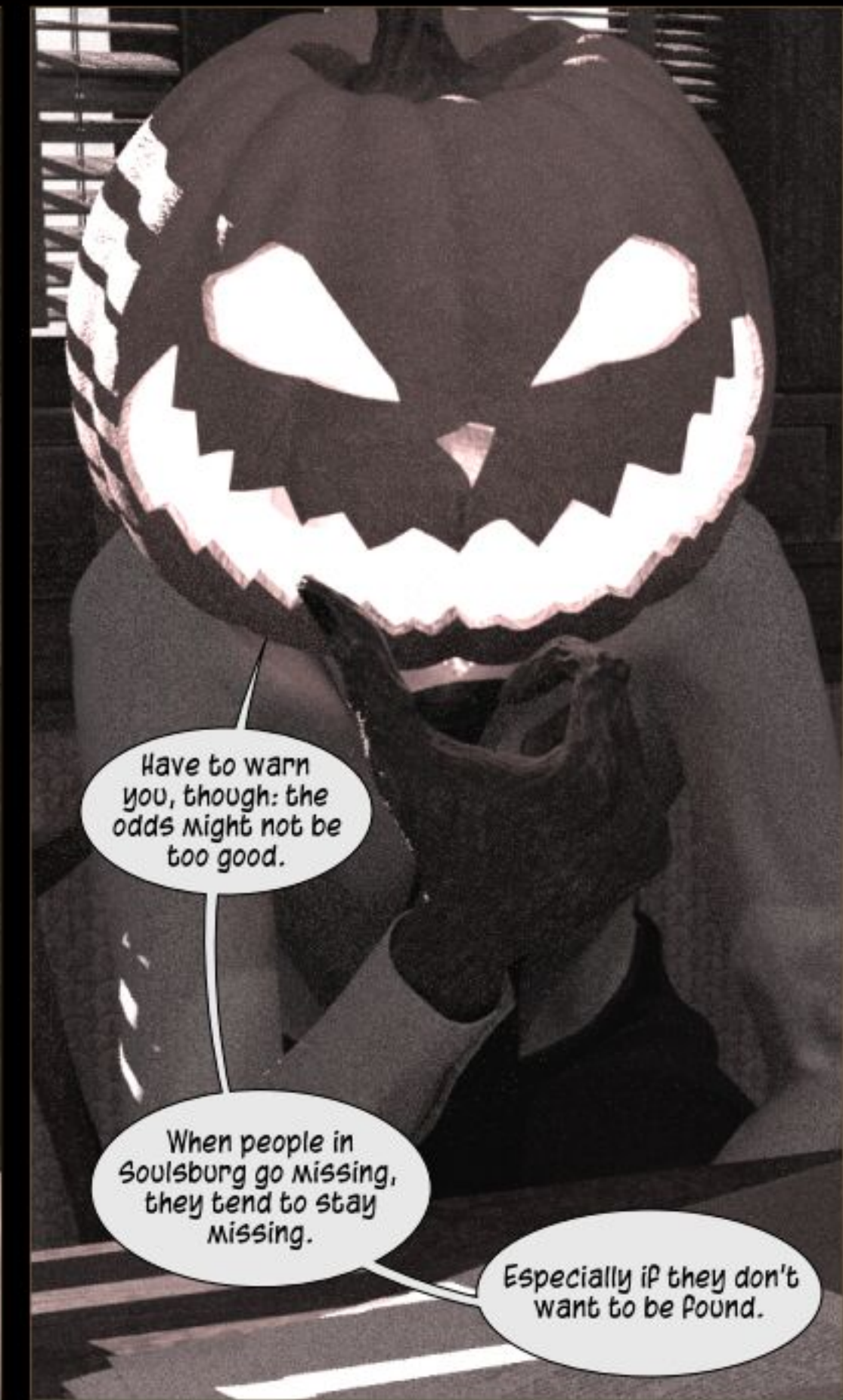
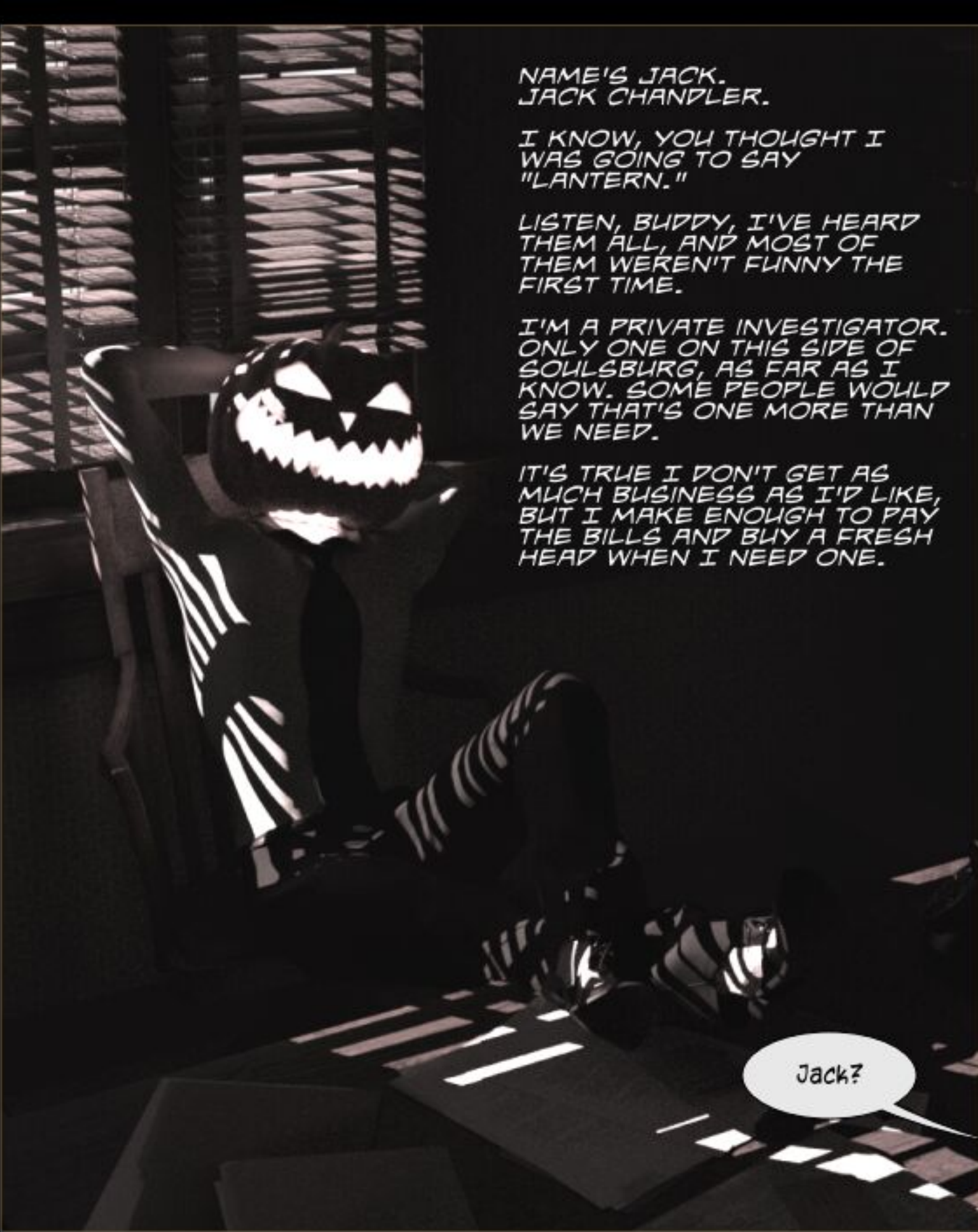




I WASN'T THRILLED ABOUT THIS CLIENT ... BUT NOT BECAUSE OF THE BAD ODDS. HERE ON THE DEAD SIDE OF TOWN, THE OLD VAMPIRE FAMILIES STILL HAVE A LOT OF THE MONEY AND POWER, AND THE VELAZQUEZ NAME WAS ONE OF THE OLDEST AND CRUelleST, NASTY FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS AND COUNTING. IT WOULDN'T DO MY STREET REP ANY FAVORS TO BE SEEN TAKING A JOB FROM THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, MY REPUTATION WASN'T ALL THAT ANYWAY, AND A JOB'S A JOB.



Pumpkin, P.I.

Story and images by Trilby

OFFICIALLY, I'M NOT ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH THE POLICE, BUT THERE ARE A COUPLE I GET ALONG WITH. LT. BRIAN O'HOWLORAN WAS ONE I MIGHT EVEN CALL A FRIEND. ON A GOOD DAY.

I WASN'T CATCHING HIM ON A GOOD DAY, THOUGH.

Do I look like an inFormation desk?

You think I'm just going to drop everything I'm doing to go check missing persons reports?

Well, I figured it couldn't hurt to ask.

... So, what's actually biting your ass?

My captain. Gnawing on it. He's not going to let it go until I'm sitting on bones.

Three of Viscous' people have disappeared, and somehow this is my problem.

Nobody'd give a wet shit if all of those clowns vanished Forever, but I guess somebody's got connections, because all of a sudden it's a goddamn investigative priority.

Now he's even thrown in --

Hey, Brian?

Our meeting with the captain's in five minutes! Don't tell me you're not done with that report yet?

Uh, well ... sorry, it's just taking a bit longer than I expected ...

I'll take the hit. I'm already on his shit list.

Don't worry about it. If I stall him, it'll work. He wasn't going to read the thing anyway.

But be there, or we'll both be on his list.

LT. NORMA KANINSKY. ONE OF THE GOOD ONES. I THINK WE GET ALONG, BUT WITH HER IT'S A LOT HARDER TO TELL.

I ... Uh thanks.

For pity's sake, would you just tell her already?

You're the same rank! It wouldn't even be against the rules!

And have her laugh me off? No chance. I'm not sure I could take it.

I know I need to, Jack. I do. But ... I'm not ready.

And now they've gone and made us a team!

How am I supposed to investigate some missing sleazebags when I don't want to say a word around her because I'll surely put my foot in it?

Look, I've got to get to this damned meeting, or it will be my ass.

You know all you'd get from missing persons is that someone thinks your man's gone missing. Old news.

What I'd do first, I'd check to see if your young idiot was working for Viscous.

Seems like somebody wants a lot of his people to be missing persons right now.

IT SEEMED LIKE A STRETCH. I MEAN, THE SCION OF A VAMPIRE FAMILY WORKING FOR ONE OF OUR LOCAL THIRD-RATE MOBS? HE'D CONSIDER THAT BENEATH HIS STANDARDS OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE WAS REBELLING AGAINST EVERYTHING, MAYBE HE'D TAKE ON A GIG WITH VISCOUS JUST TO PISS HIS FAMILY OFF.

IT WAS PROBABLY WORTH CHECKING, IF ONLY TO ELIMINATE IT. THE PROBLEM WITH THAT WAS, I DIDN'T --

Hey!! Jack!

Need a lift somewhere?

Well, I might, Brix, if I had any idea where I was going.

On a job, huh? Anything good?

Too soon to tell. I'm looking for Ricky Velazquez. He's missing.

I was trying to figure out who I could ask whether he was working for Viscous.

I mean, besides asking Viscous.

You hear a lot ... know anything about it?

BRIXTON IS MY REGULAR CABBIE. I DON'T DRIVE. HE LOVES IT WHEN I'M ON A JOB, BECAUSE I'LL HIRE HIM FOR PAYS. HE DOESN'T GET ENOUGH BUSINESS ANY OTHER TIME. PEOPLE ON THE DEAD SIDE DON'T USE TAXIS MUCH, AND ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN THEY TEND TO BE PUT OFF BY HIS APPEARANCE.

Velazquez, huh? One of those?

'Fraid so.

Hm. I got nothin'.

What you wanna do, you should go ask Mort.

Mort?

Mort works for Hubbard. Why would he know about Viscous' people?

Mort knows everything about everything.

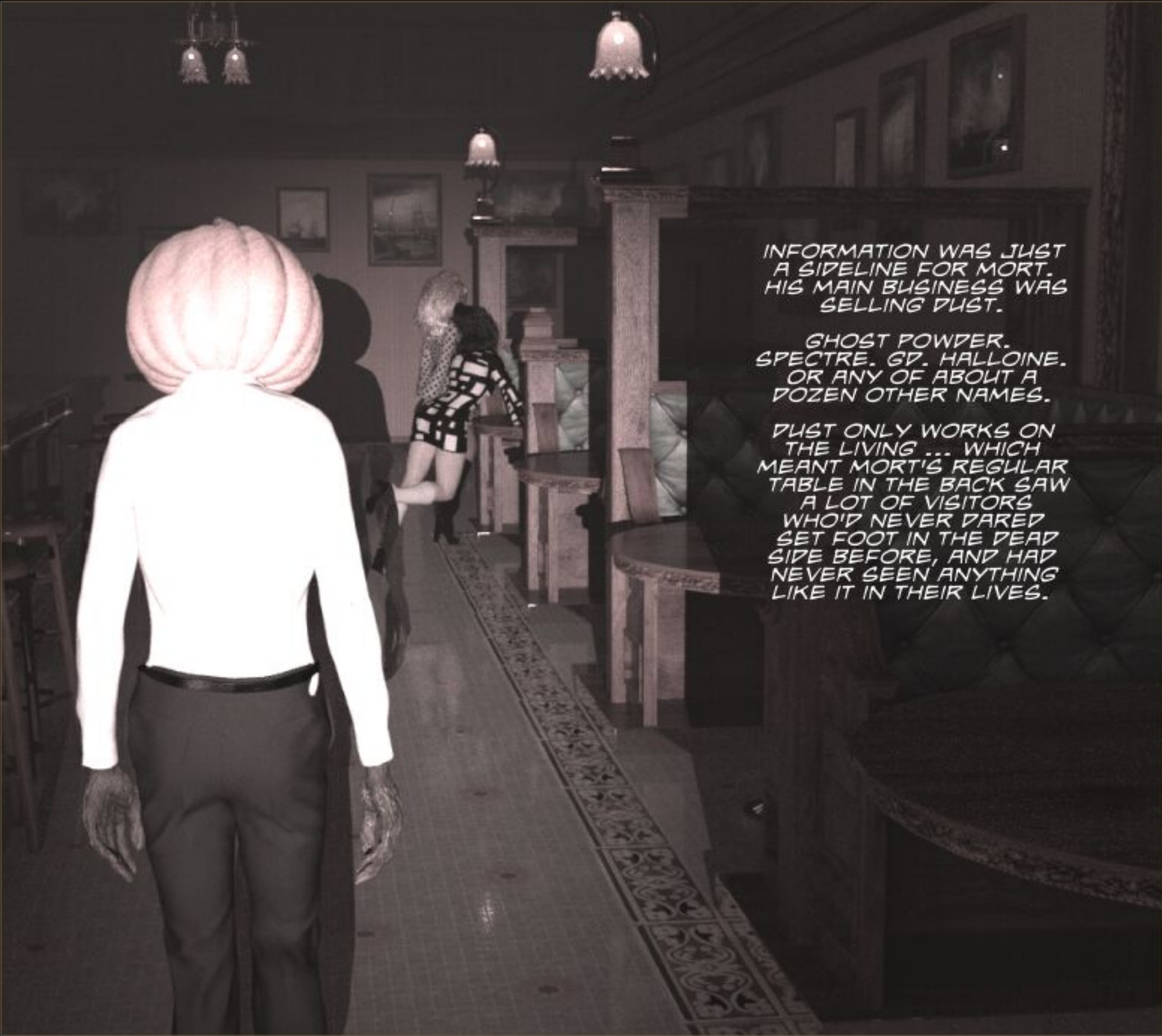
I don't think there's been a chunk of dirt he's missed in more than twenty years. Every time I hear something choice, he knows it already.

Besides, Viscous is the other team and Mort likes to know the opposition.

OK, Brix, you've sold me.

Run me over to Ossie's, would you?

You got it!



INFORMATION WAS JUST A SIDELINE FOR MORT. HIS MAIN BUSINESS WAS SELLING DUST.

GHOST POWDER. SPECTRE. GP. HALLOINE. OR ANY OF ABOUT A DOZEN OTHER NAMES.

DUST ONLY WORKS ON THE LIVING -- WHICH MEANT MORT'S REGULAR TABLE IN THE BACK SAW A LOT OF VISITORS WHO'D NEVER DARED SET FOOT IN THE DEAD SIDE BEFORE, AND HAD NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT IN THEIR LIVES.



Hey, Mister! Is it true, what they say about ... you Folks?

Marianne!

Probably.

Can't look into it right now, though. Some other time.



Why, Jack!

Been a while, hasn't it? Take a seat.

I'm just going to be here a minute.

I can't believe you asked him that!



Not a social visit, eh? Could have guessed.

And you're certainly not here for dust ...

So. What are you going to try to pry out of me?

You could at least sit down. For the sake of appearances.

I have trouble getting in and out of those seats.

I'm trying to find out about Ricky Velazquez.



Velazquez --

-- ah ... what makes you think I'd know anything about that?

I wasn't sure you did, until three seconds ago.



For someone who does what you do, you're a lousy liar, Mort.

I dunno, I'd have said it was easier to have a poker face when you don't have a face, but here we are.

I have a face! ... And unlike you, I can move my jaw.

Great. Move your jaw and use it to tell me whether Ricky Velazquez was working for Viscous.

You're out of your gourd, Jack.

Ha! See what I did there?

I mean, come on, of all things, why would I know about Viscous?

Because you're just that good?



While Plattery will usually get you pretty far, I --

C'mon, Mort. It's a yes-or-no question. One harmless piece of dirt ...

No information's harmless, Jack. You know better than that.

And if I answer it, you're going to ask me some other ones that are a lot worse.

Still, it's gonna end up being a problem with or without you ... and I do owe you for not f*cking up that Scapula business ...



All right. But not here. And not now.

I'll give you an address. Meet me there at eleven tonight.

And for the love of mercy, if you get Brix to take you, don't tell him the real address. Have him drop you off a few blocks away.

That man can not keep his mouth shut.



Seely?

... I'm thirsty.



Oh ... uh ... but, ma'am ...

What's wrong? It's been a few days. You've got good color today. You've been taking your iron, haven't you?

Yes, ma'am, but ... Remember I asked for time off to go to my sister's wedding this weekend?

I was hoping we could wait until I came back from that ... I ... I don't want to scare them.



I'll bite you down there ...

oh ...

... maybe they'll just have to take what they get.



Oh, no.

Seely, we're going to have to play later.

I've got to throw something on and get to the door before Daddy or Torpid does.



Mr. Chandler! You could have just phoned ...

Yeah, sorry about that. I had a few questions and I thought it'd be better to ask them in person.
 BECAUSE ON THE PHONE I CAN'T WATCH WHAT YOUR FACE DOES.

I'd like to know a little more about how Ricky got along with his family ... not just recently, I realize it hasn't always been like that ...



Well ... the thing is, this may not be a good time ...

Because of whoever you're watching over your shoulder for? Your father?

Yes ... Daddy is ... I mean, he isn't ...

He's not interested? His son's missing and he doesn't want to pursue it? Why?



Because he's disgusted with what his son was doing with his life. Which is to say, nothing.

Daddy!

RUPERT VELAZQUEZ. I'D HAVE PREFERRED TO MEET HIM UNDER BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES.
 ACTUALLY, I'D HAVE PREFERRED NOT TO MEET HIM AT ALL.

My son and I were not on good terms, Mr. Chandler, and it was absolutely mutual. Not only do I see no point in pursuing him, I'm certain, wherever he is, that he wouldn't want me to.

Not that any of this is any of your business in the slightest.

SO I GUESS THAT MADE TWO OF US.



He's probably found some rich living woman he can bleed, the goal being to live well without his ever having to actually lift a finger.

He wouldn't do that!

No offense, my dear daughter, but I think you have ideas about Ricky that don't match reality.

One day perhaps something will come along to knock him off that pedestal you've built for him.



It won't be this idiot, though. I resent you spending my money on him.

I spent my own money on him. And I can hire him if I want to.

Very well. But don't expect me to applaud.

And, Mr. Chandler: you are not welcome in this house.

I'll bear that in mind.

MEANWHILE, IN A LESS SWANK PART OF TOWN ...



He's just too stupid to get the message! That's the problem.

DORIS "MOTHER" HUBBARD.

We squash three of his people, he goes on like nothing happened ...

That slime doesn't know an ultimatum when he sees one!

We could squash a few more ...

Not yet. We may get there, but not yet.



I think we need to make it more obvious first.

Wither!

I saw you listening, you know. Get your rotten ass over here.

I have a job for you.

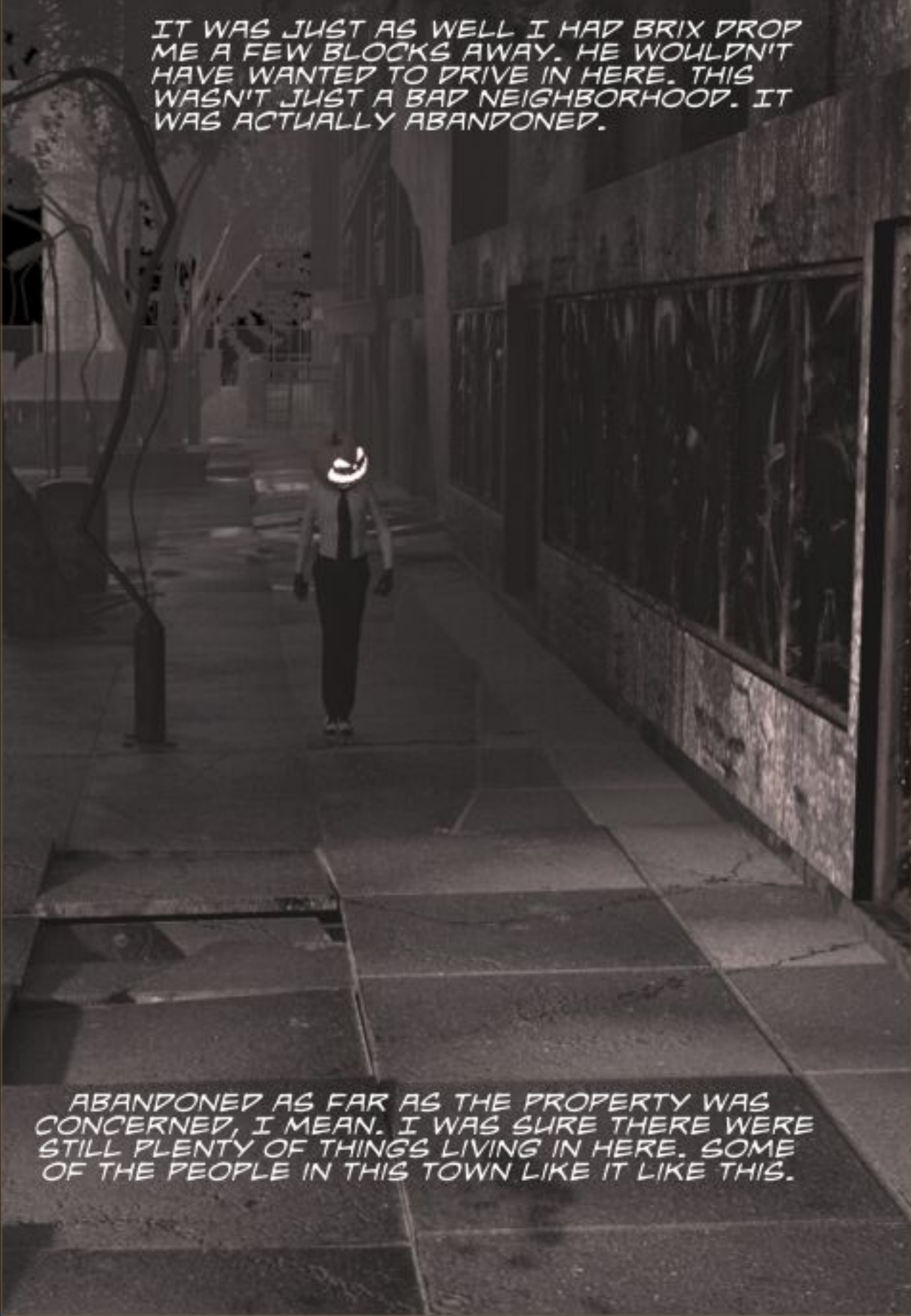


You're going to deliver a gift to Viscous for me.

T-to Viscous?

Don't worry. He'll give you safe passage for this, or he's an even bigger fool than I think. I don't believe that's possible.

And I'm going to tell you exactly what you're going to say to him.



IT WAS JUST AS WELL I HAD BRIX PROP ME A FEW BLOCKS AWAY. HE WOULDN'T HAVE WANTED TO DRIVE IN HERE. THIS WASN'T JUST A BAD NEIGHBORHOOD. IT WAS ACTUALLY ABANDONED.

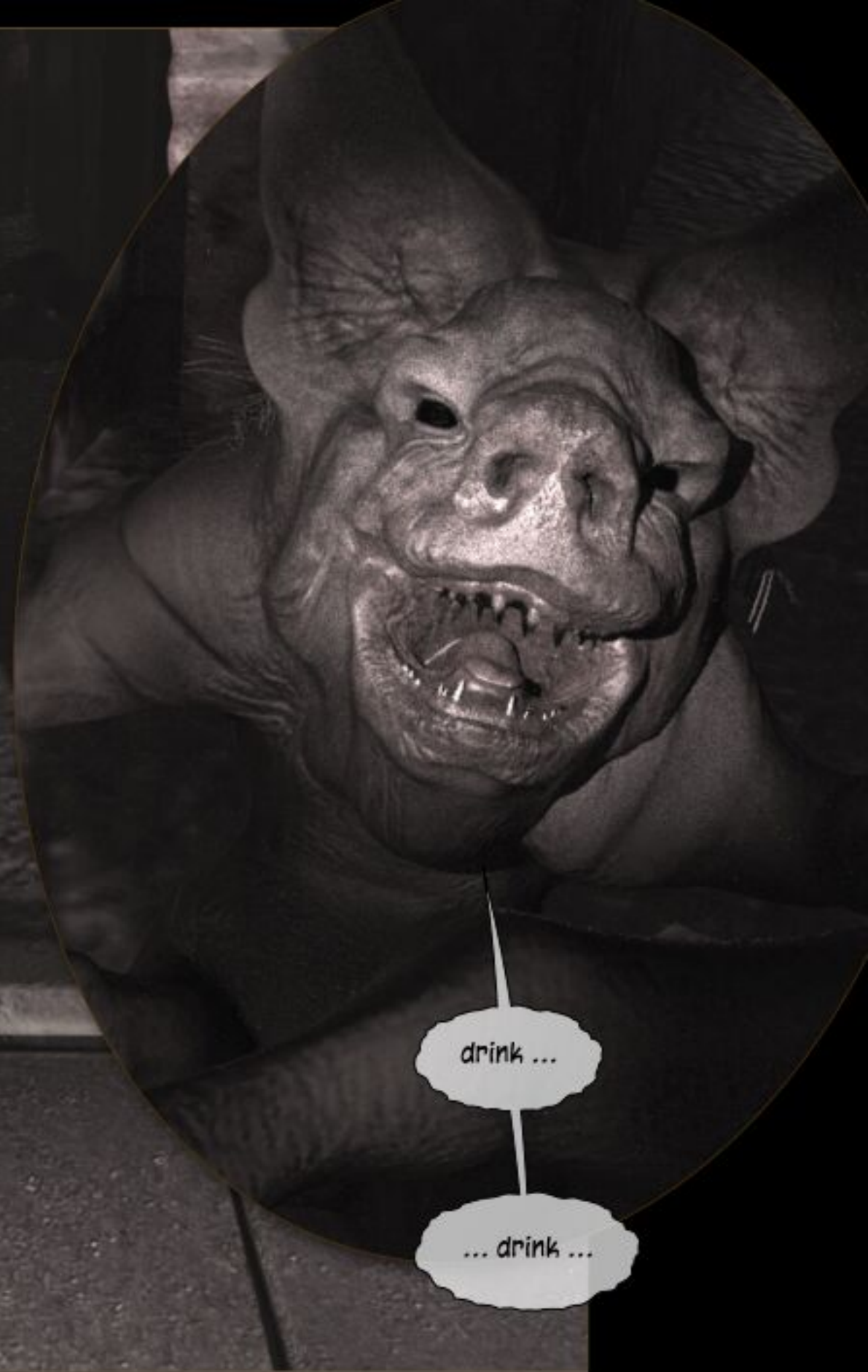
ABANDONED AS FAR AS THE PROPERTY WAS CONCERNED, I MEAN. I WAS SURE THERE WERE STILL PLENTY OF THINGS LIVING IN HERE. SOME OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS TOWN LIKE IT LIKE THIS.



