

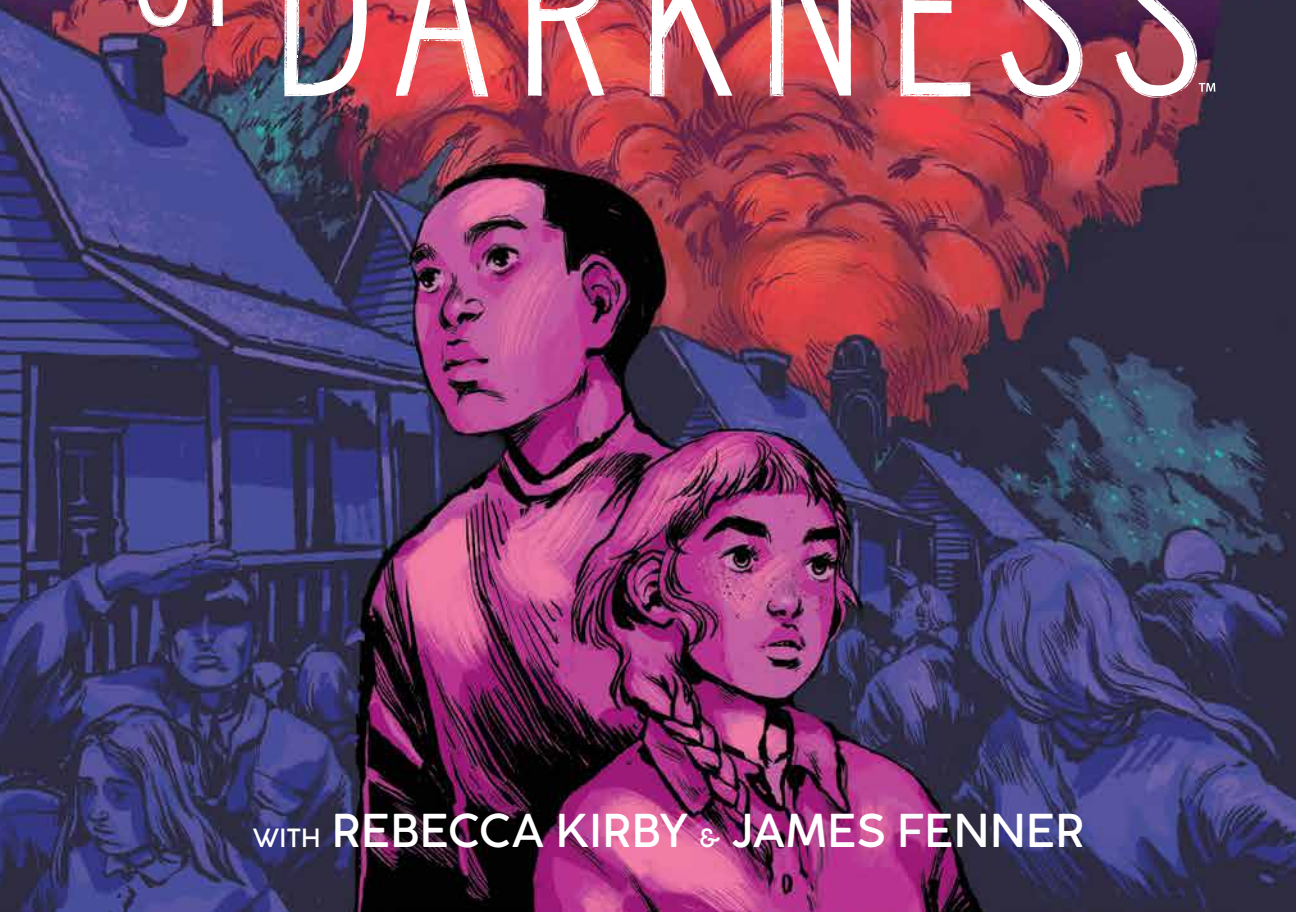
FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *BAD FEMINIST*

ROXANE
GAY

TRACY LYNNE
OLIVER



THE SACRIFICE OF DARKNESS



WITH REBECCA KIRBY & JAMES FENNER

THE SACRIFICE OF DARKNESS™

Based on the short story *We Are The Sacrifice of Darkness* by

ROXANE GAY



Published by
ARCHAIA™

THE SACR OF DAR



RIFICE RKNESS

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Special thanks to Allyson Gronowitz







THE TOWNSFOLK WOULD TELL OF THE THUNDEROUS STREAK OF HIRAM HIGHTOWER'S AIR MACHINE AS IT HEADED LIKE A SPEAR TOWARDS THE SUN THAT DAY.



ROARRRRRRRRRRRR

THE MINERS WOULD TELL OF THE SOUND OF TRIUMPH IN THAT ROAR.





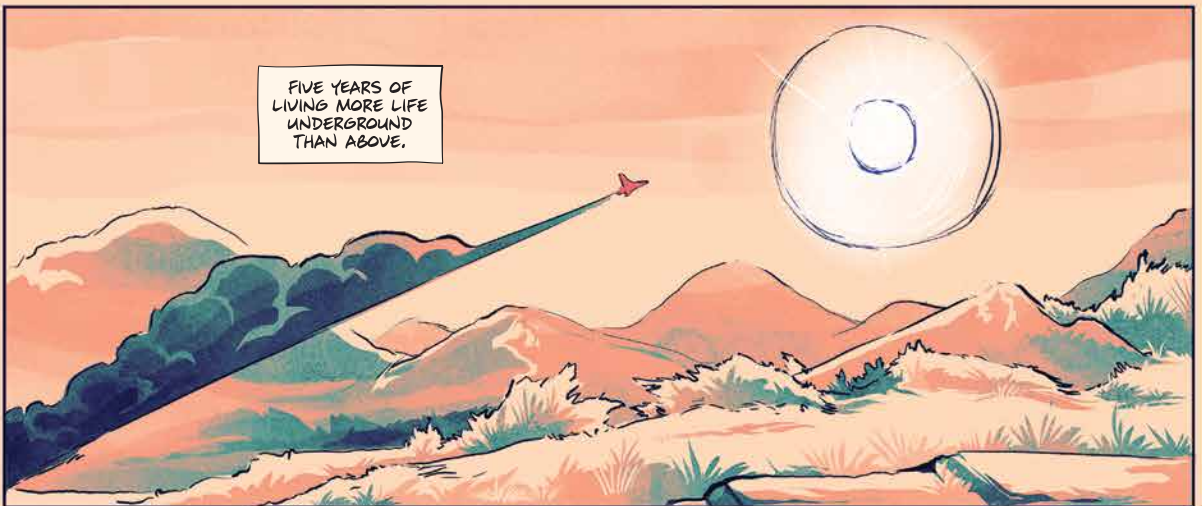
A MAN WITH RESOLUTE STRENGTH, IT TOOK FIVE YEARS FOR THE MINES TO FINALLY BREAK HIRAM DOWN.



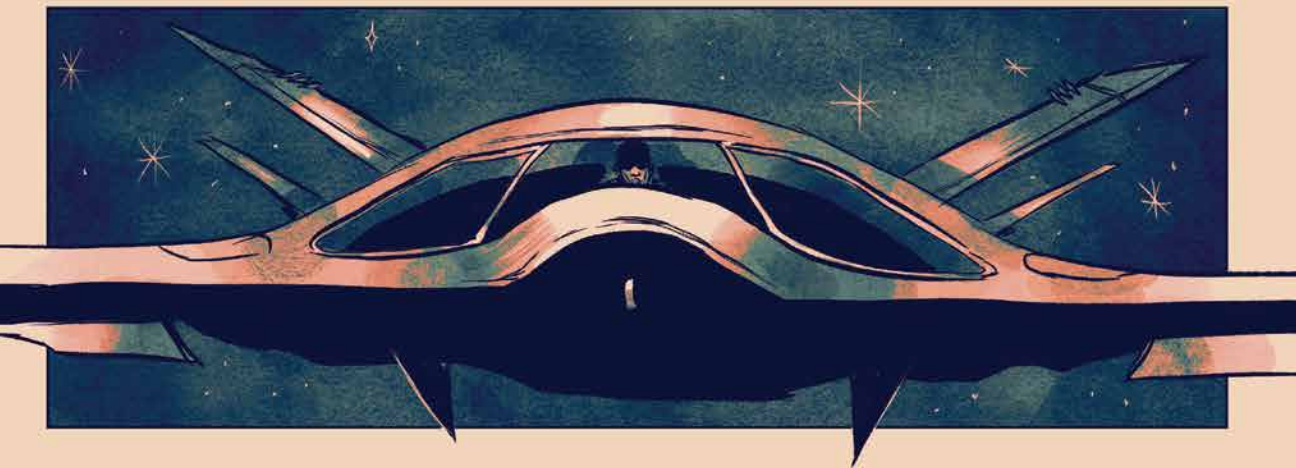
FIVE YEARS OF DARKNESS INSTEAD OF FAMILY.



FIVE YEARS OF KNOWING MORE COLD THAN WARMTH.



FIVE YEARS OF LIVING MORE LIFE UNDERGROUND THAN ABOVE.

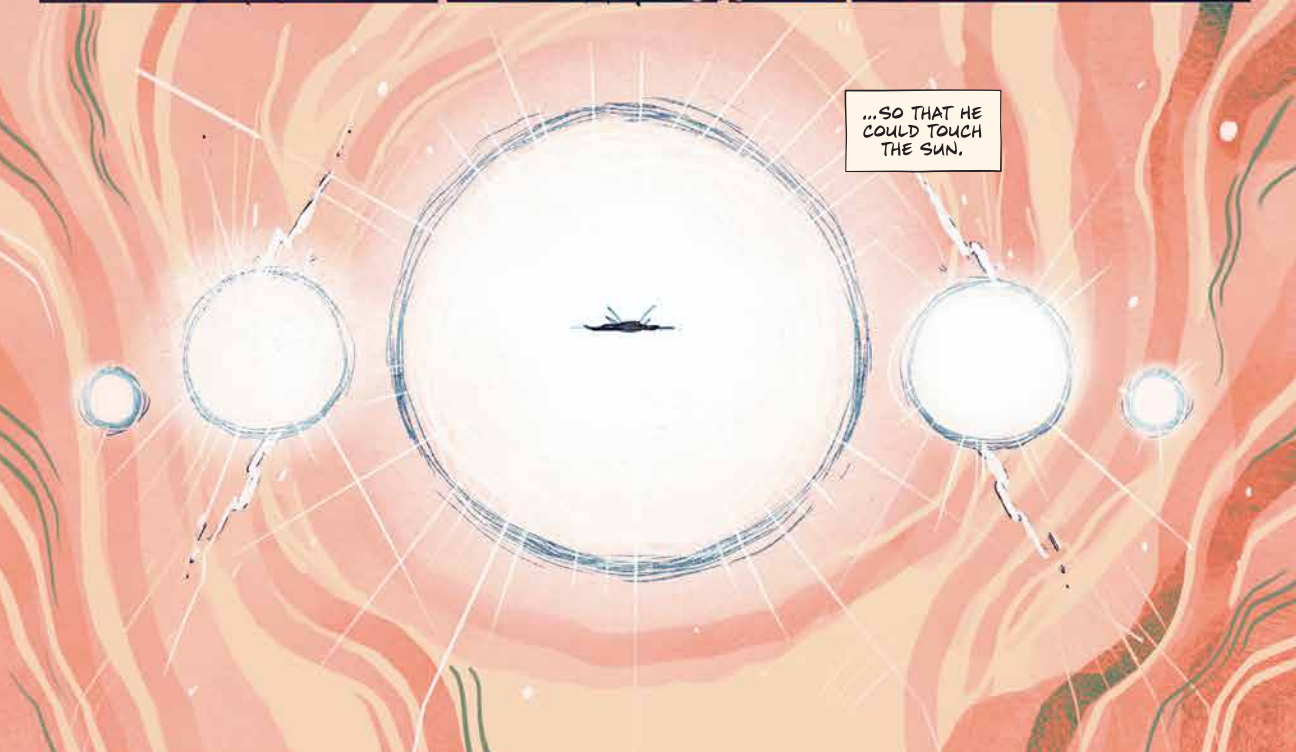


FIVE YEARS TO
RIP THE MINER'S
HEART FROM HIS
CHEST...



... AND SEND
HIM AWAY FROM
EVERYTHING HE
LOVED...

... SO THAT HE
COULD TOUCH
THE SUN.





ALL WOULD TELL OF HOW THE SUN GREW BRIGHTER, THEN BLINDING, THEN SMALLER AND SMALLER, AS IT FILLED HIRAM HIGHTOWER UP WITH THE LIGHT HE'D CRAVED FOR SO MANY YEARS, WORKING IN THE COLD, LONELY MINES.



THE MINERS WOULD TELL HOW, ON THAT FATEFUL DAY, THEY BELIEVED HIRAM HAD FINALLY FOUND PEACE.



THEY WOULD TELL OF THE BRIGHT RED CREASE APPEARING IN THE SKY AFTER THE SUN DISAPPEARED.



HOW THE AIR CHILLED AND THE WORLD GREW COLD.



