

A FINE AFTERNOON FOR SOME CASUAL RECREATION IN CITY PARK ...



Dude, what was that?

Sorry!



My bad! I'll go get it.

You sure will.



Shit, I think it went through an upstairs window.



Oop, this place is falling apart. Hope the stairs hold up ...

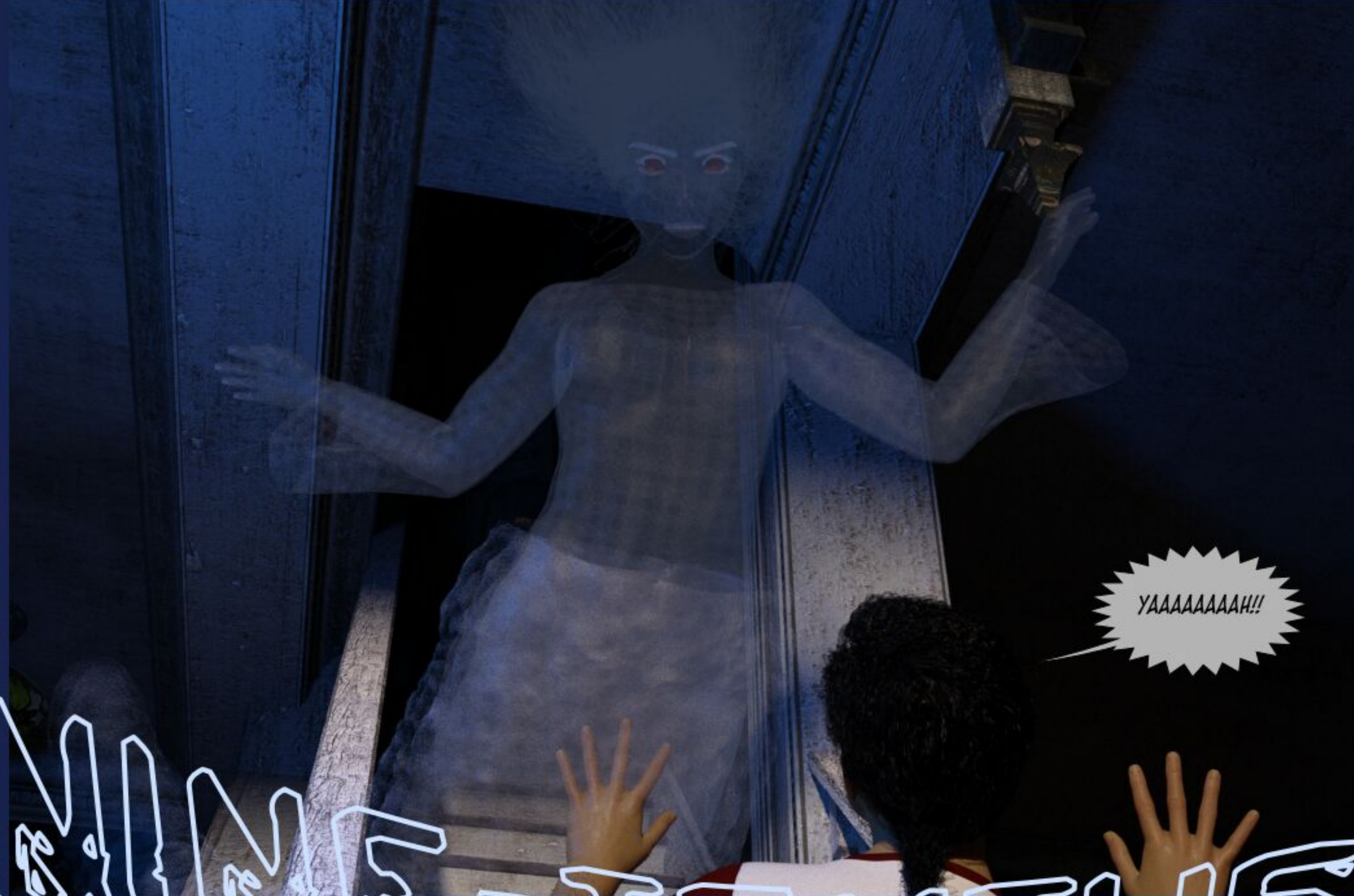


I guess nobody cares I broke the window.

Figures my best throw ever goes totally wild ...



Wonder how old this place is--



YAAAAAAAHH!!

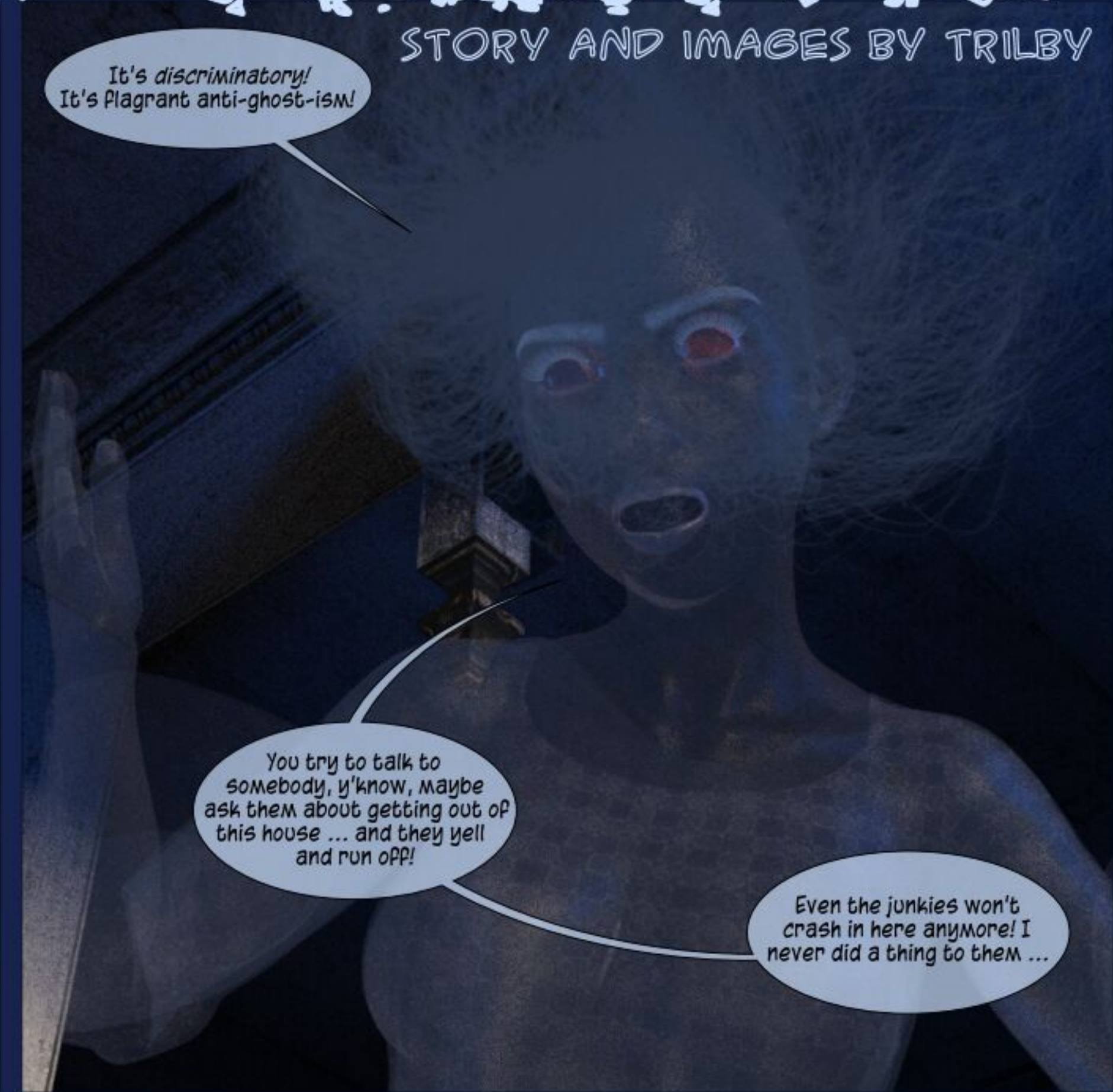
THE TENTHS

STORY AND IMAGES BY TRILBY



Why does everybody do that?

Uh ... because you're a ghost? You know? Transparent? Floating? Spooky?



It's discriminatory! It's Plagant anti-ghost-ism!

You try to talk to somebody, y'know, maybe ask them about getting out of this house ... and they yell and run opp!

Even the junkies won't crash in here anymore! I never did a thing to them ...



OK, sorry. You just ... you startled me, OK?

What did you mean about getting out of the house?

I can't leave! I'm stuck in here. The only way I can get out is if someone takes me out.

Takes you out? What, like to a movie?

No, idiot! Physically removes me.

Carries you out? I guess I can do that ...

Though I didn't think you were, uh, solid ...

Not exactly ... It's more like ... well ... I have to occupy you.

You're talking about possession! No way!

Aw, c'mon. It's not going to hurt or anything.

I'm pretty sure it won't, anyway.

Uh-uh. I watch horror movies. I know how this kind of thing goes.

Fine.

Go away and leave me alone, then.

Somebody has to come along sooner or later. I can wait.