MOST OF THEM WERE LIKELY TO BE THE KIND OF PEOPLE I TRIED TO NOT HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH. WHICH IS SAYING A LOT, FOR ME.

hm?

hmrrh



drink ...

... drink ...

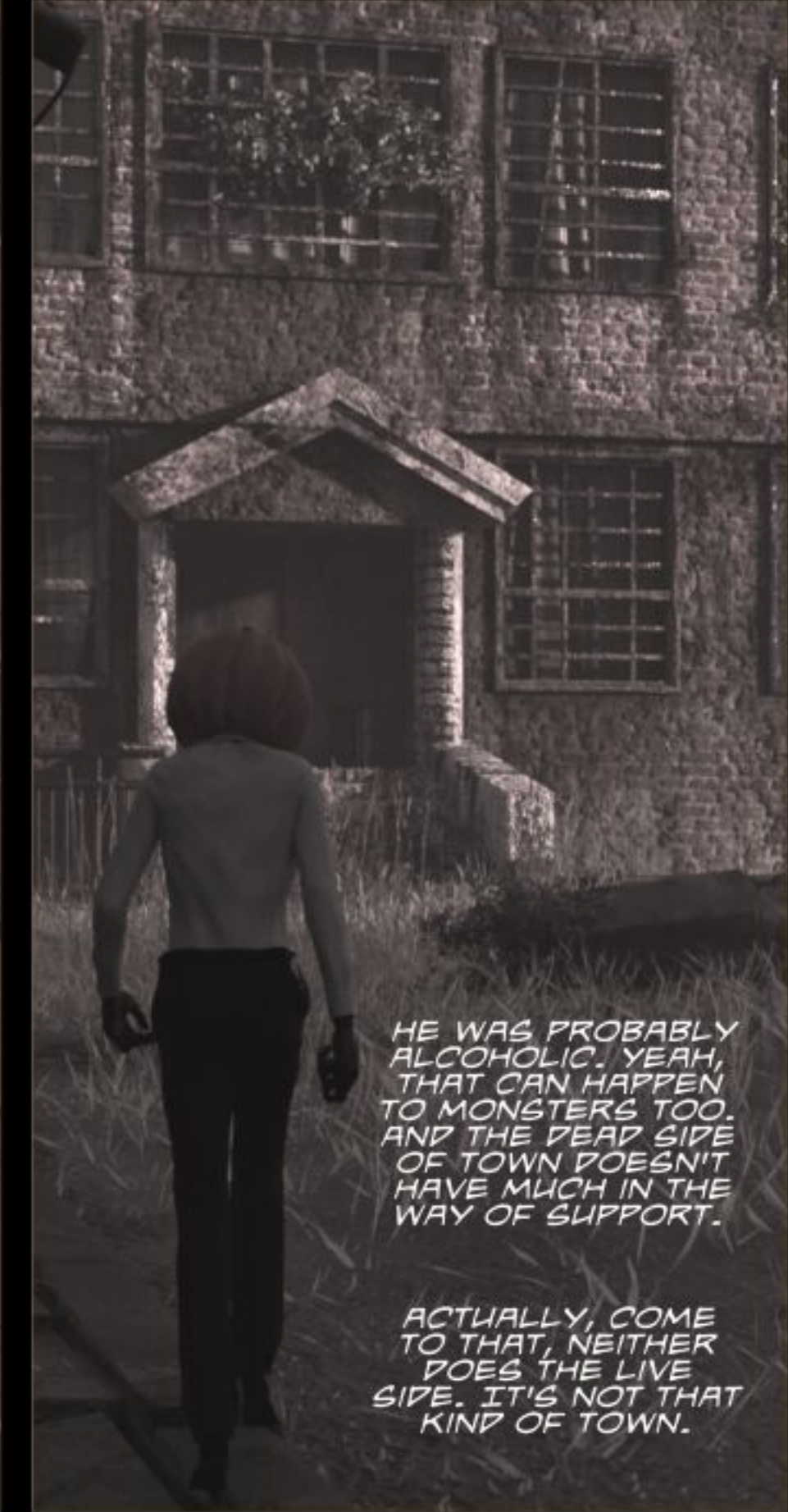


need ...

... drink ...

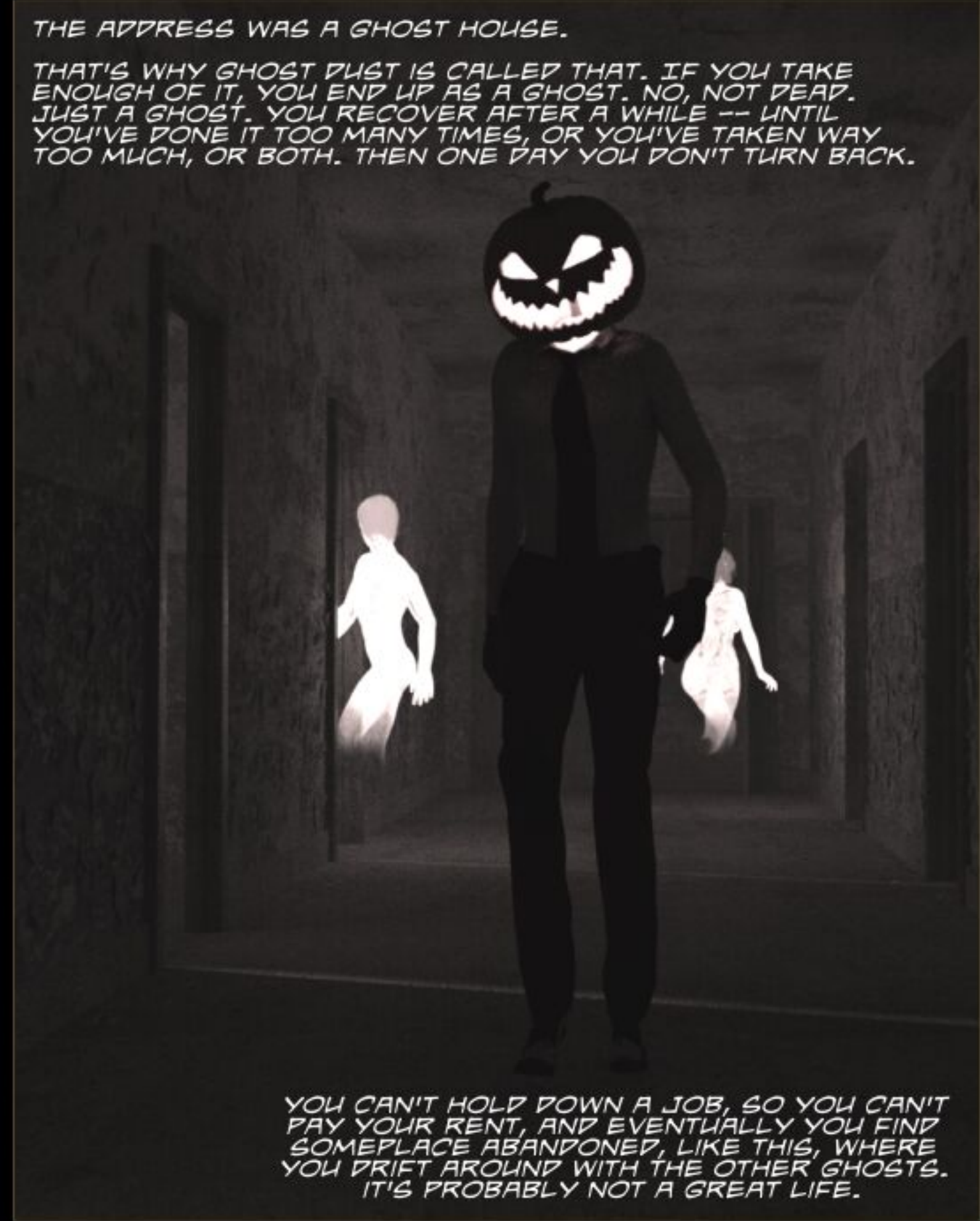
I don't have anything for you. Sorry.

There's a shelter five blocks up the street ...



HE WAS PROBABLY ALCOHOLIC. YEAH, THAT CAN HAPPEN TO MONSTERS TOO. AND THE DEAD SIDE OF TOWN DOESN'T HAVE MUCH IN THE WAY OF SUPPORT.

ACTUALLY, COME TO THAT, NEITHER DOES THE LIVE SIDE. IT'S NOT THAT KIND OF TOWN.



THE ADDRESS WAS A GHOST HOUSE.

THAT'S WHY GHOST DUST IS CALLED THAT. IF YOU TAKE ENOUGH OF IT, YOU END UP AS A GHOST. NO, NOT DEAD. JUST A GHOST. YOU RECOVER AFTER A WHILE -- UNTIL YOU'VE DONE IT TOO MANY TIMES, OR YOU'VE TAKEN WAY TOO MUCH, OR BOTH. THEN ONE DAY YOU DON'T TURN BACK.

YOU CAN'T HOLD DOWN A JOB, SO YOU CAN'T PAY YOUR RENT, AND EVENTUALLY YOU FIND SOMEPLACE ABANDONED, LIKE THIS, WHERE YOU PRIET AROUND WITH THE OTHER GHOSTS. IT'S PROBABLY NOT A GREAT LIFE.



MORT HAD SAID TO GO TO A ROOM ALL THE WAY IN THE BACK, AND I WAS ALREADY GETTING THAT FEELING IN MY STEM THAT SAID SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT.

... Mort?



Aw, no, Mort ...

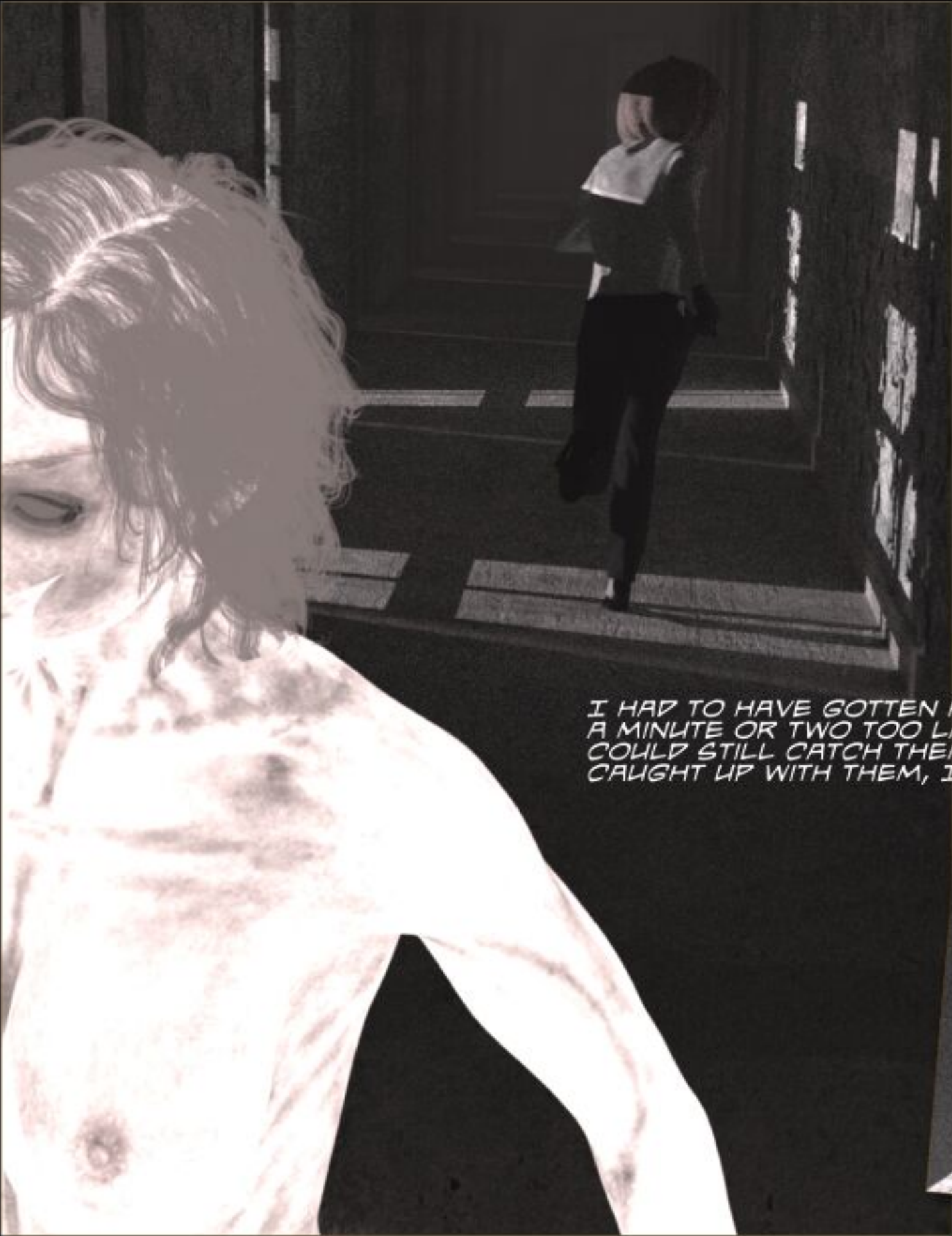
SOMEBODY HAD USED MORT'S SKULL AS A BASEBALL. AND THEY'D HIT A HOME RUN.

I HADN'T BEEN REAL CLEAR ON WHAT WOULD KILL A SKELETON BEFORE, BUT APPARENTLY THAT WOULD DO IT.

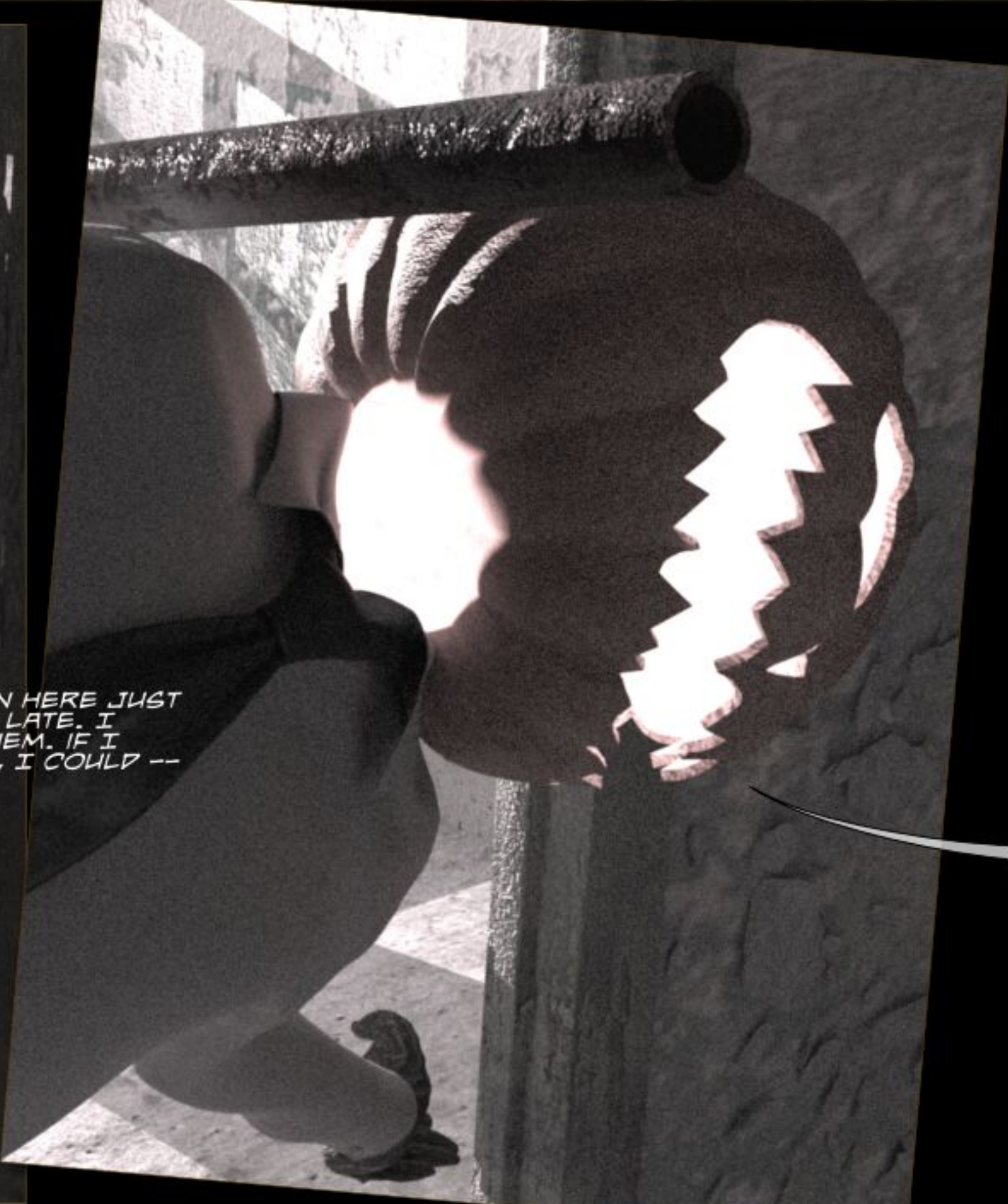


I HEARD A NOISE IN THE HALL BEHIND ME. SOMEBODY RUNNING.

GHOSTS DON'T MAKE NOISE.



I HAD TO HAVE GOTTEN HERE JUST A MINUTE OR TWO TOO LATE. I COULD STILL CATCH THEM. IF I CAUGHT UP WITH THEM, I COULD --



hgh



You in there?

urrp

Oh, good.
Guess you picked a
tough pumpkin.

I can see the
dent, though.

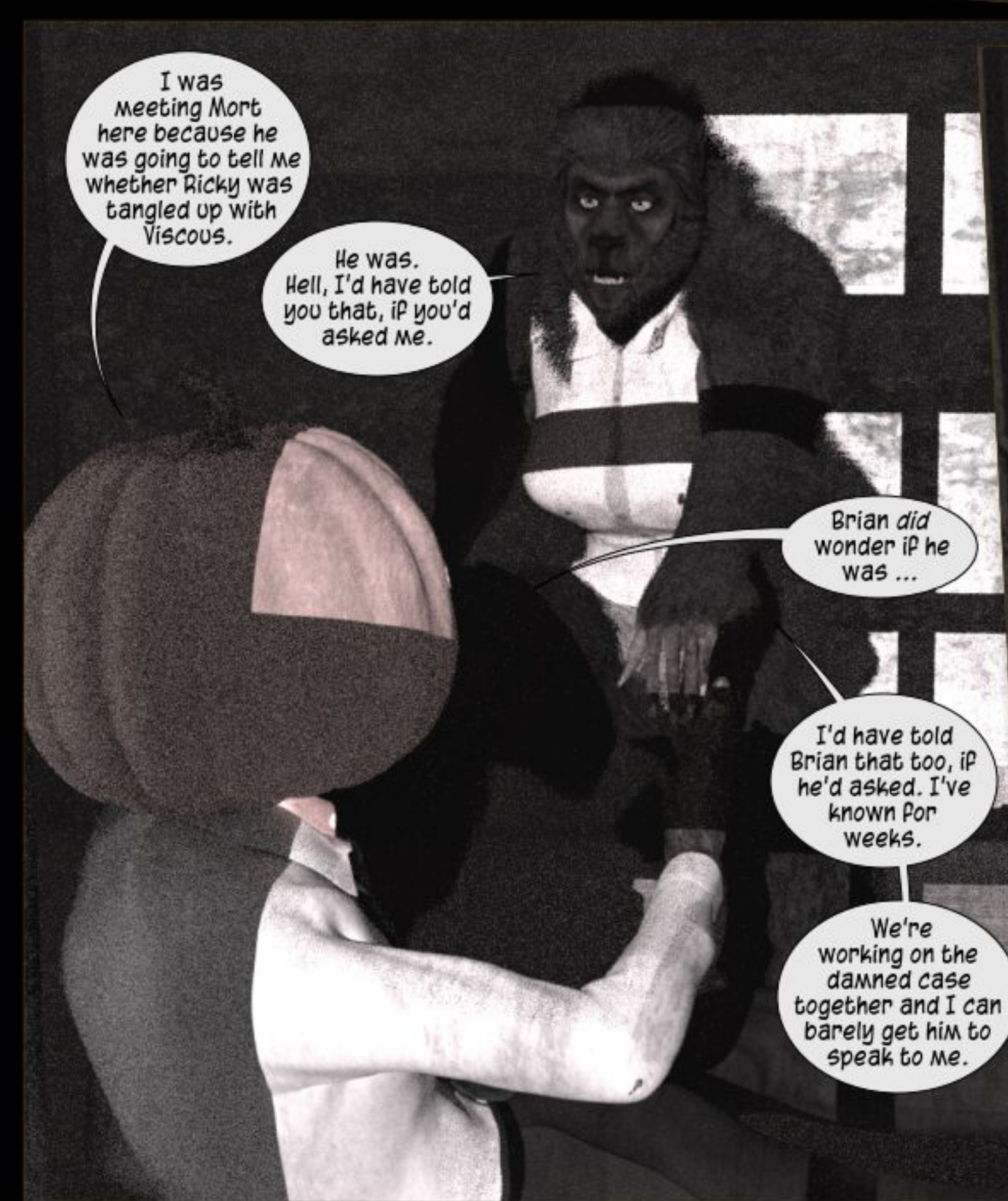


Norma?
What are you
doing here?

Was going to
ask you the same
thing. I found
Mort's body.

I didn't think you were
dumb enough to get caught
up in a gang war.

I'm not. Believe me.
I'm just trying to find out
what happened to Ricky
Velazquez.



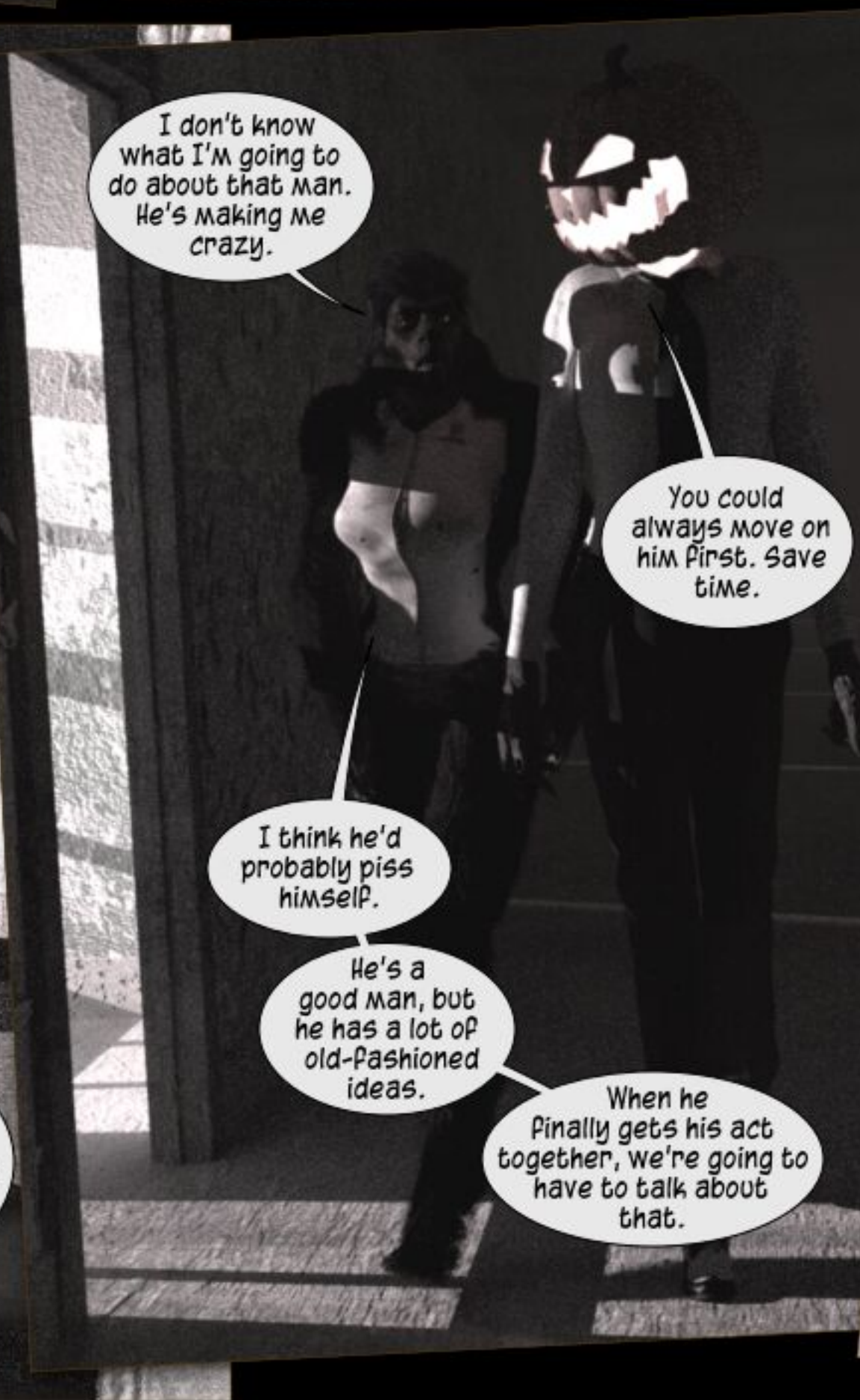
I was
meeting Mort
here because he
was going to tell me
whether Ricky was
tangled up with
Viscous.

He was.
Hell, I'd have told
you that, if you'd
asked me.

Brian did
wonder if he
was ...

I'd have told
Brian that too, if
he'd asked. I've
known for
weeks.

We're
working on the
damned case
together and I can
barely get him to
speak to me.



I don't know
what I'm going to
do about that man.
He's making me
crazy.

I think he'd
probably piss
himself.

He's a
good man, but
he has a lot of
old-fashioned
ideas.

When he
finally gets his act
together, we're going to
have to talk about
that.

You could
always move on
him first. Save
time.



Listen, I can't tell
you not to keep going
with your case.

But you need to be
careful. This is a war,
and it's heating up, and
they're not going to be
too picky about who
gets hurt.

IT LOOKED LIKE I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO DO THE THING I'D BEEN TRYING NOT TO DO: TALK TO JIMMY VISCOUS. GOOD NEWS WAS, THERE WAS NO PROBLEM FINDING HIM. HE HADN'T LEFT HIS CASINO IN YEARS. AND HE KEPT CLUB HOURS, SO EVEN THOUGH IT WAS GETTING LATE, I WOULDN'T BE DISTURBING HIM.

THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN DANGEROUS.



C'mon, Jimmy,
again?

You know I like a
good time as much as
anybody, but ...



Polly. I know you got
a head full of goo, but
something's gotta stick in
it sooner or later.

I don't keep you
around for your
personality. And it sure
ain't for your brains.

You don't wanna
put out when I say so,
then get your ass out of
here. Go see how you do
out on the street.

Or get over
here and do that
thing you do with them
squishy tits.