HOW THAT WAS THE DAY THE LIGHT LEFT THEM.



CLAIRE OLIVIA BERTRAND! GET OUT OF THOSE TREES RIGHT N--

CRACK



I'M OKAY!



WHAT IS IT, MAMA?



I DON'T KNOW, BEAR...



THE CURFEW IS NOW ENGAGED.

ANYONE FOUND OUTSIDE FROM SEVEN PM TO SEVEN AM WILL BE ARRESTED.

PLEASE REMAIN INSIDE YOUR HOMES. THE CURFEW IS NOW ENGAGED.



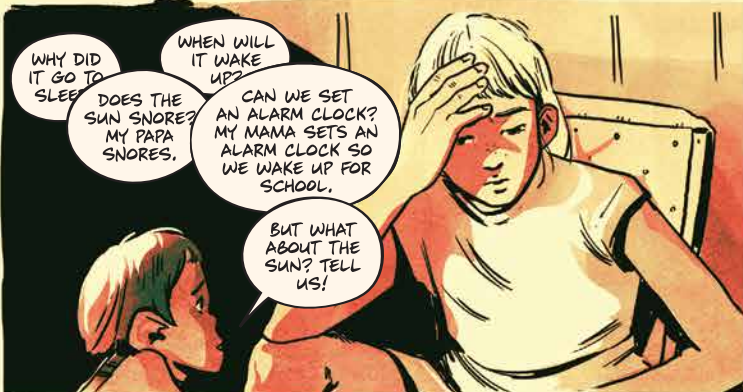
I'M SCARED OF THE DARK!

WHEN CAN WE PLAY OUTSIDE AGAIN?



I TOLD YOU, HONEY, THE SUN WENT TO SLEEP. WE'RE WAITING FOR IT TO WAKE UP.

UNTIL THEN, WE'RE GOING TO PLAY INSIDE, OKAY?



WHY DID IT GO TO SLEEP?

WHEN WILL IT WAKE UP?

DOES THE SUN SNORE? MY PAPA SNORES.

CAN WE SET AN ALARM CLOCK? MY MAMA SETS AN ALARM CLOCK SO WE WAKE UP FOR SCHOOL.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SUN? TELL US!



I DON'T KNOW, CHILDREN. I JUST DON'T KNOW.

HOW CONFUSION AND CHAOS REIGNED IN THOSE EARLY DAYS OF NEW DARK.

RED CREASE CONTINUES TO DECREASE IN SIZE

"In the seventeen days since the event, we can now confirm the red crease has lessened by approximately 38%," Professor Winters announced on Tuesday. "We predict the darkness will be fully realized by the end of the month." Disheartening news for the world trying to adjust to this catastrophe.

I CAN TRADE THESE BATTERIES FOR SOME GASOLINE.

HOW MUCH FIREWOOD CAN I GET FOR THESE CANDLES?

WE NEED FLASHLIGHTS. WHO CAN TRADE ME FLASHLIGHTS?

WILL THEY BE OPEN TODAY?

THEY SAID THEY'D TRY. LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, THEY JUST WANT TO GET THINGS BACK TO NORMAL.

I PRAY FOR NORMAL.

HOW LONG WILL IT BE LIKE THIS?

WE CAN'T KEEP PLOWING IN THE DARK! THIS IS MADNESS!

IF THIS GOES ON ANY LONGER, WE'LL HAVE TO ARRANGE FOR PHOTON REPLICAS. YOU KNOW HOW EXPENSIVE THAT WILL BE!



IT WAS ONE OF US AND SOON ENOUGH THE WORLD'S GONNA KNOW IT.

'BOUT TIME THEY GOT A TASTE OF THE DARKNESS WE LIVE WITH EVERY DAMN DAY!

FIVE YEARS OF DOUBLE-SHIFTS, SIX DAYS A WEEK, DIGGING FOR FLAREON, WHAT DID THEY EXPECT?!

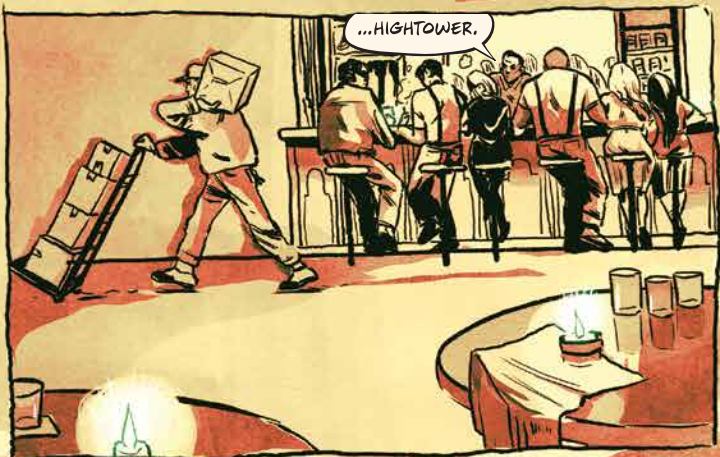
AS LONG AS WE CAN PROTECT HIS NAME, NO REVENGE WILL COME UPON HIS FAMILY.



HIRAM...

...COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE...

...FLEW IT RIGHT INTO THE SUN!



...HIGHTOWER.



HIRAM

HIGHTOWER

HIRAM

HIGHTOWER!



... HIRAM HIGHTOWER...



... AN AIR MACHINE, RIGHT INTO THE SUN!



... HIRAM HIGHTOWER...



... HIRAM HIGHTOWER...



... HIRAM HIGHTOWER...



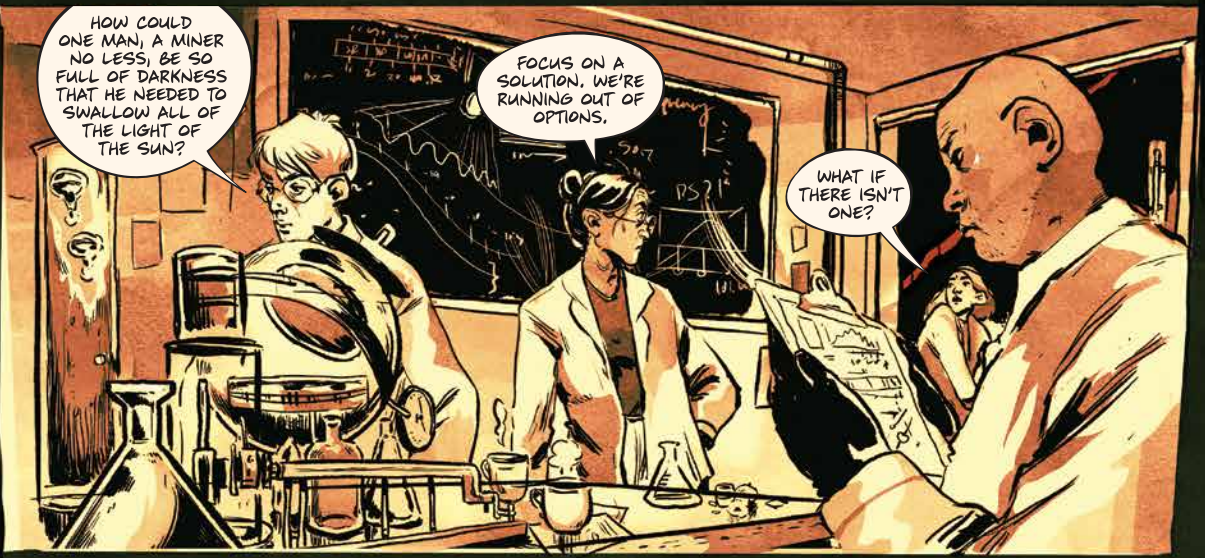
HOW THE SCIENTISTS WORKED IN THE DARK OF DAY FOR SOLUTIONS ON HOW THE WORLD COULD BE PUT RIGHT.

SEVERAL WEEKS AND IT'S STILL PULSING. IT'S REGENERATING, I TELL YOU!

WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

TIME WILL SOON TELL.

HAVE THE FOREIGN REPORTS BEEN RECEIVED? I'D LIKE TO REVIEW THEIR DATA AS WELL.



HOW COULD ONE MAN, A MINOR NO LESS, BE SO FULL OF DARKNESS THAT HE NEEDED TO SWALLOW ALL OF THE LIGHT OF THE SUN?

FOCUS ON A SOLUTION, WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS.

WHAT IF THERE ISN'T ONE?




THEY'VE ALL ENCOUNTERED THE SAME IMPASSES WE HAVE.

WE'VE FAILED. THE SUN IS GONE.

WHAT WILL BECOME OF US? THE WORLD?


WE MUST INFORM THE COUNCIL.



HOW THE CORONA COUNCIL
CONVENED ONCE MORE. THE
FEAR, FOR ONCE, SOMETHING
GREATER THAN THEIR GREED.



WE MUST
CEASE THE
HUNT FOR
FLAREON. WE
MUST CLOSE
THE MINES!



BUT HOW
WILL WE REPLACE
THE ENORMOUS
PROFITS FLAREON
BRINGS US?

IT NO LONGER
MATTERS! THEY MUST
BE CLOSED. WE DON'T
KNOW WHAT ANOTHER
MINER MIGHT DO.

IT IS
DECIDED.
THE MINES
WILL BE
CLOSED.

INSTRUCT THE MAYOR
TO ENLIST ALL MINERS IN
GAS LAMP INSTALLATION.
OUR STREETS MUST NO
LONGER REMAIN DARK.



NOW THAT THE MINES ARE CLOSED WE NEED YOU TO LIGHT OUR CITY.



BUT, I'M A MINER... NOT A LAMP MAKER.



GAS LAMPS WILL NEED TO BE BUILT.



INSTALLED AND MAINTAINED.



THERE WILL BE TEAMS EACH MORNING AND EXTINGUISH THEM EACH NIGHT.



SCRAPPERS BROKE INTO THE MINES AGAIN.

IF THEY'RE SMART THEY'LL SELL ANY GAINS FOUR TOWNS OVER. NOBODY HERE WANTS ANYTHING TO DO WITH THOSE MINES.



I KNOW YOU LOVED THEM.

THE CORONA COUNCIL TOOK THAT LOVE FROM ME. TOOK IT FROM US ALL.



OUR CITIZENS NEED TO HAVE A SEMBLANCE OF DAYS AND NIGHTS.

HOW MINERS
BECAME WORKERS
ABOVE GROUND
INSTEAD OF BELOW.



A HALF-DOZEN
FAMILIES HAVE
LEFT. MINERS WERE
MEANT TO MINE, I
TELL YOU.

I AGREE,
BUT THE NEAREST
MINES ARE SEVEN
REGIONS AWAY. MY
HOME IS HERE,
MINES OR
NOT.



HEY YOU TWO,
LESS TALKING,
MORE CARRYING!
MAYOR WANTS
THE LAMPS LIT
BY THE END OF
THE MONTH!



AND THE
MAYOR ALWAYS
GETS WHAT HE
WANTS.



I MISS
MINING.

GOD
BLESS HIRAM
HIGHTOWER.



WITH GAS LAMPS
INSTALLED IN 90% OF THE
CITY'S STREETS AND
GATHERING SPACES...



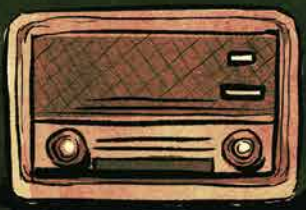
... THE MAYOR
PREDICTS THE GRAND
LIGHTING CEREMONY
WILL TAKE PLACE AS
SCHEDULED.



IT'S BEEN THREE MONTHS OF
HARD WORK. I CAN'T WAIT FOR
OUR CITIZENS TO HAVE THEIR
STREETS LIT DURING WHAT WE
ONCE KNEW AS DAYTIME.



THE
GOOD PEOPLE
OF THIS TOWN
HAVE SUFFERED
ENOUGH.



'BOUT
TIME.

IF THE LIGHTS
COME ON, I'LL BE
ABLE TO SEE YOUR
HANDSOME FACE
BETTER.



YOU BETTER
HOPE THEY
BURN OUT... FOR
YOUR WIFE'S
SAKE!





FOR MANY MONTHS OUR DAYS AND NIGHTS HAVE MERGED INTO ONE.



MAY THE LIGHT FROM THESE LAMPS RETURN OUR DAYS AND NIGHTS TO US.



MAMA, WHEN IS THE LIGHT COMING?

ANY MINUTE NOW, BABY.



MAY THEIR GLOW PROVIDE US WITH THE MEMORY OF THE SUN'S WARMTH.