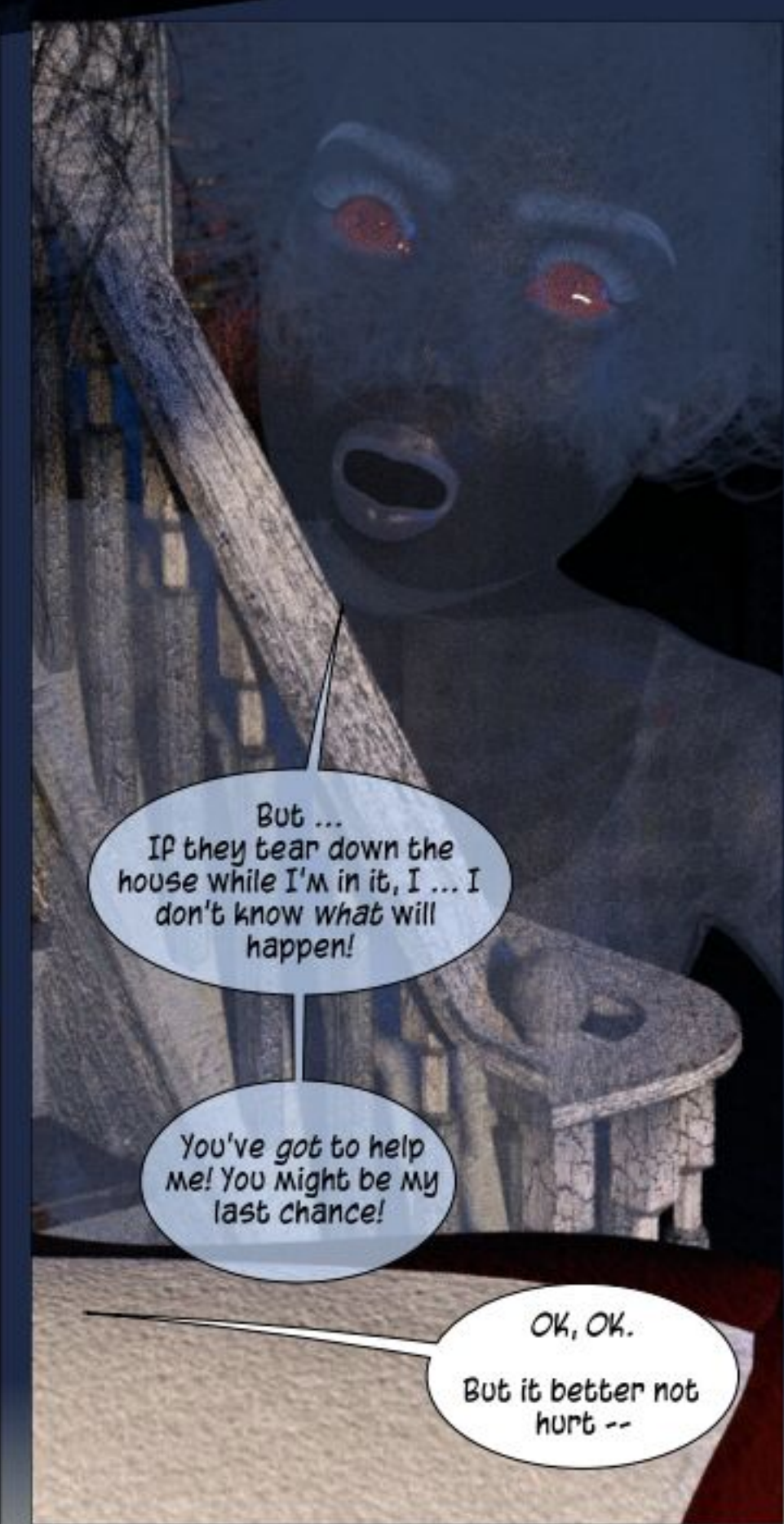
... Oh. Uh, well ... see ...



This house is condemned.

Condemned? They're going to tear down my house?

Uh ... yeah. Not sure when. Any day now, I guess.



But ... If they tear down the house while I'm in it, I ... I don't know what will happen!

You've got to help me! You might be my last chance!

OK, OK.

But it better not hurt --



Whauuuhh!

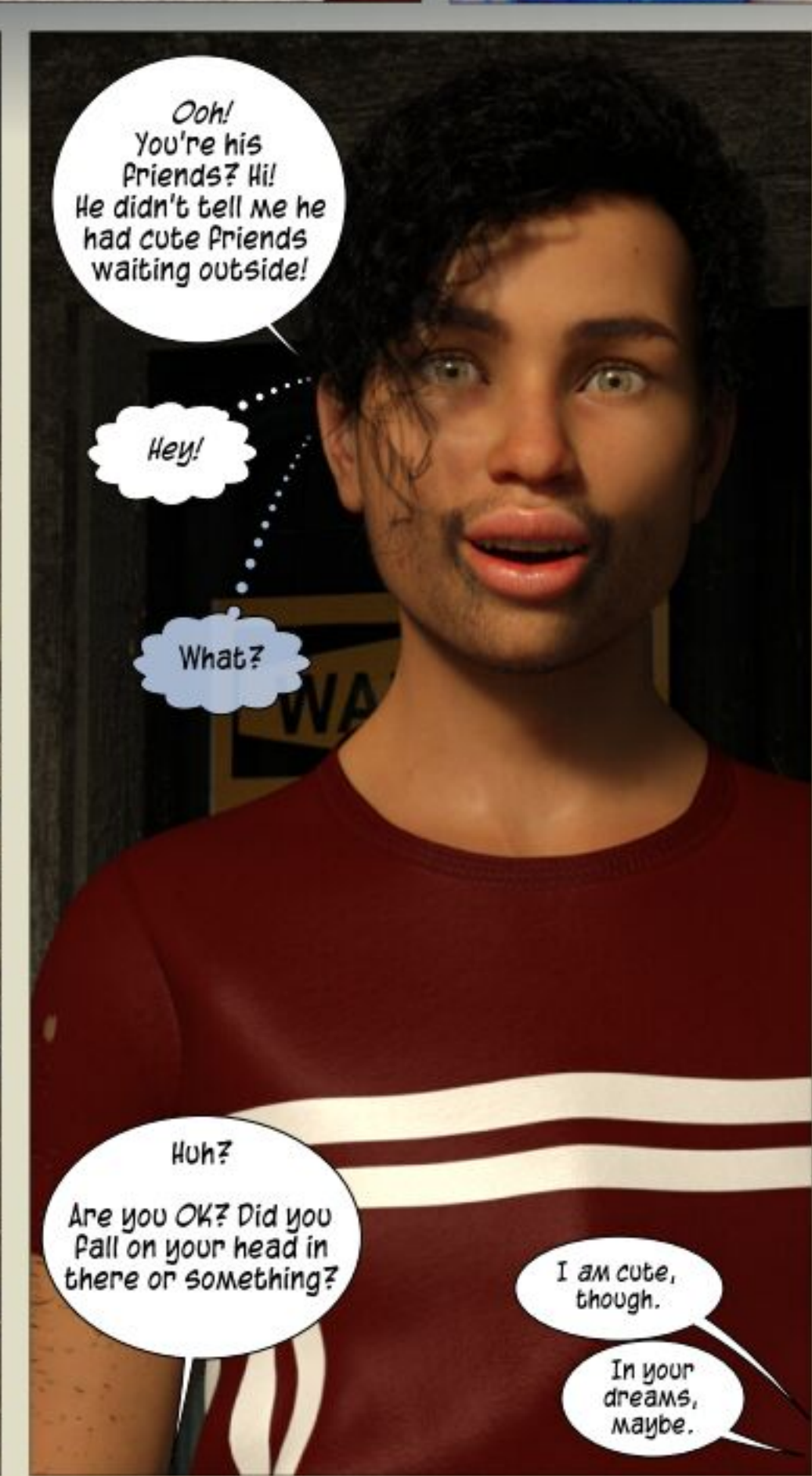


Luis! Geez, dude.

We were just about to come in looking for you.

Actually Falco was just trying to locate his balls. He's scared of the dark.

Bite me, Antoine.



Ooh! You're his friends? Hi! He didn't tell me he had cute friends waiting outside!

Hey!

What?

Huh?

Are you OK? Did you fall on your head in there or something?

I am cute, though.

In your dreams, maybe.



Uh ... yeah! I think maybe I did. I think I'm going to go to the E.R. Y'know, just to be safe.

I'll see you guys later, OK?



That was mean! I just wanted to get to know them ...

Yeah? It sounded like you wanted to get to know them a little too well.

So what if I did? Women's liberation is a thing, you know. We don't have to wait on you guys to get a clue.

Huh?

What are you ... that's not even what I'm talking about! Those guys are all way straight. Like, brutal straight. I'm lucky they thought I'd hit my head.



ooh. I get it.

Sorry! ... I kind of forgot it wasn't me talking.

Whatever.

I got you out of that house, now get out of my body. We're done.

But it doesn't work that way!

I have to find you another house?

No, silly! You took me on. I'm here now.



I'm stuck with you? Forever?

You didn't say anything about that!

I thought I was just, y'know, giving you a ride! I wouldn't have said yes if I'd known I was going to have you hitchhiking in there for the rest of my pucking life!!

People really will think you're crazy if you talk to me out loud, you know.

In this city? They'll hardly notice.

Doesn't have to be forever. You can find me someone else as host. ... A woman, please.



I barely know any women!

Definitely none I'd be willing to screw over the way you did me ...

She could want to have a ghost, you know. Anyway it'd have to be voluntary. I think.

This is where you live? It's tiny!



Oh, now you can come out ...

I can always come out. Did you want me to walk down the street with you? That would make a Puss.

You're still carrying me. You're my house now.

How do you live in a place this small?

Have you seen what rents are like around here? I can barely afford this. Besides, I don't take up much space.

But what do you do if you want to have Friends over? What if you want to throw a party?

... I don't throw parties.



Don't go to them either, I bet.

Well, in Painsness, I don't get invited.

You're a real stick, huh? Going to have to make some changes, else we'll be finding out whether a ghost can die of boredom.

Now listen --



Appearance first! That'll help a lot. Maybe change the hair. And you need better clothes.

Oh, I haven't shopped for clothes in so long!

Hold on!

There's nothing wrong with my clothes, I like my hair the way it is, and I didn't ask you to interfere with my life!

It's for your own good! You'll thank me afterward.

