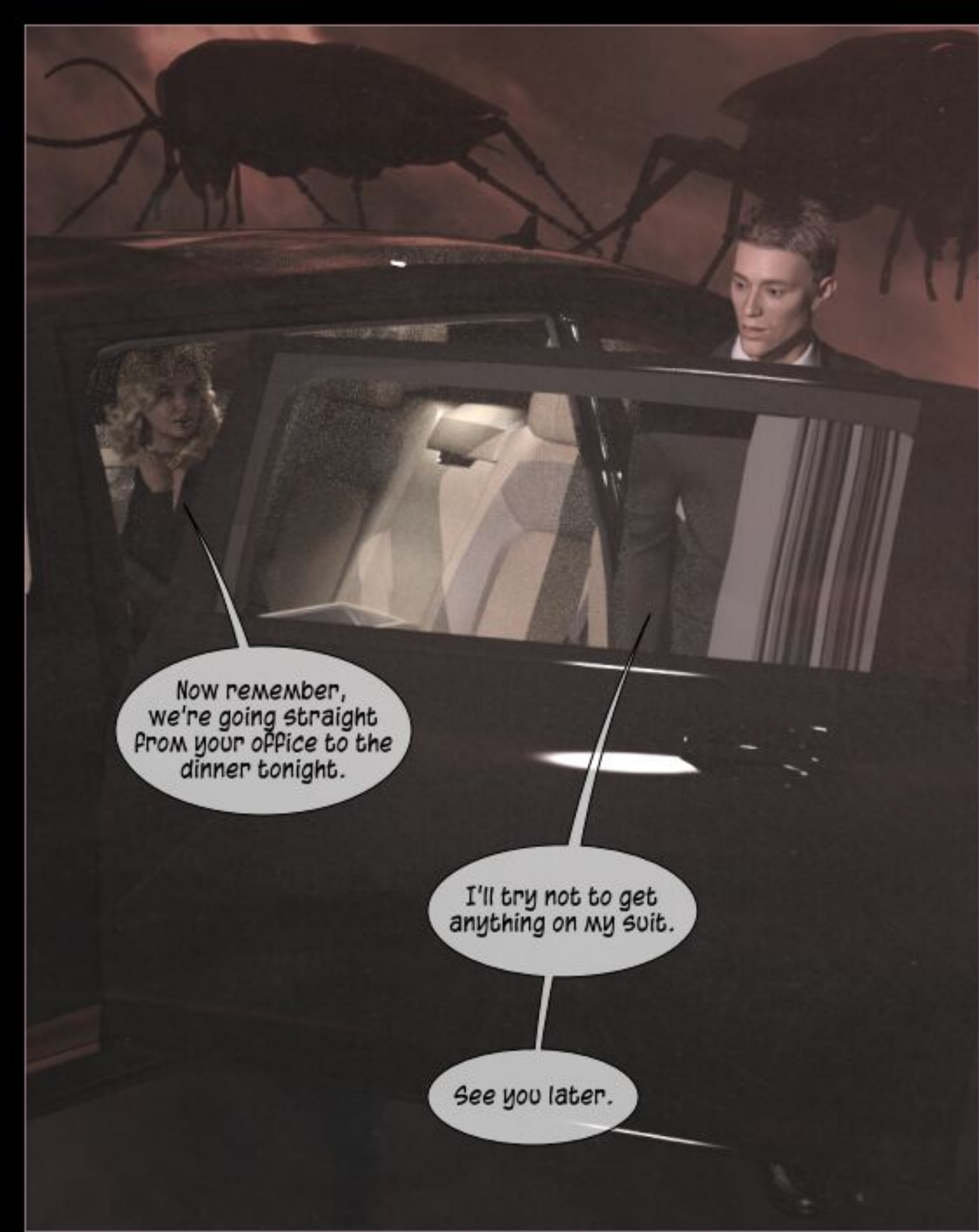
Sugar ... That wasn't supposed to -- I didn't think that would happen!

Maybe you fucking well should have.