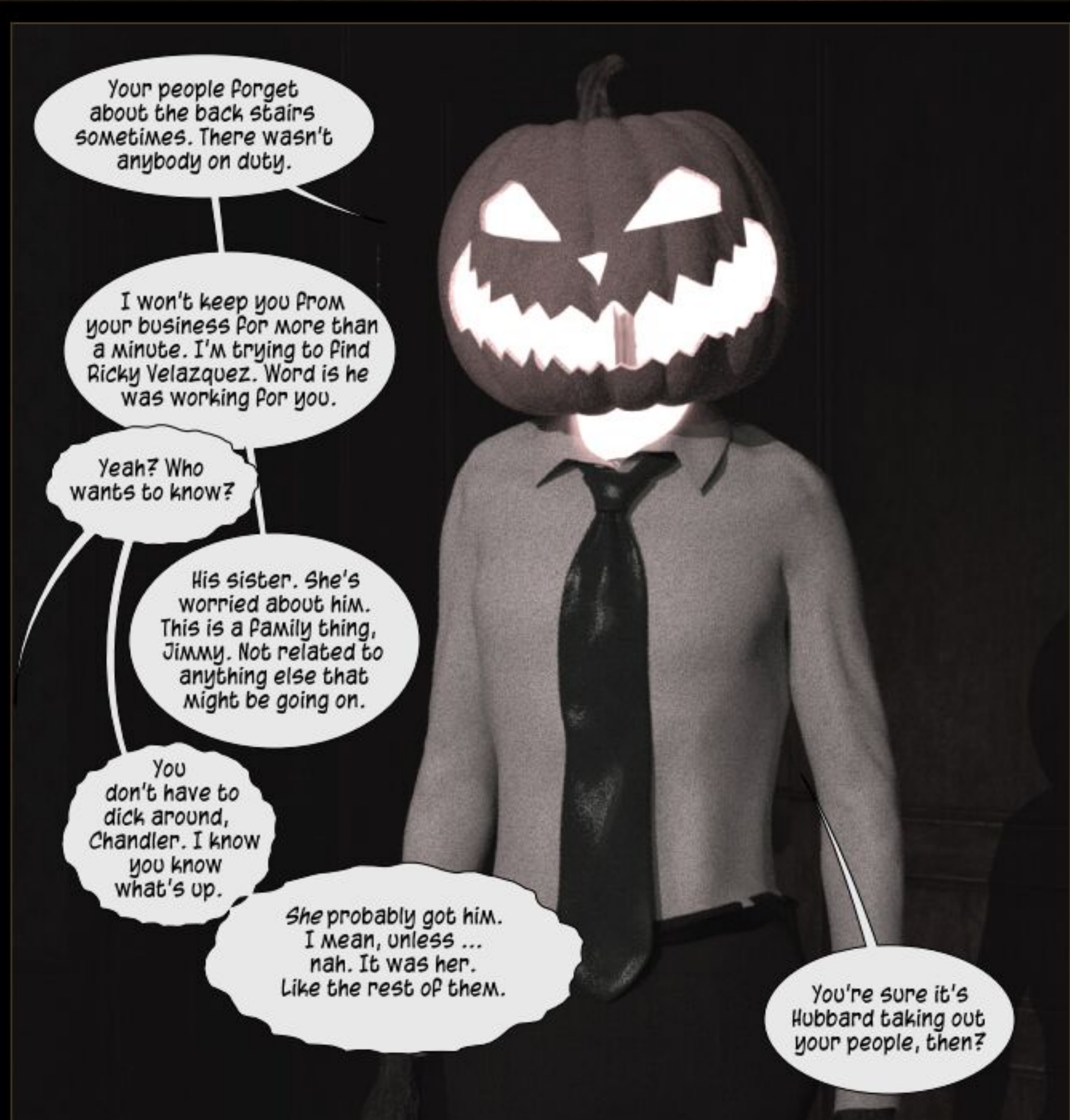
Huh.
Guess I came in at a
bad time.

You sure as shit did.
How'd you even get in?
I'mna have to kick
somebody's ass now.

COUPLE OF YEARS AGO,
WORKING A CASE, I
PROVED VISCOUS HADN'T
DONE SOMETHING
EVERYBODY WAS AFTER
HIM FOR.

I HADN'T BEEN TRYING
TO CLEAR HIM -- IT WAS
A SIDE EFFECT OF WHAT
I WAS WORKING ON. BUT
IF HE WANTED TO THINK
IT HAD BEEN ON
PURPOSE, THAT WAS
FINE WITH ME.

IT MEANT HE'D
TOLERATE ME -- BUT
ONLY UP TO A POINT,
AND I DIDN'T WANT TO
PUSH MY LUCK.



Your people forget
about the back stairs
sometimes. There wasn't
anybody on duty.

I won't keep you from
your business for more than
a minute. I'm trying to find
Ricky Velazquez. Word is he
was working for you.

Yeah? Who
wants to know?

His sister. She's
worried about him.
This is a family thing.
Jimmy. Not related to
anything else that
might be going on.

You
don't have to
dick around,
Chandler. I know
you know
what's up.

She probably got him.
I mean, unless ...
nah. It was her.
Like the rest of them.

You're sure it's
Hubbard taking out
your people, then?



She's gunning for me, Chandler!

You get what her deal is, right? She thinks she's the only one who gets to move dust in this town!

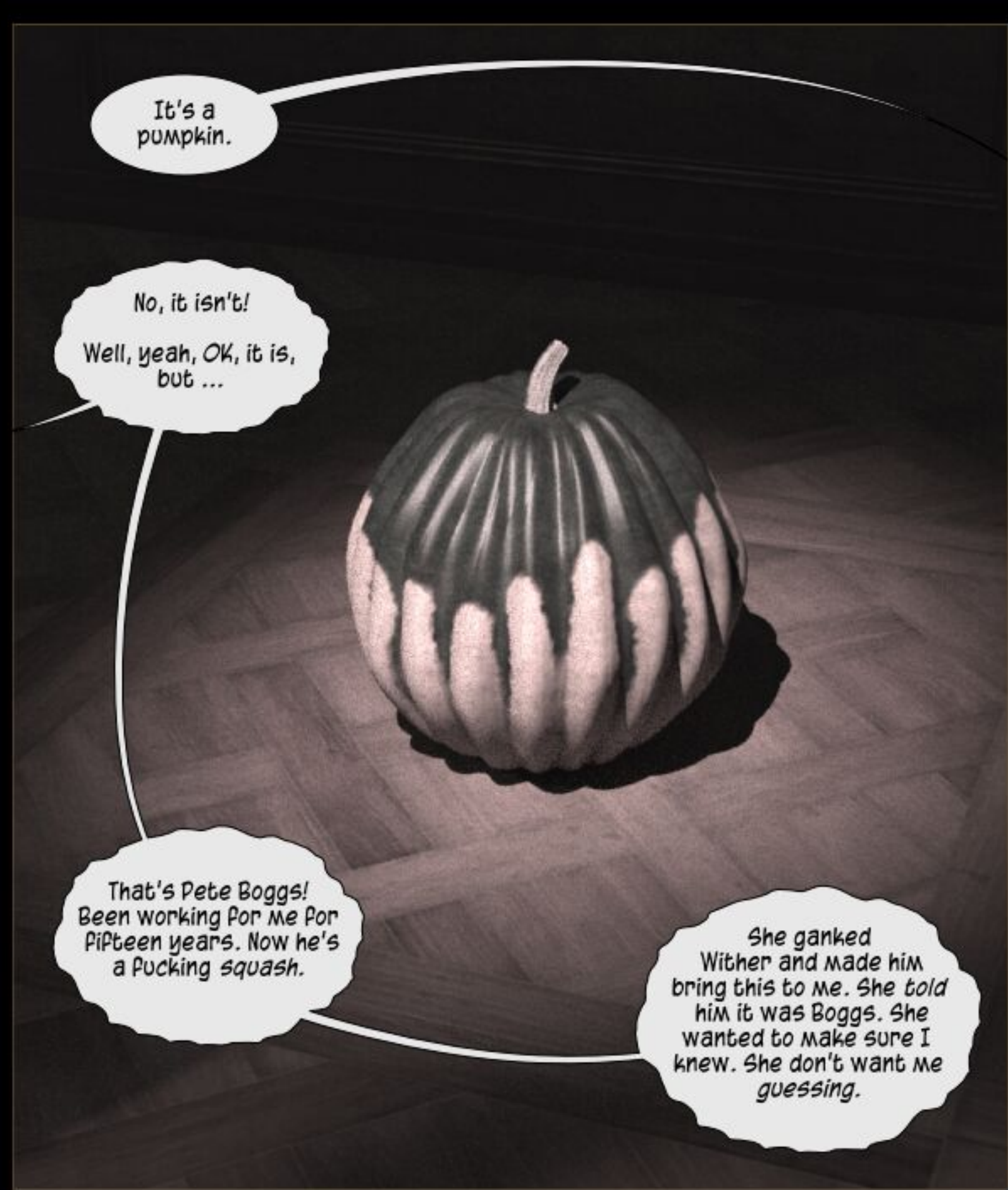
She don't wanna actually, y'know, compete, so she's just trying to squash all my people!

I ain't gonna sit here and take it! I've got somebody on it. He's gonna cut her a new face. With a Pucking axe!

OK, but ... all I'm saying, Jimmy, is, you go there, you better be sure ...

Of course I'm sure! What, you think I'm Pucking guessing?

C'mere. I wanna show you something.

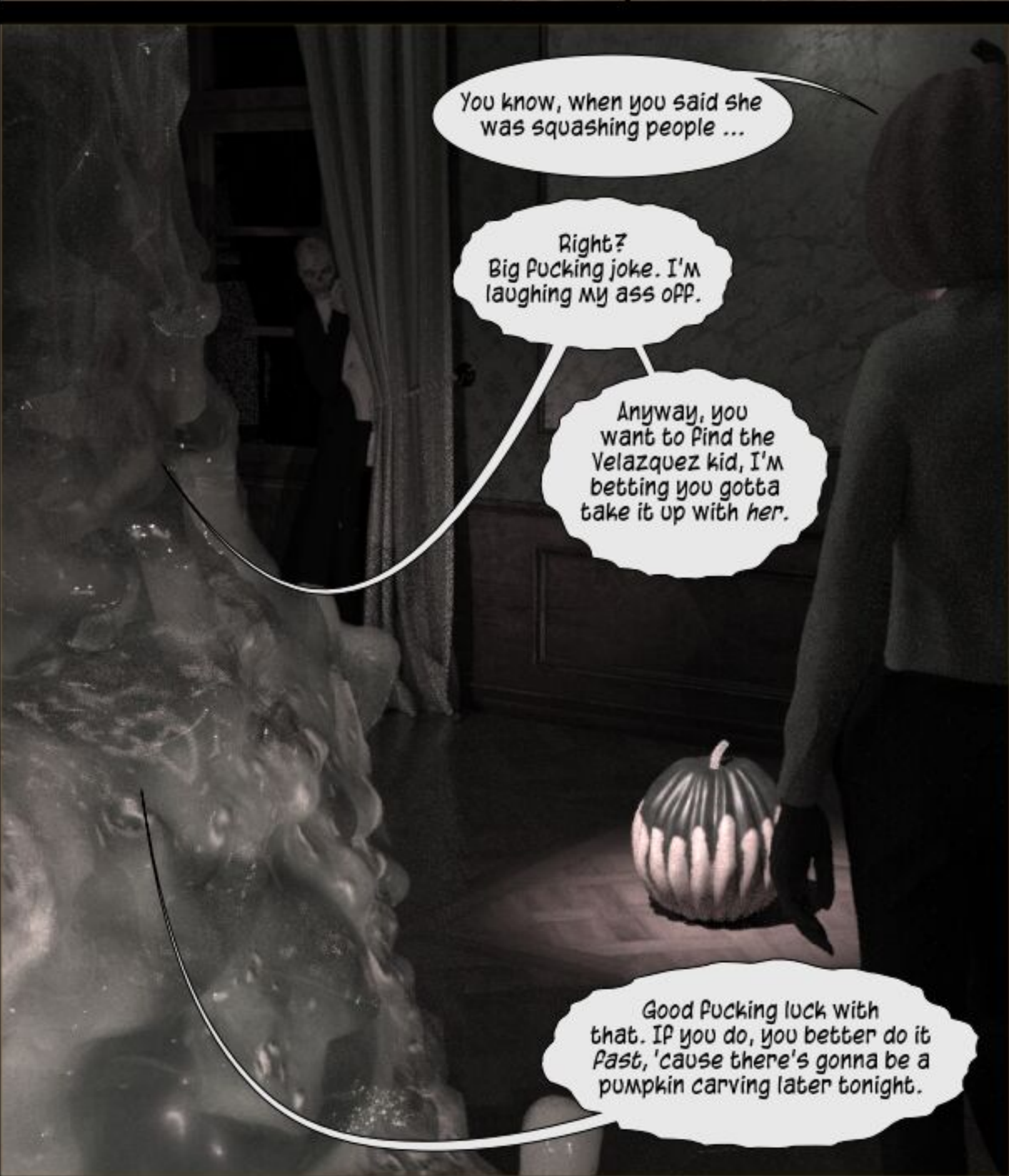


It's a pumpkin.

No, it isn't! Well, yeah, OK, it is, but ...

That's Pete Boggs! Been working for me for fifteen years. Now he's a Pucking squash.

She ganked Wither and made him bring this to me. She told him it was Boggs. She wanted to make sure I knew. She don't want me guessing.



You know, when you said she was squashing people ...

Right? Big Pucking joke. I'm laughing my ass off.

Anyway, you want to find the Velazquez kid, I'm betting you gotta take it up with her.

Good Pucking luck with that. If you do, you better do it fast, 'cause there's gonna be a pumpkin carving later tonight.

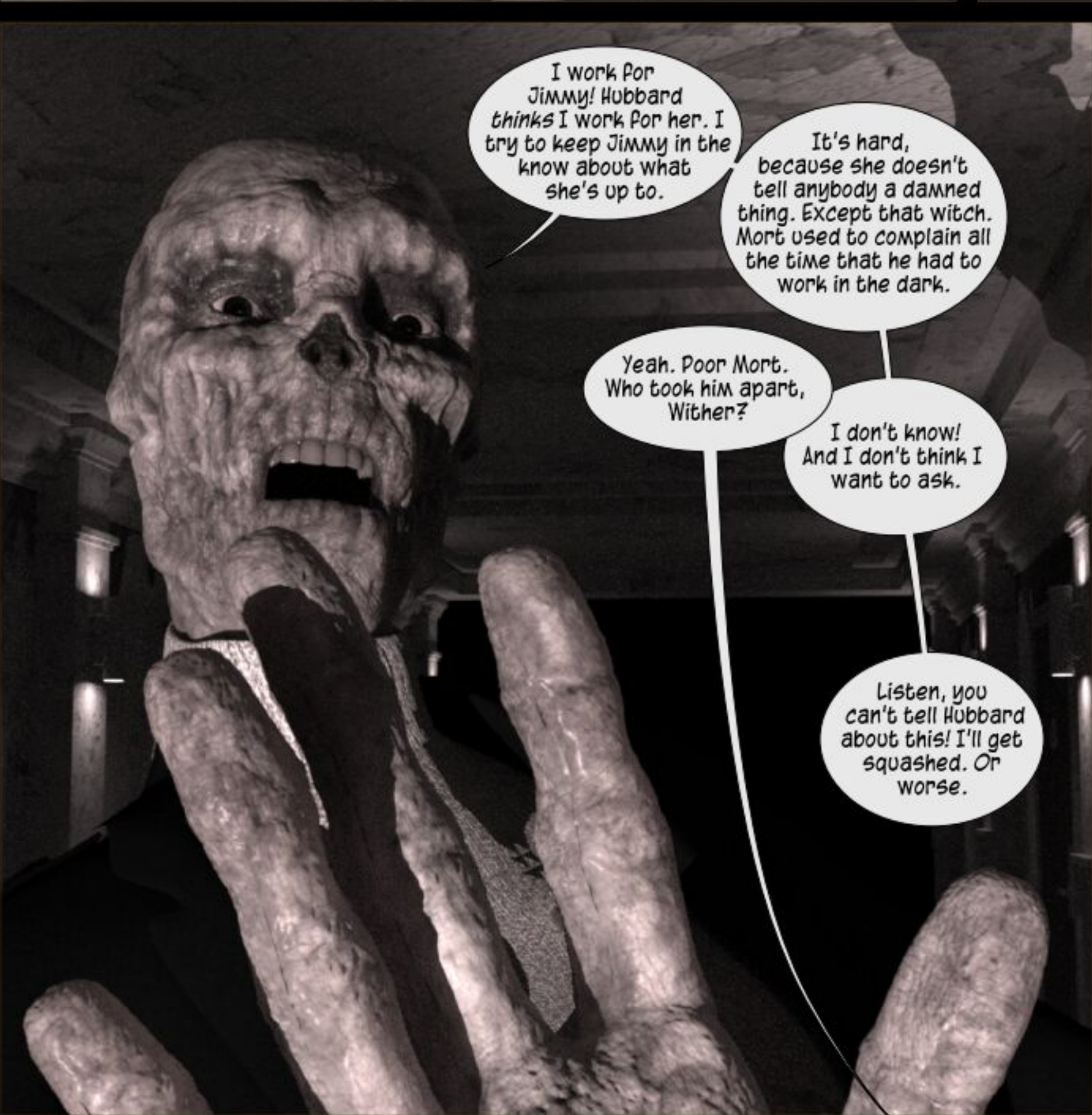


Heya, Wither. YAAAAAH!

You're really bad at spying, you know that? You're lucky Viscous can't turn around in a hurry ...

Now, seems to me like I heard you were running jobs for Hubbard these days. But here we've got Viscous talking like you're one of his ...

... so what's the deal? You playing for both teams? That's kind of a risk, don't you think?



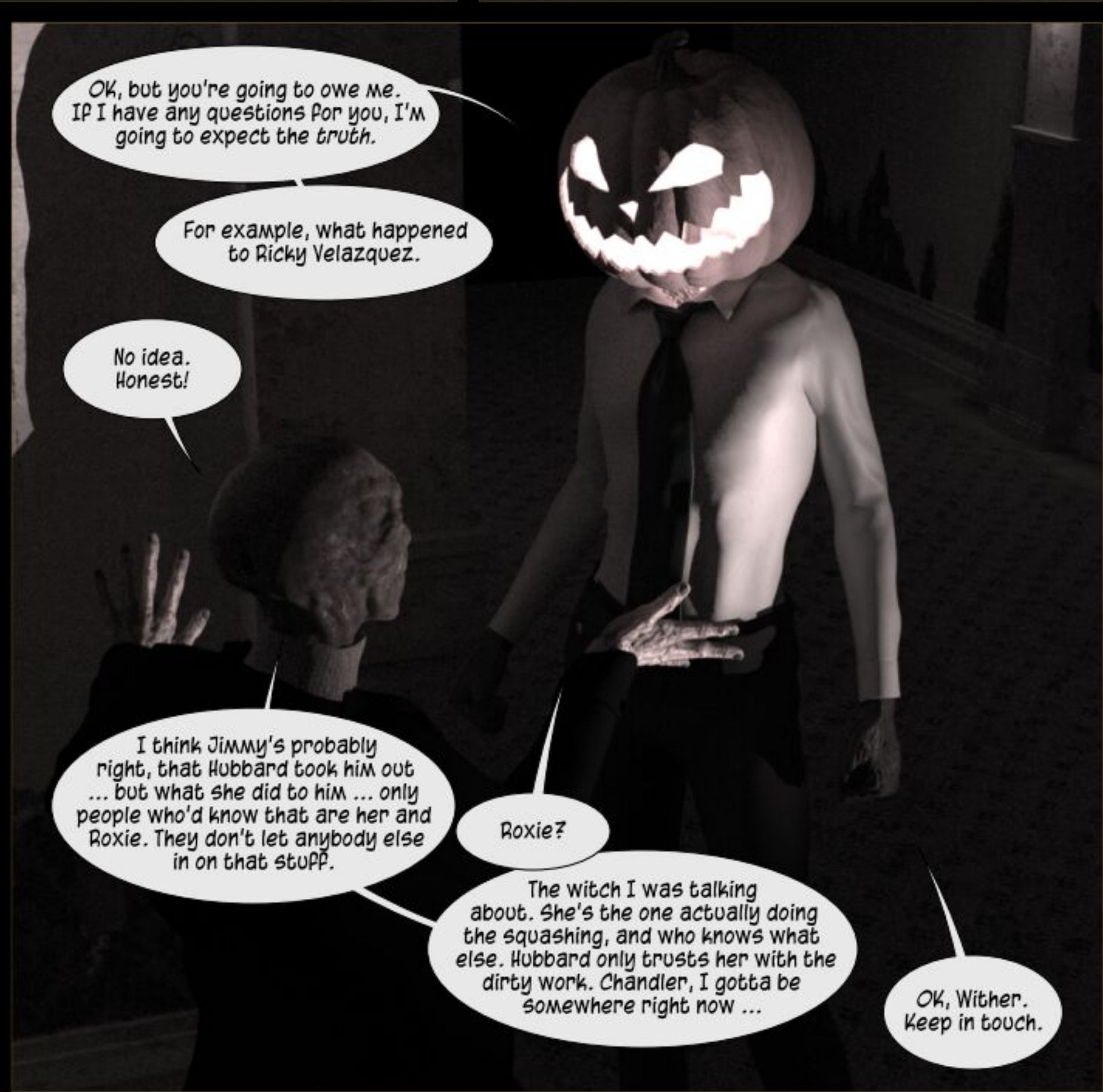
I work for Jimmy! Hubbard thinks I work for her. I try to keep Jimmy in the know about what she's up to.

It's hard, because she doesn't tell anybody a damned thing. Except that witch. Mort used to complain all the time that he had to work in the dark.

Yeah. Poor Mort. Who took him apart, Wither?

I don't know! And I don't think I want to ask.

Listen, you can't tell Hubbard about this! I'll get squashed. Or worse.



OK, but you're going to owe me. If I have any questions for you, I'm going to expect the truth.

For example, what happened to Ricky Velazquez.

No idea. Honest!

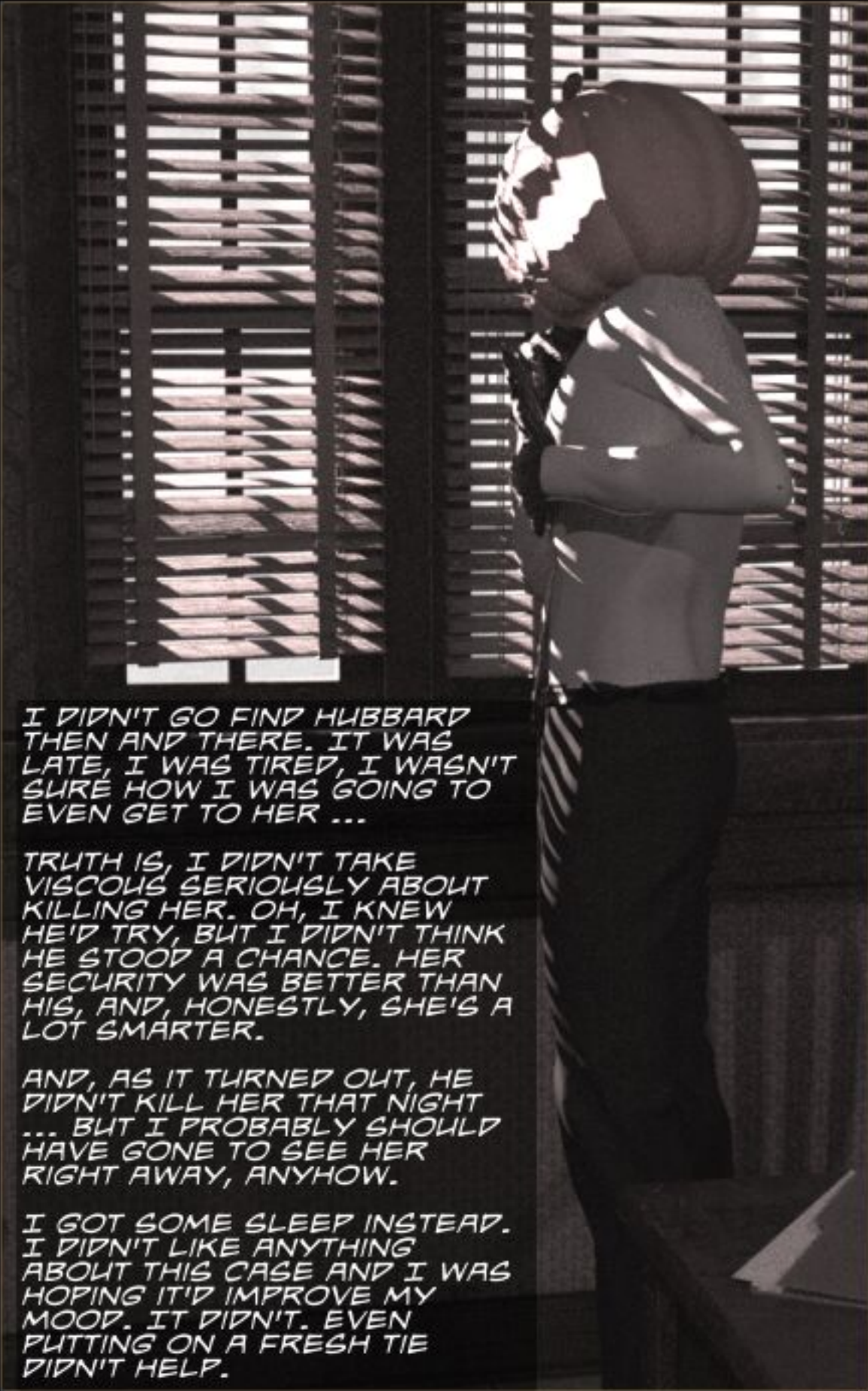
I think Jimmy's probably right, that Hubbard took him out ... but what she did to him ... only people who'd know that are her and Roxie. They don't let anybody else in on that stuff.

Roxie?

The witch I was talking about. She's the one actually doing the squashing, and who knows what else. Hubbard only trusts her with the dirty work. Chandler, I gotta be somewhere right now ...

OK, Wither. Keep in touch.

THAT WAS WHEN I MADE A MISTAKE.



I DIDN'T GO FIND HUBBARD THEN AND THERE. IT WAS LATE, I WAS TIRED, I WASN'T SURE HOW I WAS GOING TO EVEN GET TO HER ...

TRUTH IS, I DIDN'T TAKE VISCOUS SERIOUSLY ABOUT KILLING HER. OH, I KNEW HE'D TRY, BUT I DIDN'T THINK HE STOOD A CHANCE. HER SECURITY WAS BETTER THAN HIS, AND, HONESTLY, SHE'S A LOT SMARTER.

AND, AS IT TURNED OUT, HE DIDN'T KILL HER THAT NIGHT ... BUT I PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE GONE TO SEE HER RIGHT AWAY, ANYHOW.

I GOT SOME SLEEP INSTEAD. I DIDN'T LIKE ANYTHING ABOUT THIS CASE AND I WAS HOPE IT'D IMPROVE MY MOOD. IT DIDN'T. EVEN PUTTING ON A FRESH TIE DIDN'T HELP.



Jack!

HMM? Something wrong?

Don't give me "something wrong." I can see that dent in your head from here. What happened?

Somebody thought they'd get cute.

Hunk of pipe, I think. They didn't stick around to answer questions.

I was going to need a new head in a few days anyway. This one's getting a little soft.



That's supposed to make it OK? Jack, you've got to be more careful!

Don't worry. I'm not planning to endanger your paycheck.

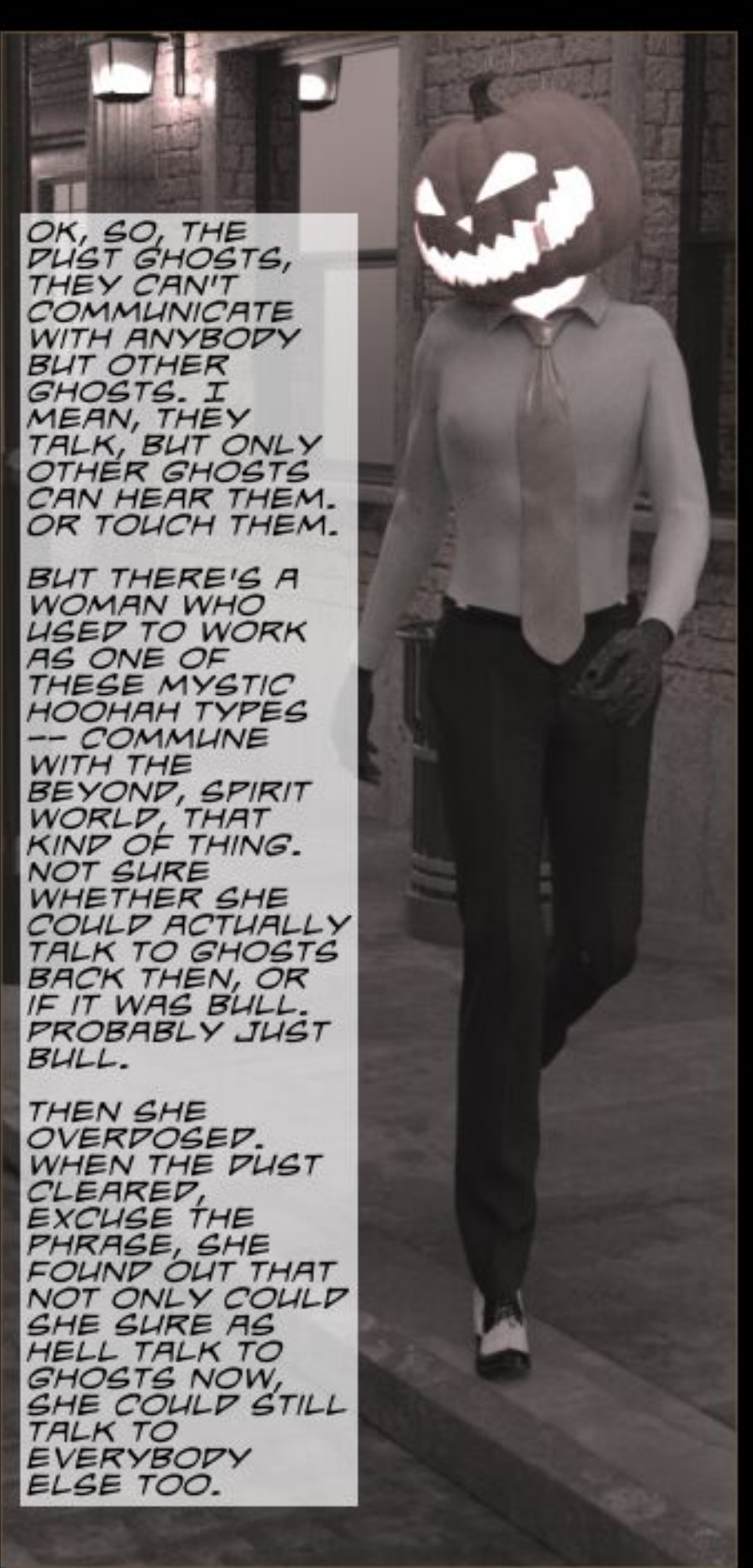
I do worry. No matter how much you try to put me off by being a jackass.