There's not going to be an afterward. Because I'm not going to do it!



FIVE MINUTES LATER.

Taking control of my body is a really dirty trick.

Well, they say possession is nine-tenths of the law! -- giggle --

That is not what that means.

It took me a long time to grow even that much, and now you're making me start all over ...

It looked scraggly! Why would you want to go around looking scraggly?



Because I look like a little boy without it, OK? Nobody's interested in a guy who looks like he's twelve.

Instead you'd rather look like a guy who just didn't wash his face real well?

Oh, thanks a lot.

And you're going to tell me this was 'scraggly' too?

Don't have to. You know it.

Maybe some people just weren't meant to have body hair.

Maybe you just want to make me suffer.

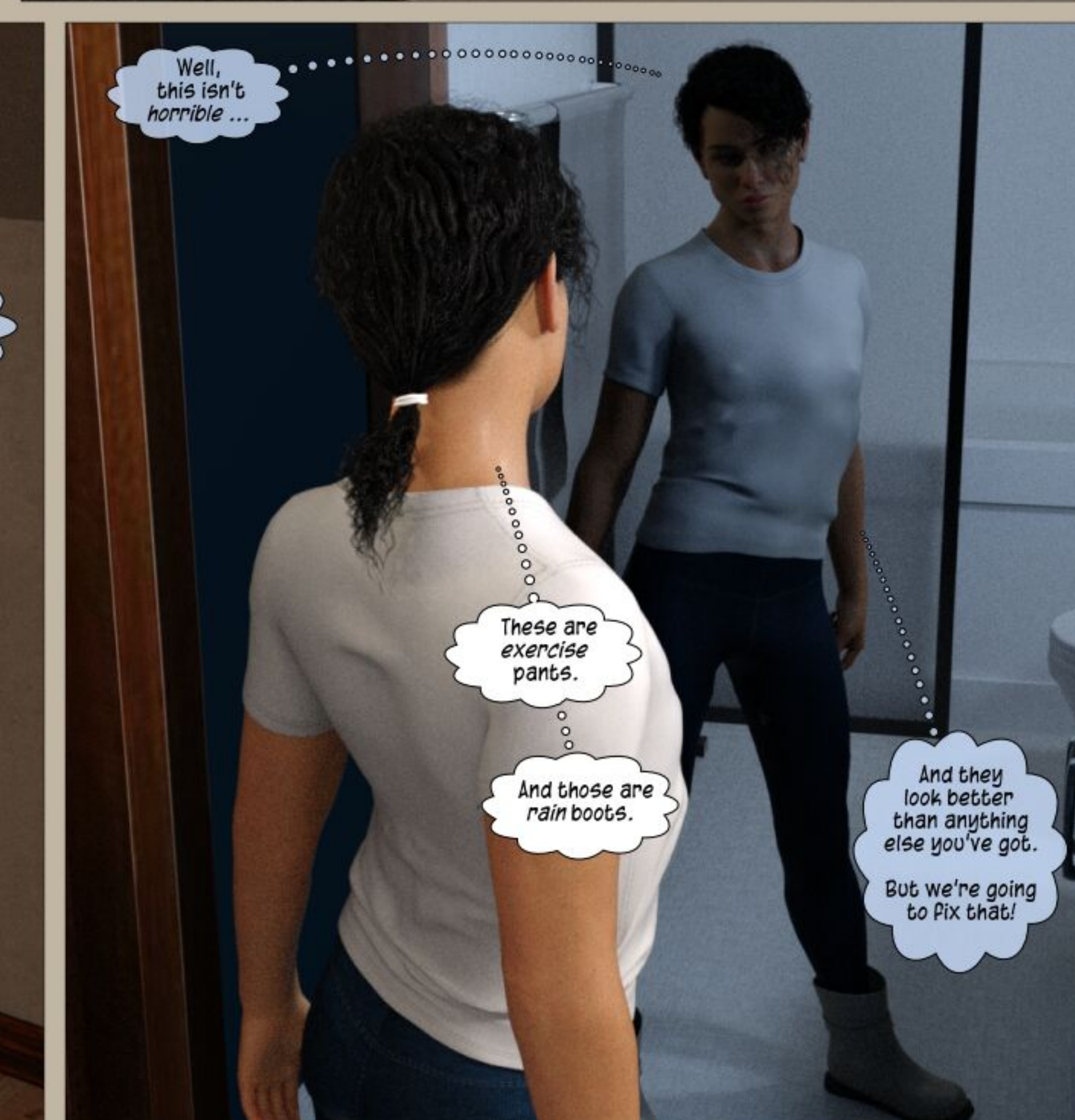
Oh, stop Pussing. I used to have to do this twice a week.



Augh! Why don't you have anything to wear?

Not my fault you don't like my personal style.

You don't have a personal style. "Don't bother" isn't a style.



Well, this isn't horrible ...

These are exercise pants.

And those are rain boots.

And they look better than anything else you've got.

But we're going to fix that!



Ooh, yes! This is the stuPP.

I shouldn't be in here ...

Don't be silly! They're not going to throw you out just for being a guy.

This place would make me jumpy even if I were a woman. I feel like I'm being judged.

... That's just because you need better clothes!



This is cute! Don't you think this is cute?

On a woman, maybe.

I bet it looks good on you! We should try it on.

... I hate to break it to you, but they are not going to let me into a fitting room.



Oh, that's a good color for you!

Er ...

Would you like to try it on?

I can do that?

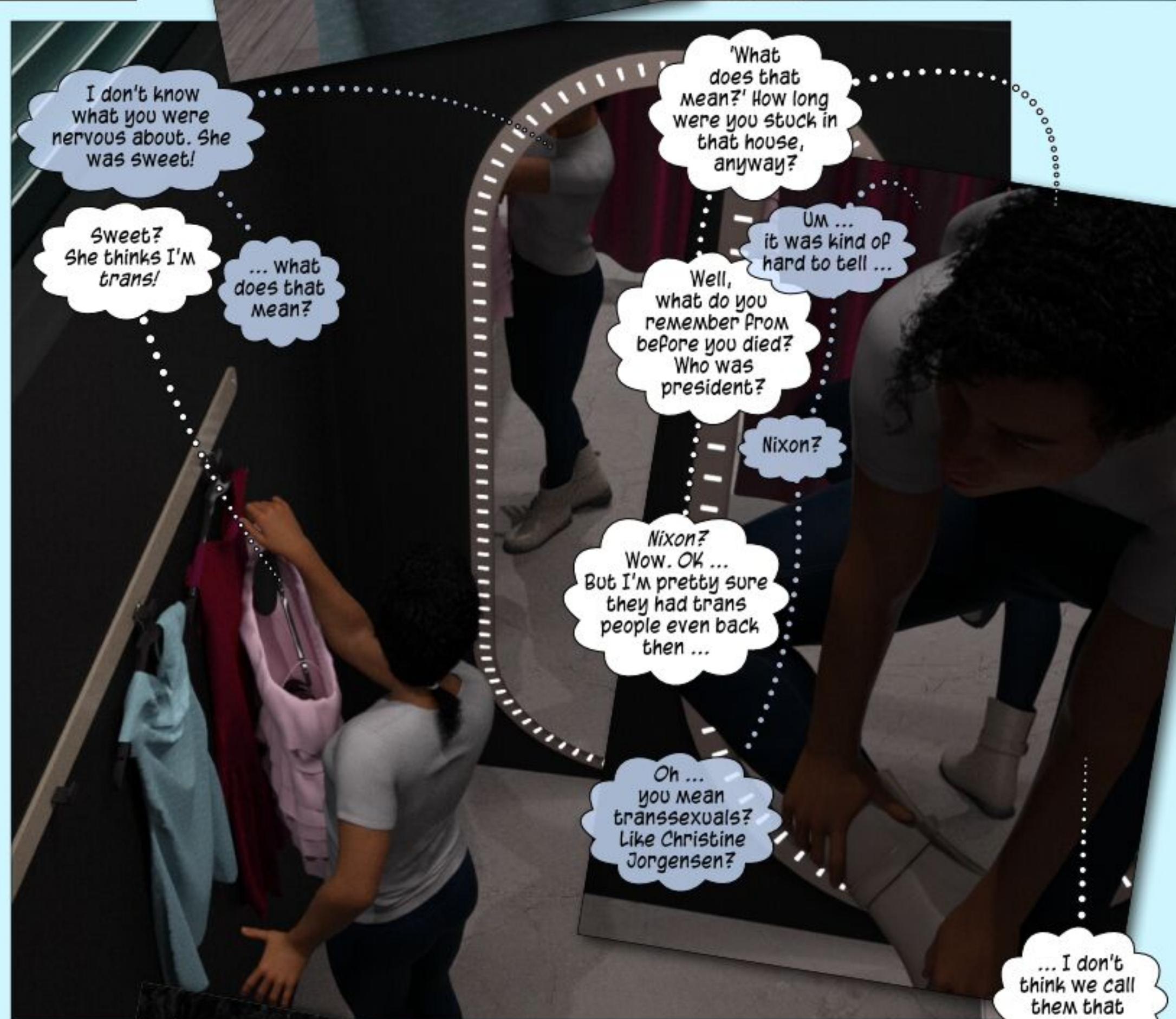


Of course! We're an inclusive business. All customers welcome.

I think it's great that you're comfortable with your gender expression.

Just remember that you can't try on underwear or swimwear. Health code.

Let me know if you need help finding anything!



I don't know what you were nervous about. She was sweet!

Sweet? She thinks I'm trans!

... what does that mean?

"What does that mean?" How long were you stuck in that house, anyway?

Um ... it was kind of hard to tell ...