You can't just use people and not think about the consequences. Not only is it horrible, but sooner or later it does come back to bite you.

With you it's gonna be sooner.

Goodbye, Bella.



Now remember, we're going straight from your office to the dinner tonight.

I'll try not to get anything on my suit.

See you later.



Oh, shit!

Dale, we need to turn around.

Ma'am?

I have to buy a gift for his sister and I have no idea how to shop for her.

I meant to talk to him about it and Porgot. It should be OK, he's never too busy first thing.

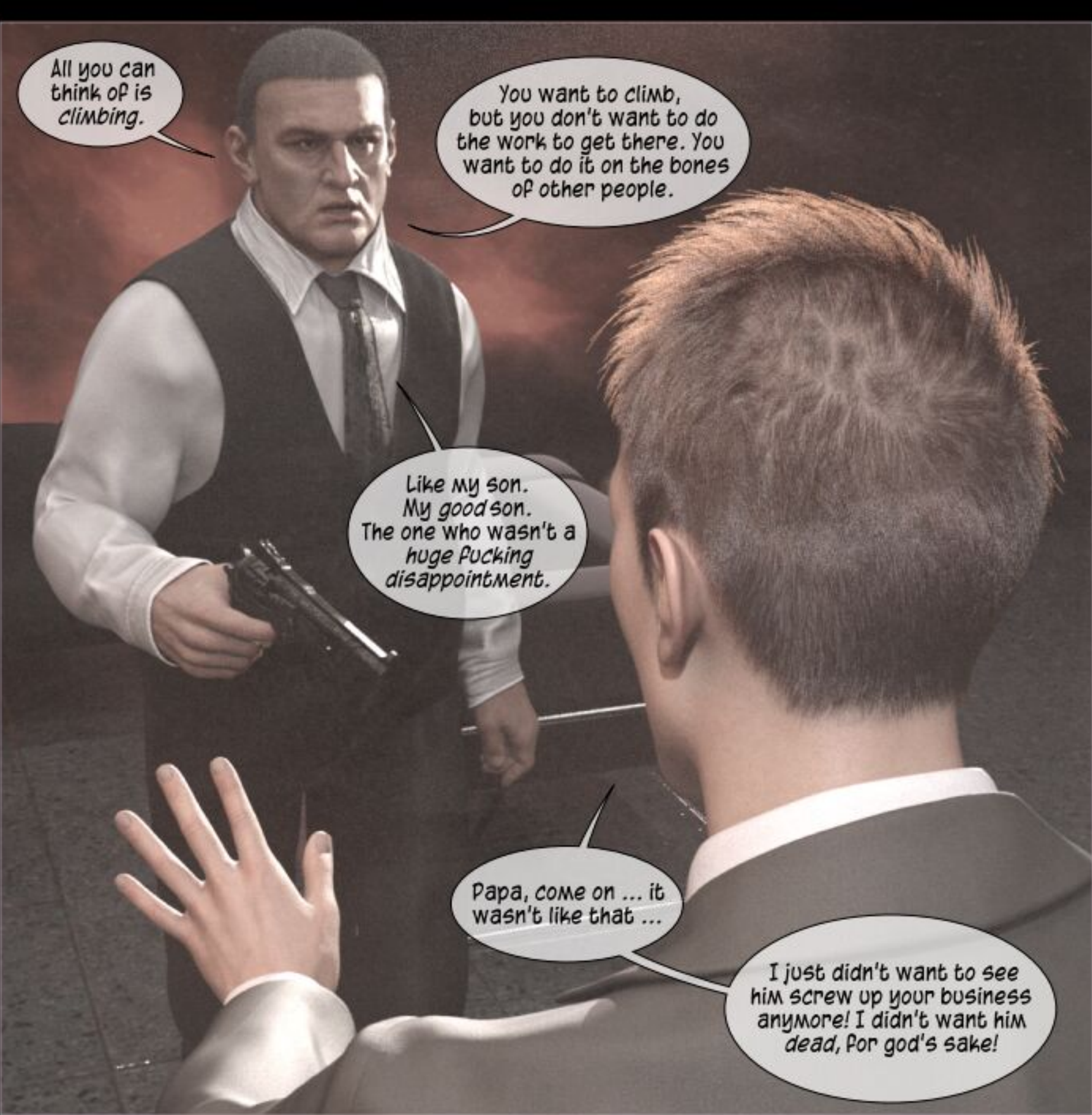
In fact, there won't be anyone else there.