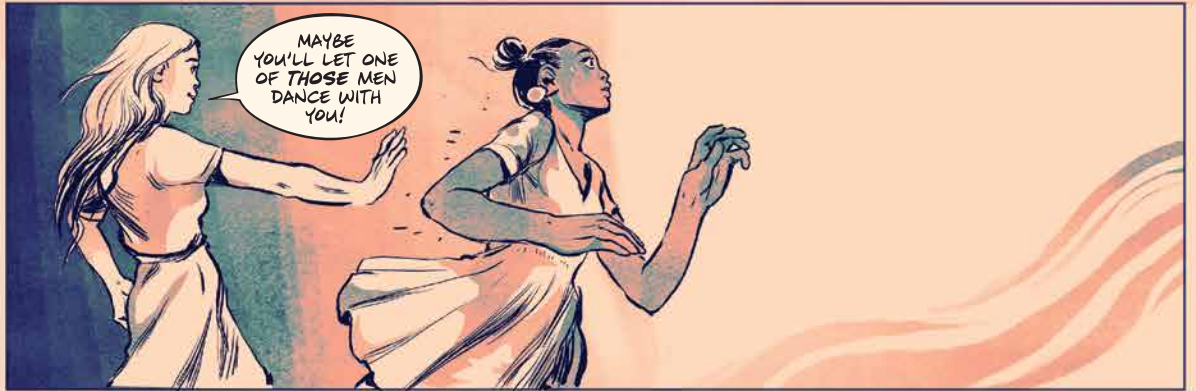


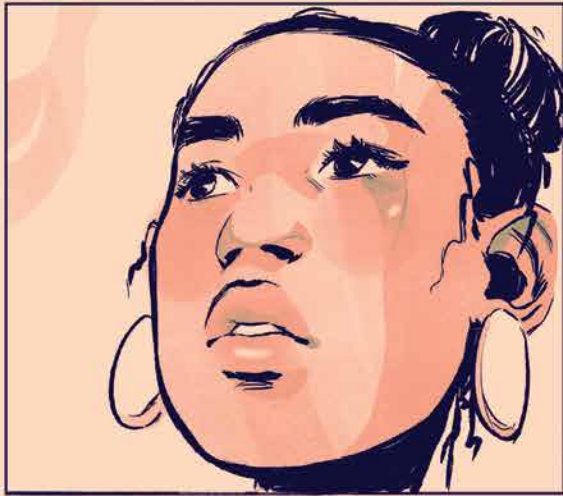
...SO, WITH NO FURTHER ADO, LIGHT THE LAMPS!

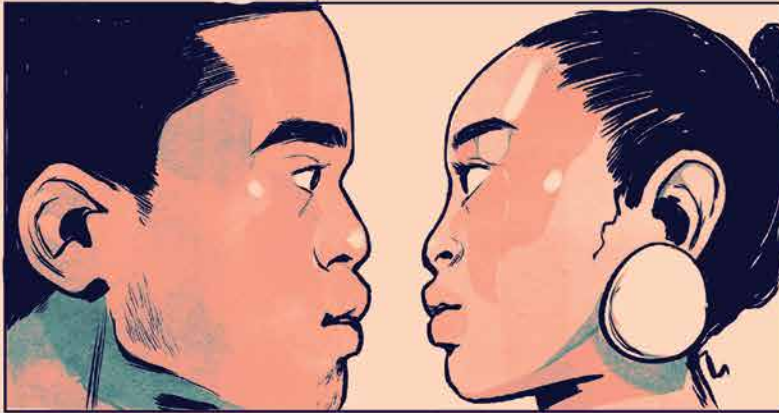
THAT MOMENT MARKED A NEW RARITY, PURE JOY BECAME SOMETHING SOUGHT AFTER, WORKED HARD FOR. ITS SPONTANEITY GONE, ALONG WITH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN.

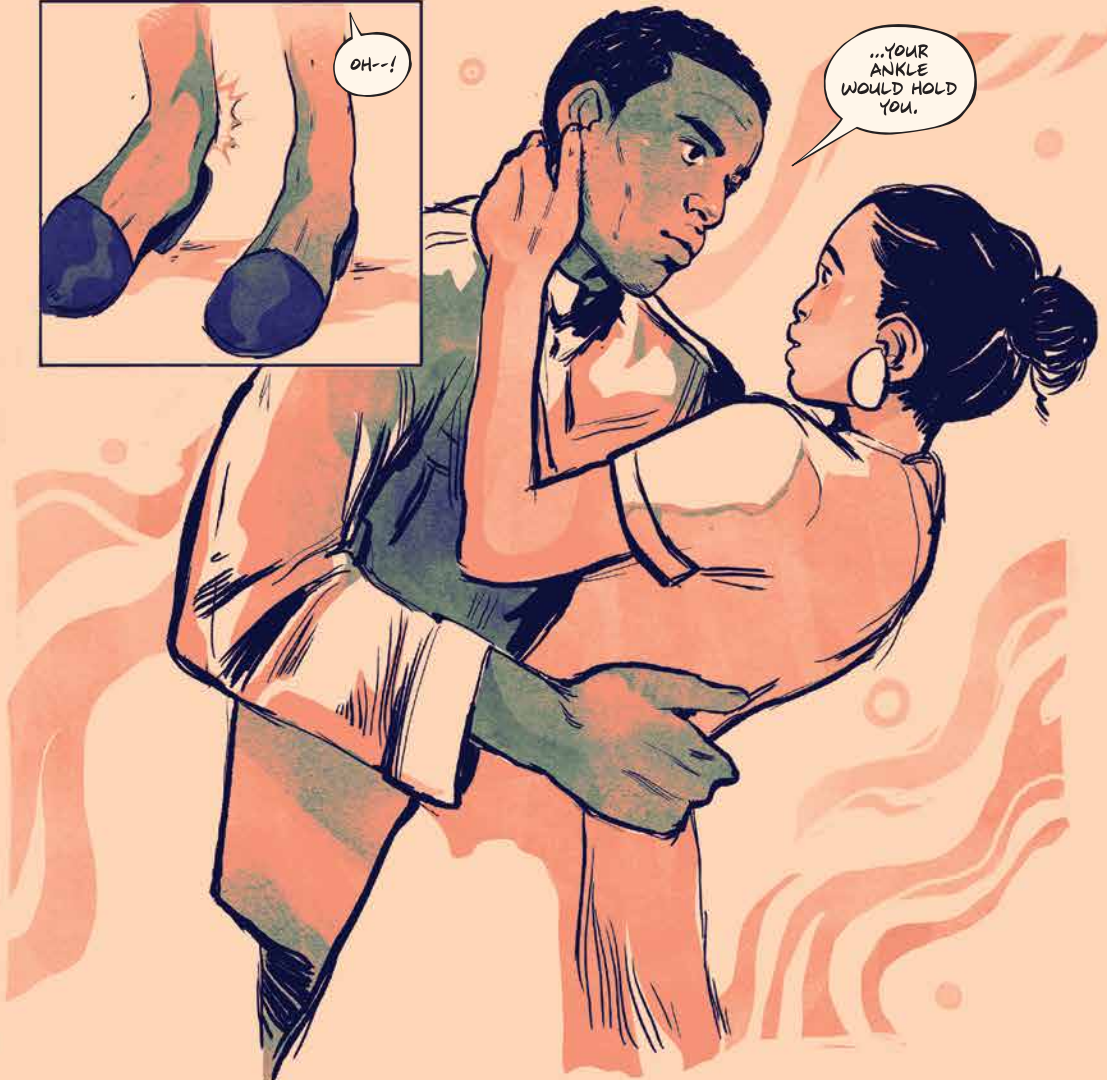


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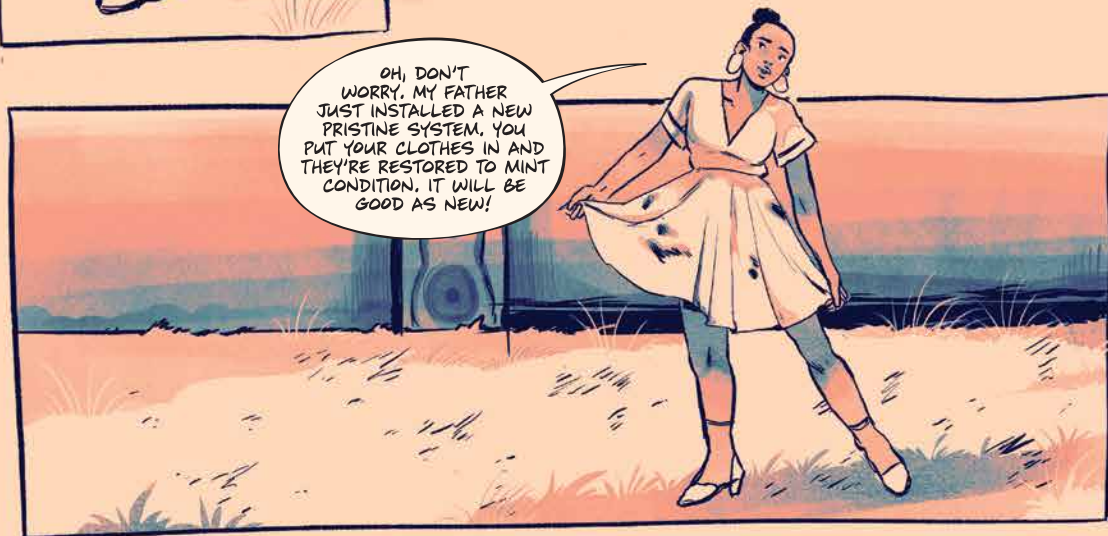


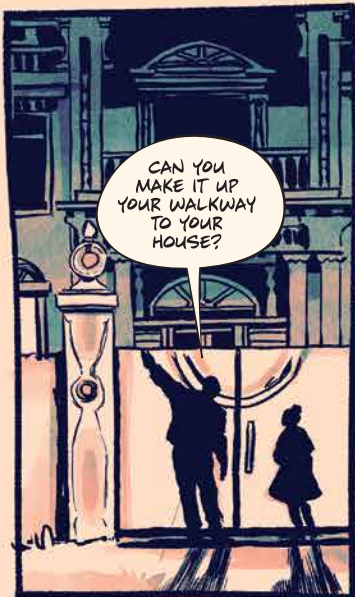










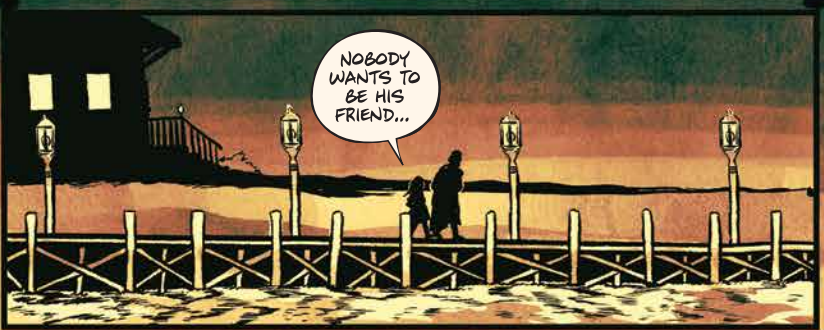




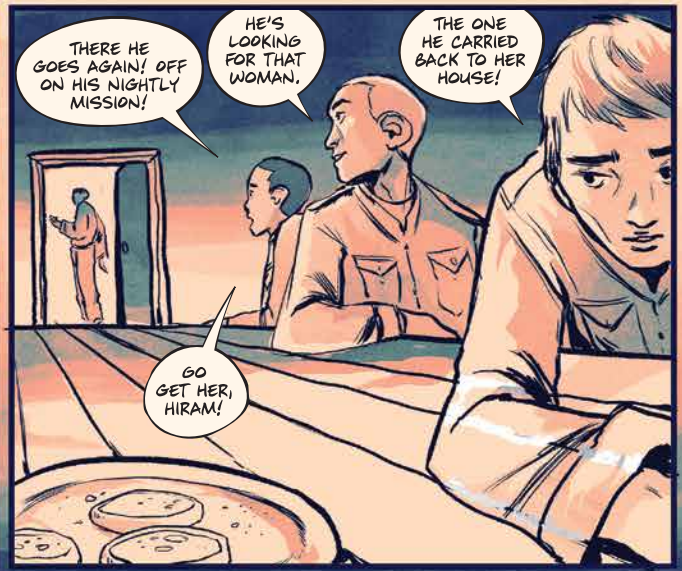
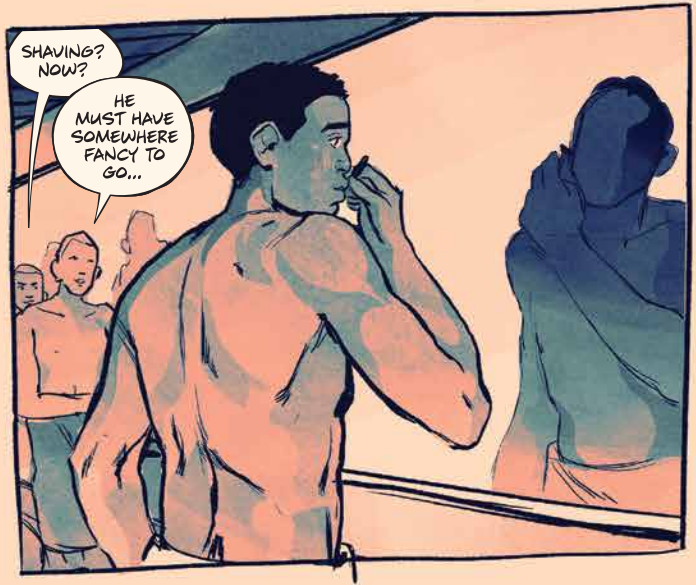
AFTER...