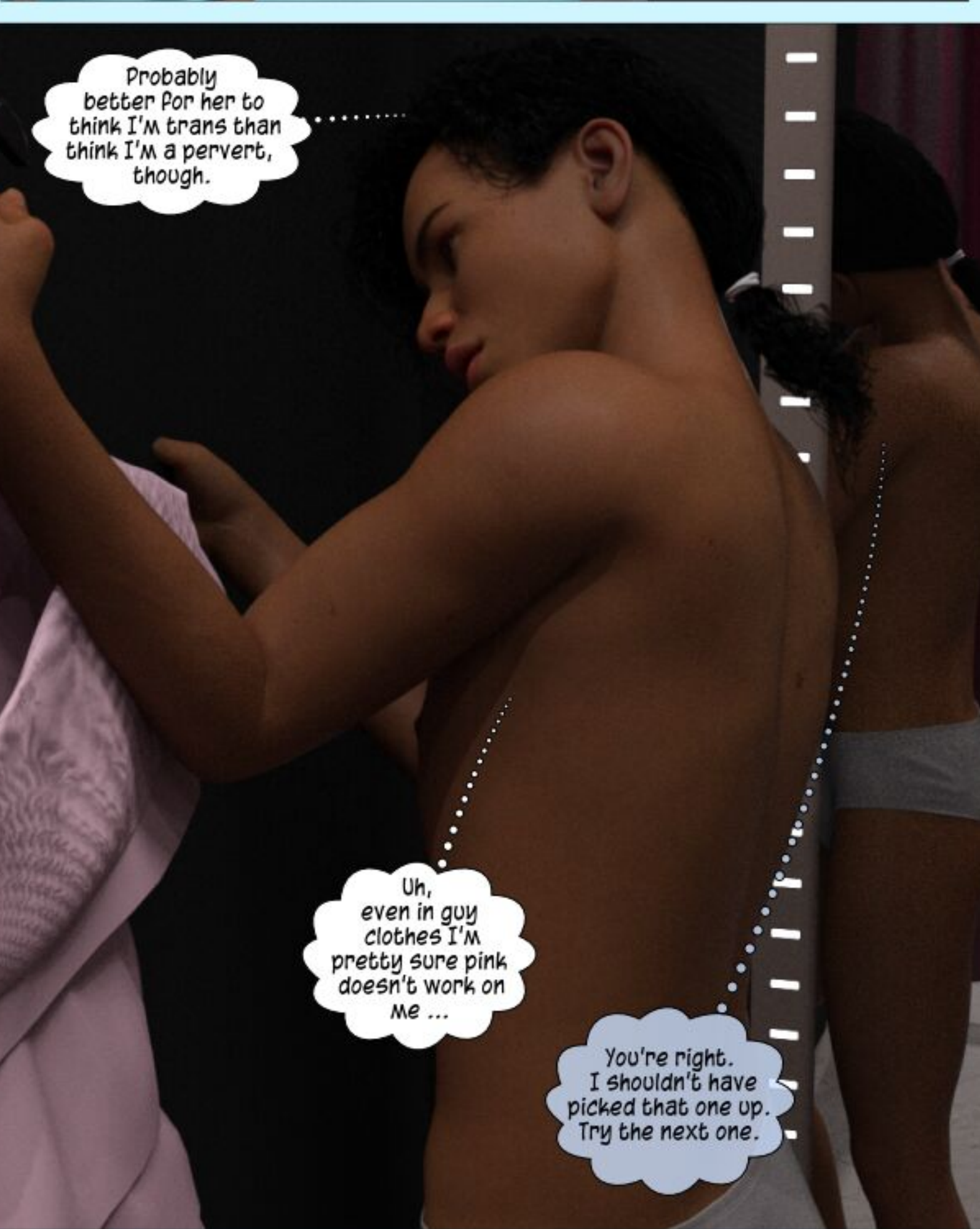
Well, what do you remember Prom before you died? Who was president?

Nixon?

Nixon? Wow. OK ... But I'm pretty sure they had trans people even back then ...

Oh ... you mean transsexuals? Like Christine Jorgensen?

... I don't think we call them that anymore.



Probably better for her to think I'm trans than think I'm a pervert, though.

Uh, even in guy clothes I'm pretty sure pink doesn't work on me ...

You're right. I shouldn't have picked that one up. Try the next one.



This doesn't work either.

Aw, I like it! Have to do something about the bulge though ...

You like it because it's Prom, your time. Nobody wears this kind of thing anymore.

... Fine. Next one.

Oh, this works! The color's good, it hangs well even though you don't have breasts, and it makes you look like you've got a waist ...

I'm not supposed to have a waist!

OK, I get you want to put me in better clothes, but why women's clothes?

Because men's clothes are boring?

This one's a keeper. Let's try the next one.

You know, I don't have a lot of money to burn ...

Just a couple more. I promise.

-- Sigh --



Did you find everything you wanted?

Oh, yes!

Actually ... could I get a bag to put my old things in?

I'd like to keep this on.

We are not wearing this on the street!

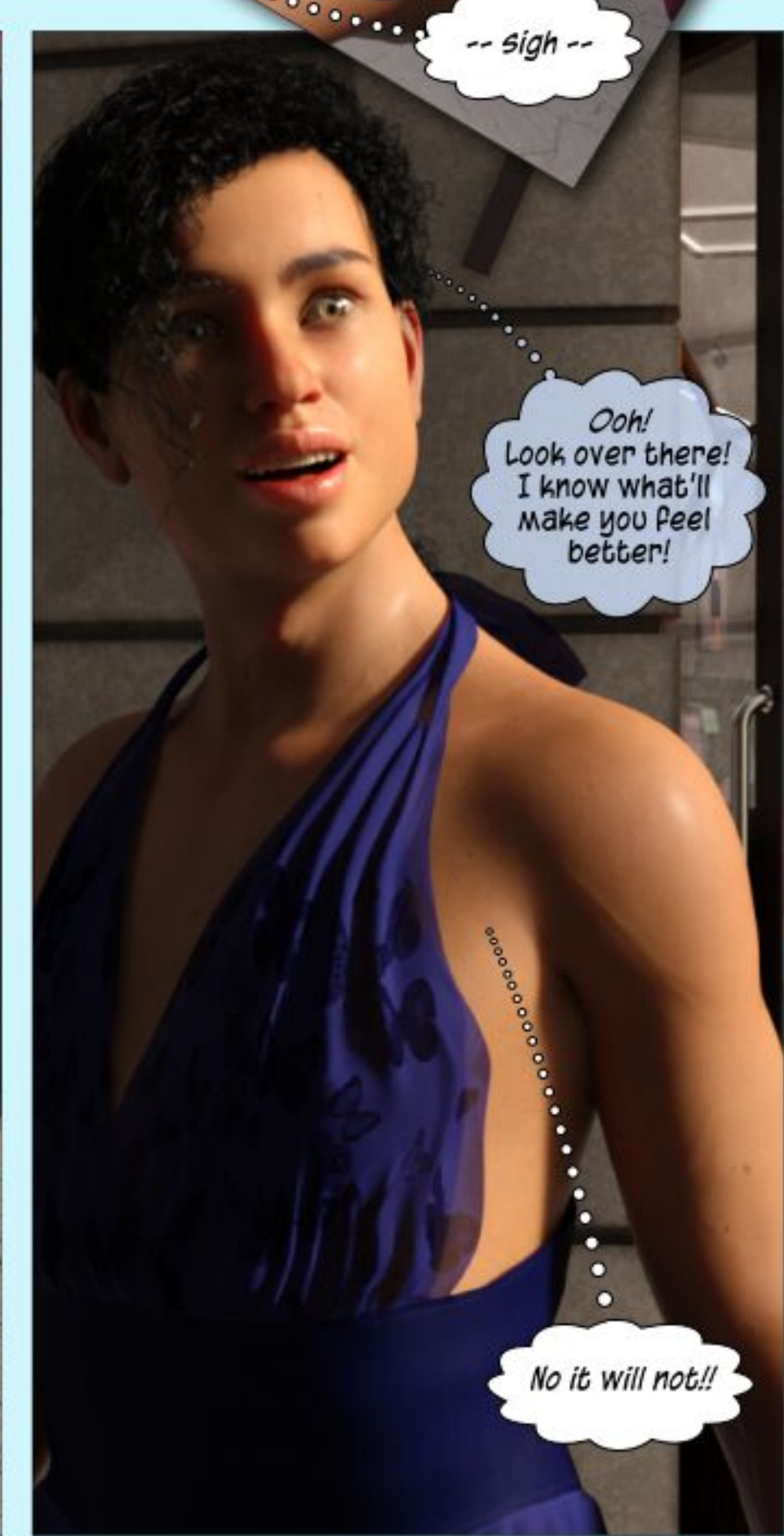
Certainly!



I can't believe this. You're not only going to spend all my money, but you're going to ruin my life ... What if I see one of my Friends on the street?

If they're really your Friends then they won't care, right?

Why are you such a grump? I'm trying to make everything better for you.



Ooh! Look over there! I know what'll make you feel better!

No it will not!!



All right, so what did you have in mind?
Nothing! She didn't have anything in mind! She just wants to torture me!

I don't know, really ... I just want to do something more ... interesting with it.

I hate you so much right now.

Aw, come on! I told you, "don't bother" isn't a style. You can do better than that!



Well, it'd be hard to do something *less* interesting with it.

See?

Hmm ... you had more hair in that tail than I thought ... I can work with this.

How "interesting" do you want to go?

Oh, no.

Come over to the wash chair. You can think about that while I give you a shampoo.



TWENTY MINUTES LATER ...

OK, we're going to let that set for a while, then I'll give it a Pinal pass.

This is Sylvie, our esthetician.

Hi! Would you like me to take care of those brows? And maybe fix up your face a bit?



AND A SHORT WHILE AFTER THAT ...

All right, what do you think?

Oh, god ...

It looks great!



BACK AT THE APARTMENT.

I can't believe you did this to me! I can't fix that hair! I'll have to go to class on Monday like this!