See, the thing is, you're dumb.

Picking up that woman wherever you found her was the only smart thing you've ever done.

Never occurred to you that you can bribe FBI agents? That you can bribe prosecutors? How can you expect to take over the business if you don't have any imagination?



All you can think of is climbing.

You want to climb, but you don't want to do the work to get there. You want to do it on the bones of other people.

Like my son. My good son. The one who wasn't a huge fucking disappointment.

Papa, come on ... it wasn't like that ...

I just didn't want to see him screw up your business anymore! I didn't want him dead, for god's sake!



And if I'd gone to jail and someone had put a knife in me, is that what you'd have said?

"I just wanted him out of the way! I didn't want him dead!"

Papa, don't -- Please --

AAAAIIGH!



Dale!

You've got to get me out of here! Anywhere! As far as we can get! Fast!

But, ma'am ... Mr. Jimmy ...?



Jimmy's dead, Dale, and if I don't clear out, I'm dead too.

Maybe you as well. I don't know. Papa's on a rampage.

But -- I don't --



Dale ... I know you want me. I see you watching in the mirror sometimes.

Get us out of this alive, and I promise, I'll make it worth it.



... You want to leave the country?

I think I have to. He's got too many people paid off! I can't tell who might be watching for me now!

Well, if you don't want anyone knowing where you went, that means smuggling you out. Not easy.

HM. My brother works for a trucking company. I'm not saying they do that kind of thing a lot, but ... I bet he could arrange it.

It'll take a few days for me to set up, though. We need some place for you to hide until then.



Where is he? What's happened to him?

He went back to Papa Dio and told him where to find me! Any minute now they're going to come for me ...

Or ... maybe Papa Dio found him and didn't wait to get more information ... maybe Dale's cut into pieces now ...

Oh, who am I kidding? I don't have any idea. I don't even know how long I've been in this damned room ...

I need to get out of here ... I ...