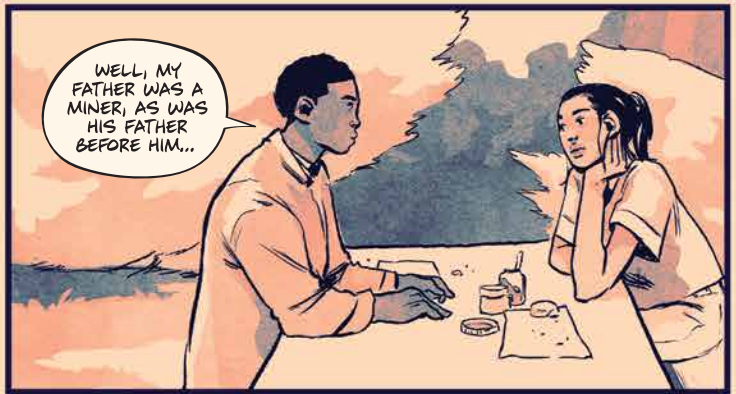


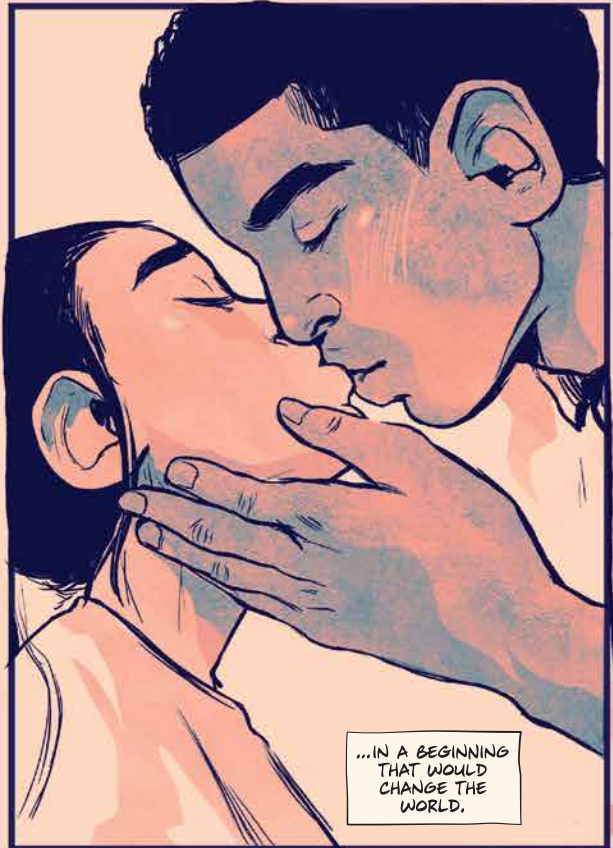
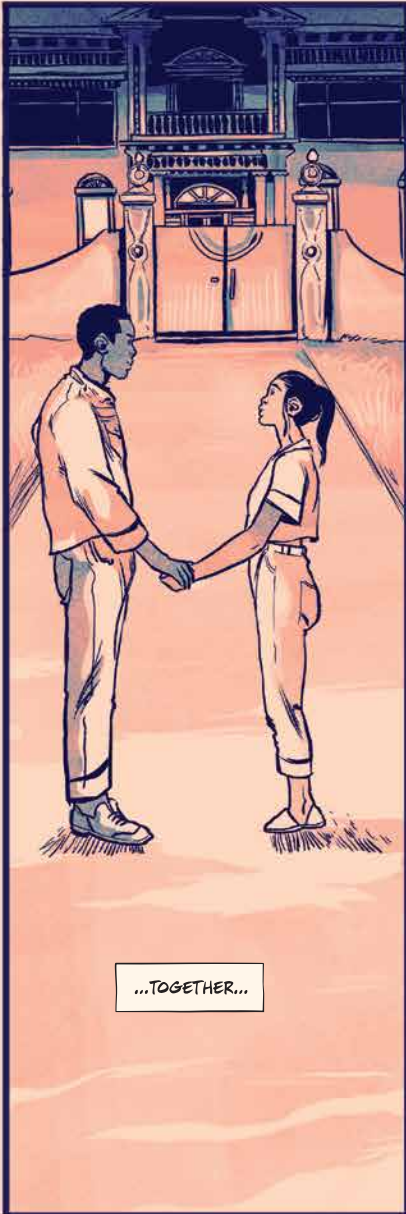










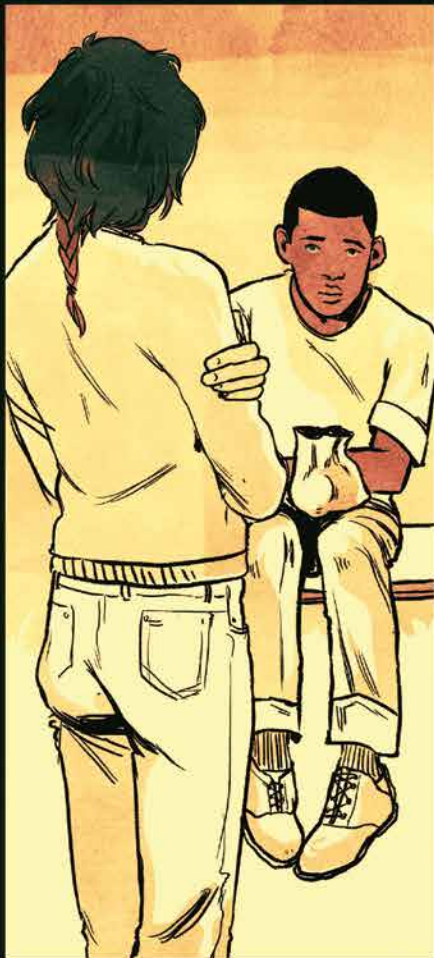


AFTER...

THE NEXT DAY,
INTENT ON HER
MISSION, CLAIRE
STUDIED JOSHUA.

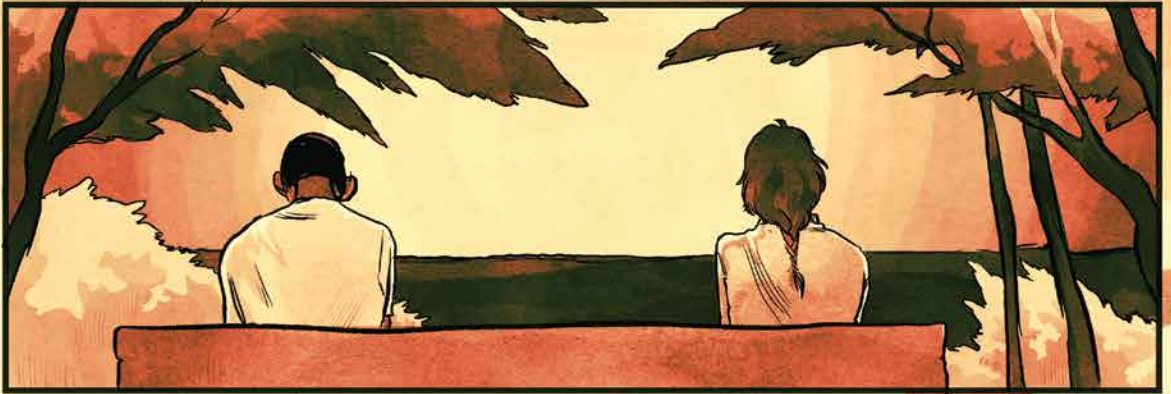


MAY I
SIT WITH
YOU?





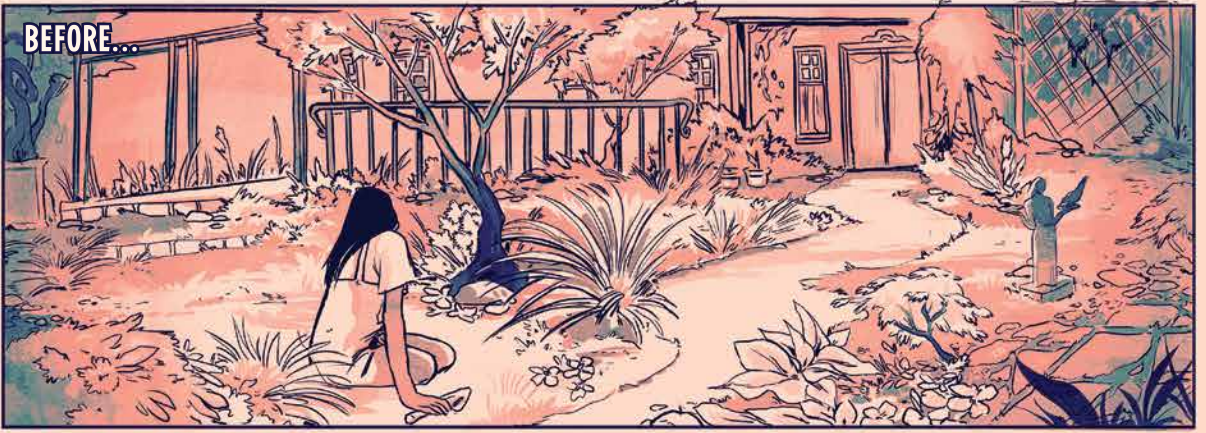








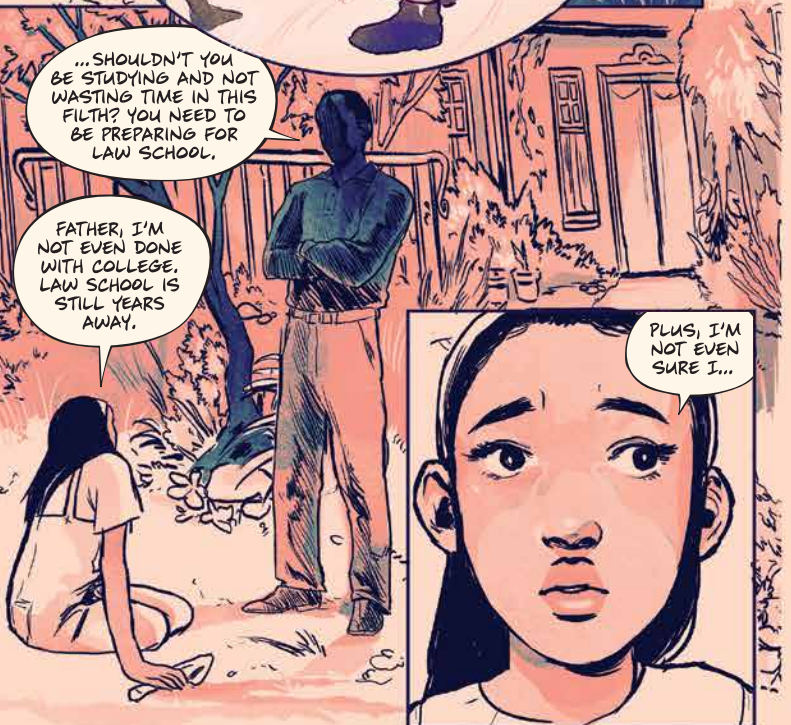
BEFORE...



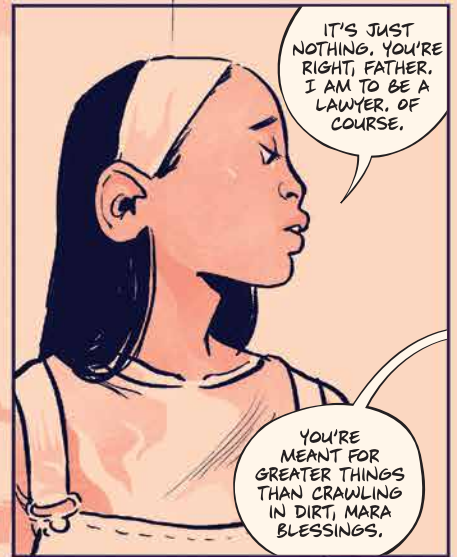
REALLY, MARA...

...SHOULDN'T YOU BE STUDYING AND NOT WASTING TIME IN THIS FILTH? YOU NEED TO BE PREPARING FOR LAW SCHOOL.

FATHER, I'M NOT EVEN DONE WITH COLLEGE. LAW SCHOOL IS STILL YEARS AWAY.



PLUS, I'M NOT EVEN SURE I...



AFTER...

CLAIRE AND JOSHUA AVOIDED EACH OTHER FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS.



WHEN ONE WOULD MAKE EYE CONTACT, THE OTHER WOULD QUICKLY LOOK AWAY.



EACH OF THEM VERY MUCH AWARE OF THE OTHER PRETENDING NOT TO BE AWARE.



I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT.



I... I WOULD LIKE TO VISIT YOUR HOME.