And you made me go into the drugstore looking like this ... buying all that stuff ... people were laughing at me!

Oh, they were not. A couple of them were whispering to one another. To hell with them.

And you needed all those supplies. Beauty takes maintenance!

I don't want beauty! I don't want to look like this! What part of that aren't you getting?

But, see, I don't think I believe you. You liked trying on the clothes, even if you were fussing about it ... you didn't even complain about the makeup ...



I didn't have a choice! You were driving! You've got nine-tenths of me right now, and then you say I must like it because my tenth can't stop you?

Let me out of this dress and this makeup and you'll see what I really think!

What?? No way!

Can't do that. We're going out! Gotta look good for the club!

Come on. At least give it a try. If it really freaks you out, we'll leave, OK?



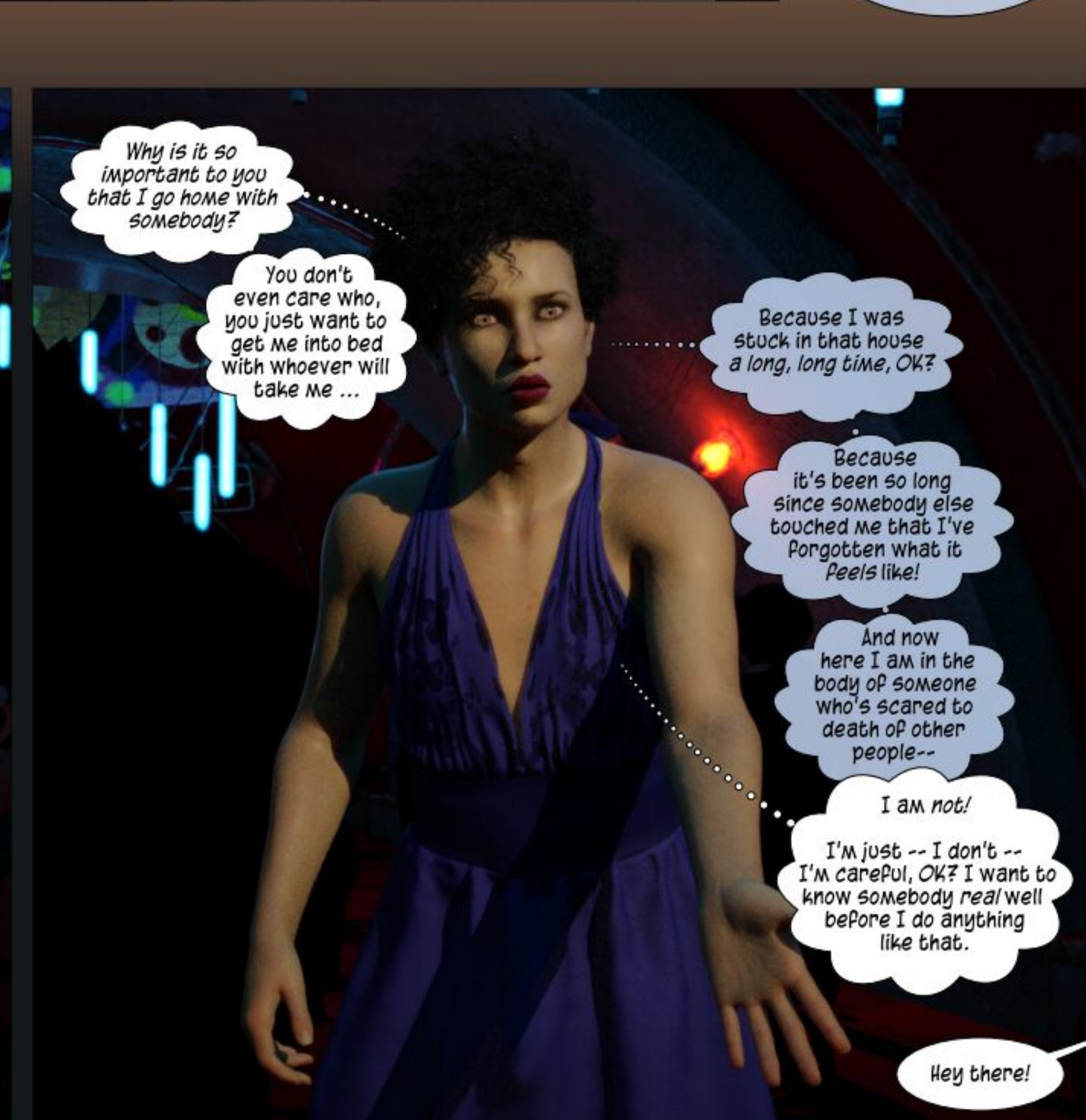
Wow, the music has really changed since the last time I was in a club ...

Yeah, now it sucks. How freaked do I have to get before we can leave?

You are the biggest grump. You haven't even tried! Look at all these cute men! Let's go talk to one of them.

I'm not interested in men!

OK, there's lots of cute women too. I bet one of them would go home with us ... or us with them ...



Why is it so important to you that I go home with somebody?

You don't even care who, you just want to get me into bed with whoever will take me ...

Because I was stuck in that house a long, long time, OK?

Because it's been so long since somebody else touched me that I've forgotten what it feels like!

And now here I am in the body of someone who's scared of death of other people--

I am not!

I'm just -- I don't -- I'm carePul, OK? I want to know somebody real well before I do anything like that.

Hey there!



Uh ...

You look kind of like you're having an argument with yourself.

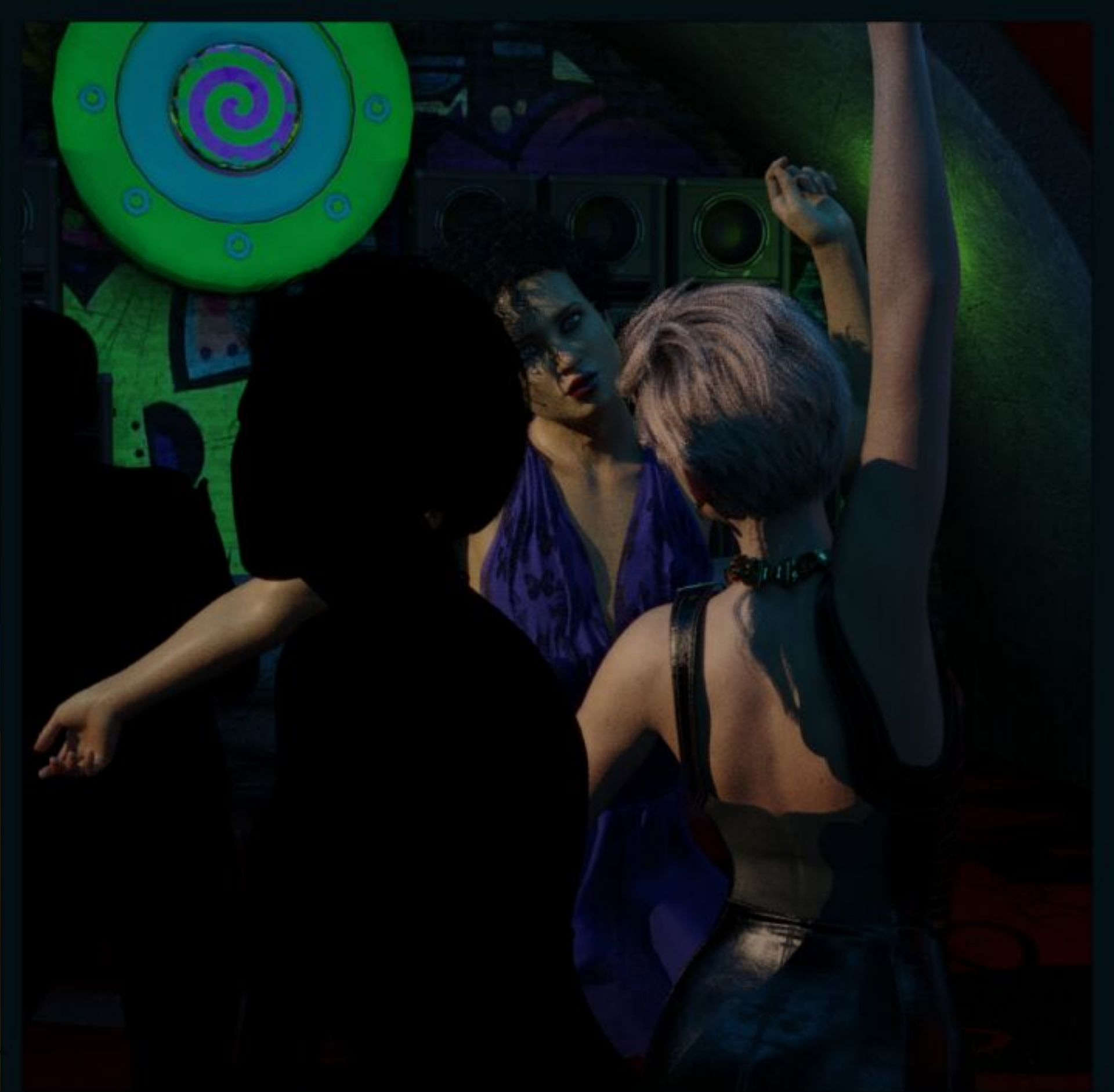
And losing.

Actually, I was trying to figure out how to start up a conversation with you.

Oh, you evil bitch.

Well, points for honesty.

Never mind a conversation. Let's dance a little.



You know, you're not a very good dancer.

We could see if you're better at other things.

I ... uh ... I have to go.

Sorry.



urrrrgh.

And here I didn't think the day could have gotten any worse--

Well, that's on you, though! You ran away! She was perfectly nice and you ran away!



I want you out.

I don't care what I have to do. You've fucked up my life enough in just one day. I can't deal with any more.

Well, that's going to be kind of hard, isn't it? We can't find me another host if you run away every time a woman talks to you!