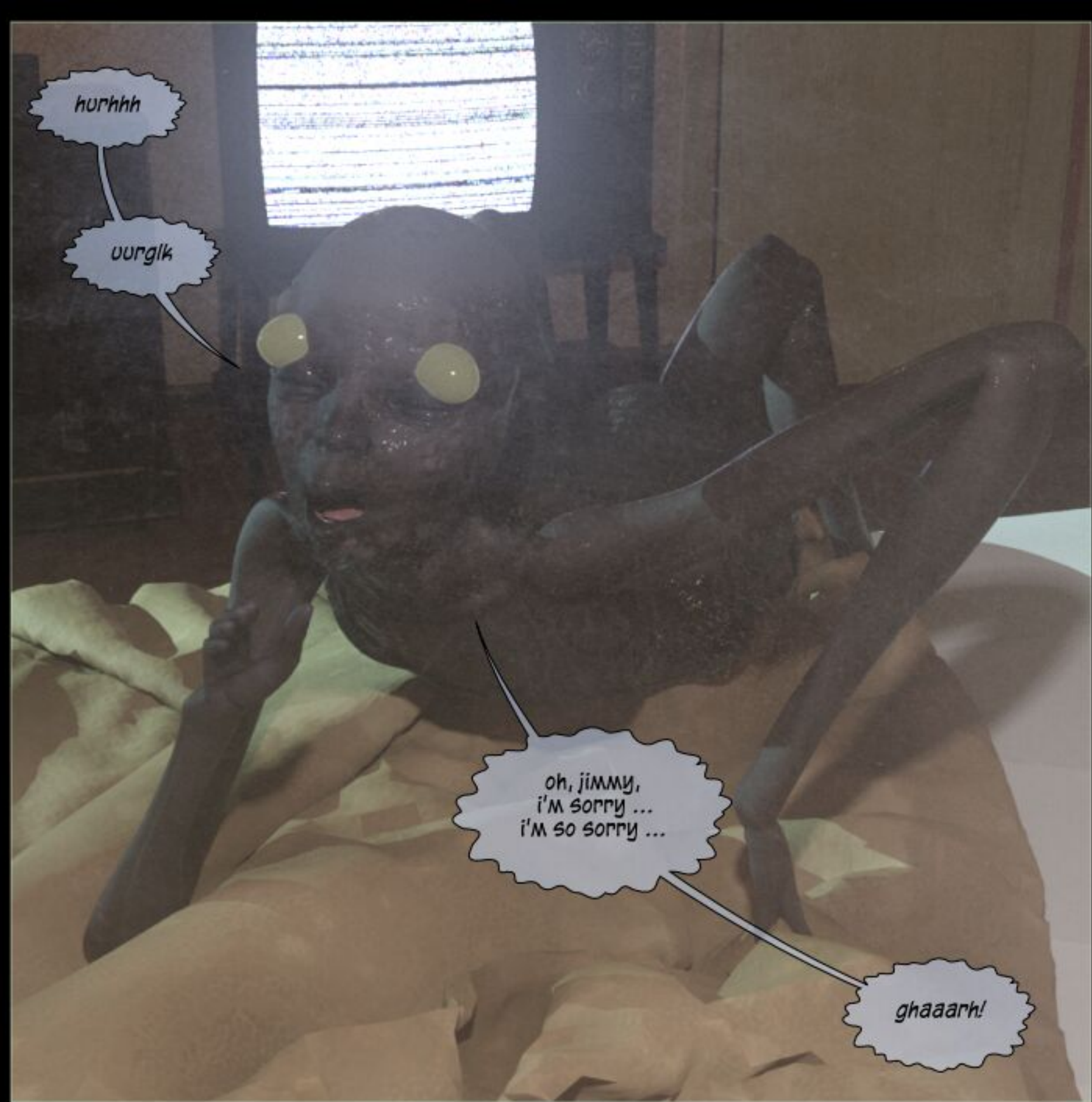
I need ...

... oh, god ...