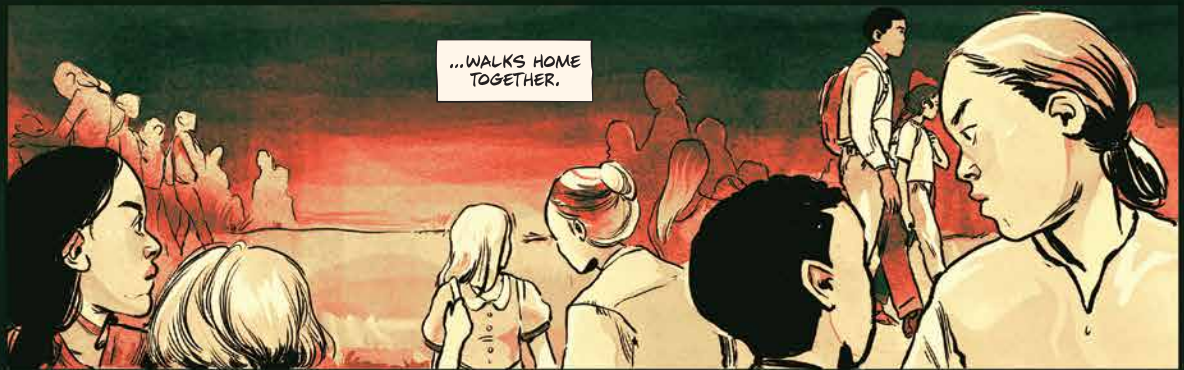
DOING THEIR
BEST TO AVOID
THE STARES...



...CLAIRE AND
JOSHUA MADE
THEIR FIRST OF
MANY...

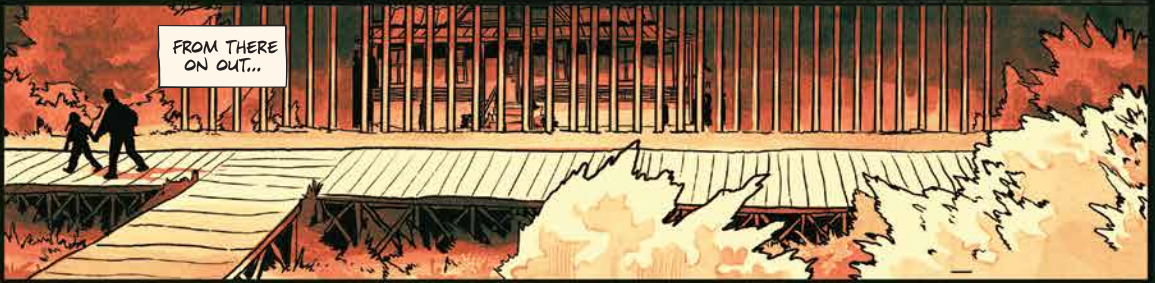


...WALKS HOME
TOGETHER.









FROM THERE
ON OUT...



... CLAIRE AND
JOSHUA...



... WERE RARELY
APART.



THANK
YOU.



LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN BEAT YESTERDAY'S RECORD!



TAP tap STOMP

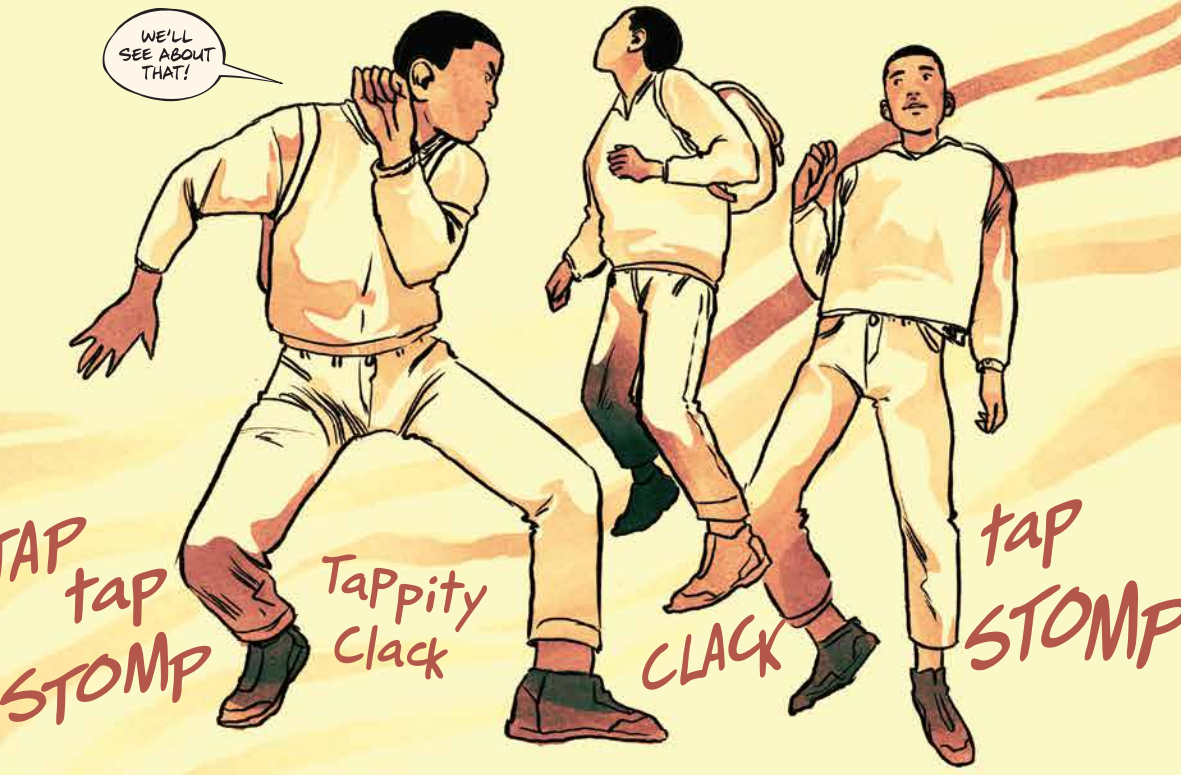
CLACK

TAP STOMP



OKAY, YOUR TURN! THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN MATCH THAT!

WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!

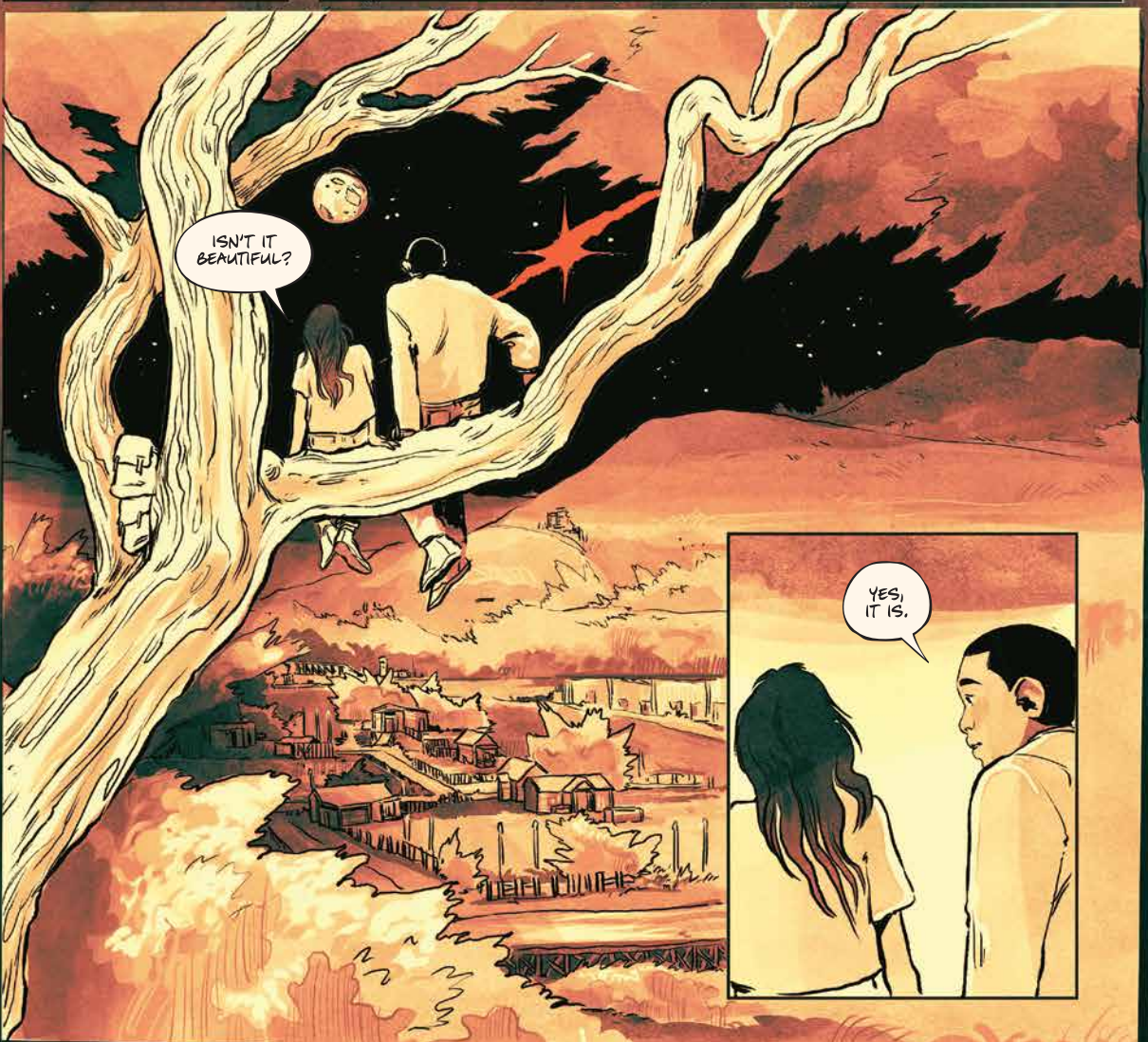


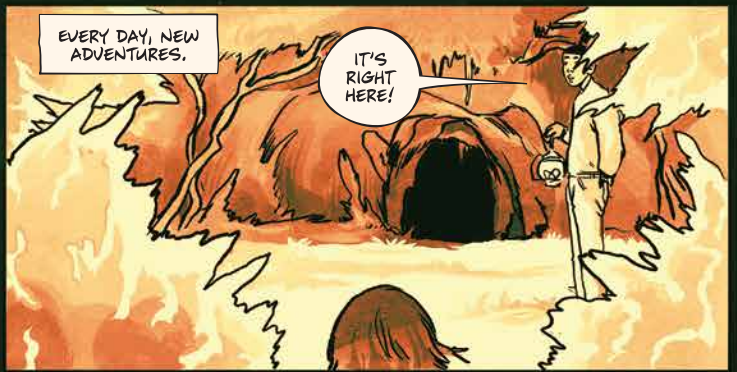
TAP tap STOMP

Tappity Clack

CLACK

tap STOMP





BEFORE...

I CAN'T
EAT ANOTHER
BITE!

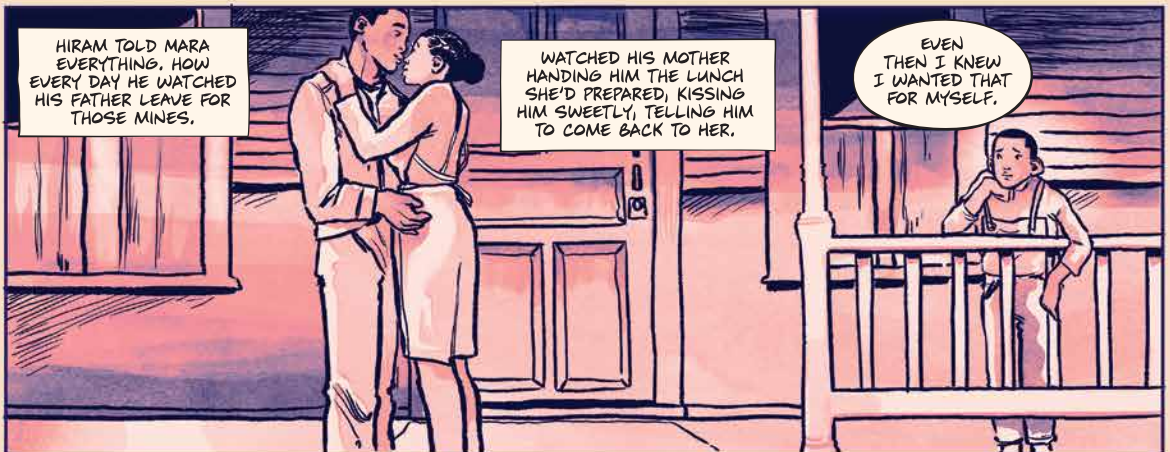
THAT'S
WHAT YOU SAID
TEN BITES
AGO!

WELL, IF
YOU WOULDN'T
KEEP MAKING SUCH
DELICIOUS MEALS
MISS BLESSINGS, I
WOULDN'T BE SO
TEMPTED.

WELL, I'M GOING
TO KEEP MAKING YOU
DELICIOUS MEALS, MR.
HIGHTOWER, SO YOU'D
BETTER LEARN HOW TO
EAT SOME AND SAVE
SOME FOR LATER.

THE GUYS TELL ME
I'VE PUT ON AT LEAST
TWENTY POUNDS IN THE
LAST SIX MONTHS. MAYBE
I'D BETTER DO WHAT
YOU SUGGEST.