... OK, Pair.

You may not have anything else to worry about on this case, because I'm not sure where I go from here.

What I need to do is talk to Hubbard, but I have to have a lever or she won't tell me a thing.

HMM ... though I know a way I might be able to get one.



OK, SO, THE
JUST GHOSTS,
THEY CAN'T
COMMUNICATE
WITH ANYBODY
BUT OTHER
GHOSTS. I
MEAN, THEY
TALK, BUT ONLY
OTHER GHOSTS
CAN HEAR THEM.
OR TOUCH THEM.

BUT THERE'S A
WOMAN WHO
USED TO WORK
AS ONE OF
THESE MYSTIC
HOOHAH TYPES
-- COMMUNE
WITH THE
BEYOND, SPIRIT
WORLD, THAT
KIND OF THING.
NOT SURE
WHETHER SHE
COULD ACTUALLY
TALK TO GHOSTS
BACK THEN, OR
IF IT WAS BULL.
PROBABLY JUST
BULL.

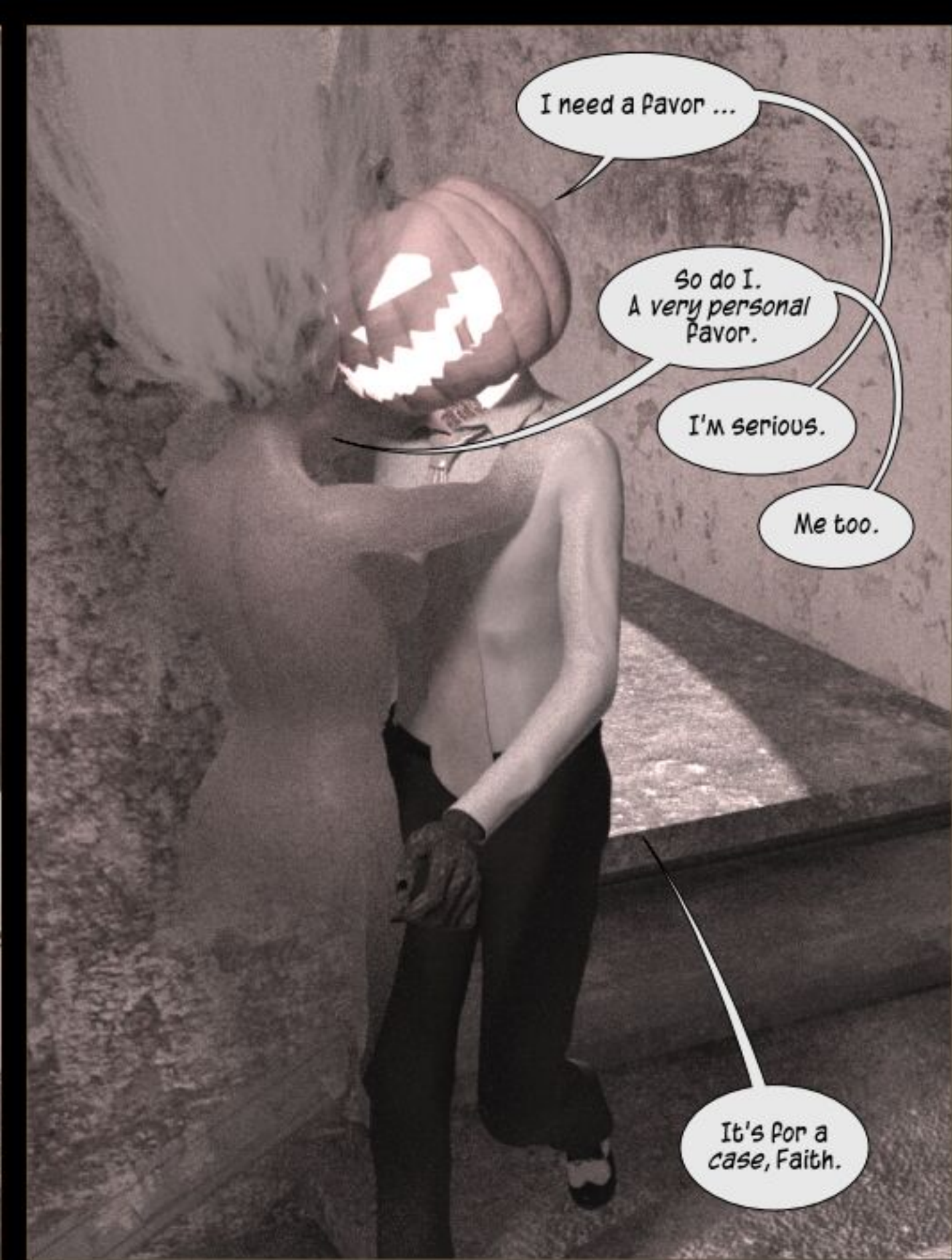
THEN SHE
OVERPOSED.
WHEN THE JUST
CLEARED,
EXCUSE THE
PHRASE, SHE
FOUND OUT THAT
NOT ONLY COULD
SHE SURE AS
HELL TALK TO
GHOSTS NOW,
SHE COULD STILL
TALK TO
EVERYBODY
ELSE TOO.



Jack!

Where have you
been hiding? It's
been ages.

Hello, Faith.



I need a favor ...

So do I.
A very personal
favor.

I'm serious.

Me too.

It's for a
case, Faith.



Case, shmase.
Do you know how bored I am, Jack?
Do you have any idea? You know when
the last time was that somebody
came to see me?

Maybe if you
left this place once
in a while ...

I keep getting pulled back
here, Jack. It's a ghost thing, I
guess. Anyway, it didn't look like
this when I lived in it.

If you want to take me
somewhere else, I bet that would
work, at least for a bit.



C'mon, Jack. I just want to pool
around a little. Touch somebody for a
while. That's not too much to ask, is it?
Your case can wait that long.

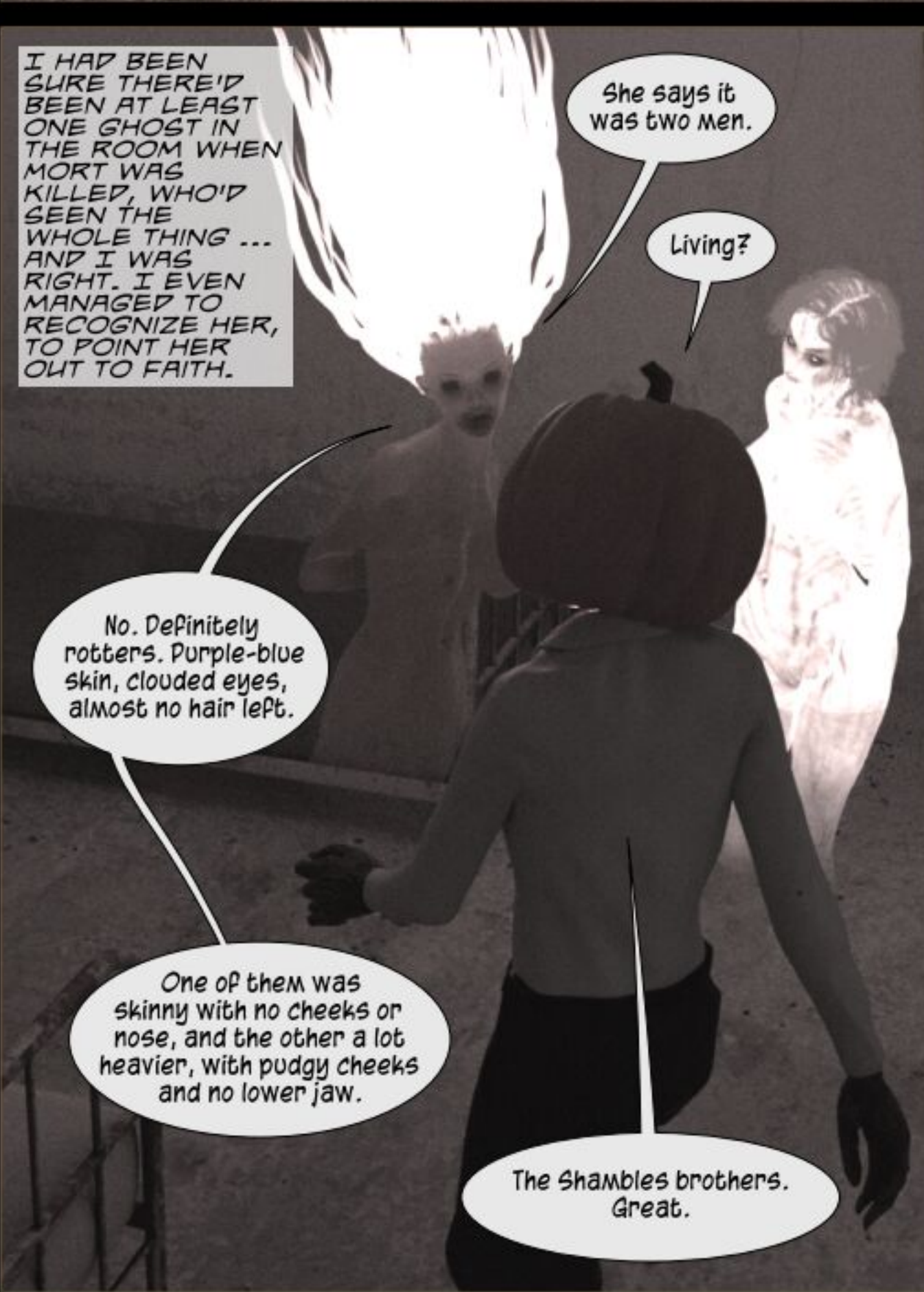
No, but the
thing is ...

... look, this is where my
head is right now. I'm not going
to be able to think about anything
else. I couldn't give you the
attention you deserve.

Can I give you a
raincheck, maybe?

... Maybe.

If you promise to
honor it.



I HAD BEEN
SURE THERE'D
BEEN AT LEAST
ONE GHOST IN
THE ROOM WHEN
MORT WAS
KILLED, WHO'D
SEEN THE
WHOLE THING ...
AND I WAS
RIGHT. I EVEN
MANAGED TO
RECOGNIZE HER,
TO POINT HER
OUT TO FAITH.

She says it
was two men.

Living?

No. Definitely
rotters. Purple-blue
skin, clouded eyes,
almost no hair left.

One of them was
skinny with no cheeks or
nose, and the other a lot
heavier, with pudgy cheeks
and no lower jaw.

The Shambles brothers.
Great.



Not people I
want to cross ... on
the other hand, they
definitely only work for
Viscous, so that as good
as proves he ordered
the hit ...

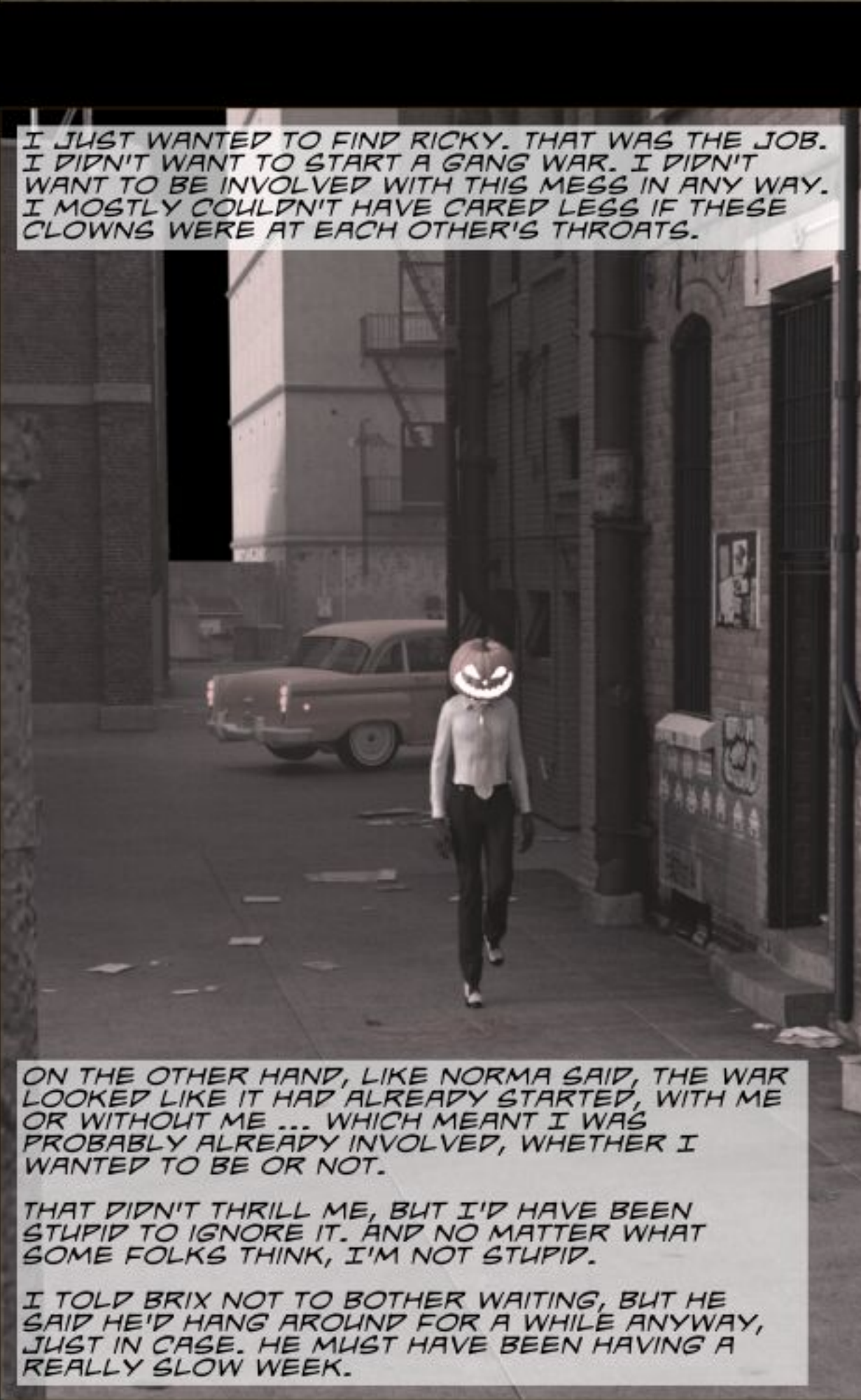
... which I guess is
enough to go to Hubbard
with, even if she already
suspects that. OK.

Thank her for
me, Faith --



-- oh.

SEEMED LIKE FAITH
WASN'T THE ONLY
GHOST WHO WAS
DEPERATELY IN
NEED OF SOME
ENTERTAINMENT.
I GAVE THEM SOME
PRIVACY ... NOT
THAT THEY'D HAVE
NOTICED IF I
STAYED TO WATCH.



I JUST WANTED TO FIND RICKY. THAT WAS THE JOB.
I DIDN'T WANT TO START A GANG WAR. I DIDN'T
WANT TO BE INVOLVED WITH THIS MESS IN ANY WAY.
I MOSTLY COULDN'T HAVE CARED LESS IF THESE
CLOWNS WERE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS.

ON THE OTHER HAND, LIKE NORMA SAID, THE WAR
LOOKED LIKE IT HAD ALREADY STARTED, WITH ME
OR WITHOUT ME ... WHICH MEANT I WAS
PROBABLY ALREADY INVOLVED, WHETHER I
WANTED TO BE OR NOT.

THAT DIDN'T THRILL ME, BUT I'D HAVE BEEN
STUPID TO IGNORE IT. AND NO MATTER WHAT
SOME FOLKS THINK, I'M NOT STUPID.

I TOLD BRIX NOT TO BOTHER WAITING, BUT HE
SAID HE'D HANG AROUND FOR A WHILE ANYWAY,
JUST IN CASE. HE MUST HAVE BEEN HAVING A
REALLY SLOW WEEK.



You get
around, huh?

I still don't have
anything for you,
though.



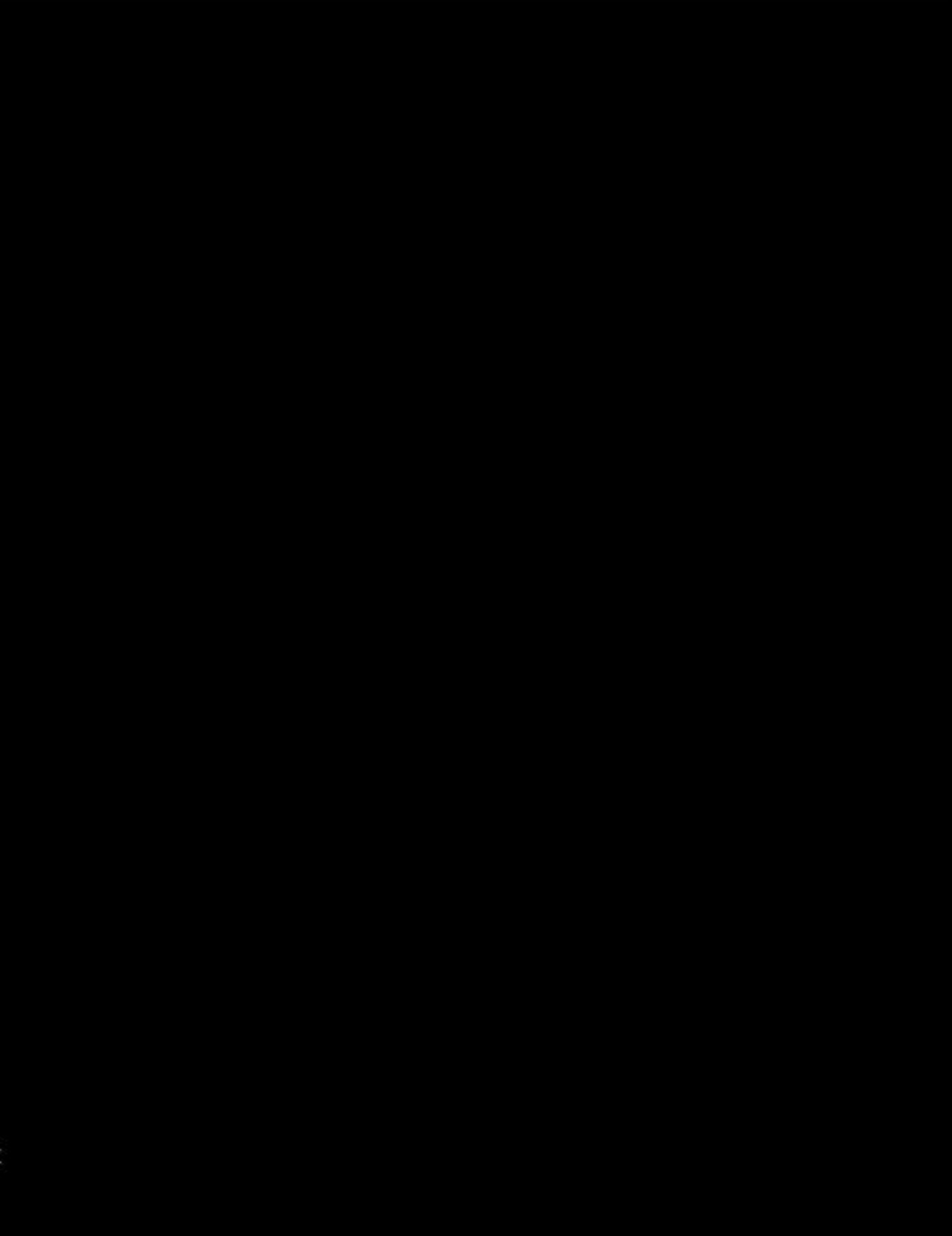
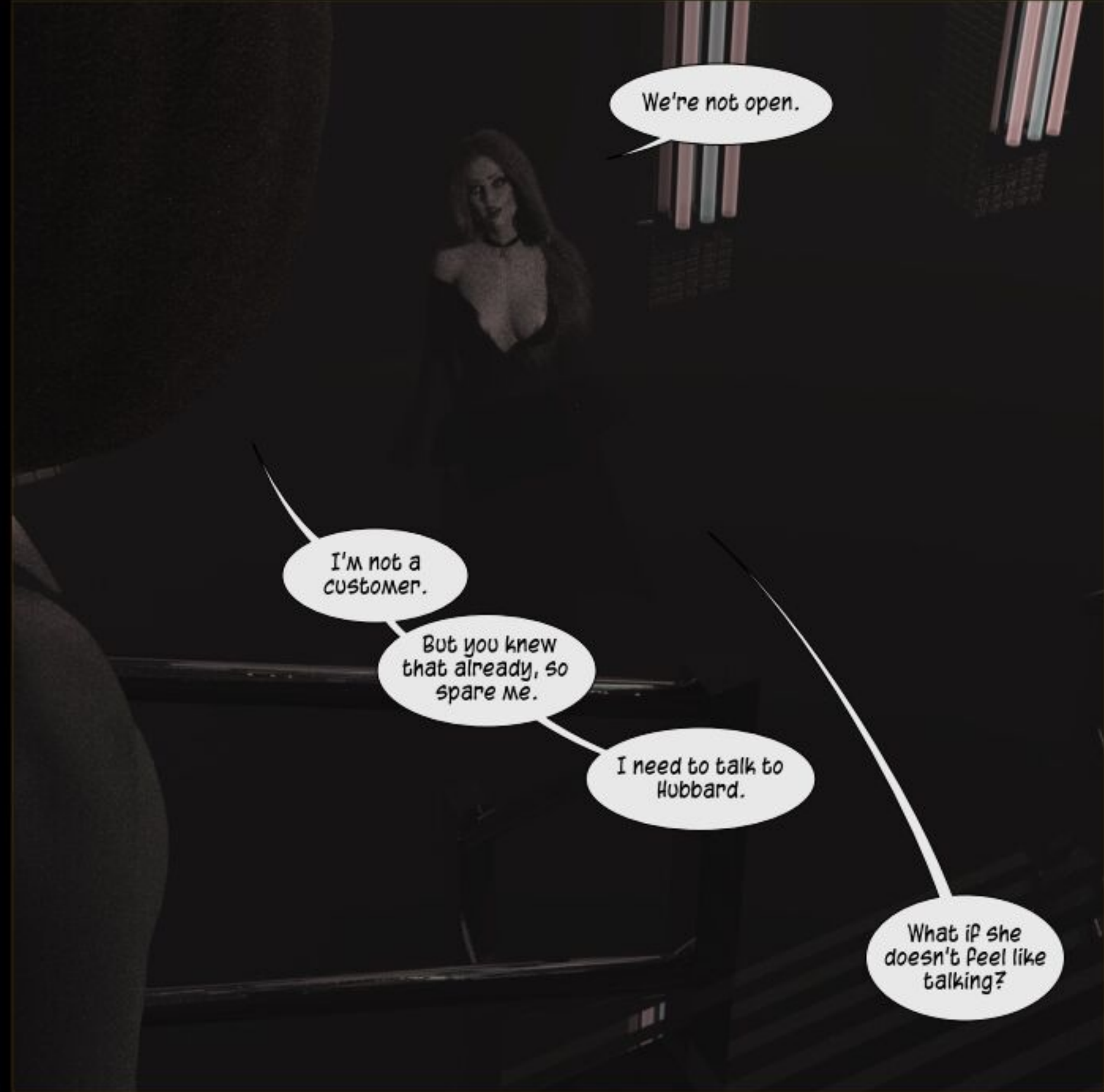
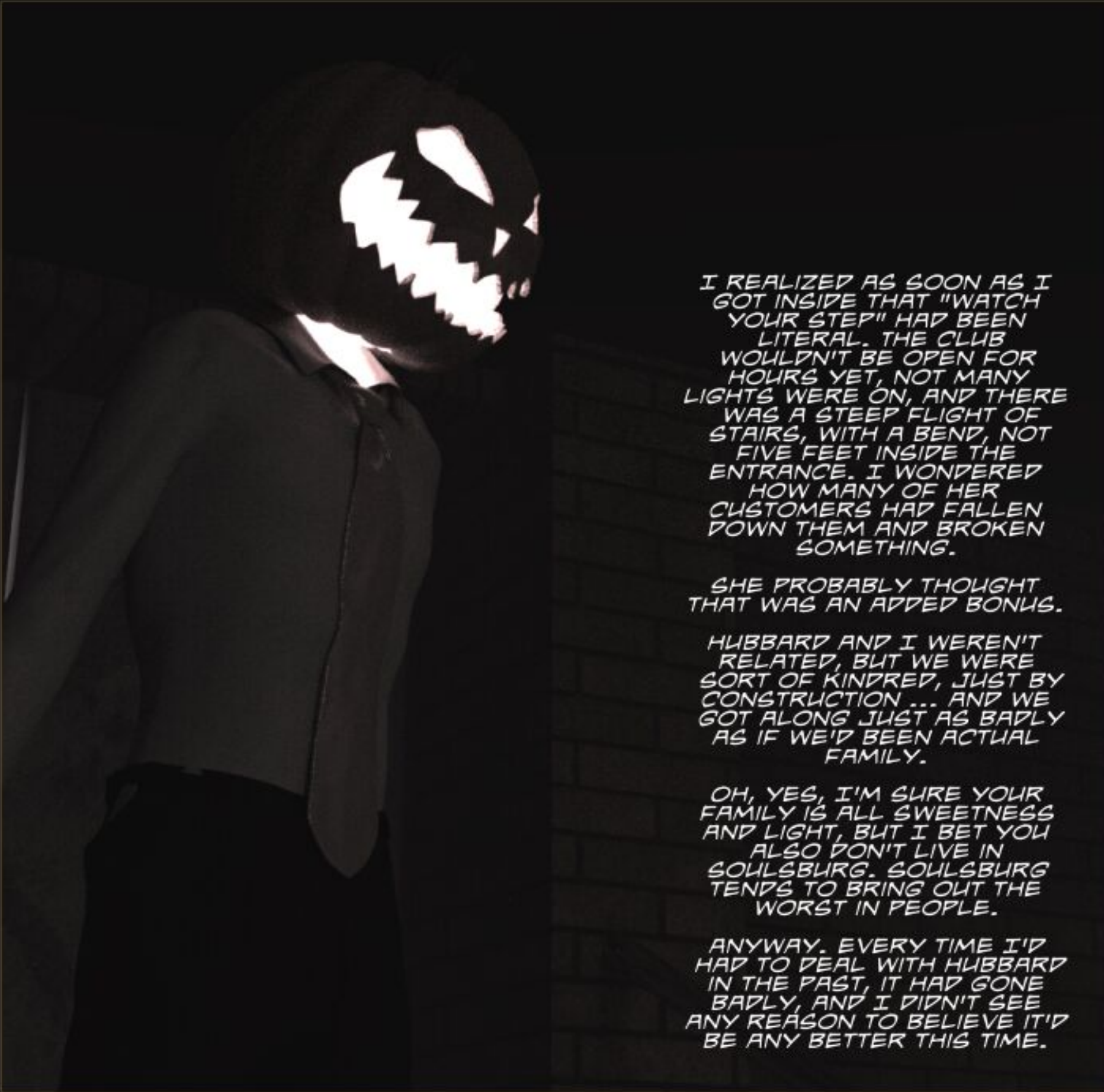
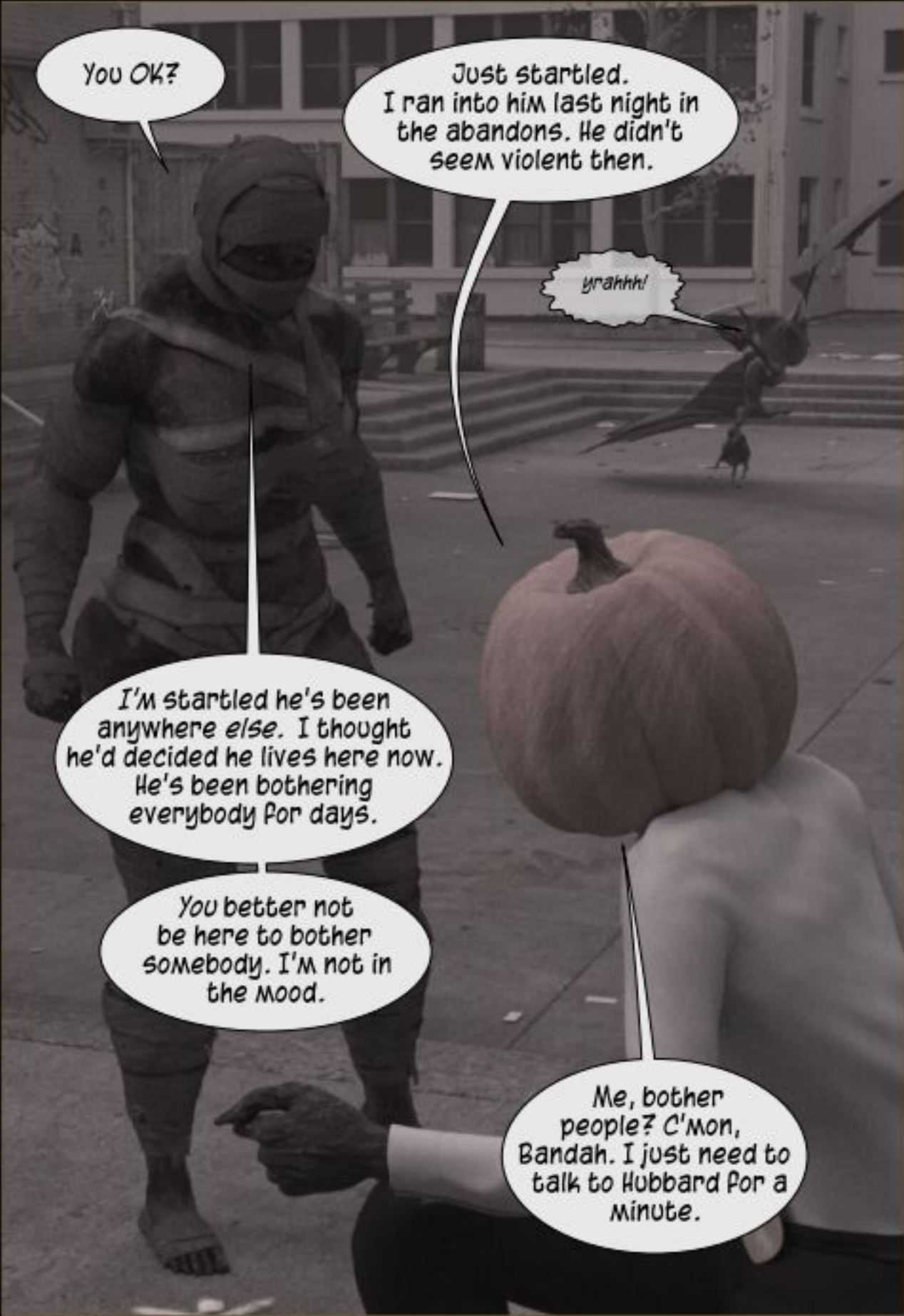
drink ...