I do not! It wasn't about her talking to me, it was about her wanting to jump me!

Sure. Do you have any female friends? Actually ... do you have any friends at all? I saw three guys you were throwing a football with, that it seems like you didn't really think much of ...

That's ... uh ... that's not the point!

It's absolutely the point. What do you expect me to do? I can't find a new host without you.



What's keeping you here?

Huh?

Aren't ghosts supposed to hang around because they have, like, unfinished business? Things they didn't do when they were alive?

Oh. I get it.

Hmm. You know, I never thought about that before ...



John Burdon, probably.

Who's that?

Big tycoon type. He wanted to eliminate my father as competition. But he didn't just try to wreck daddy's business.

He made up a story that daddy was committing fraud, swindling people, and he got it to stick. He got daddy sent to jail. He died there.

Mother was never the same after that. She died not long after I finished high school.

I said that once I got somewhere in college I was going to find a way to get back at Burdon for wrecking my family. But I died before I got a chance.

... How did you die, anyway?

I don't want to talk about it.

Well, I guess we could do some searches, try to find out about him ... but ...



... that's what I was afraid of.

I mean, if you do the math, he'd have had to have been real old ...

Damn it.



Ah ... excuse me for intruding, but ...

Did you know him?
I mean, no, you couldn't have known him yourself, but ...

... Why do you ask?

Well, that's my grandfather.

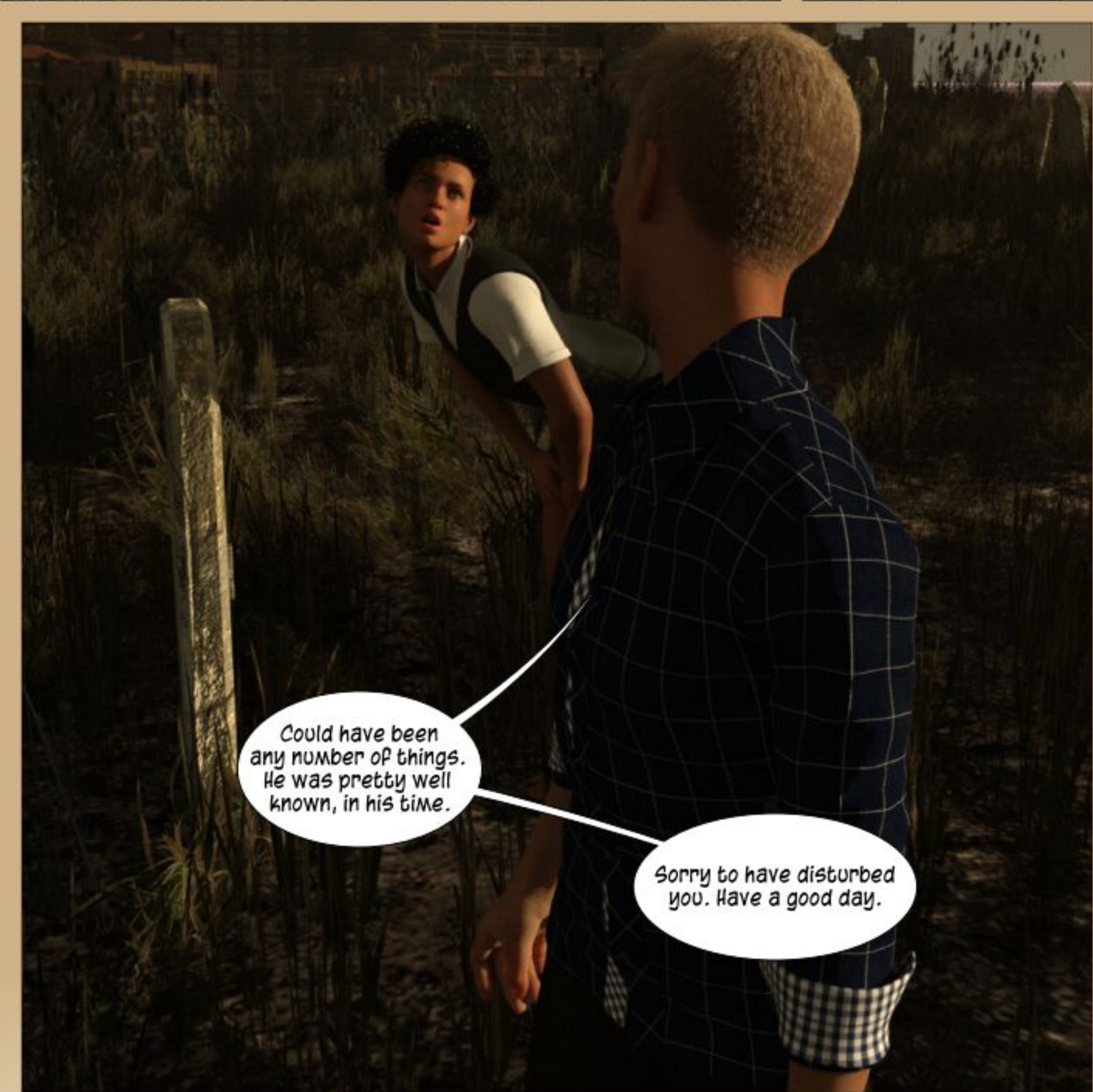
I come here fairly often, to visit my parents, and ... ah ...

I've never seen anyone visit his grave before.



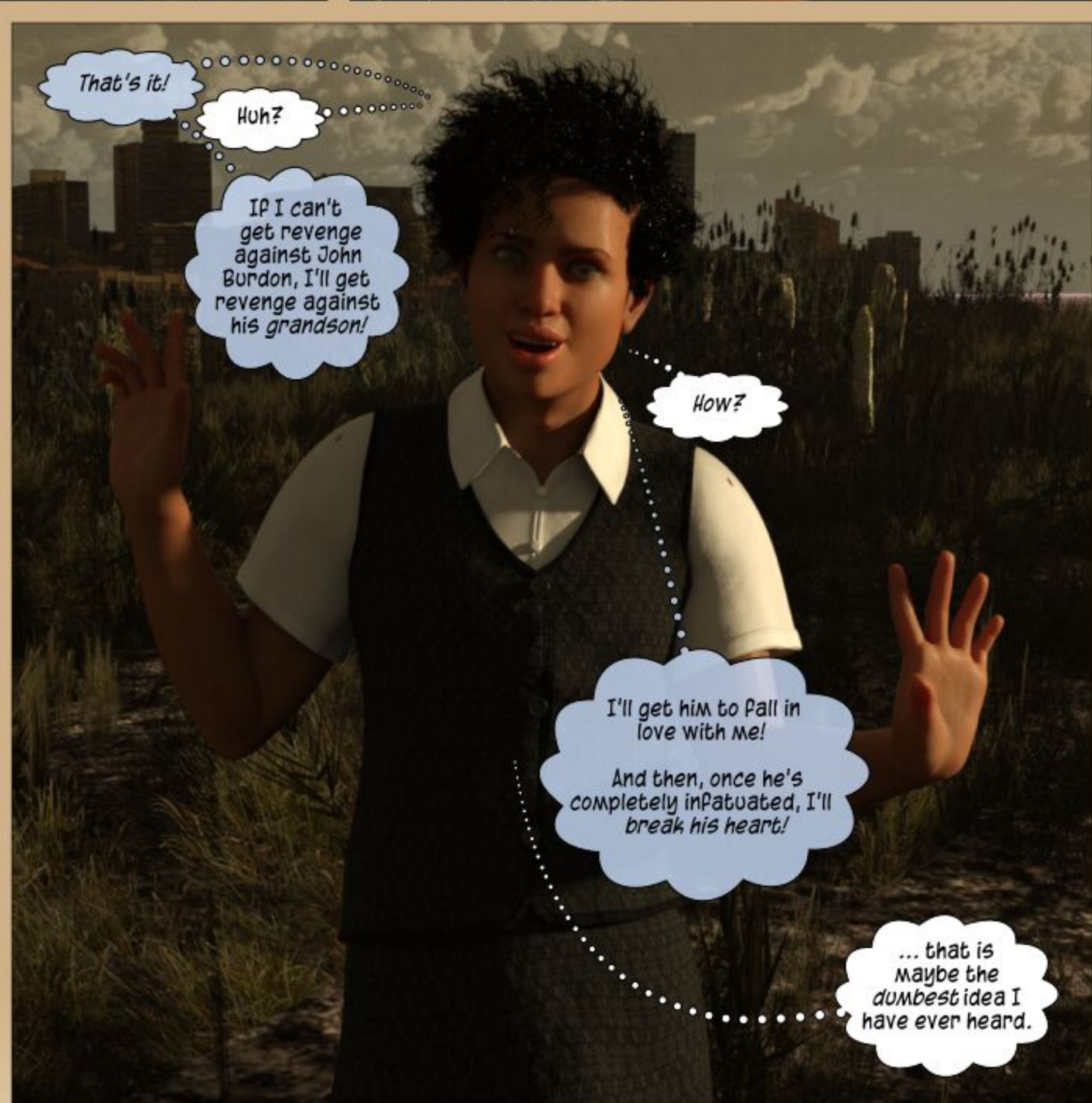
Oh!
I -- uh --

No, I don't know him.
I was just trying to figure out why the name sounded familiar.



Could have been any number of things. He was pretty well known, in his time.

Sorry to have disturbed you. Have a good day.



That's it! Huh?

If I can't get revenge against John Burdon, I'll get revenge against his grandson!

How?

I'll get him to fall in love with me!
And then, once he's completely infatuated, I'll break his heart!

... that is maybe the dumbest idea I have ever heard.

EARLY NEXT MORNING.



OK, I agreed we needed to buy more clothes to pull this off ... but do we really have to use the fake tits?

"Breast Forms." They're just so you look like you've got something up top. And they make the clothes fit better.