YOU'VE
NEVER LOOKED
BETTER, MR.
HIGHTOWER.



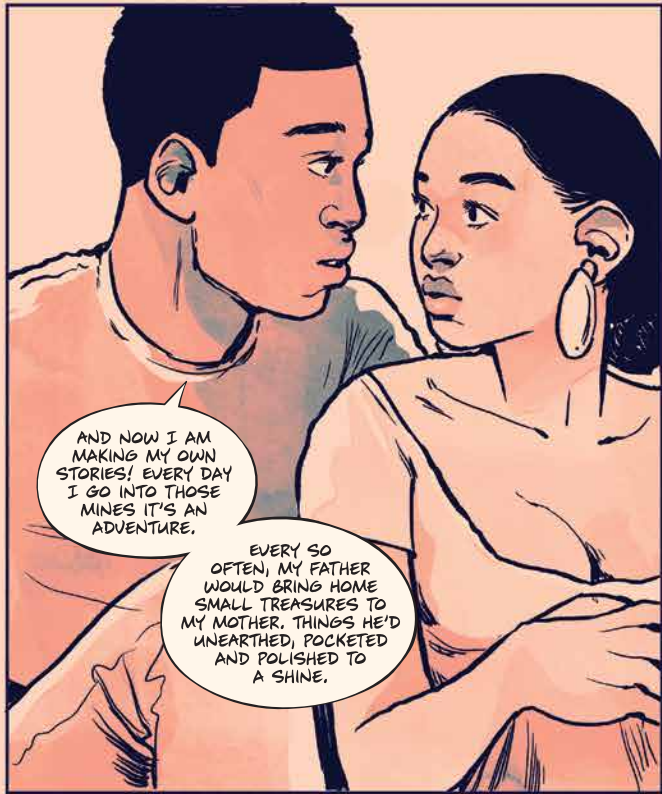
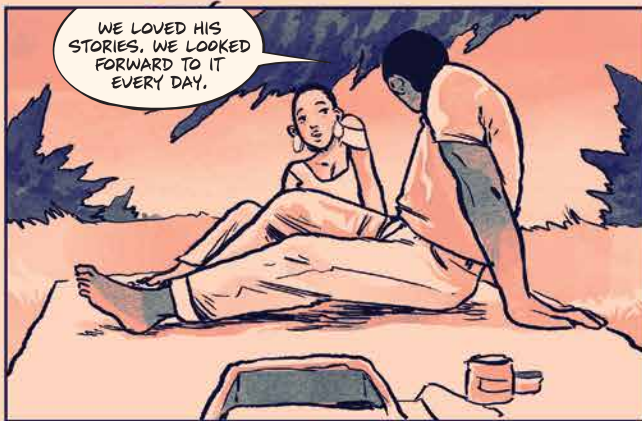
HIRAM TOLD MARA HOW EVERY DAY HE WATCHED HIS FATHER RETURN FROM THOSE MINES, DIRTY, SMELLY, TIRED AND HUNGRY, BUT SO VERY HAPPY.



HOW, OVER DINNER, HE WOULD TELL HIS FAMILY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY; ALL THE THINGS THEY'D UNCOVERED, HOW DEEP THEY DUG, ANY FUNNY STORIES ABOUT HIS WORK MATES.

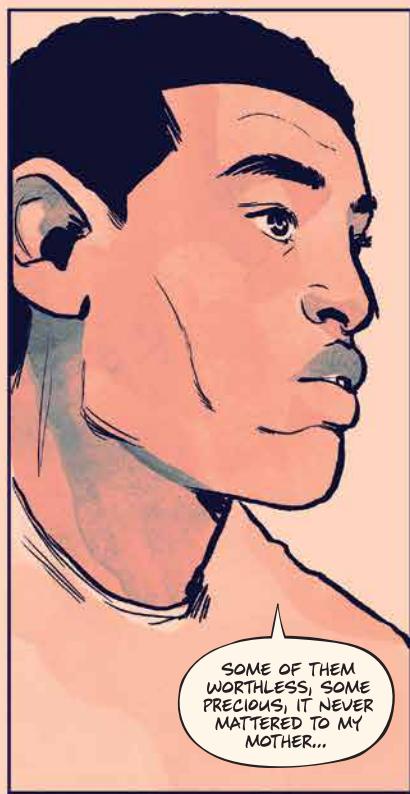


WE LOVED HIS STORIES. WE LOOKED FORWARD TO IT EVERY DAY.



AND NOW I AM MAKING MY OWN STORIES! EVERY DAY I GO INTO THOSE MINES IT'S AN ADVENTURE.

EVERY SO OFTEN, MY FATHER WOULD BRING HOME SMALL TREASURES TO MY MOTHER. THINGS HE'D UNEARTHED, POCKETED AND POLISHED TO A SHINE.



SOME OF THEM WORTHLESS, SOME PRECIOUS, IT NEVER MATTERED TO MY MOTHER...



...TO MY MOTHER, THEY MEANT EVERYTHING.



I BURIED HER WITH THOSE TREASURES. AND WHEN MY FATHER PASSED, HE WAS BURIED ALONGSIDE HER.



AND NOW?



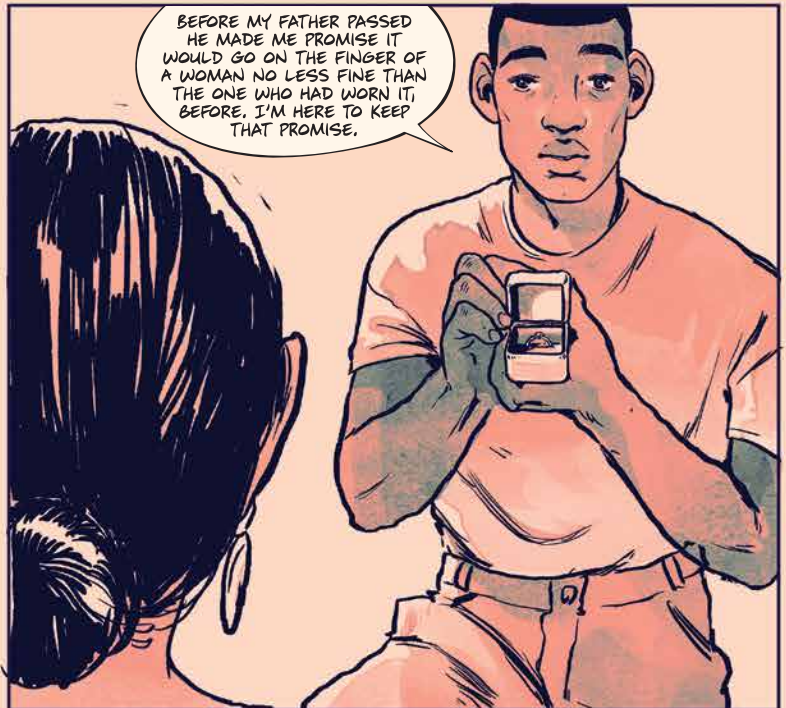
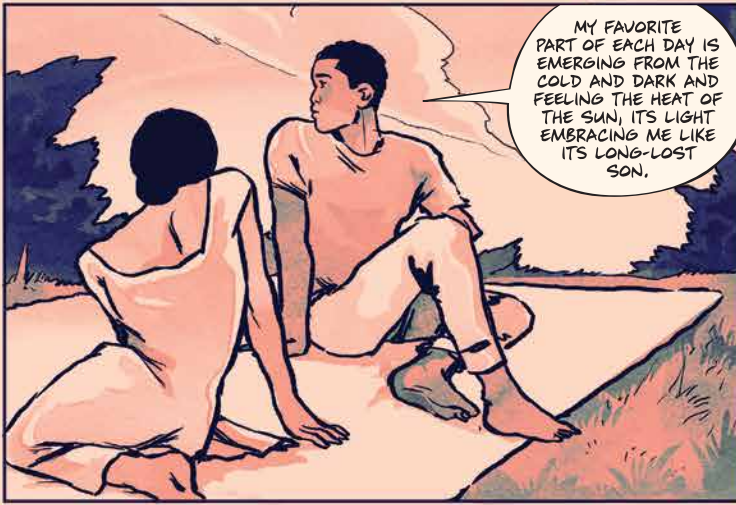
THERE'S A BEAUTY TO MINING THAT MANY WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND. THE MAGIC OF UNEARTHING ANCIENT THINGS. PARTS AND PIECES OF BIGGER THINGS.

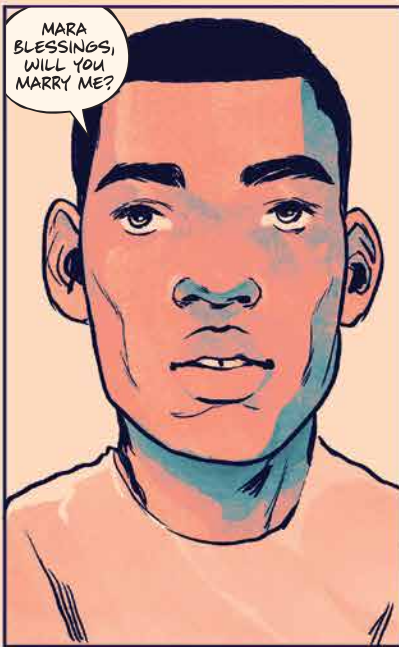


NOW? NOW I WAKE UP EVERY DAY EXCITED TO DO WHAT I LOVE.



MINING IS THE DESIRE TO UNCOVER. TO SEARCH. TO DIG FOR PRECIOUS THINGS. TO BE CONTENT IN THE FINDING AS WELL AS THE NOT FINDING. TO MINE IS TO HAVE FAITH IN THE UNSEEN.







YOU CANNOT MARRY HIM! YOU WILL NOT BE A MINER'S WIFE! THAT IS NOT THE LIFE WE WANT FOR YOU!



MY LIFE IS NOT YOURS TO WANT FOR, FATHER. IT IS MINE, AND I WANT A LIFE WITH HIRAM.



JUST THE FLEETING CRUSH OF A YOUNG GIRL, INDEED.



IF THIS IS YOUR CHOICE, YOU MUST LEAVE OUR HOME, IMMEDIATELY.

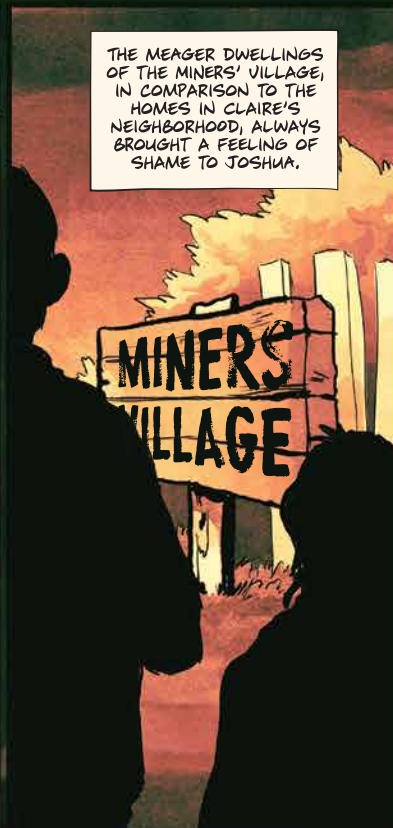


I MAY BE A YOUNG GIRL, FATHER, BUT HIRAM IS MUCH MORE THAN A CRUSH AND MY LOVE FOR HIM IS THE OPPOSITE OF FLEETING.





AFTER...





HI KIDS! HOMEWORK AGAIN?

YES!



HAD A GOOD DAY, CLAIRE-BEAR?



GOOD AS ANY!



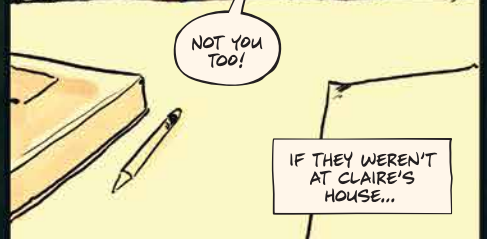
ANY NEW BRUISES?

MOOOOOOOOOO!



WHAT? ISN'T IT TRUE, JOSHUA, THAT THIS GIRL CAN'T GO A DAY WITHOUT A BRUISE?

ONE HUNDRED PERCENT TRUE!



NOT YOU TOO!

IF THEY WEREN'T AT CLAIRE'S HOUSE...



JOSHUA...



WHAT, CLAIRE?



YOU HAVE CREAM ON YOUR NOSE.



... THEY WERE AT JOSHUA'S.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.



YOUR NOSE, SILLY. THERE'S WHIPPED CREAM ON IT!



YOU'RE THE ONE WITH CREAM ON YOUR NOSE!





WHEN I WAS LITTLE WE'D ALL SIT ON THIS BENCH AND MY FATHER WOULD TELL ME I WAS BORN IN THIS GARDEN.



HOW THEY PLANTED ME RIGHT ALONGSIDE THE PEAS AND BEANS UNTIL I WAS RIPE AND READY.