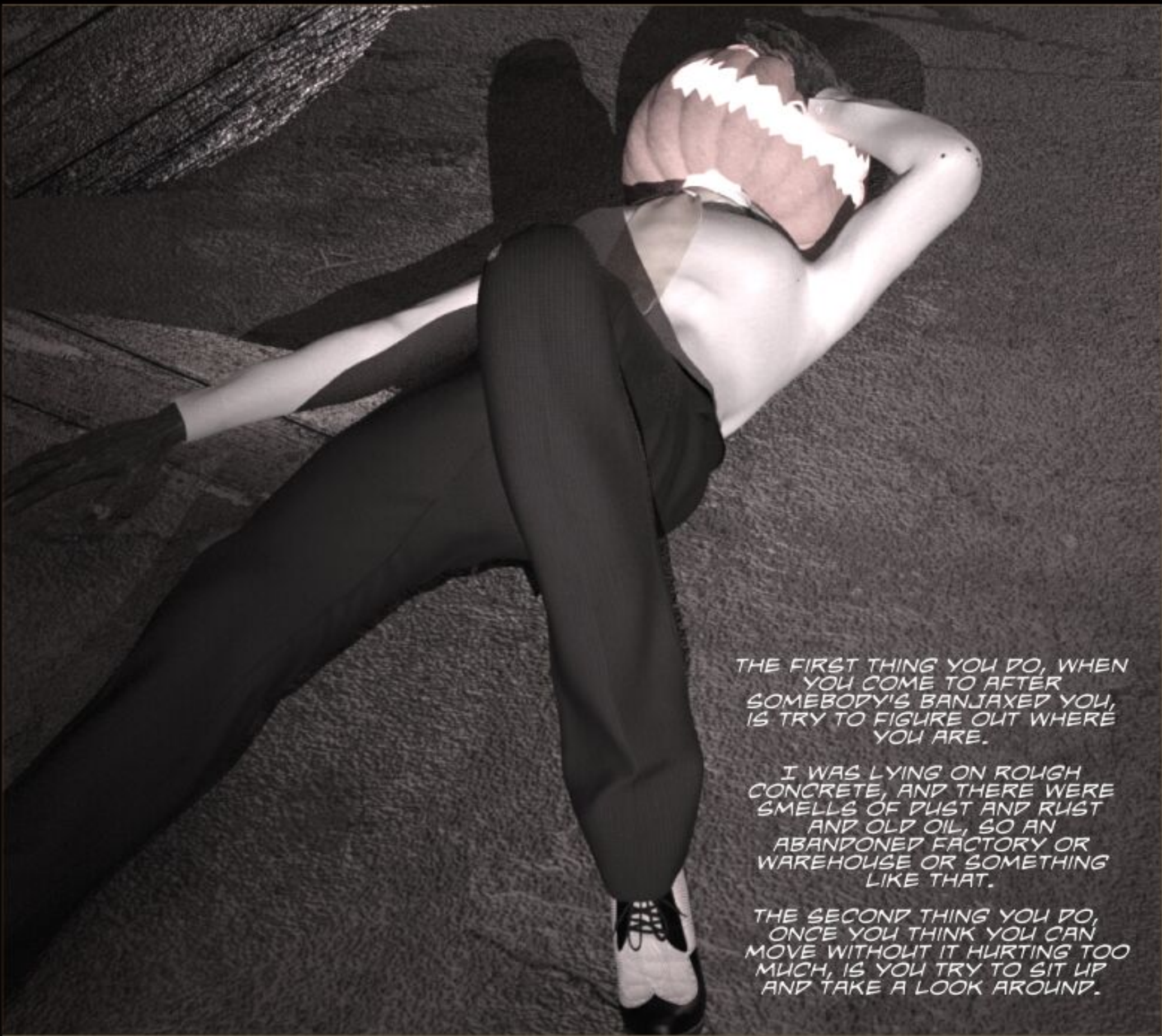
need ...
drink ...

drink!

DRINK!!

Hey, now --!

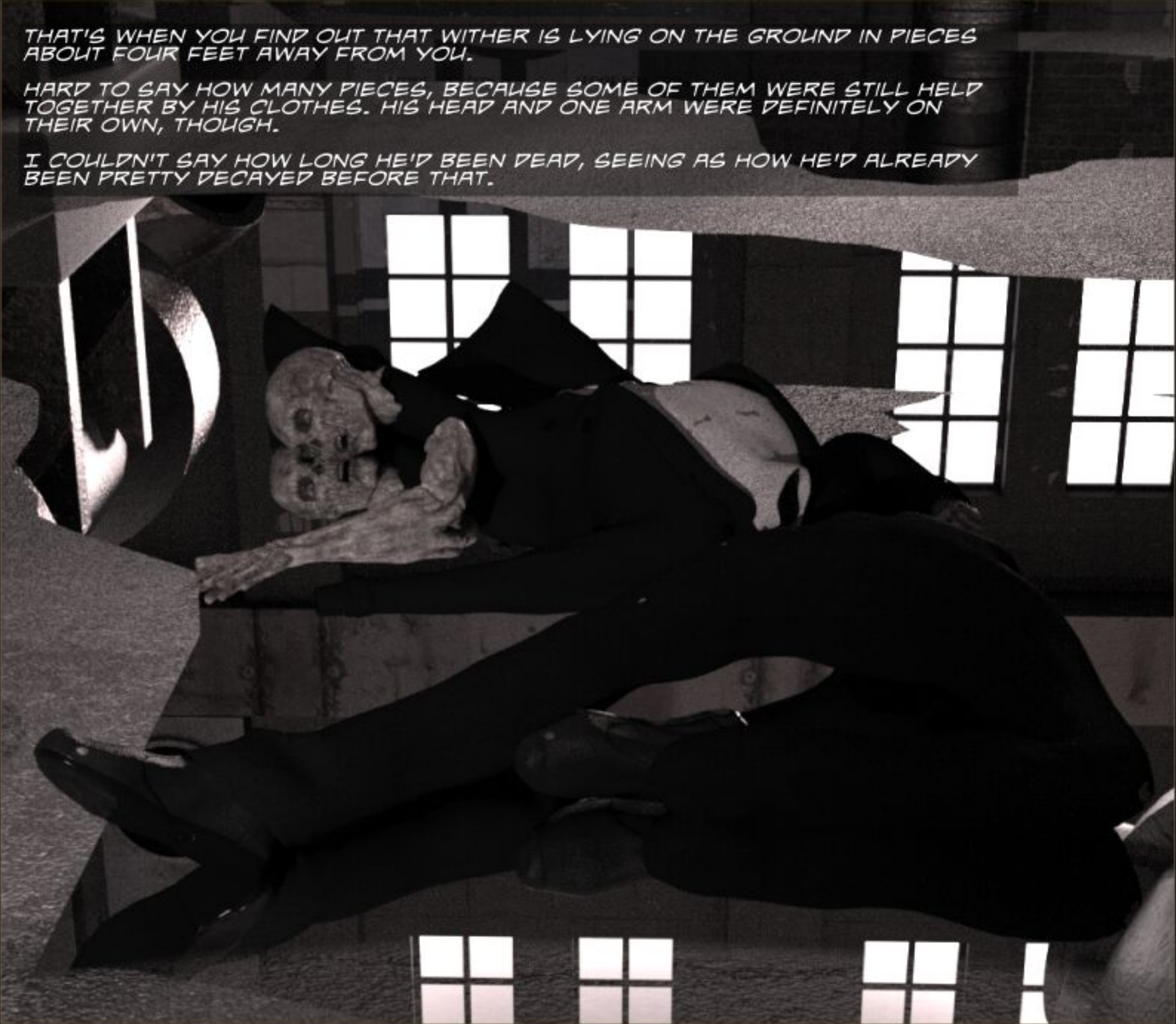




THE FIRST THING YOU DO, WHEN YOU COME TO AFTER SOMEBODY'S BANTAXED YOU, IS TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU ARE.

I WAS LYING ON ROUGH CONCRETE, AND THERE WERE SMELLS OF DUST AND RUST AND OLD OIL, SO AN ABANDONED FACTORY OR WAREHOUSE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

THE SECOND THING YOU DO, ONCE YOU THINK YOU CAN MOVE WITHOUT IT HURTING TOO MUCH, IS YOU TRY TO SIT UP AND TAKE A LOOK AROUND.



THAT'S WHEN YOU FIND OUT THAT WITHER IS LYING ON THE GROUND IN PIECES ABOUT FOUR FEET AWAY FROM YOU.

HARD TO SAY HOW MANY PIECES, BECAUSE SOME OF THEM WERE STILL HELD TOGETHER BY HIS CLOTHES. HIS HEAD AND ONE ARM WERE DEFINITELY ON THEIR OWN, THOUGH.

I COULDN'T SAY HOW LONG HE'D BEEN DEAD, SEEING AS HOW HE'D ALREADY BEEN PRETTY DECAYED BEFORE THAT.



BLUE AND RED LIGHTS. POLICE. I'D BEEN SET UP.



MAYBE THEY COULDN'T PROVE ANYTHING, BUT SOMEBODY HAD CLEARLY TIPPED THEM OFF, AND I HAD TO ASSUME THE WORST. I NEEDED TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE, FAST. I HOPED THEY HADN'T SENT SOMEONE TO WATCH THE OTHER DOORS YET.



Jack!

Over here!

Brix! You're the best thing I've seen all day.

But how'd you know?



Saw that witch toss you in the trunk of her car, along with a bundle. Figured you weren't on that ride for fun, so I decided to follow her and see.

C'mon, the cab's around the corner. The police haven't seen it yet.

Brix, you're getting hazard pay today. Take me back to my office. I've got to get some supplies.

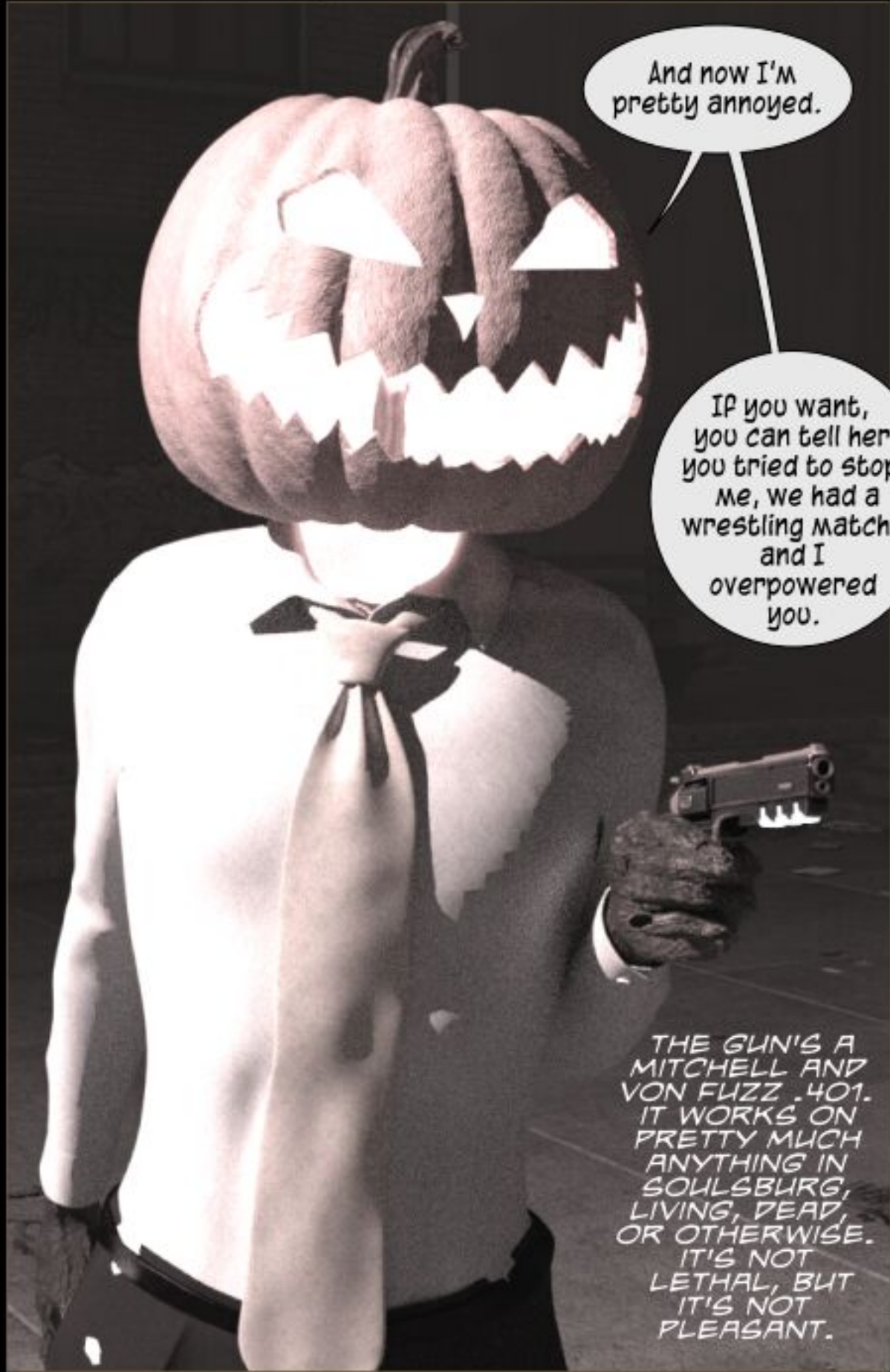
I HAD BRIX WAIT AT THE OFFICE, BECAUSE I WAS GOING TO HAVE HIM TAKE ME RIGHT BACK TO HUBBARD'S PLACE FOR ANOTHER TRY. STUBBORN. OR STUPID. YOU PICK.



Sorry, Jack. This time I do have instructions. You aren't coming in.

Guess she had enough of you.

She can't have had enough of me. I never got to see her the first time.



And now I'm pretty annoyed.

If you want, you can tell her you tried to stop me, we had a wrestling match, and I overpowered you.

THE GUN'S A MITCHELL AND VON FLIZZ .401. IT WORKS ON PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING IN SOULSBURG, LIVING, DEAD, OR OTHERWISE. IT'S NOT LETHAL, BUT IT'S NOT PLEASANT.



She'd never believe it. You couldn't overpower me in your wet dreams.

Yeah, probably not. But you play it any way you want.

She really is going to throw you out a window, you know.

If you survive, and you ever decide you do want to wrestle ... COME SEE ME.

I CAGED THE PLACE FIRST. ROXIE DIDN'T SEEM TO BE AROUND, WHICH WAS GOOD FOR NOT HAVING TO WATCH MY BACK, BUT BAD BECAUSE I'D REALLY WANTED A CHANCE TO SHOOT HER A FEW TIMES.

You know, having your pet witch slip me a Mickey and then try to Prame me for murder ... that's really rude.

Says the man with the gun pointed at me. Put that thing away before you hurt yourself, would you?

I don't know why you think I'd give you the time of day. I know Viscous only sent you here to make trouble.

Viscous? Where'd you get that? Did Roxie Peed you that line?

Viscous didn't send me. And I didn't plan on making any trouble. At least not until she pulled that. Now I don't know. I'm not in a great mood.

I'm quaking with fear.

Look, I just want to know what you did with Ricky Velazquez.

Knowing you, I figure it's probably too late, but I owe my client to at least bring back his corpse.

You've lost what little mind you had.

"Knowing me"? You don't know me worth a good goddamn. You think I'm a monster. I got that a long time ago.

I'm a businesswoman. I'm trying to run a business.

By changing your competition into pumpkins.

They can be changed back, you know. Like nothing ever happened.

I'm not trying to get rid of them. Not that way. I'm just trying to get an idea into Viscous' head. Which is even harder than getting one into yours.

And even if I was a killing type, why on earth would I kill Ricky? He was working for me.

Is that so?

He was a spy. You never can tell what Viscous is going to do. He's not smart enough that you can trust it to make a damned bit of sense. You have to have eyes and ears.

Lot of that going around.

OK, Pine. You didn't disappear Ricky -- you notice I didn't say "kill" -- because he was one of yours. And Viscous didn't disappear him because he thought he was one of his.

Then what did happen to him?

How the hell should I know? Isn't Pindig that out your job?

Why chase me first? Or Viscous? Why aren't you looking into whether he skipped town? Or dredging the bay for his car?

Just playing the odds. I figure if you run with the sleaze, the sleaze is most likely to be what does you in.

You sure it isn't just because you don't want to spend a year doing a lot of boring sifting?

I don't know about you, Jack. I don't think I've ever known anybody else who's wasted their life this hard.

What, I should have picked your career?

I'll let you in on something, Hubbard: Viscous got the Shambles brothers to kill Mort. Confirmed that today.

He did that in retaliation for your squashing his people. And he's not done yet.

You've started a war, and a lot of people are going to get hurt. Most of them ... eh. But a couple of them were pretty decent.

I didn't start it!

Twenty years, Viscous and I have been operating on the same turf! Twenty years, never a problem.

Then all of a sudden, a couple of months ago, he decides he's going to get into the dust business. My business.

Do I get in his face? No. Do I run a casino? No. I thought we had boundaries. I thought we had an agreement. Then he pulls this.

And I'll tell you another one: There's no way he got that bright idea on his own. He doesn't get ideas.

If I ever find out who put him up to it, I'll make that person wish they'd never existed.

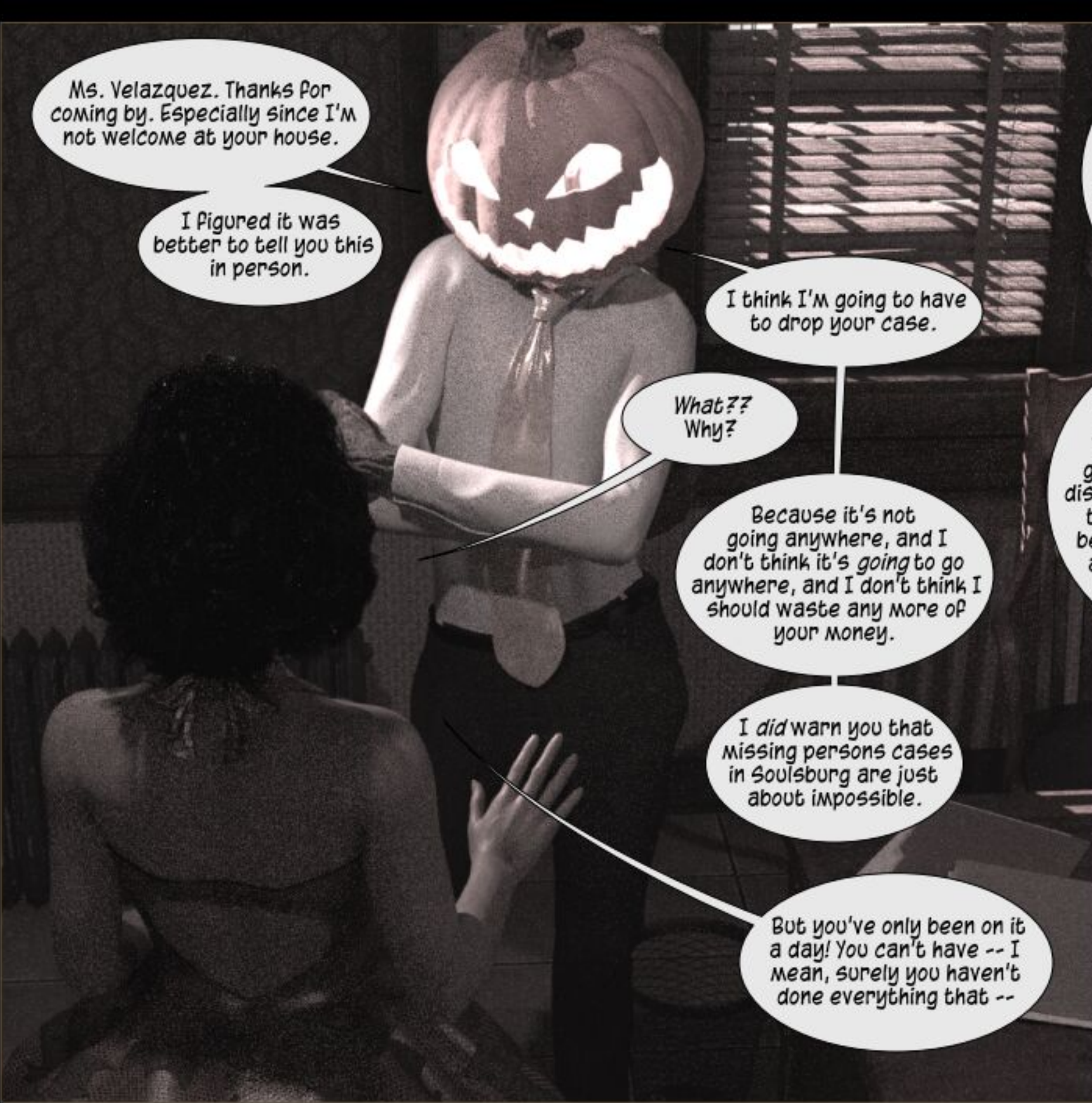
HUBBARD'S SHOT HIT ME HARDER THAN I WANTED TO ADMIT.

THE THING WAS, SHE WAS RIGHT. I DIDN'T WANT TO DO THE SIFTING. NOT BECAUSE OF LAZINESS, BUT BECAUSE I JUST DIDN'T SEE THE POINT. I COULD POKE AROUND FOR MONTHS AND NOT GET ANYTHING.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IT SEEMED LIKE I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING NOW, SO IT WASN'T LIKE THE CURRENT APPROACH HAD DONE ANY BETTER.

Your client is here.

Yeah, I see that.



Ms. Velazquez. Thanks for coming by. Especially since I'm not welcome at your house.

I figured it was better to tell you this in person.

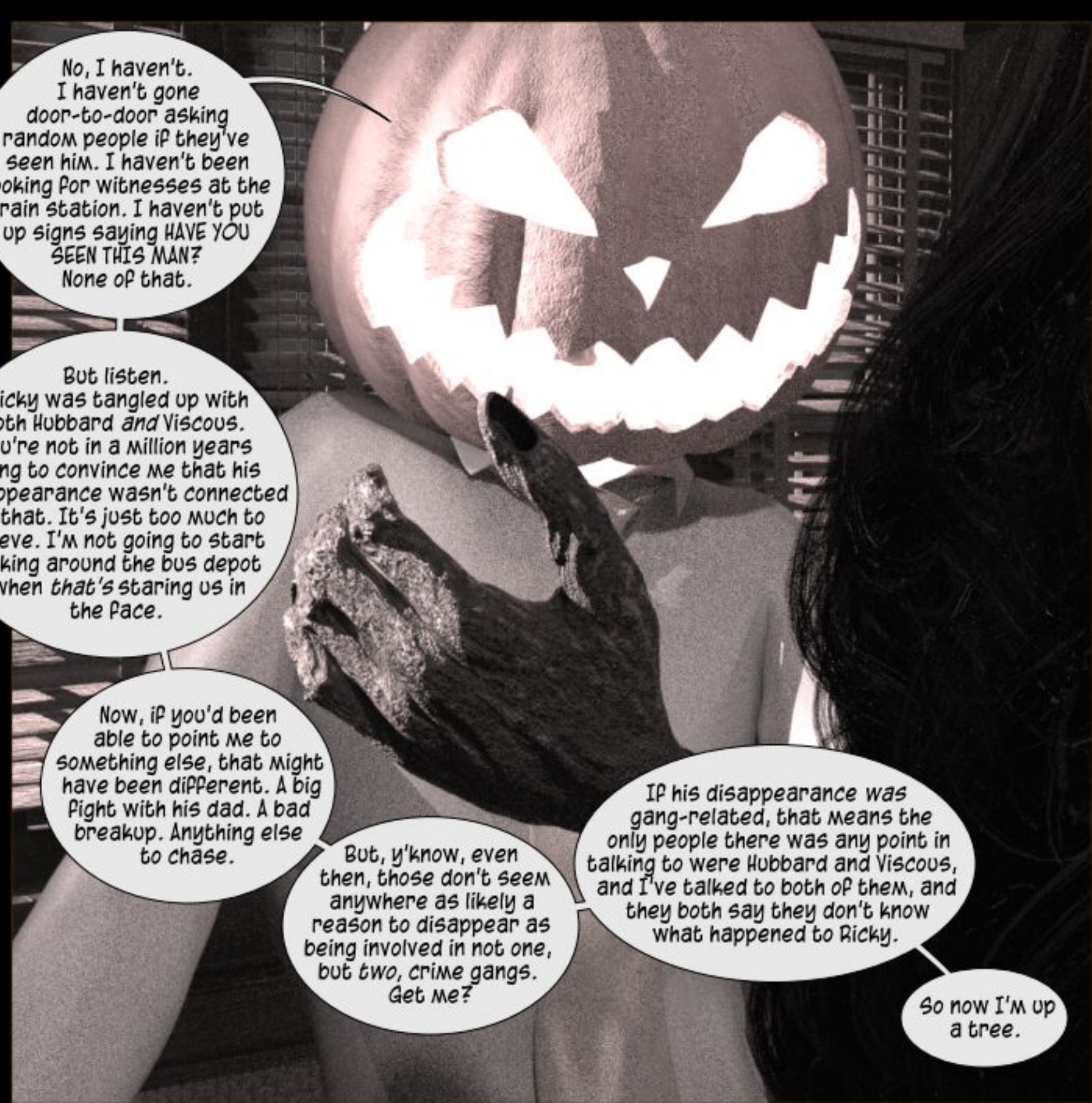
I think I'm going to have to drop your case.