And would you please change to the panties? You're going to need to tuck, and it's not going to work in those boy briefs.

You know, he's already seen me. None of this is going to pool him.

Guys don't notice things past. He barely got a look at you yesterday.

Now quit stalling. I've still got to show you how to do your makeup, and get you dressed, and you insisted you needed to be on time for class.



People are staring at me! This is really uncomfortable.

Maybe they think you're cute.

... I doubt it, somehow.

Honestly. How did you get like this?

OK, maybe they're talking about you. The two behind us are, for sure. Big deal. Let them wonder.



There he is! Your computer thing is really handy.

Stalking somebody is not considered a good use of search skills.

But, OK, there he is, great. Now how do we get his attention? We don't have any classes with him ...

We'll do it the old-fashioned way.



ooh!

Oh, I'm so sorry! I wasn't looking where I was going--

It's all right! I'm fine. Just a little startled.

... Have I seen you somewhere before?



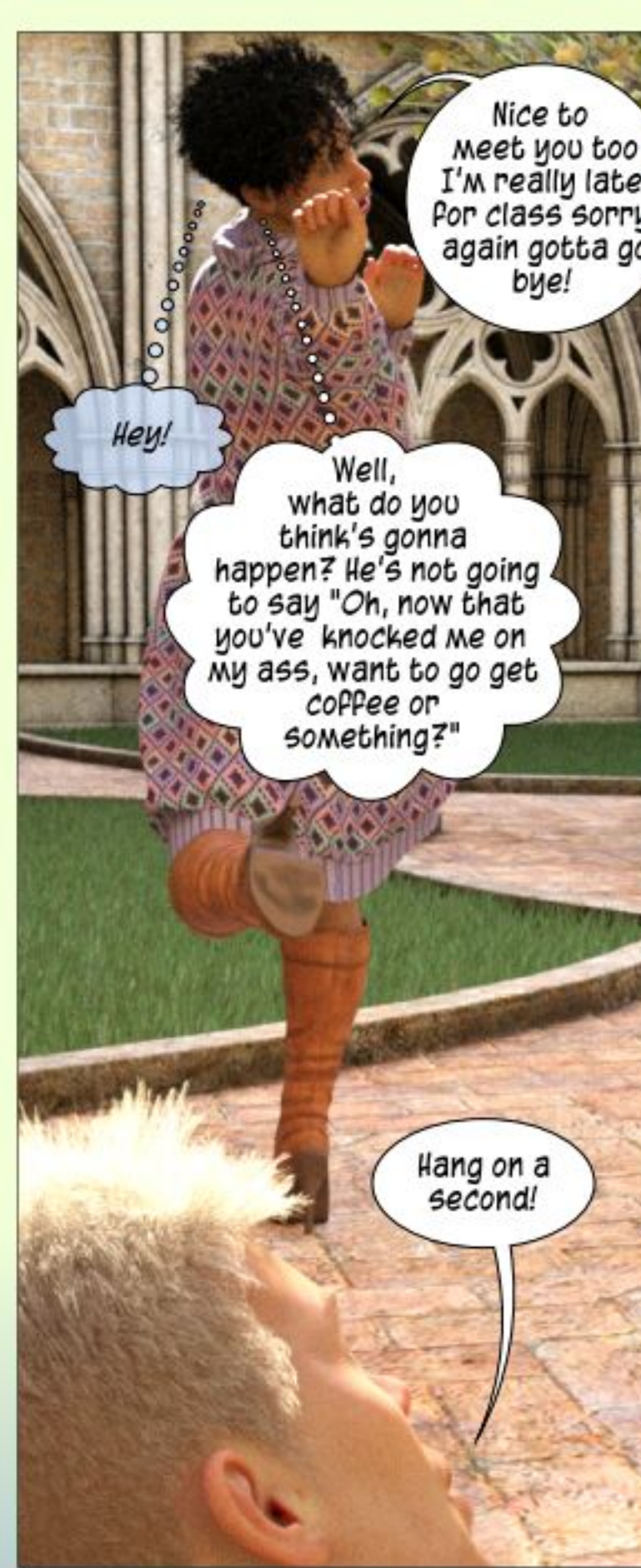
... oh!
You saw me in the cemetery yesterday. That was you, wasn't it?

It sure was. What's your name?

Louis.

Hello, Louise. I'm Terry. Nice to run into you again.

Uh ...



Hey!

Well, what do you think's gonna happen? He's not going to say "Oh, now that you've knocked me on my ass, want to go get coffee or something?"

Hang on a second!



Look, would you like to maybe go get coffee or something?

Later, I mean. When you don't have class.



I, uh --

Yes!!

... OK.
Yes.
That'd be nice.



I don't normally hang out in cemeteries. It just seemed like a nice quiet place to take a walk.

That's true, though I think I would probably rather walk somewhere that gets a few more people. I'm not sure that place even has a caretaker.

I ... might not be very good with people.

You can't be too bad; you're talking to me right now ... what kinds of things do you like to do?

Ah ... I'm not really good at anything.



I didn't ask if you were good at anything, I asked what you like to do. I don't think those two have to be the same thing.

Oh ... I guess not. Truth is, I've been so focused on getting through school ever since I got here that I don't much know what I like to do.

We should look into that, then. Everybody should have something that makes them happy.

And don't try to tell me you're not entitled to be happy, because you'd be wrong and I would refuse to accept it.



THE DAYS PASS, AND TURN TO WEEKS, AS THEY DO ...



That's really all there is to it?

That's really all there is to it!

I knew I didn't believe you when you said you weren't good at anything.



I'm not as good at it as I'll need to be to get a job in the field. There's a lot of really sharp programmers. But, yeah, I'm not bad. That's why I'm studying it ... it's something I don't hate that I might do OK at.

I'm sure you picked your major for the same kind of reasons.

I threw darts at the course catalog until I found something I thought wouldn't bore me to tears.

Your approach was probably better.



gotta pee
gotta pee bad

This is going to be a problem ...

Why? Just go, for heaven's sake!

I don't know why you always wait until you're home ...

You don't get it.

People get real bent out of shape about this. They've tried to make laws ... there's been all kinds of puss ...

Use the women's room. It'll be fine.



Empty. Good.



shit--

Calm down. Go wash your hands. Be normal.



Oh, hey.

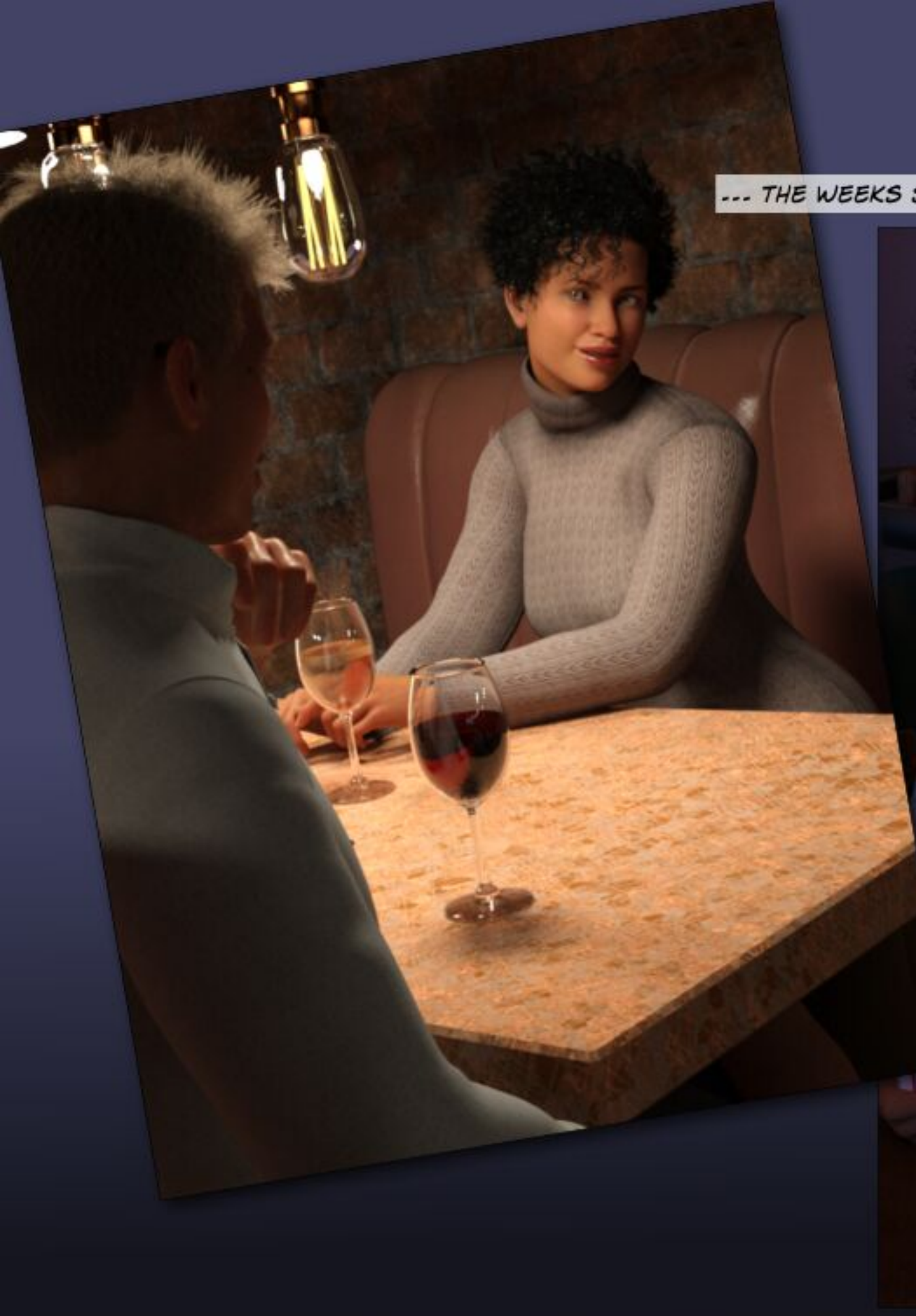
You know, you've gotten a lot better at your makeup since you started.