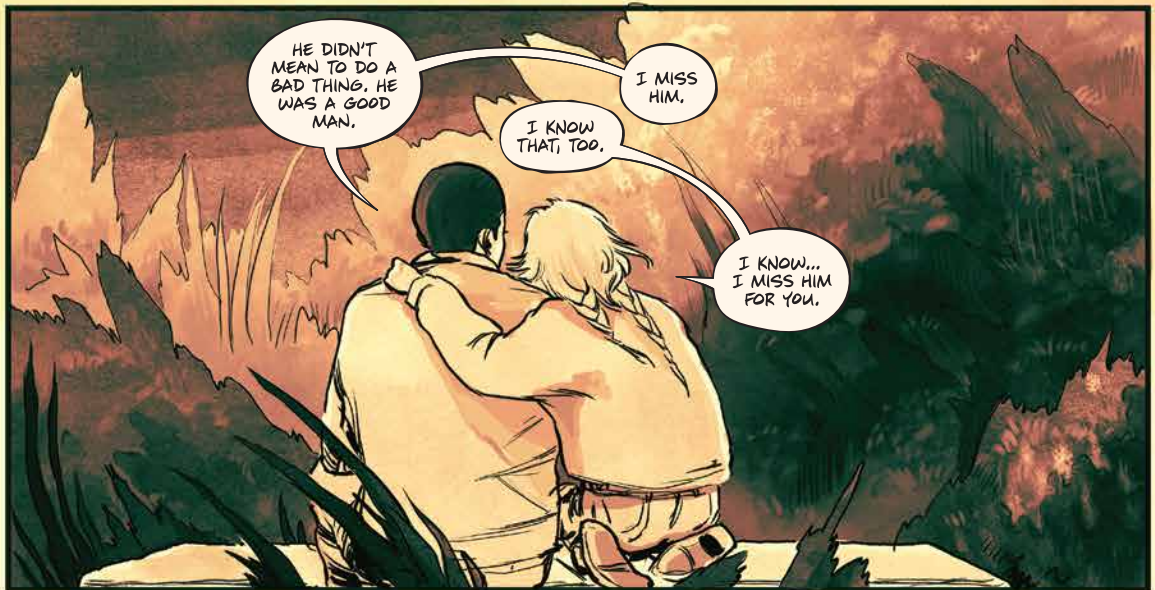


PRETTY SILLY, HUH?



MY FATHER IS UP THERE SOMEWHERE.

I KNOW.



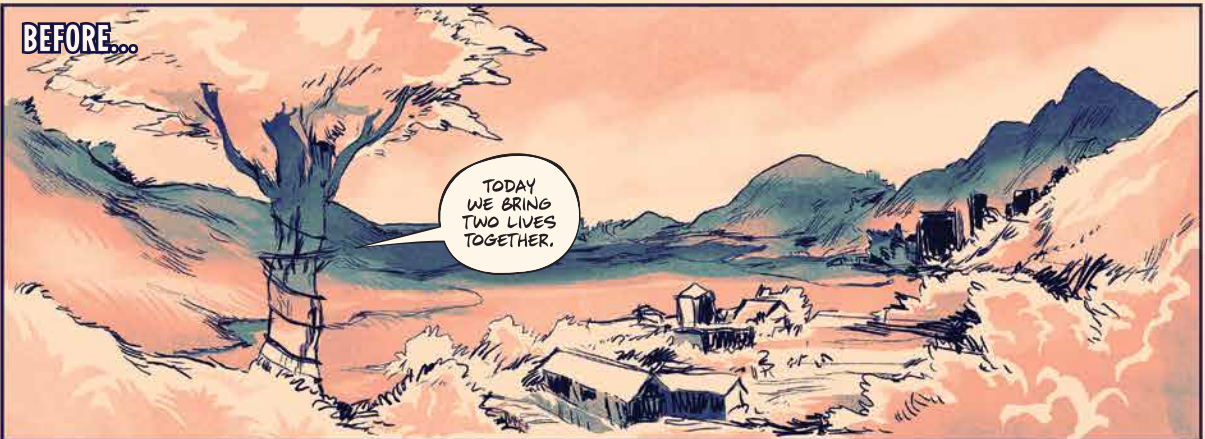
HE DIDN'T MEAN TO DO A BAD THING, HE WAS A GOOD MAN.

I KNOW THAT, TOO.

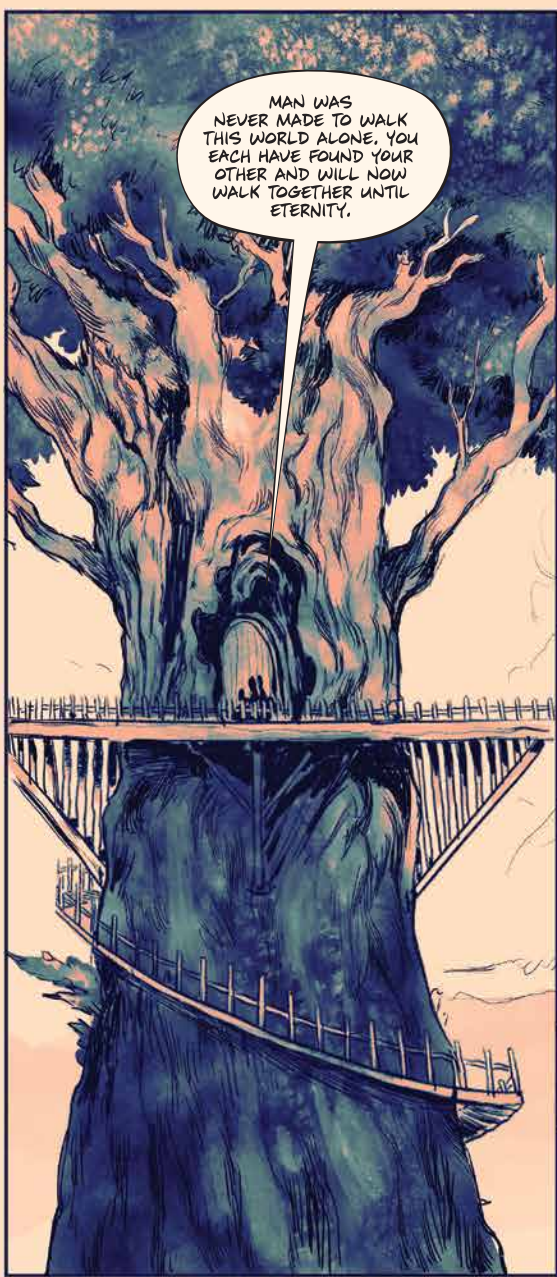
I MISS HIM.

I KNOW... I MISS HIM FOR YOU.

BEFORE...



TODAY
WE BRING
TWO LIVES
TOGETHER.



MAN WAS
NEVER MADE TO WALK
THIS WORLD ALONE. YOU
EACH HAVE FOUND YOUR
OTHER AND WILL NOW
WALK TOGETHER UNTIL
ETERNITY.



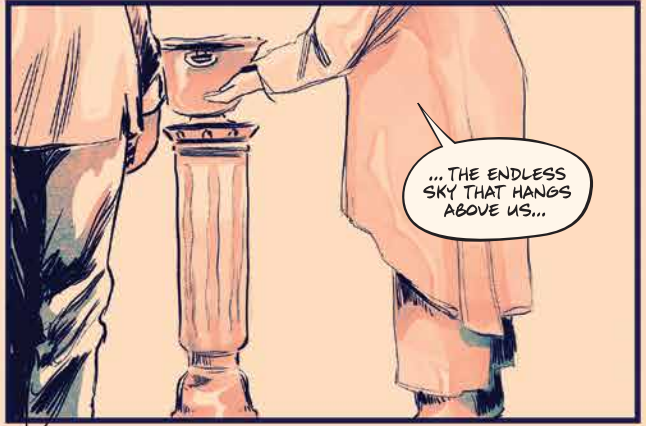
HIRAM
HIGHTOWER AND
MARA BLESSINGS,
ARE YOU READY TO
TAKE THIS WALK
TODAY AND EVERY
DAY?



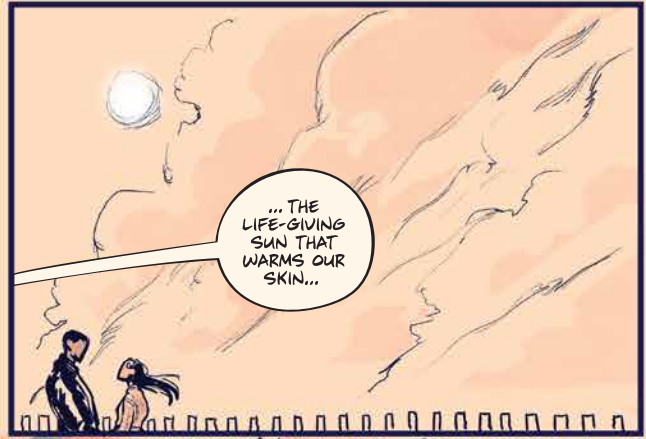
YES, WE
ARE.



WE STAND HERE TOGETHER WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WITNESSES...



... THE ENDLESS SKY THAT HANGS ABOVE US...



... THE LIFE-GIVING SUN THAT WARMS OUR SKIN...



... A GRAND TREE, OLD WITH WISDOM AND THICK WITH STRENGTH...





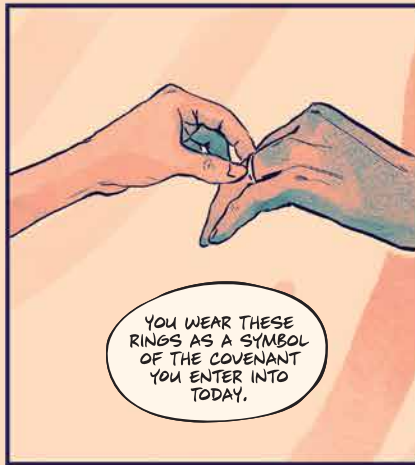
AS YOU SOUGHT EACH OTHER, SO YOU SEEK THESE RINGS.



HOW YOU FOUND EACH OTHER, NOW YOU FIND THESE RINGS.



NOW, PLACE THE RINGS ON ONE ANOTHER'S FINGERS.



YOU WEAR THESE RINGS AS A SYMBOL OF THE COVENANT YOU ENTER INTO TODAY.



YOU WEAR THESE RINGS AS AN ETERNAL PROMISE TO LOVE AND CHERISH.





I NOW
PRONOUNCE
YOU MAN
AND WIFE.

AFTER...

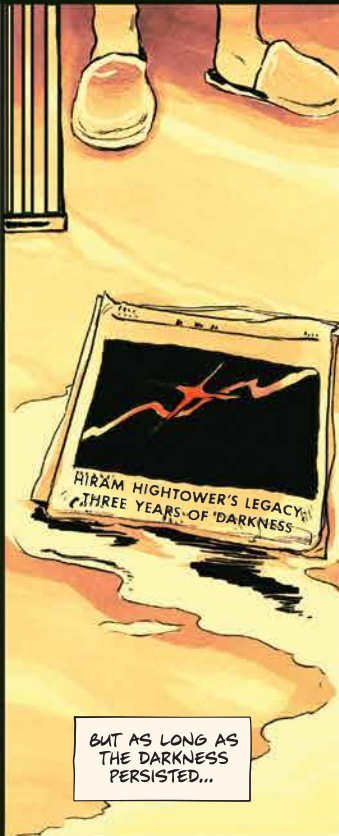
THEIR FRIENDSHIP
DEEPENED THAT
DAY...



...AND
CONTINUED...



...TO GROW.



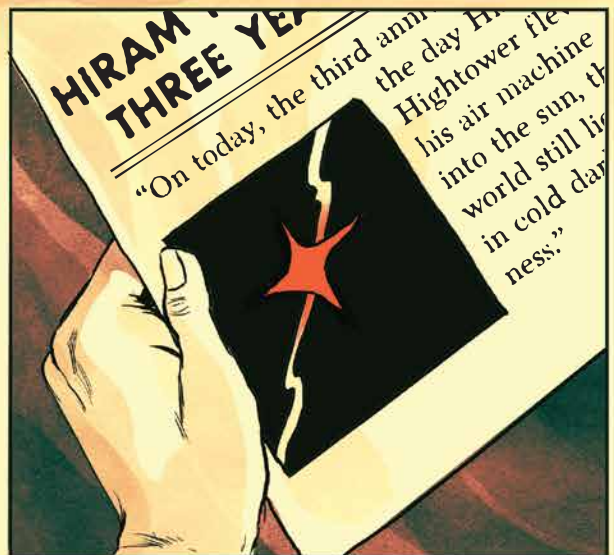
BUT AS LONG AS
THE DARKNESS
PERSISTED...



...THE WORLD
COULD NOT
FORGIVE...



...WHO HAD
BROUGHT THAT
DARKNESS...



A man with a backpack is walking past a woman in a classroom. The man is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The woman is wearing a red top and a light-colored skirt. The background shows a classroom with desks and other students.

SON
OF A SUN
STEALER!

AS THE MONTHS
OF DARKNESS BECAME
YEARS, THE HATRED
TOWARD THE FAMILY OF
THE MAN WHO TOOK THEIR
SUN AWAY GREW.