What?? Why?

Because it's not going anywhere, and I don't think it's going to go anywhere, and I don't think I should waste any more of your money.

I did warn you that missing persons cases in Soulsburg are just about impossible.

But you've only been on it a day! You can't have -- I mean, surely you haven't done everything that --



No, I haven't. I haven't gone door-to-door asking random people if they've seen him. I haven't been looking for witnesses at the train station. I haven't put up signs saying HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN? None of that.

But listen. Ricky was tangled up with both Hubbard and Viscous. You're not in a million years going to convince me that his disappearance wasn't connected to that. It's just too much to believe. I'm not going to start asking around the bus depot when that's staring us in the face.

Now, if you'd been able to point me to something else, that might have been different. A big fight with his dad. A bad breakup. Anything else to chase.

But, y'know, even then, those don't seem anywhere as likely a reason to disappear as being involved in not one, but two, crime gangs. Get me?

If his disappearance was gang-related, that means the only people there was any point in talking to were Hubbard and Viscous, and I've talked to both of them, and they both say they don't know what happened to Ricky.

So now I'm up a tree.



But, Mr. Chandler ...

... Jack ...

Look, this is very important to me.

Is there anything I can do to persuade you to keep going? What can I offer you?

It doesn't have to be just money, you know.



I think I might be a little offended.

I'm not your type and we both know it. No blood to suck.

Hmph. If you feel that way about vampires, why'd you take the job?

I've got nothing against vampires. I was just telling the truth.

Anyway, I try never to turn down business.

Well, this isn't just business to me. And I really do want you to keep going.

Do you need more money? I'll pay you whatever it takes.

... Tell me a little about that. From what you said the other day, I guess you have your own income?

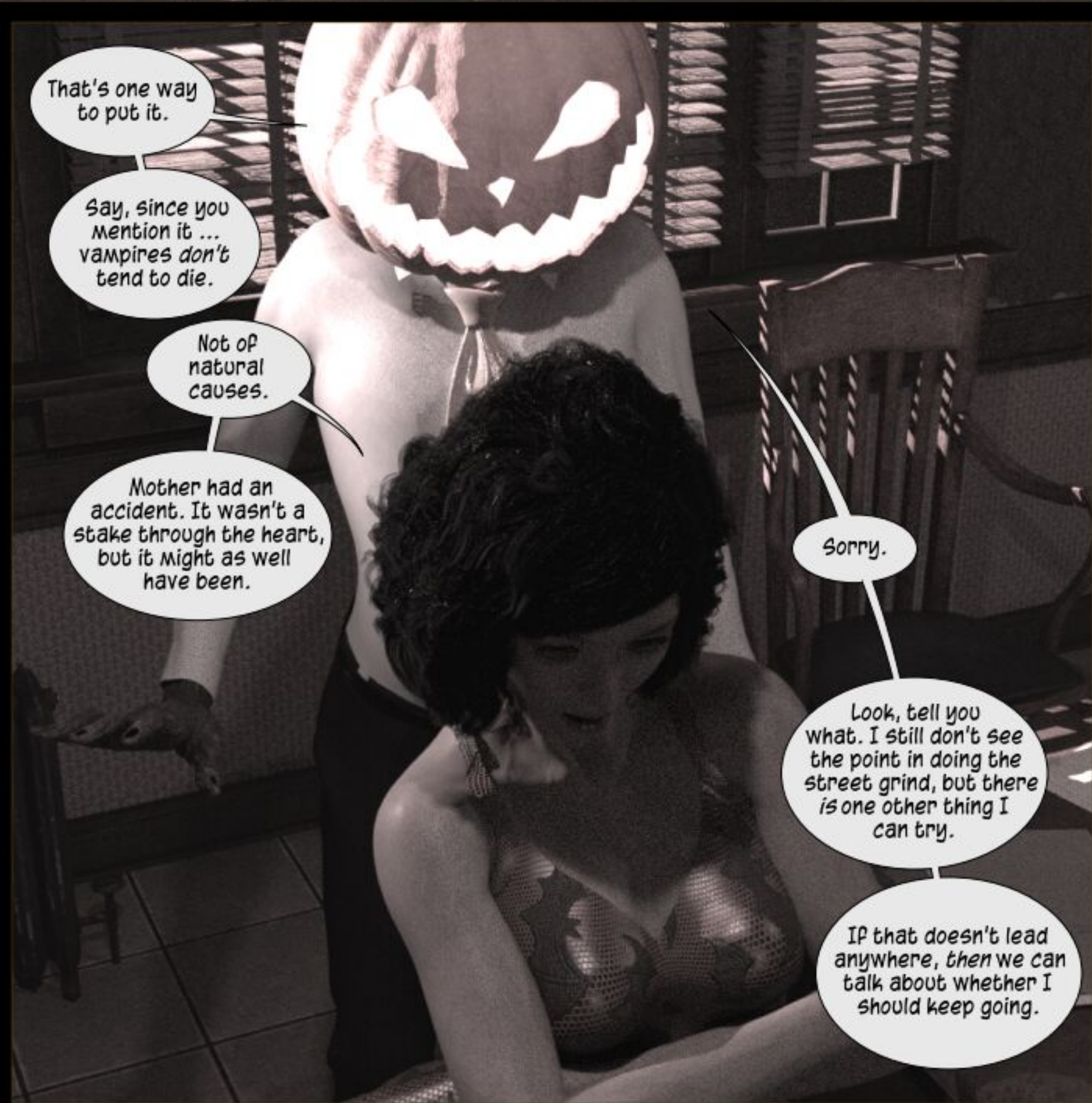


It's not really an income. Mother had money of her own. She left it all to me. Almost all.

She only left Ricky a tiny bit, and he resented that, but I know why she did it, and so did he.

She knew Daddy was going to focus on Ricky, pushing him to get into the family businesses and so on -- and probably leave him everything. If he ever dies.

He's not going to provide for me at all, I bet. He's assuming I'll marry off and be my husband's problem. Daddy's old-fashioned that way.



That's one way to put it.

Say, since you mention it ... vampires don't tend to die.

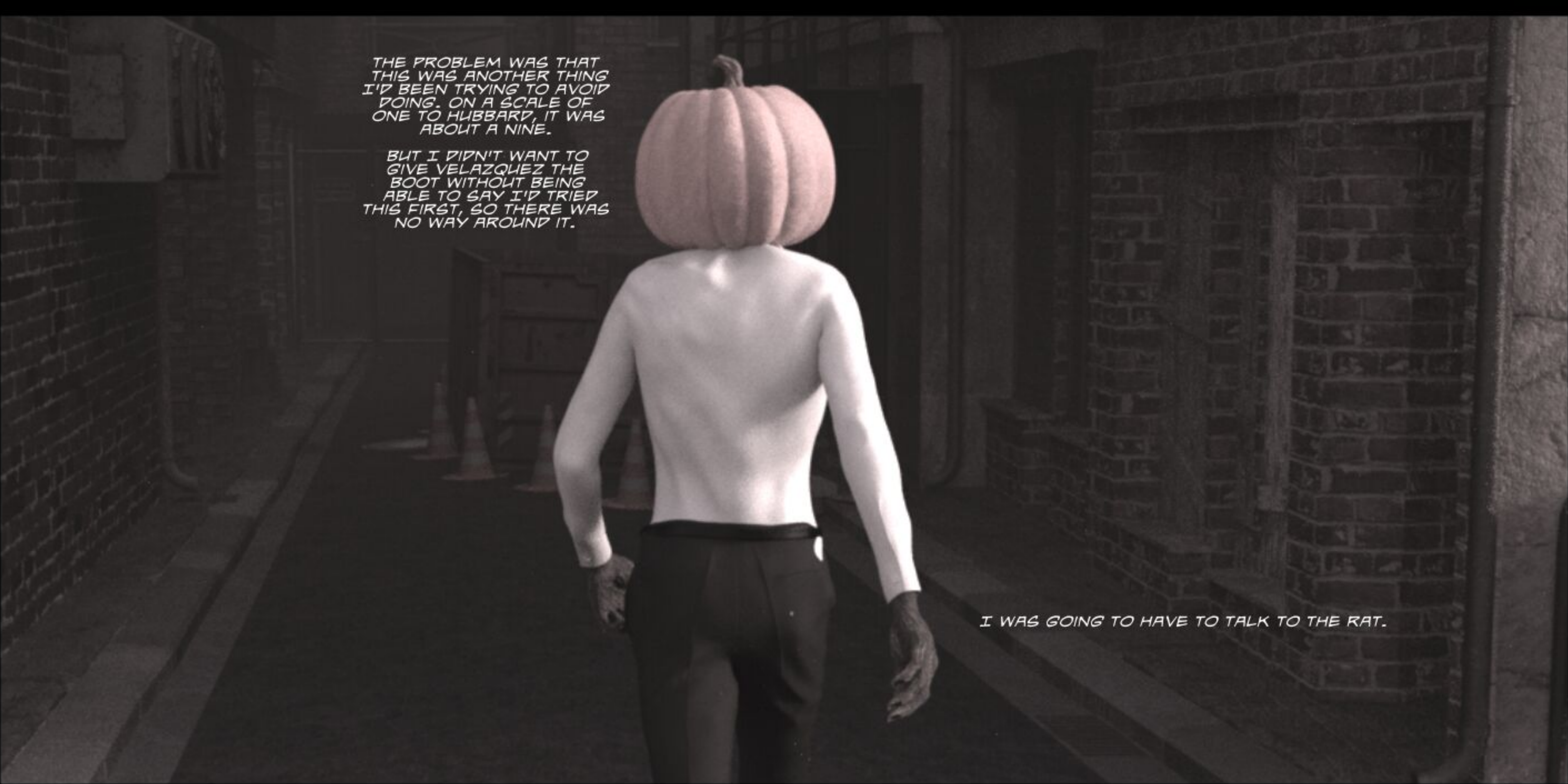
Not of natural causes.

Mother had an accident. It wasn't a stake through the heart, but it might as well have been.

Sorry.

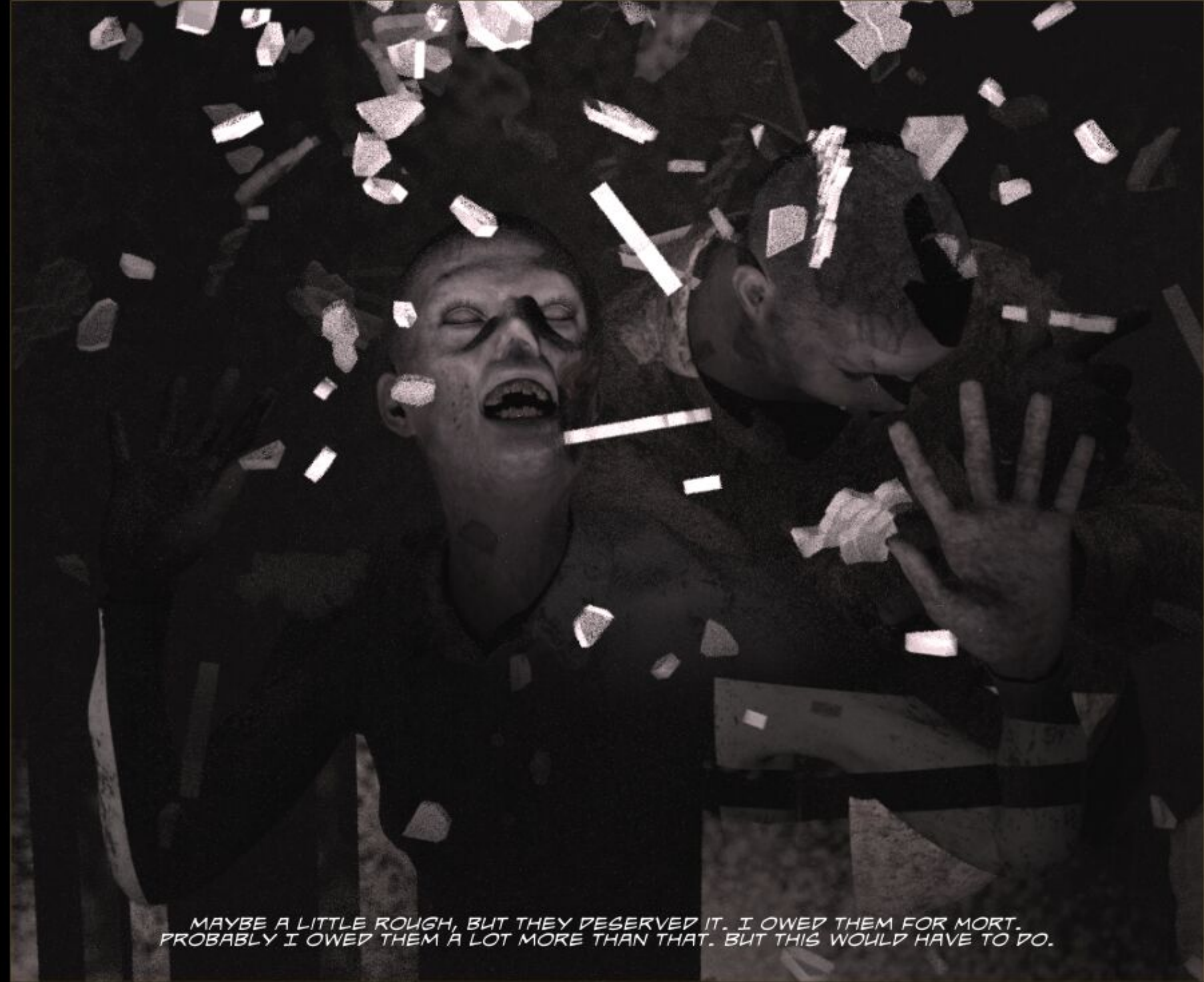
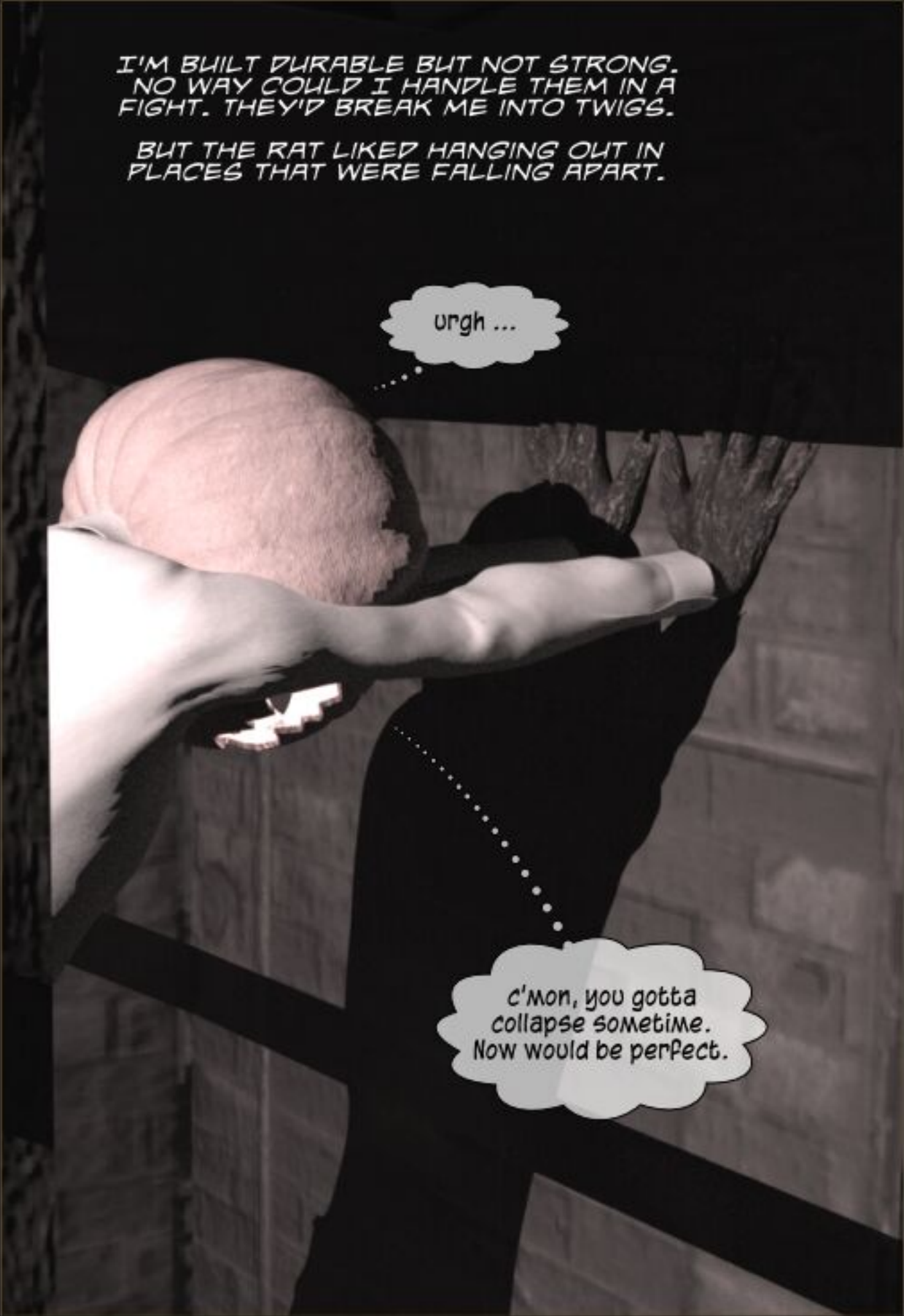
Look, tell you what. I still don't see the point in doing the street grind, but there is one other thing I can try.

If that doesn't lead anywhere, then we can talk about whether I should keep going.



THE PROBLEM WAS THAT THIS WAS ANOTHER THING I'D BEEN TRYING TO AVOID DOING. ON A SCALE OF ONE TO HUBBARD, IT WAS ABOUT A NINE.
BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO GIVE VELAZQUEZ THE BOOT WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SAY I'D TRIED THIS FIRST, SO THERE WAS NO WAY AROUND IT.

I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO TALK TO THE RAT.



THE SEX BUSINESS IN SOLESBURG IS PRETTY SEGMENTED. EVERYBODY MOSTLY KEEPS TO THEIR OWN KIND. BUT IF YOU DO WANT TO JUMP THE FENCE, THERE'S ONLY ONE PLACE TO GO.



MS. RACHEL AND I GOT ALONG, BUT THAT WOULDN'T STOP HER FROM TOSSING MY ASS OUT IF SHE THOUGHT I WAS CROSSING A LINE.

ALSO, IT WAS BUSINESS HOURS FOR HER, WHICH MEANT IT WAS A BAD TIME TO BE ASKING.



Now, Jack. I know you know better than this.

I do. Sorry.

But I don't think it can wait.



The more I chase Ricky Velazquez, the more convinced I am the clock's ticking.

It's already sat cold way too long. If I wait much longer, I don't know if anyone will be able to find him.

But even putting your timing aside, Jack ... you know the policy.

Customer privacy is very important to us. We don't talk about them. Even the ones who've gone missing.



On the other hand ... We all liked Ricky. He was a good customer. We've been worried about him.

Wait here a moment.



Jack, this is Buttons.

Buttons, take Mr. Chandler upstairs and give him what he needs.

Now, hold on ... I mean, I appreciate the thought, but I'm not really in the market for --

Trust me.



Help me with my dress?

Look, I'm -- no offense, but I'm really not here for that.

Then why are you here?

Well, I was trying to find out about Ricky Velazquez.



Ricky!

Do you know where he went? I've been worried ...

No, that's what I'm trying to find out.

You had him as a customer sometimes?

All the time. I was the only one he'd ever come upstairs with. And he was here almost every night.



Then, a couple of weeks ago, he just didn't show. We haven't seen him since.

No idea what might have happened?

Well ... he was mixed up with Mother Hubbard and Jimmy Viscous, so maybe one of them got him ...

But I don't think so. He hated doing what he was doing. I think he probably went somewhere none of them could find him. Hubbard. Viscous. His dad.

Especially his dad. There was something going on between them. I never could figure out what.



That's all I know. You sure you don't want to play? You're paying for the time anyway ...

Thanks, but no.

You know ... even for this place you're pretty unusual ...

If you don't mind my asking ... what kind of customers do you usually get? I mean, what do they want you to do?

Nothing, mostly.

They want me to lie completely still and stay where they put me and not say a word.

That's their idea of a good time, I guess -- somebody who's barely even there. Might as well just masturbate ... but, hey, it's their money.

Ricky was like that too?

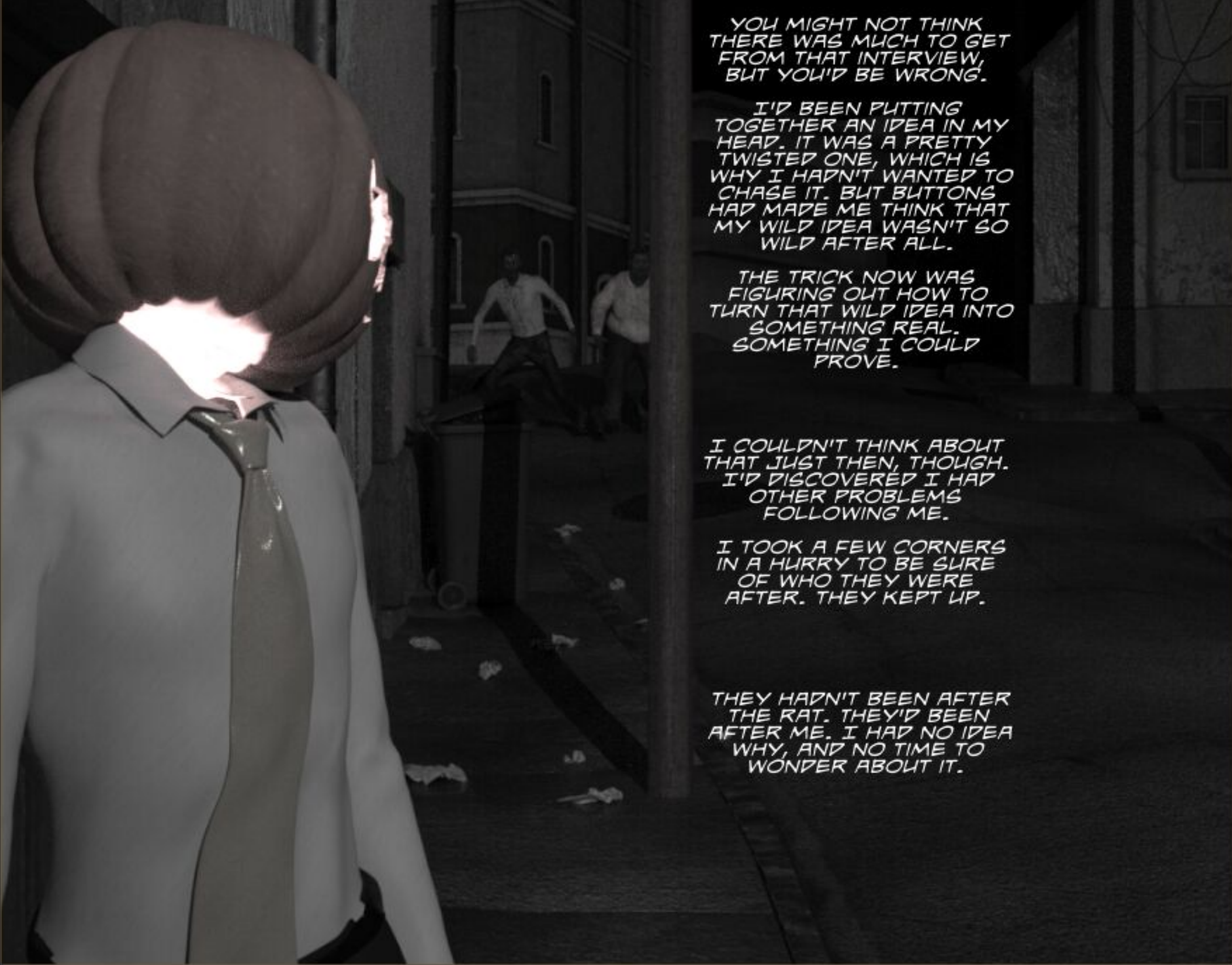


Oh, no. Ricky was different. Ricky wanted me involved.

I think Ricky picked me because there wasn't any risk. You know how vampires get sometimes, when they're in bed ... if he did bite me, it's not like it'd do anything.

I don't think he liked being a vampire much. I don't think he was very happy.

I tried to make sure he was at least happy while he was here, you know?



YOU MIGHT NOT THINK THERE WAS MUCH TO GET FROM THAT INTERVIEW, BUT YOU'D BE WRONG.

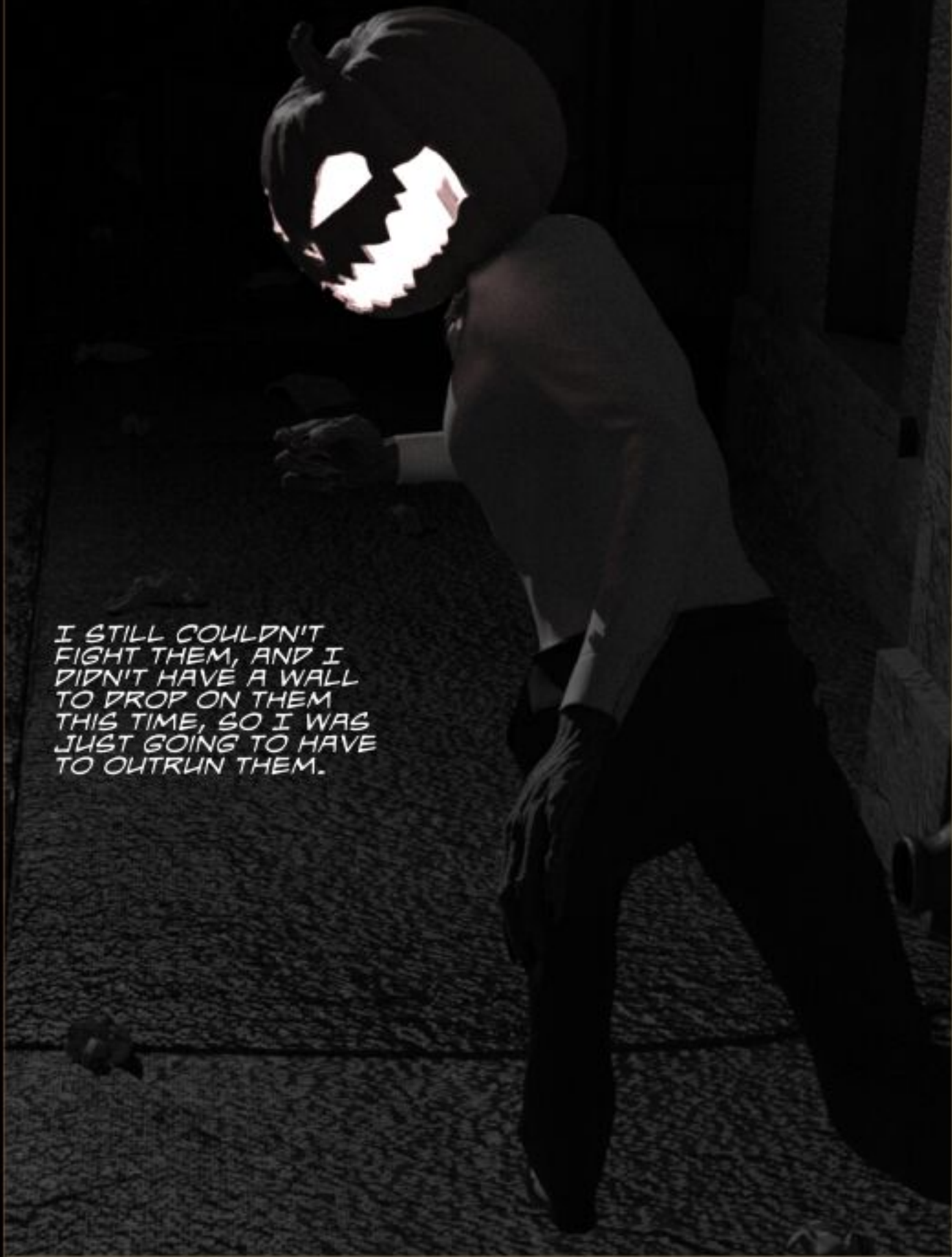
I'D BEEN PUTTING TOGETHER AN IDEA IN MY HEAD. IT WAS A PRETTY TWISTED ONE, WHICH IS WHY I HADN'T WANTED TO CHASE IT. BUT BLITONS HAD MADE ME THINK THAT MY WILD IDEA WASN'T SO WILD AFTER ALL.