It looks good.



... thank you.

... THE WEEKS SHOW DEFINITE SIGNS OF TURNING INTO MONTHS ...



I know you're not going to like this, but we really need to buy some more clothes.

Yeah. We've run out of stuff with high necklines. Need more scarves, if nothing else.

When we went to play skee-ball the other day I was thinking "I wonder if he knows how many times he's seen this tan sweater ..."

...

Yes! Finally I have defeated the skee-ball queen! I am victorious!

--hahahaha--



I was expecting a fight!

Oh ... uh, well ...

... We really need this crazy plan to work, right?

I mean, don't want to risk it falling apart just because we needed more turtle-necks ...

Uh-huh.



So, ah ...

I think I'm going to kiss you now.

I mean, if that's all right.

... It's all right.



SEVERAL DAYS LATER.



Uh, sure ... I can do that ... were you thinking of ordering a pizza or something?

Oh! Really? OK ...

Yes, I'll see you then. bye!

Well?



He wants us to come to his place tonight!

Ooh. That's big.

Maybe "in over our heads" big. He's never asked before ... He's going to cook dinner!

Well, we have to go. Even if it turns out to be as far as we go.

Yeah ... and I think it might be.



Uh, Terry ... 'scuse my saying, but this place is enormous!

You think so? I mean, it's definitely got high ceilings, but ...

You haven't seen where I live. It's basically a closet.



This place and my tuition are pretty much all that's left of the family money.

My grandfather was a horrible guy. Made his fortune in every unpleasant way possible. When he died, my dad was determined to give as much of it away as he could. Trying to undo the damage, y'know?

Anyway, it's not all that. The apartments went cheap when the building was converted from a warehouse, and most of my furniture is old hand-me-downs from my family, which is why none of it matches.

I need to go back to the food. Would you like something to drink?



I didn't know you could cook, either.

Strictly a meat-and-potatoes kind of cook. So that's what we're having. Meat and potatoes. Plus asparagus and a salad.

But I can promise you a very competent steak.

And a bottle of wine that's better than its price suggests. Well, a little better.



Look, I guess I might as well get it out right now ...

I would really love it if you spent the night.

But I don't want to put you under any pressure.



Uh ... I think maybe?

Can I decide after dinner?

Also, do you mind if I take a look around? I want to see the rest of this place.

Of course not! Though there's not much to see.

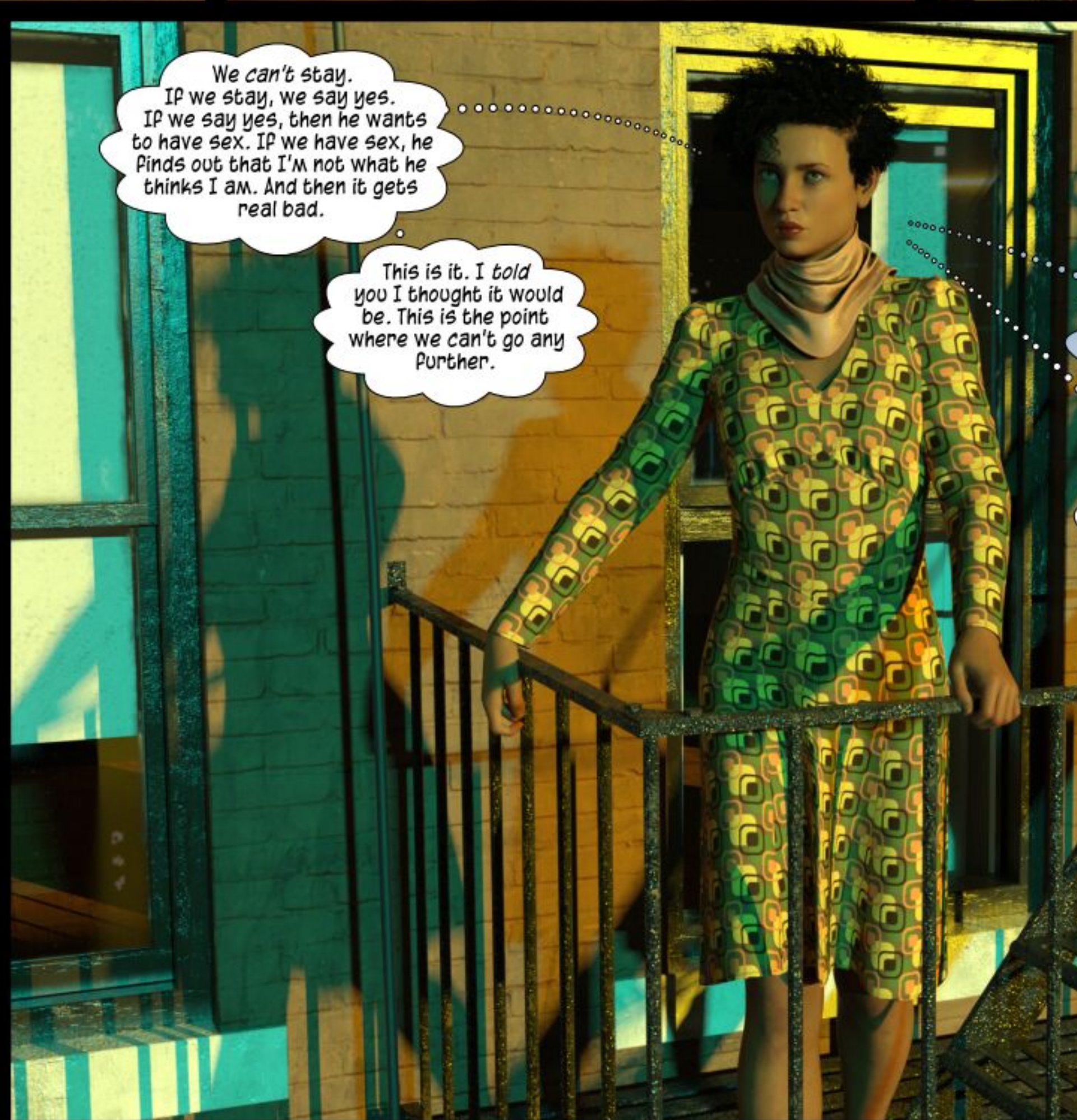
It should be reasonably clean; I did my best this afternoon ...



OK, that's what we'll do. We'll go out the fire escape.

Going to be cold getting home, though ... wonder if we can sneak down and get the coat without him seeing ...

Huh? What are you talking about? You want to run away?



We can't stay. If we stay, we say yes. If we say yes, then he wants to have sex. If we have sex, he finds out that I'm not what he thinks I am. And then it gets real bad.

This is it. I told you I thought it would be. This is the point where we can't go any further.

We could go have dinner and then tell him we didn't feel ready for that just yet ...

And how long would that buy us? He's ready, for sure.

You said you wanted to get him--what was that word you used?

InPAtuated.

That. And then break his heart. Well, he's there. It's time.



Luis, I lied to you a little.

Well, maybe more than a little.

I wasn't ever all that close to my father. Mother wasn't either, I don't think. He was always too deep into his work.

Burdon did get him sent to jail, and that was awful, but daddy wasn't a saint either. He didn't do that thing, but he did other things.

And we weren't ruined. We had enough money to keep the house and put me through college ...



I don't know what it is I have to do to ... move on ... but I knew that revenge on Burdon wasn't it.

I told you, I never thought about moving on. It was your idea. I went along because I wanted to find some way to get you out of your box.

I want to enjoy things, and I want you to enjoy things too.

You've changed so much over the past few months, and I think it's a lot better. Don't you?

Can you look me in the eye and tell me you don't think it's better?



No ... but why did it have to be with a guy? This was always going to end badly that way.

People get killed for this! When we go downstairs and he finds out I'm not a woman, I don't know what will happen! The man's using a knife right now!

Does he seem like that kind of person to you?

Well ... no. But you can't always tell--

I need to know something important.

If you were a woman ... and if I wasn't here ... if you were a woman and you'd met him and started seeing him, same as you are now, but without these other ... complications ... would you want to break up with him? Would you be unhappy with what you have?



No.

That's what I thought.

You know, you've been wrong about it from the beginning: It hasn't even been nine-tenths me. It's always been nine-tenths you. I've just been trying to steer a little bit.

I don't think you should waste time being embarrassed about enjoying being a woman, and I don't think you should be afraid of falling in love with this guy just because you think you're not supposed to be in love with a man.



There you are! How was the self-guided tour? I went ahead and opened the wine. Steaks are going on in just a minute.

Terry, I ... I've got something I need to tell you.



I'm not a woman.

Well, I mean, I guess I am ... but not in certain ways.

Uh, physically, I mean--

Damn it. I have a penis, OK? That's what I mean.

I know.



You do?

When I first saw you in the cemetery, you weren't covering your neck like you always do. You have an adam's apple.

And a couple of times when I've hugged you I've definitely noticed that there's something down there that ... well, not a lot of women have, let's say.

You've never corrected me for getting your name wrong, so I figured this is the way you like it.

"Guys don't notice things past."

OK, fine, but you already knew we had a live one.



You're ... OK with that?

I like you. You make me happy. And I'm pretty sure I make you happy too. That's the hard part.

Everything else seems like it's fairly easy to deal with.



MMMMH!

... Does this mean you're spending the night?

Yes, dooPus!



But I have to warn you ... I'm making all this up as I go ... I mean, I really don't have a clue what I'm doing.

We'll figure it out.



I guess this means you're stuck, though ... I mean, we still don't actually know what would let you move on ...

Why would I want to move on? I'm having a lot of fun.

-- MMM -- ... Me too.

END