HRRRANK

oh god oh god

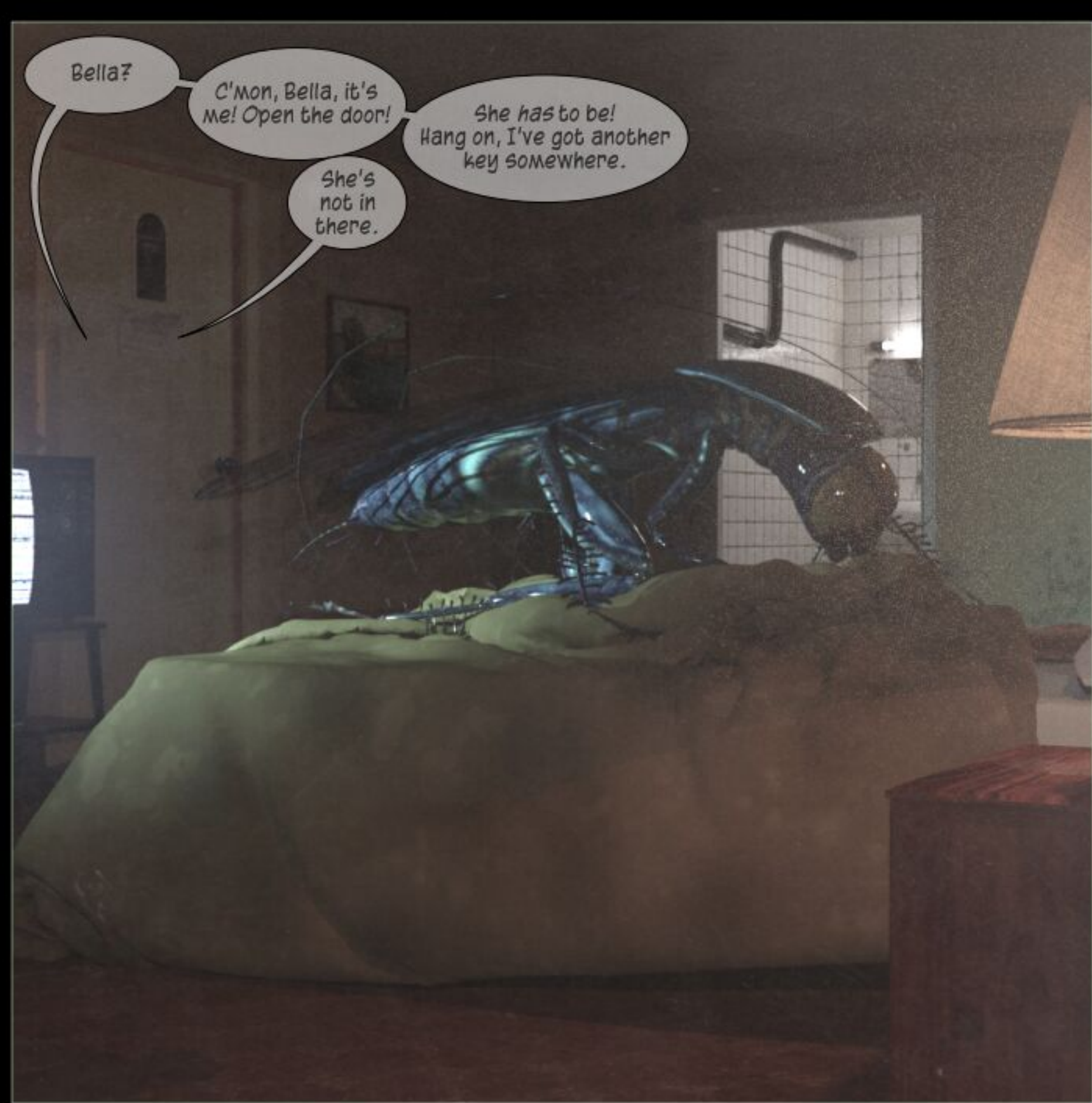


hurhhh

uungik

oh, jimmy,
i'm sorry ...
i'm so sorry ...

ghaaark!



Bella?

C'mon, Bella, it's
me! Open the door!

She's
not in
there.

She has to be!
Hang on, I've got another
key somewhere.



Told you.
She bugged out.

Aw, no ...
It can't be ... and
after all this ...

I don't know why
you thought you could
trust her.

C'mon, bro.
Jimmy Dio's woman?
I know you know
better than that.



Can't really
blame her for not
wanting to spend
four days in here,
y'know?

I mean, this
place isn't just
filthy, it smells.

And that's the
biggest Pucking
cockroach I've
ever seen.

Let's get out of here.
Forget the expenses. I'll just
charge you for gas and we won't
ever mention it again.



... Yeah, you're right.
I'm coming.

Just gonna do the
motel a little favor.

That's no
favor. They'll
never get the
stain from that
one out.

They won't try.
This carpet has never
been cleaned in its life.

This place is where
roaches go to die.



To be honest,
that story probably
should have ended with
a gigantic SPLAT
sound effect.

We chose not
to because we
felt it would be in
poor taste.

You may
feel that by
then it was
already far too
late to be
concerned
about that.



That's all we have
time for this evening,
I'm afraid.

There are going to be some
people who are a bit put out because
we didn't go any of their favorite places.
There were no gender changes this
time, for example.

But remember: There are so many
stories. So many. More stories than
we will ever have time to tell.

The gallery has more
pictures than it can ever
possibly display. We have to
rotate the collection.



Your turn will
come again.

Good night.

Oh, and ...
happy Hallowe'en.