THE TRICK NOW WAS FIGURING OUT HOW TO TURN THAT WILD IDEA INTO SOMETHING REAL. SOMETHING I COULD PROVE.

I COULDN'T THINK ABOUT THAT JUST THEN, THOUGH. I'D DISCOVERED I HAD OTHER PROBLEMS FOLLOWING ME.

I TOOK A FEW CORNERS IN A HURRY TO BE SURE OF WHO THEY WERE AFTER. THEY KEPT UP.

THEY HADN'T BEEN AFTER THE RAT. THEY'D BEEN AFTER ME. I HAD NO IDEA WHY, AND NO TIME TO WONDER ABOUT IT.



I STILL COULDN'T FIGHT THEM, AND I DIDN'T HAVE A WALL TO PROP ON THEM THIS TIME, SO I WAS JUST GOING TO HAVE TO OUTFRIN THEM.



I WAS SO FOCUSED ON THAT, I NEARLY RAN SMACK INTO BRIAN.

... just doesn't fit with their habits ...

WHICH WOULD HAVE HURT. HE'S BUILT SOLID.

I don't know. Maybe they were in a hurry. Keep that light steady, would you?



That's not a gang-war victim ...

DEAD-SIDE TOURISM IS A THING. PEOPLE FROM THE LIVE SIDE GET BORED AND DECIDE TO COME OVER TO FIND SOME EXCITEMENT. SOMETIMES THEY FIND MORE OF IT THAN THEY WANT.

That'd be all we need.

Not unless a vampire's decided to sign up with them.

We just happened to be passing by.



She's alive!

Yeah, barely. Almost got drained dry. We've got an ambulance coming.

uuurhh

Then I guess we'll take a look around. It didn't happen more than a few minutes ago, Norma thinks. Perp might still be in the area.

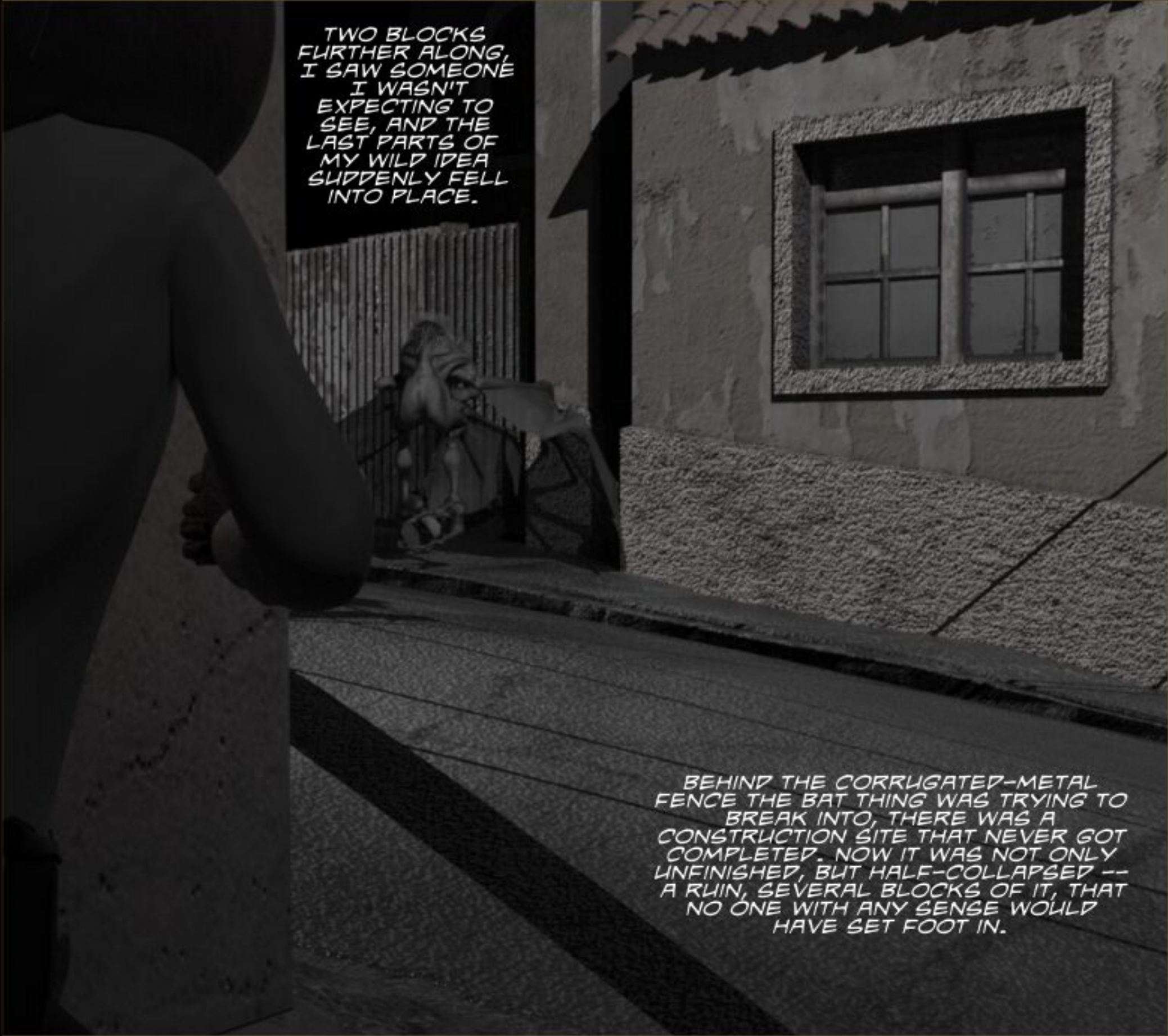


Well, good luck, gotta run!

Hey --

Brian, the light.

IF I COULD PUT THEM BETWEEN ME AND THE SHAMBLES BROTHERS, I STOOD A GOOD CHANCE OF GETTING AWAY. THE BROTHERS WEREN'T SCARED OF MUCH, BUT THEY WEREN'T PLUME ENOUGH TO ASSAULT TWO POLICE OFFICERS OUT IN THE OPEN.



TWO BLOCKS FURTHER ALONG, I SAW SOMEONE I WASN'T EXPECTING TO SEE, AND THE LAST PARTS OF MY WILD IDEA SUDDENLY FELL INTO PLACE.

BEHIND THE CORRUGATED-METAL FENCE THE BAT THING WAS TRYING TO BREAK INTO, THERE WAS A CONSTRUCTION SITE THAT NEVER GOT COMPLETED. NOW IT WAS NOT ONLY UNFINISHED, BUT HALF-COLLAPSED -- A RUIN, SEVERAL BLOCKS OF IT, THAT NO ONE WITH ANY SENSE WOULD HAVE SET FOOT IN.



SO OF COURSE HERE I WAS, FOLLOWING. LIKE I SAID: STUPID OR STUBBORN, YOU DECIDE WHICH.

IT JUST SEEMED IMPORTANT ALL OF A SUDDEN TO FIND THE BAT. I HAD SOME QUESTIONS. I HOPED I COULD GET COHERENT ANSWERS.



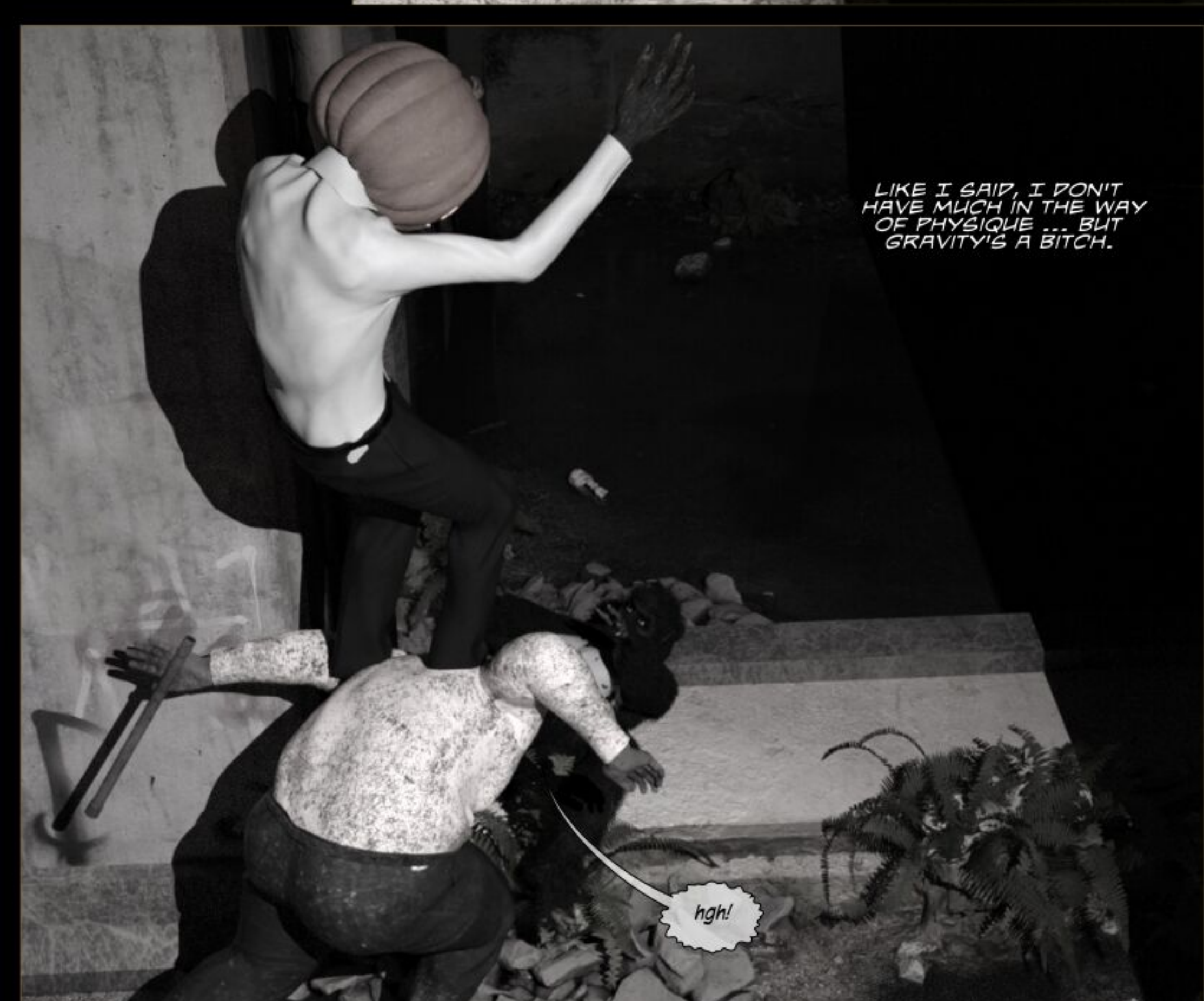
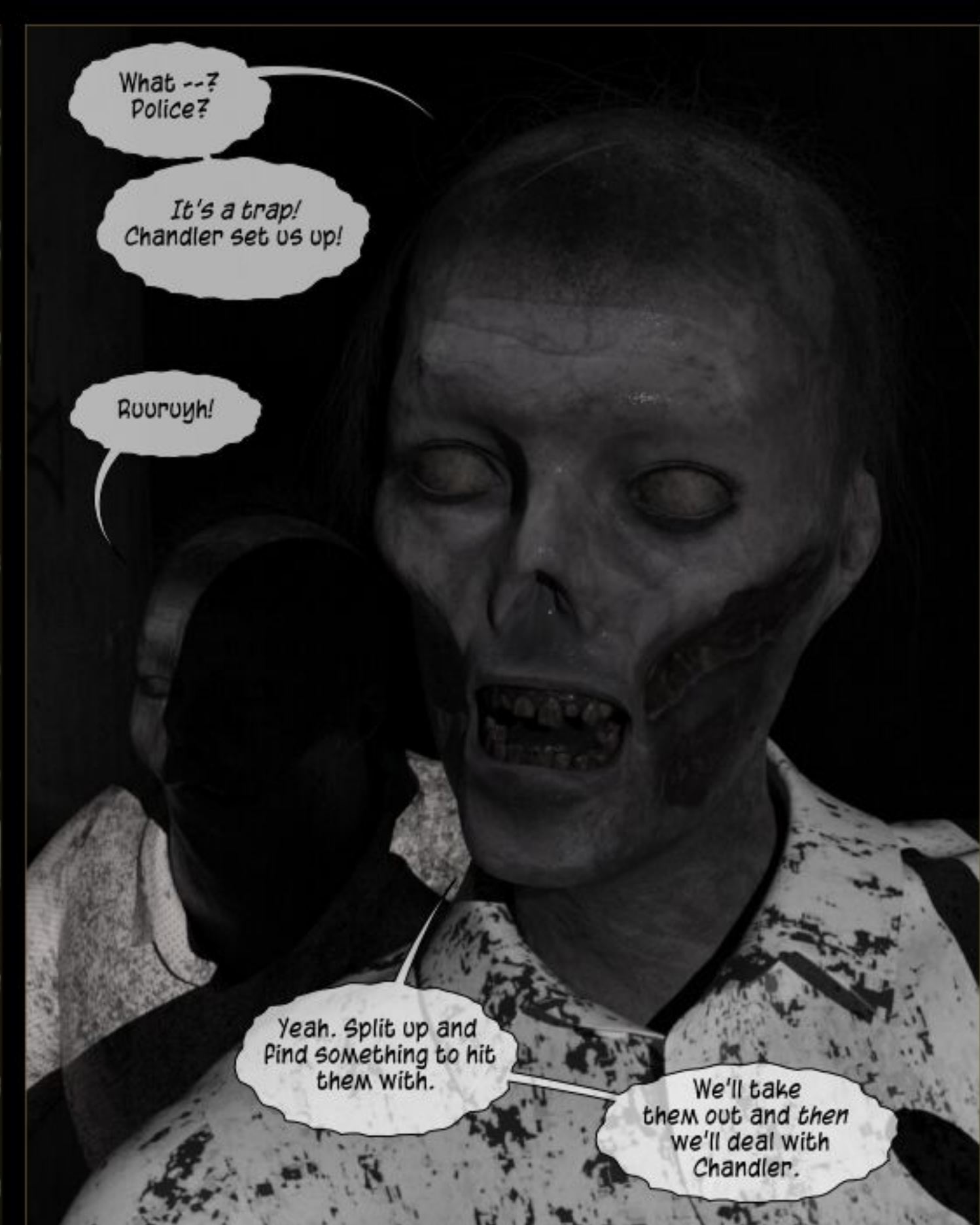
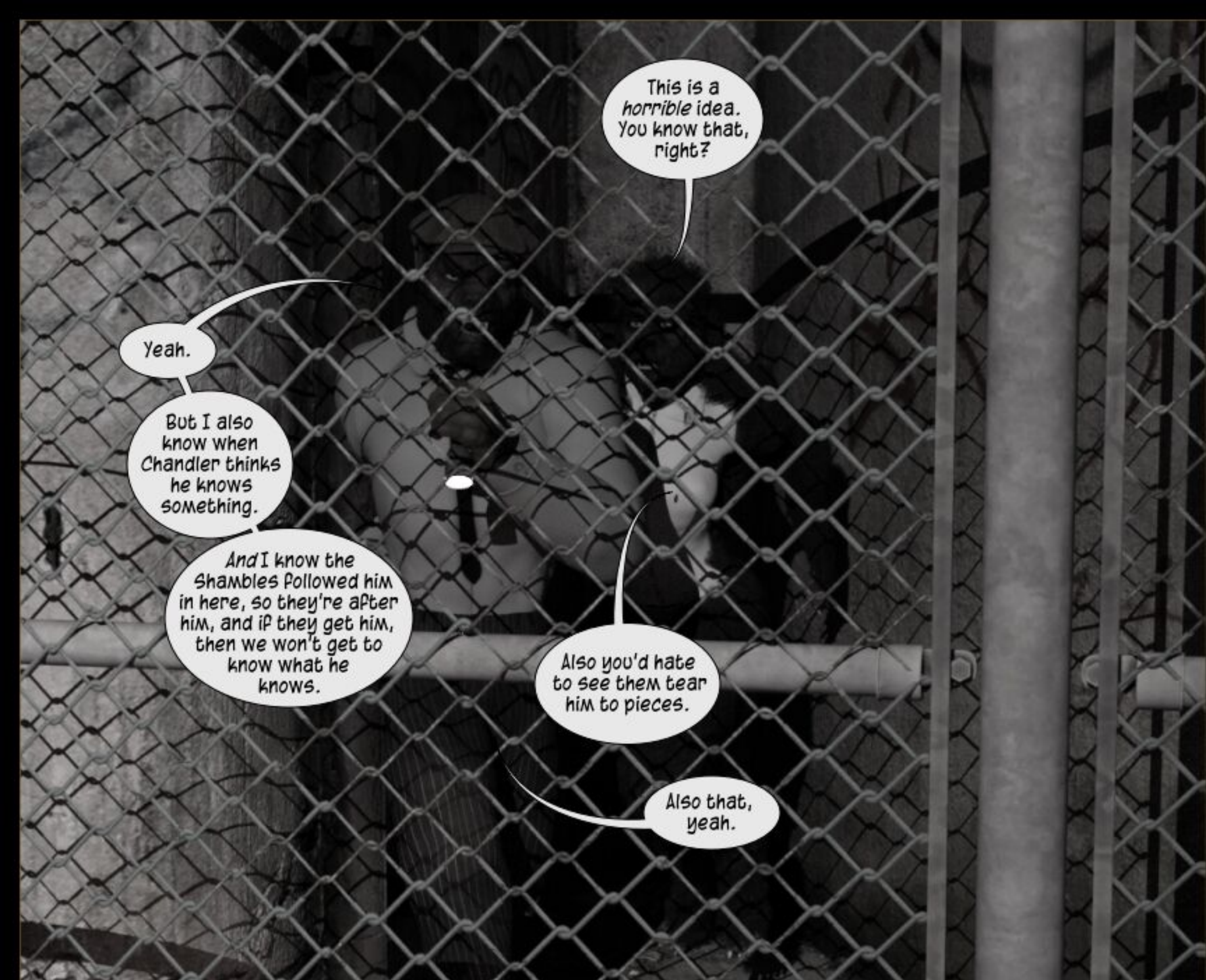
Yoo-hoo, Chandler!

Come out, come out, wherever you are.

Mr. Viscous thought you were a friend of his. He's very disappointed that you're helping Hubbard knock off our people.

He says we can break you into little pieces and use your head as a basketball, so let's get on with it. We haven't got all night.

Yuurh.





THE NEXT NIGHT.



unh!

uunk!

uunhhh!!



What the --?

Muck?
Are you lookin' to die?

I'm sorry, sir!
Really! Really,
really sorry!

But it's an
emergency!

The police are
here! They've got a
warrant! They're
looking for you!

The boys
and I are trying to
stall 'em, but you need
to get out of here
right now!



Hurry, sir!

They can't
possibly have
anything ...

This is
hurryin', Muck.
This is as good as it
puckin' gets.



Evening, Polly.

Now that he's
distracted, I need a
minute of your time.



Polly,
I know you don't like this
place. I know you hate
having to put up with him.
Having to do what he
wants all the time.

What's keeping you here?
What's he got on you?

I can't talk to
you, you know
that! He'd --

It's not like that!
He's not --

-- I'm safe here,
OK?



I pissed off
Bobby Sanguine. Six,
seven years ago now.
I lose count.

He said if he
ever caught me he'd
have me melted, and
he meant it.

Not too many people
can hold off Sanguine, but
Jimmy can.

Sure, probably ...
but, Polly ...

Sanguine's
been dead for
two years.



WHAT??

Took a stake to the heart.
I guess Viscous didn't bother to
tell you.

That ...
that ...

Son of a bitch!!



But you know, I still
can't tell you anything.

If I pink on Jimmy,
then I'm gonna need
somebody to protect me
from him.

I don't ever
get to win.

I don't know
about that.

He can barely move,
Polly. He's not getting
away. The police probably
have him in a jar
downstairs already.

And the charges are real.
They're going to stick. I don't
think you're going to need to
worry about him anymore.



Look, I'm not
asking for much. I just
want one thing from you. I
don't need you to show up in
court or anything like that.
Tell me the truth and you
can hit the road.

Someone else has been
running this gang for a while now.
Viscous has a secret boss. Even if
you've never seen the guy, I'm sure
Viscous has griped about it to you.
I know how he is.

I just need a name.



You've got nothing on me! My lawyer will have me out of this before you can get me to the jail.

Keep telling yourself that.

You are charged with assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest ... anything you say may be recorded and used against you ...

We've got statements that you're responsible for the commission of least five murders in the last two years.

Your hitmen are trying really hard to save their asses.



Going pretty well.

Yeah. I think we've mopped up in here.

What's the word on the second part?

We couldn't get authorization for anybody else. They thought it was too shaky. If the two of us want to take the risk, that's small enough to sweep under the rug if it blows up.

And are you still willing to take the risk?

Mhmm ... if you can get your missing piece.

Right. Guess I'd better go see about that.

I HATE THE WORD "CLUE." I'M NOT SOME BOOK DETECTIVE WITH A DRAWING ROOM AND A MAGNIFYING GLASS. BUT I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING BETTER. SO:

ONE IMPORTANT CLUE WAS REALIZING THAT THE BAT WASN'T JUST HANGING OUT IN RANDOM PLACES.

IN FRONT OF HUBBARD'S -- TRYING TO GET INSIDE. IN THESE CONSTRUCTION RUINS. SLEEPING IN THE ABANDONS ... IN AN ALLEY THAT HAD AN EXIT FROM THE RUINS, ON THEIR FAR SIDE.

THE BAT WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING. AND WHEN THAT SOMETHING WASN'T AT HUBBARD'S, IT WAS HERE. SOMEWHERE.

IT TOOK ME MOST OF THE NEXT DAY TO FIND. NOT A SURPRISE. THE BAT NEVER HAD MANAGED IT, AND HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR A LOT LONGER.

I CAME BACK AFTER DARK. I'D ASKED ABOUT HER HABITS, AND I KNEW SHE'D BE HERE. SHE DIDN'T STICK AROUND HUBBARD'S WHILE THE CLUB WAS OPEN. APPARENTLY SHE DIDN'T LIKE THE NOISE.



Hello, Roxie.

If you're going to try anything, wait until after we talk, OK? It's important.



... How did you even find this place?

It took some work.

No, seriously, don't try anything. I'm not in the mood.

And if I don't come out of here in a little while, somebody's going to notice.

Besides, you don't want to pick a fight with me. You don't know it yet, but we're on the same side. We're going to be cooperating.



Why would I cooperate with you?

Because you owe me for trying to set me up for murder? No?

OK, how about this: Because you didn't kill Wither and you don't want to get busted for something you didn't do?

The police are going to get somebody for it, Roxie. Right now, you're number one on the list.



Which'd be a shame, because I know you didn't do it. You just moved the body. Because Hubbard asked you to.

Killing things isn't your style. You never do anything that permanent. When you change people, you always make sure you can change them back.

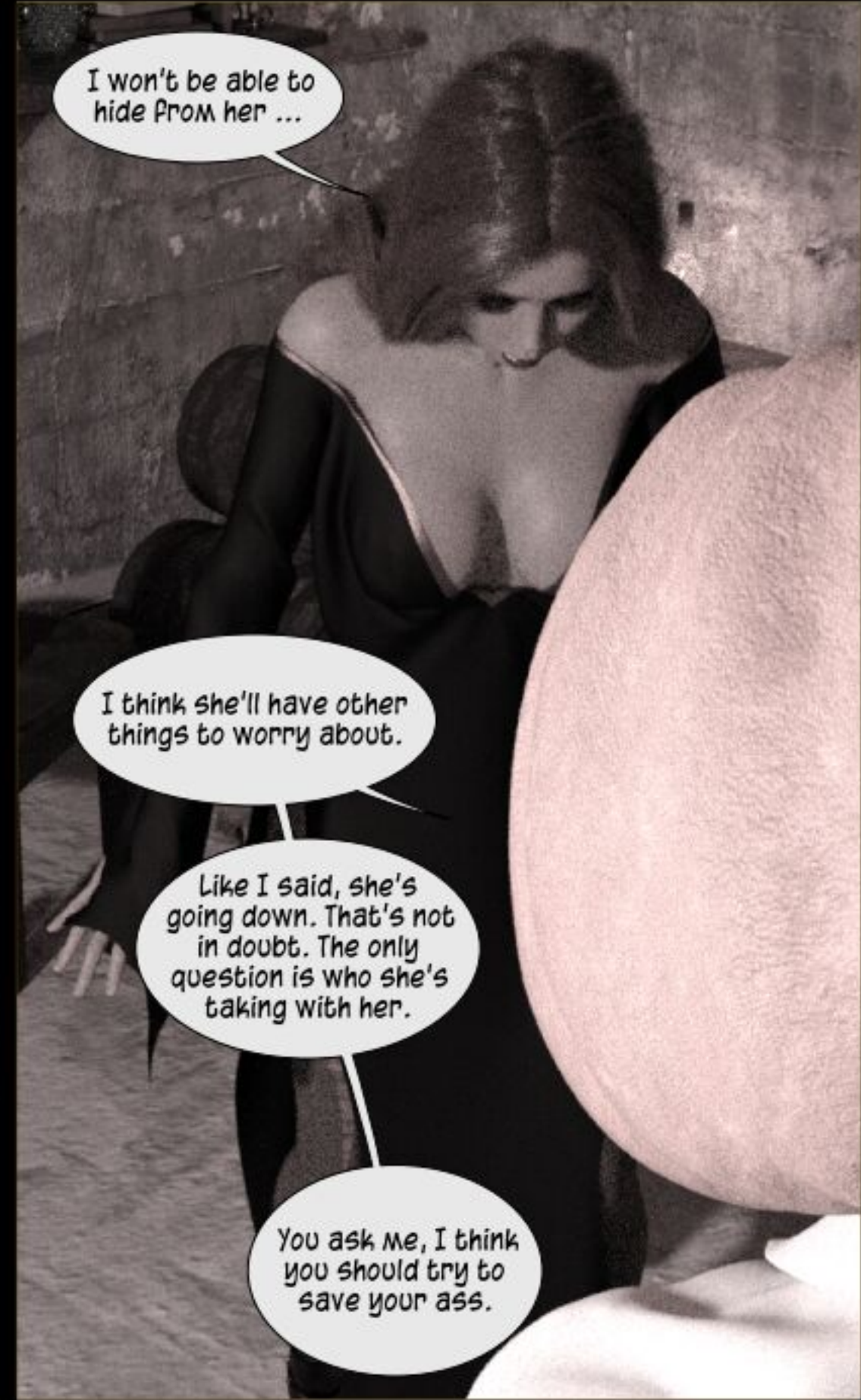
Makes me think you're working for the wrong person. She'd kill somebody without giving it a second thought.



You want me to sell her out.

I want you to have a way out.

Look, the police are going to get her, whatever it takes. They already got Viscous. They're tired of all this.



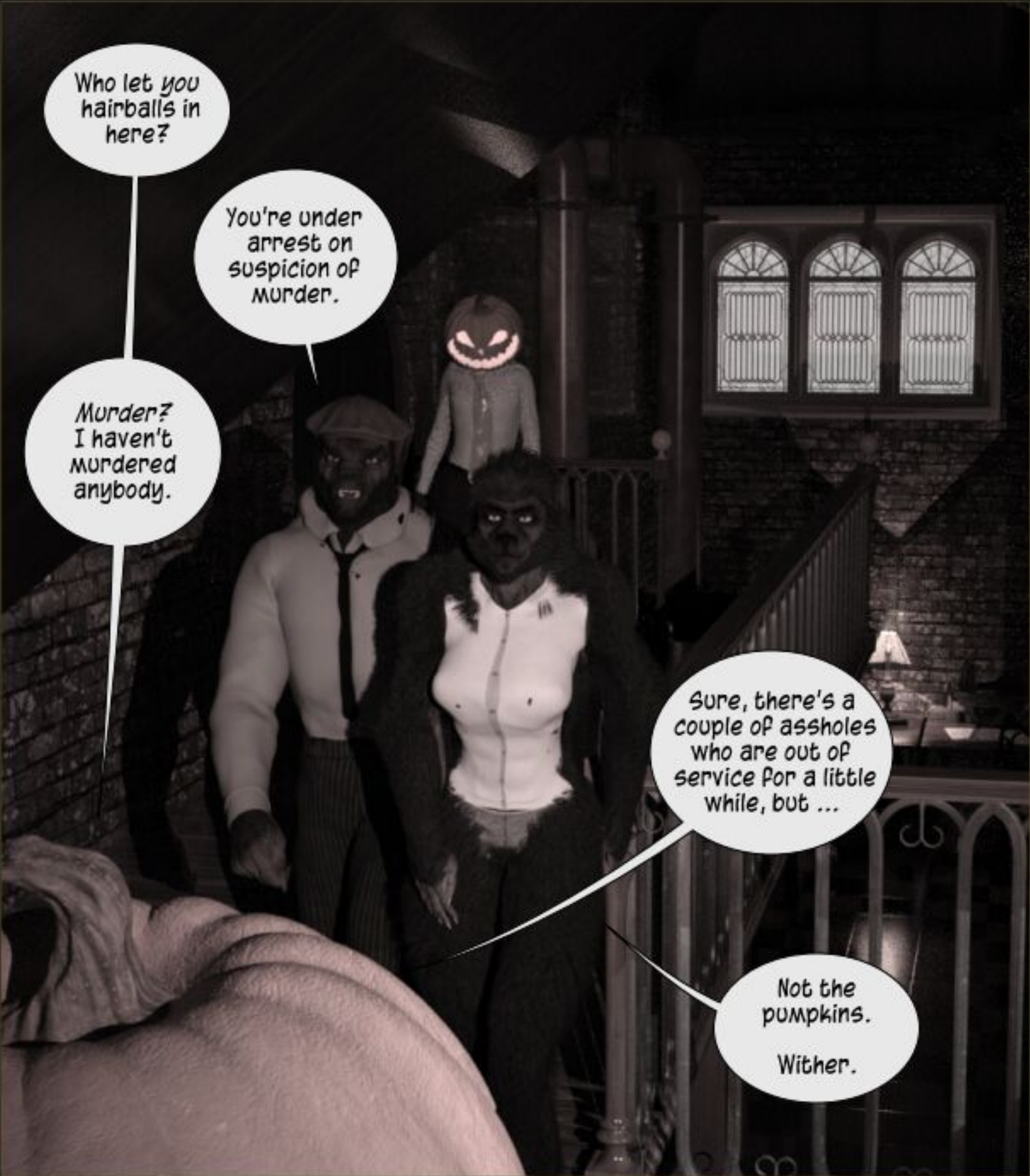
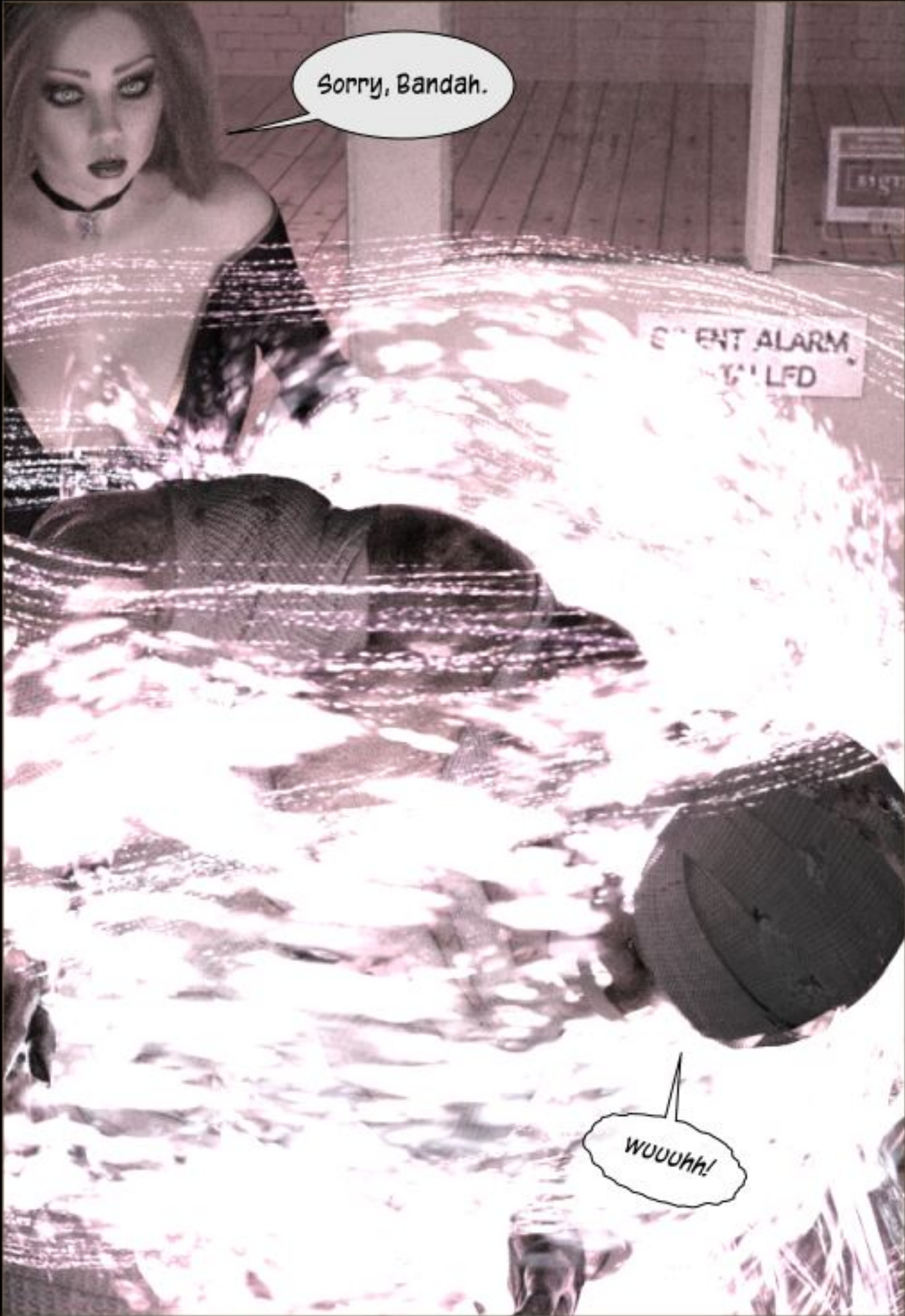
I won't be able to hide from her ...

I think she'll have other things to worry about.

Like I said, she's going down. That's not in doubt. The only question is who she's taking with her.

You ask me, I think you should try to save your ass.

A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER.





A visitor to see you, sir.

Torpid, I am hosting a party.

Yes, sir. She was extremely insistent. Said it was of the highest urgency.

She's in the office.



Roxie?

This had better be good. We're not even supposed to know each other.

You're endangering my business.

Your business is already in danger.

I'm going to have to revert my work.

All of it.



We had an agreement ...

Listen to me. The police have arrested Viscous. They've arrested Hubbard. They're shutting both gangs down.

Lies. If Viscous had been arrested, I'd have heard about it.

What, he'd have called you? Even he's not that dumb. Talk about endangering you ...



You've told them, haven't you? You've told the police about me. You've told them about --

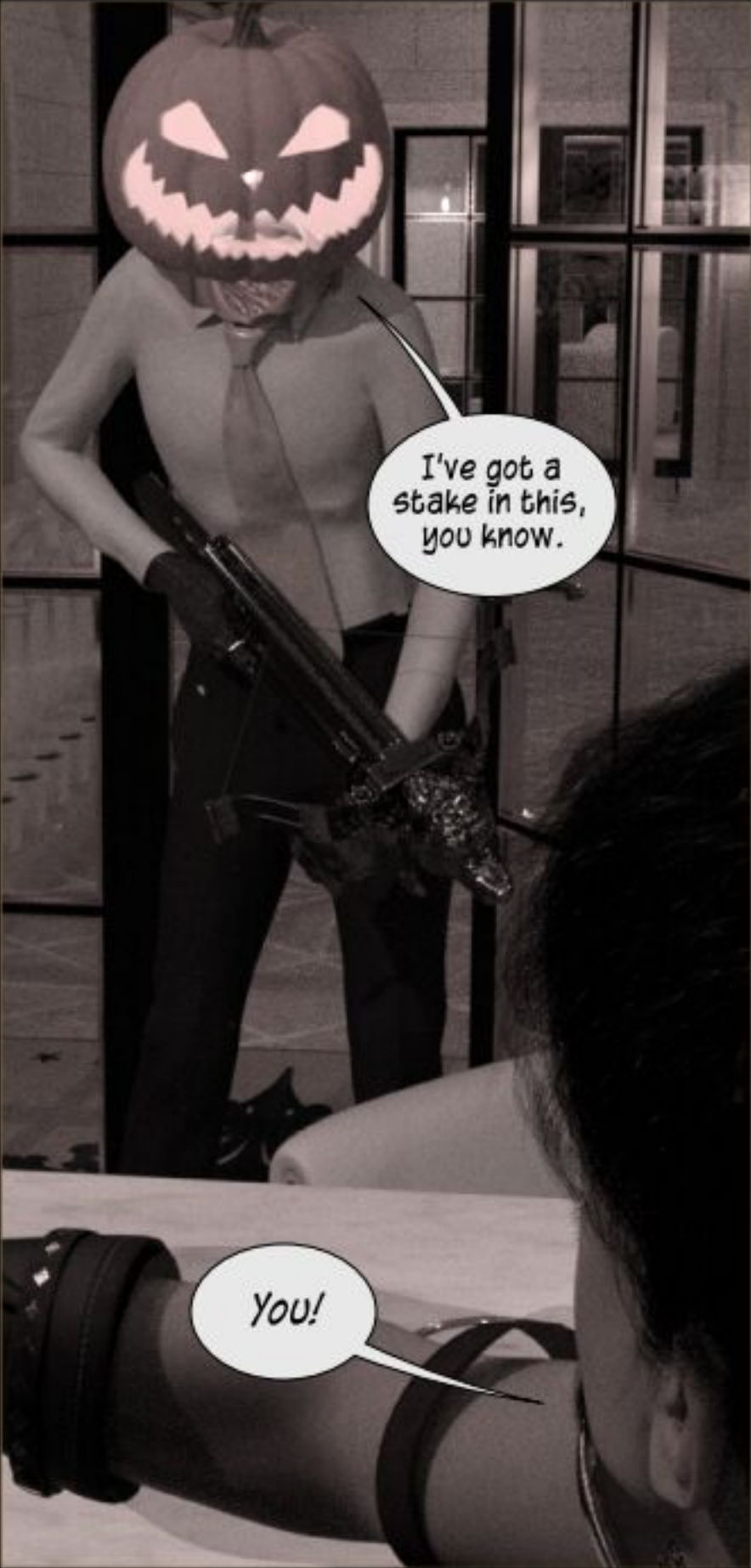
I haven't!

I haven't said anything about any of that.

But they are making me revert everything, and you know as soon as I do, it's going to be --

I don't believe you, you traitorous cunt! I knew you couldn't be relied upon --

Hey, now, Rupe. Take a step back, there.



I've got a stake in this, you know.

You!



You brought him here? You sold me out and you brought him here to see it?

I didn't!

She didn't.

She hasn't told me about anything except turning some people into pumpkins and helping cover up Wither's murder.

She absolutely did not tell me that you've been secretly running Viscous' gang for months now.

I figured that out myself.



And she didn't bring me here. I followed her.

See, I knew I wasn't going to get her to tell me the parts that had you in them. She's a lot more scared of you than she is of Hubbard.

I was only about ninety percent sure it was you, so I needed to get her to come find you. So I'd know. I like to be certain about these things.

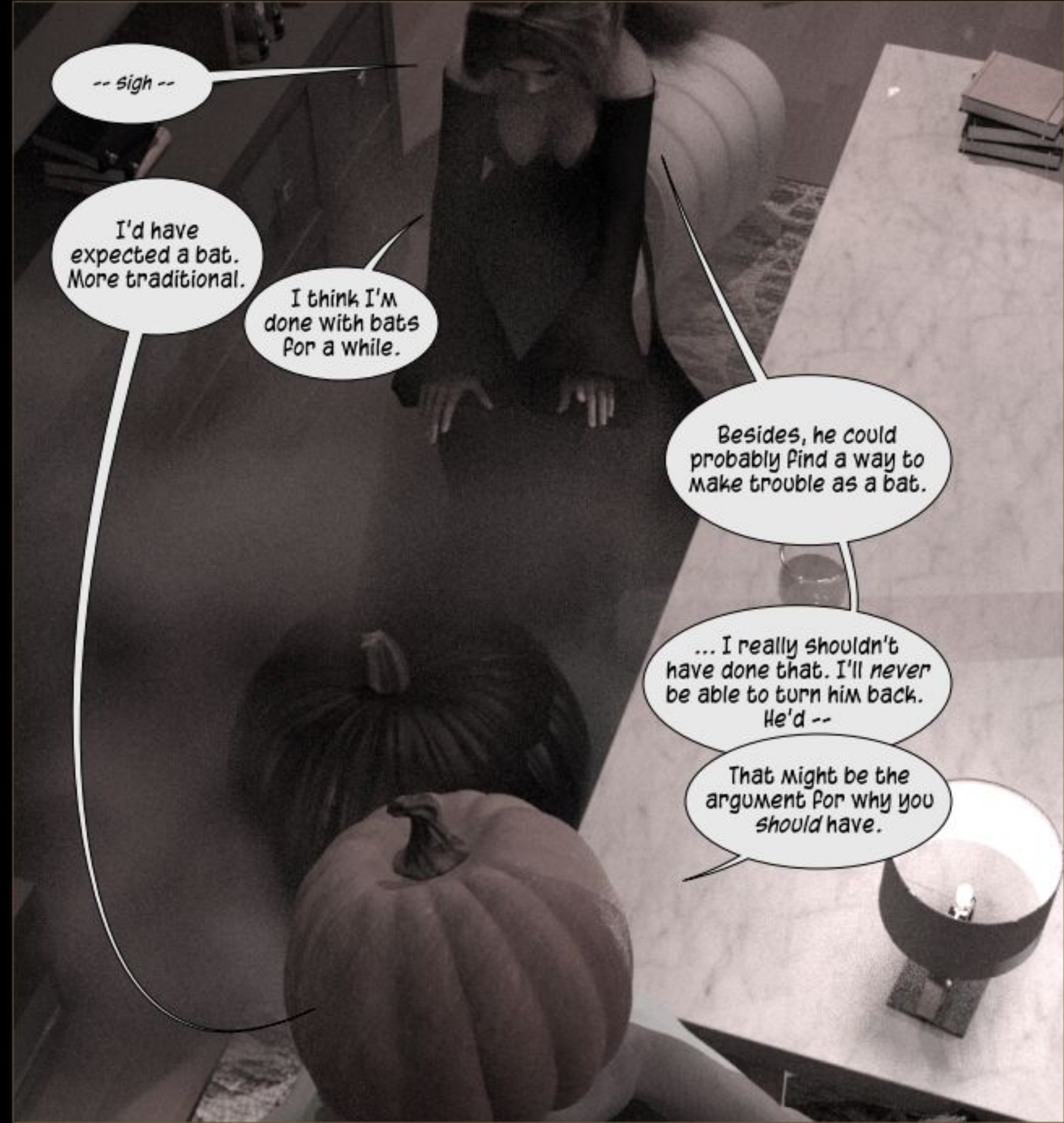


You utter idiot!

You'll pay for this right now!!

Back off!

Hey!



-- sigh --

I'd have expected a bat. More traditional.

I think I'm done with bats for a while.

Besides, he could probably find a way to make trouble as a bat.

... I really shouldn't have done that. I'll never be able to turn him back. He'd --

That might be the argument for why you should have.

If he'd waited a second or two to explode, he'd have realized I didn't have a thing on him.

Selling dust or running a gang isn't illegal, and nothing else can be proven.

He probably only wanted to keep his involvement secret because it'd hurt his reputation. In vampire society. Too lowbrow for them. They don't get their hands dirty.

You tricked me.

I did not. You, I have dirt on. I told you that and you decided to do the right thing.

Buying my way out is the right thing?

Cleaning up your mess is the right thing.

And we still have an important part of that to do tonight, so we should --

What is going on in here? What was that noise?

Jack? What are you doing here? Who is this?

Where's Daddy?

Uh, Carmilla ...

... your dad's skipped. He's left.

I don't think he's going to be coming back.

When we told him we knew he'd been running Jimmy Viscous' gang, and that we knew he'd arranged to get his own son out of the picture ...

... and especially when we told him we knew where Ricky was and we were going to get him back and that he'd have some interesting things to say ...

... I guess he decided it was time to cut his losses. I'm sorry.

NO, WE DIDN'T ACTUALLY TELL HIM ANY OF THAT, BUT HE GOT THERE JUST FINE WITHOUT IT.

You know where Ricky is?

Not exactly ... but near enough that we can find him.

In fact, we're going to go do that right now.

I want to go with you.

That's ... actually, that's not a bad idea, for a couple of reasons ... but you've got guests ...

I'll send them all home.

Don't do that, they'd talk.

Just tell your butler to announce last call in a couple of hours, or when he gets sick of them.

He's already sick of them. So am I.

These are mostly Daddy's friends and they're horrible.

I see him.

Hey there. We're not after you. We're trying to help you.

hrrr?

Careful on the approach, Roxie.

He's been looking for you, but that doesn't mean he's happy to see you.

Fix!

Fiiiiix!!

I'm trying!

Hold still!

y-you ...

You bitch!

Yeah.

I know.

I'm really sorry.

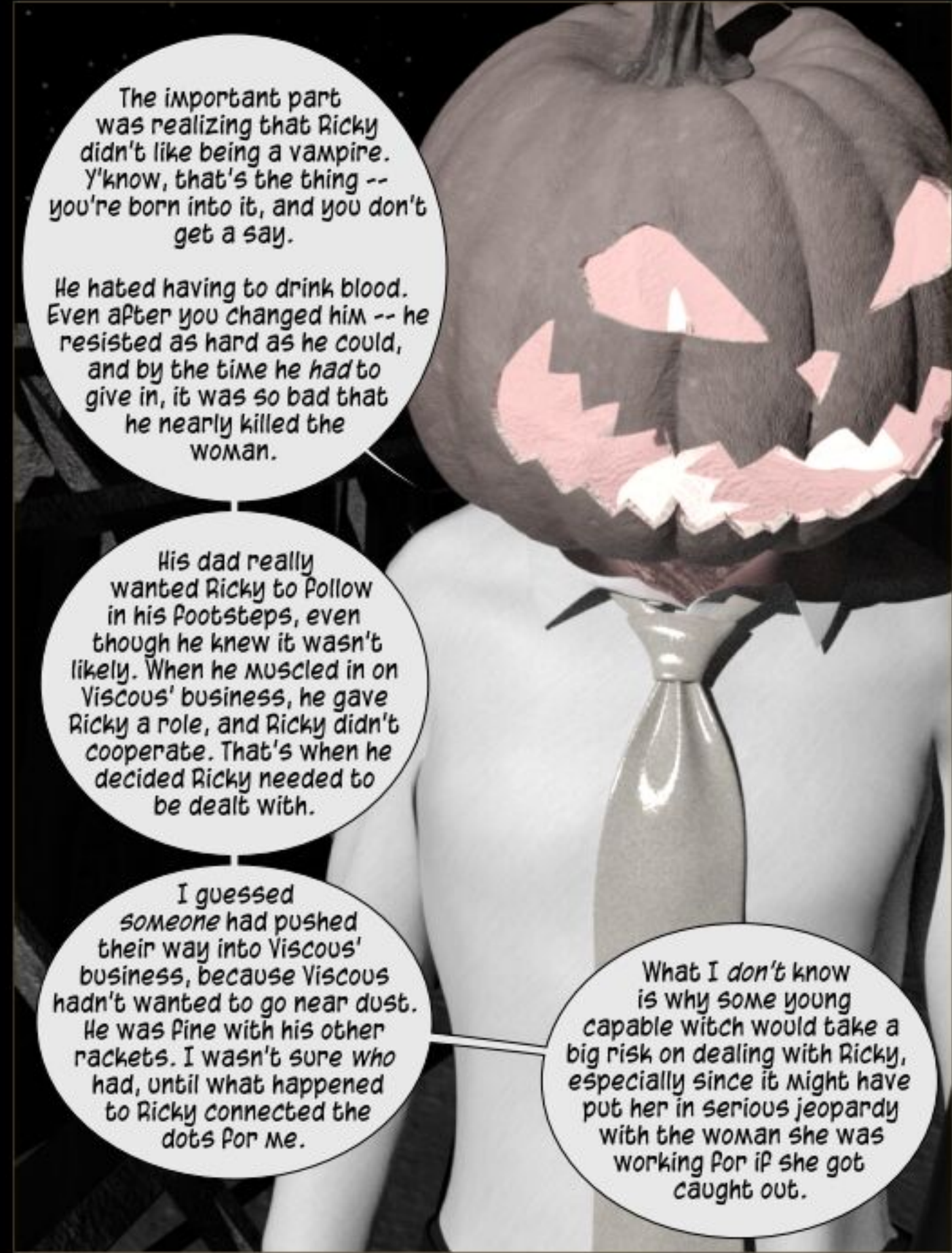


She just gets to walk away?

It's an amnesty, Ricky. Here, use my cape.

I'll tell you some things I know if you tell me some things you know.

... you go first.



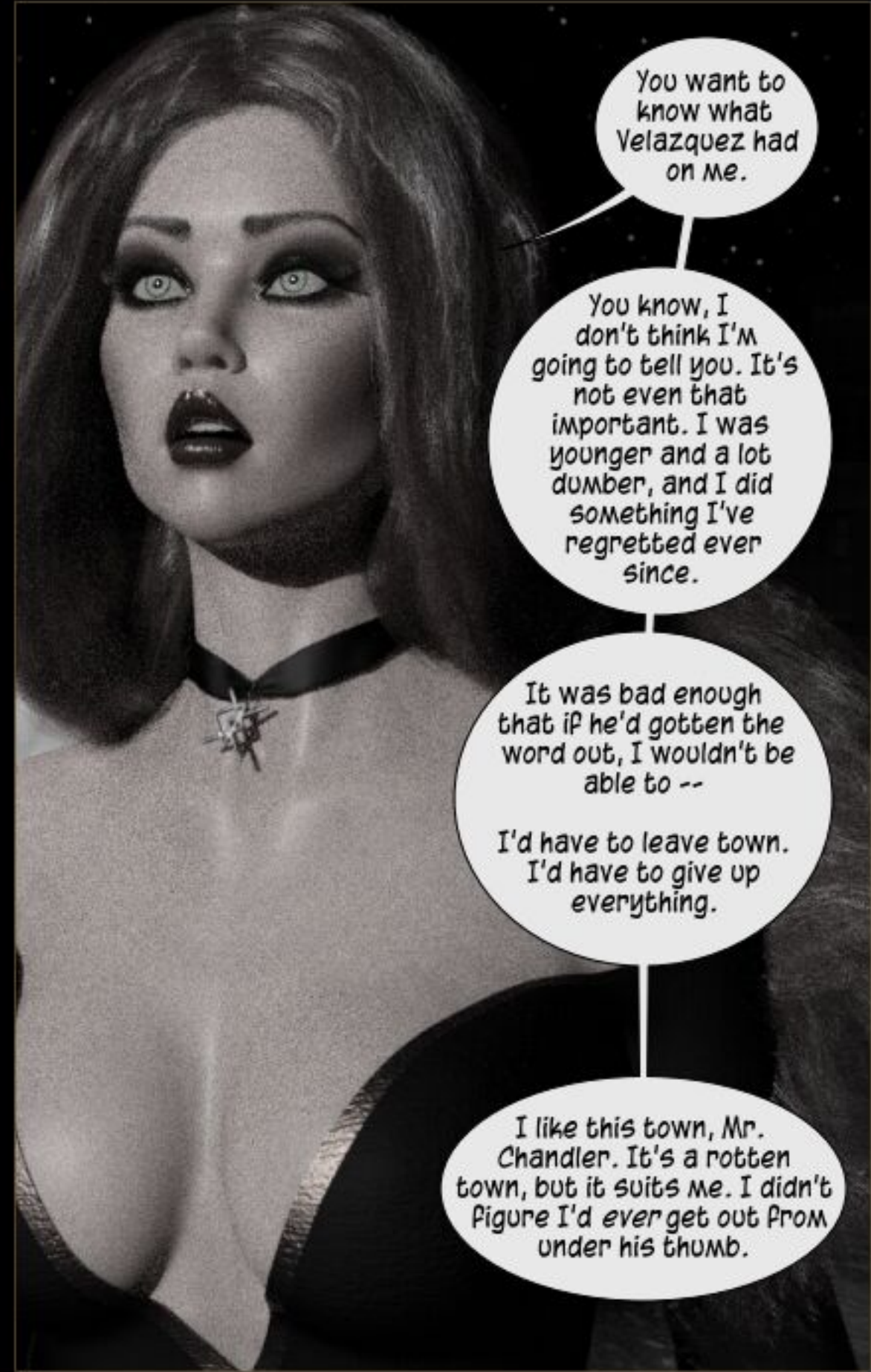
The important part was realizing that Ricky didn't like being a vampire. Y'know, that's the thing -- you're born into it, and you don't get a say.

He hated having to drink blood. Even after you changed him -- he resisted as hard as he could, and by the time he had to give in, it was so bad that he nearly killed the woman.

His dad really wanted Ricky to follow in his footsteps, even though he knew it wasn't likely. When he muscled in on Viscous' business, he gave Ricky a role, and Ricky didn't cooperate. That's when he decided Ricky needed to be dealt with.

I guessed someone had pushed their way into Viscous' business, because Viscous hadn't wanted to go near dust. He was fine with his other rackets. I wasn't sure who had, until what happened to Ricky connected the dots for me.

What I don't know is why some young capable witch would take a big risk on dealing with Ricky, especially since it might have put her in serious jeopardy with the woman she was working for if she got caught out.



You want to know what Velazquez had on me.

You know, I don't think I'm going to tell you. It's not even that important. I was younger and a lot dumber, and I did something I've regretted ever since.

It was bad enough that if he'd gotten the word out, I wouldn't be able to --

I'd have to leave town. I'd have to give up everything.

I like this town, Mr. Chandler. It's a rotten town, but it suits me. I didn't figure I'd ever get out from under his thumb.



Well, you're out from under it now.

But you're not quite done with me yet. The police are going to need you to testify against Hubbard. I don't think that's going to ruin you. Nobody likes her much.

And I'm gonna need you to restore all your pumpkins.

Except for one.

Except for one. I'll hang onto that one. For safekeeping.



Jack! Wait!

I ... I feel like I owe you an apology.



You do. But not for the reason you think.

You knew your dad wasn't on the level a long time ago, but you didn't say anything.

You suspected from the beginning that he'd done something to Ricky.

Just like you've always suspected that he did something to your mother.



... I'll never be able to prove it.

He wanted Ricky to follow in his footsteps, and he didn't like it when Mother insisted Ricky didn't have to.

She got in his way. Daddy didn't tolerate that.

You know what the worst part was? What I was really scared of? I was worried he'd start working on me. That he was going to decide I was the one who was going to follow in his footsteps now. Instead of just trying to marry me off.

And the thing is, what scared me was ... I wasn't sure I'd be able to tell him no.

I didn't want to find that out about myself.



Well, now you'll get to find out your own way.

You're sure he's not coming back, then.

I'm never as sure about most things as I'd like to be.

But I'm as sure as I can be right now that he's not coming back.

Don't mess it up, and then if he does come back ... you and Ricky will be ready for him.



You're welcome.

See you around.