HIGHTOWERS
MUST DIE!

YOUR DAD
SHOULD'VE HAD
YOU AND YOUR
MOTHER ALONG
WITH HIM.

JOSHUA AND
CLAIRE WERE AN
ISLAND THROUGHOUT
THESE YEARS; THE
TWO OF THEM EACH
OTHER'S FRIEND AND
COMPANION.

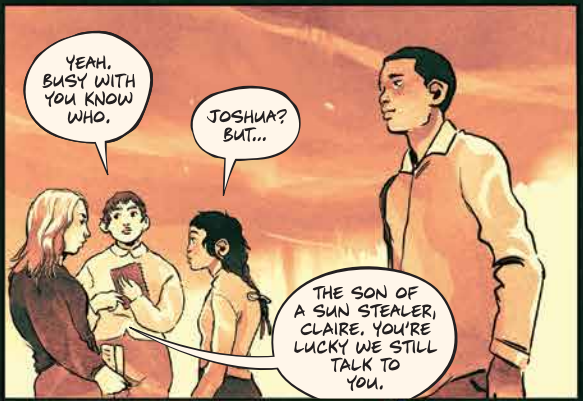




...THAT'S WHEN MAGGIE KISSED HIM. IN FRONT OF EVERYBODY AT THE PARTY!

PARTY?

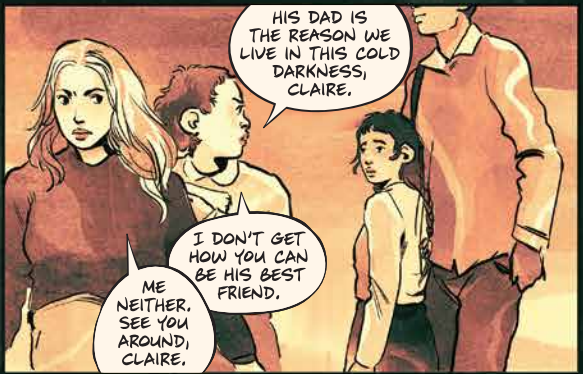
AT JUSTIN'S PARTY. YOU WERE... BUSY.



YEAH. BUSY WITH YOU KNOW WHO.

JOSHUA? BUT...

THE SON OF A SUN STEALER, CLAIRE. YOU'RE LUCKY WE STILL TALK TO YOU.



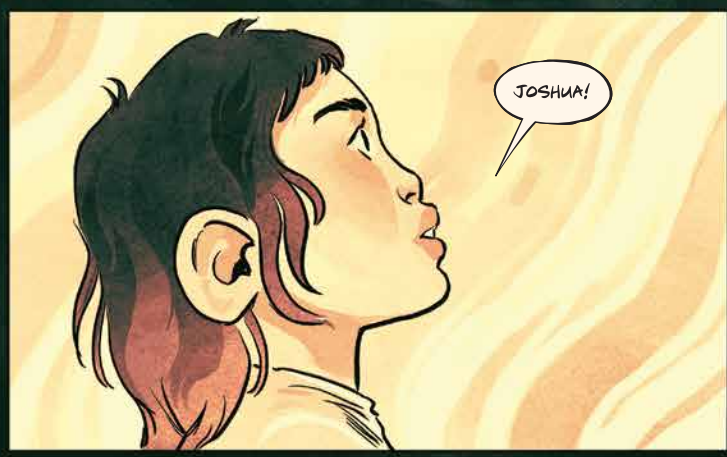
HIS DAD IS THE REASON WE LIVE IN THIS COLD DARKNESS, CLAIRE.

I DON'T GET HOW YOU CAN BE HIS BEST FRIEND.

ME NEITHER. SEE YOU AROUND, CLAIRE.



HI, BEAR!



JOSHUA!



WHAT'S WRONG?

NOTHING. EVERYTHING'S FINE. LET'S GO TO CLASS.



JOSHUA HIGHTOWER
BORE THE MISERY OF
HIS FATHER'S LEGACY
EVERY DAY.



NO MATTER
THE BACKLASH,
CLAIRE STOOD
BY HIS SIDE.



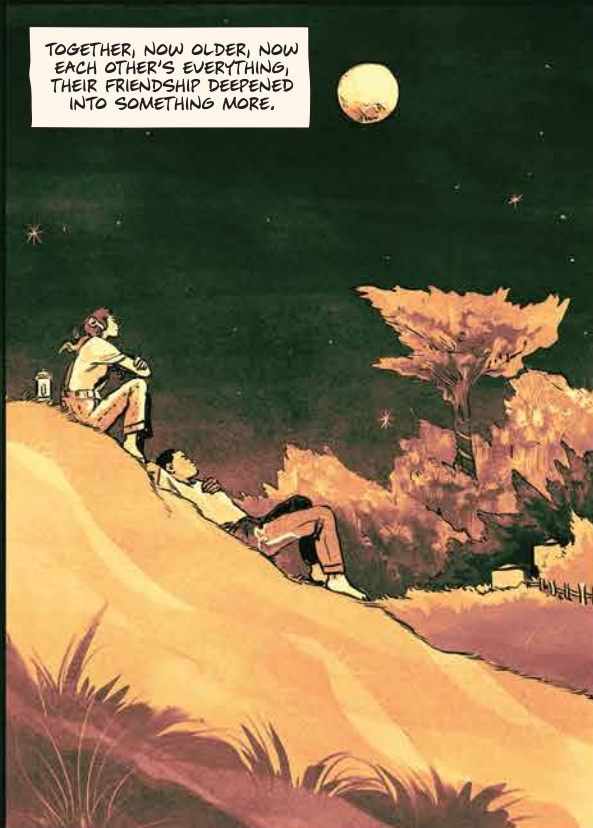
THE FRIENDSHIP
DEEPENING TO
SOMETHING NEITHER
OF THEM HAD PUT
WORDS TO.

YET.



CLAIRE WAS
ALWAYS THERE,
HIS SOFT PLACE
TO FALL.

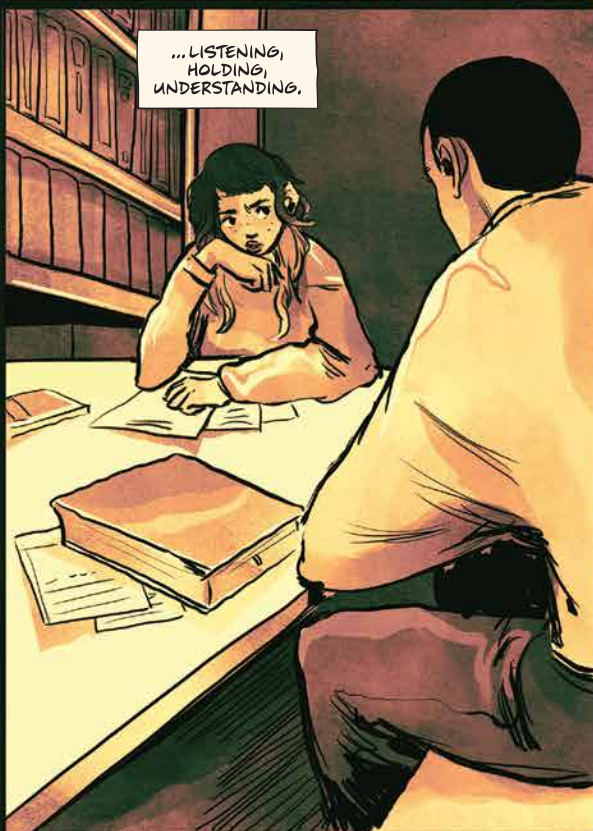
TOGETHER, NOW OLDER, NOW
EACH OTHER'S EVERYTHING,
THEIR FRIENDSHIP DEEPENED
INTO SOMETHING MORE.



THEIR CHILDHOOD
PLAY CHANGED INTO
TALKING, WALKING...



... LISTENING,
HOLDING,
UNDERSTANDING.



THEY'D SIT ON THE LAKE'S
SHORE, BLANKETS WRAPPED
AROUND THEM IN FRONT
OF A FIRE, AND TELL THEIR
STORIES ABOUT THE SUN
AND WHAT THEY'D DO IF
IT EVER CAME BACK.



NO MATTER
THE DARK AND
NO MATTER
THE COLD...



...JOSHUA AND CLAIRE
WERE EACH OTHER'S
LIGHT AND HEAT.

WHILE LIVING IN
CONSTANT DARKNESS HAD
BECOME A HEARTBREAKING
NEW NORMAL...



...AND EVERYONE HAD
REBUILT THEIR LIVES INTO
SOME SEMBLANCE OF
HAPPINESS...



...THE WORLD
STILL WASN'T
SATISFIED.



THE WORLD...



...STILL WANTED
ANSWERS.



**CORONA COUNCIL
ASSEMBLY**

**Five Year Review of
Darkness**

**HIGHTOWERS
MUST BE IN
ATTENDANCE
OR RISK
PROSECUTION**

Noon, tomorrow

**Council Building
Chambers**





WHAT MORE
COULD THEY
WANT FROM
US?



HOW MUCH
MORE ARE WE
TO ENDURE?



I DO NOT KNOW,
MOTHER, BUT I
KNOW FATHER WILL
BE WITH US WHEN
WE STAND BEFORE
THEM.



HE WILL
GIVE US
STRENGTH.



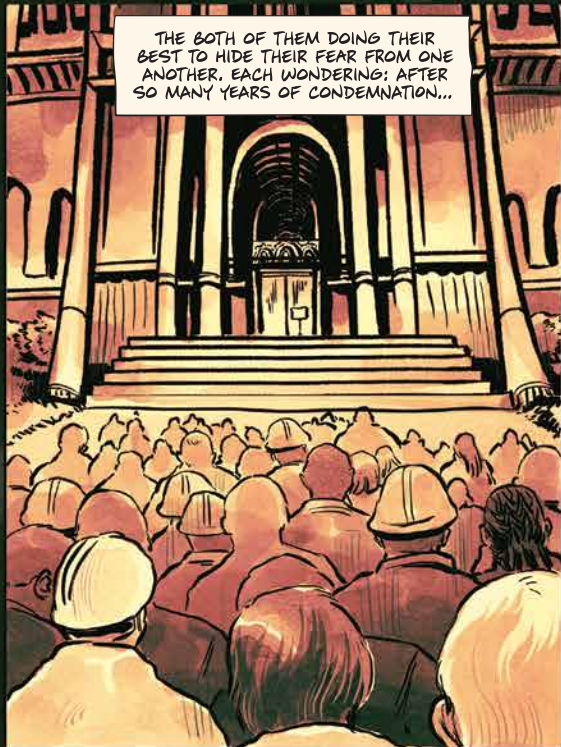
AT THE NEWS THAT THE HIGHTOWERS WERE TO BE A PART OF THE COUNCIL'S MEETING...



...THE MINERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TURNED OUT IN DROVES TO SUPPORT THEM.



MARA AND JOSHUA, RESIGNED BUT STEADFAST, MADE THEIR WAY TO THE COUNCIL BUILDING.



THE BOTH OF THEM DOING THEIR BEST TO HIDE THEIR FEAR FROM ONE ANOTHER, EACH WONDERING: AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF CONDEMNATION...



...WHAT ELSE COULD THE CORONA COUNCIL POSSIBLY WANT FROM THEM?



... AND WE FEEL THAT THIS LAST PROPOSAL HOLDS THE STRONGEST PROMISE. THANK YOU.

YOU HAVE NOW HEARD A FULL OUTLINE OF THE MULTIPLE NEW PLANS WE HAVE TO RETURN THE SUN.



MOTHER, I'M SCARED.



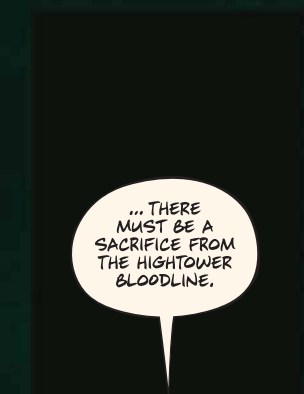
YES, THESE PLANS ARE LARGE AND GRAND IN SCALE, BUT WITH THE NEW LEARNINGS OUR TOP SCIENTISTS HAVE GATHERED IN THESE PAST FIVE YEARS, WE ARE HOPEFUL.

I HOPE THEY GET WHAT THEY DESERVE.



AT THIS TIME, WE'D LIKE TO ASK THE HIGHTOWER FAMILY TO PLEASE STEP FORWARD.







COUNCIL, THE SPILLING OF BLOOD CANNOT POSSIBLY FORCE THE SUN TO RISE.



MARA, HER HEAD HELD HIGHER THAN EVER...

YOU ARE SIMPLY SEEKING TO MAKE US PAY FOR MY HUSBAND'S ACTIONS...



LET HER VOICE THAT HAD LONG BEEN SILENT RING OUT, CLEAR AND STRONG...

...ACTIONS YOU YOURSELVES BROUGHT ABOUT WITH YOUR GREED FOR FLAREON!



LET IT BE HEARD...



...THAT THIS DAY...



FILLED WITH A FURY JOSHUA HAD NEVER HEARD FROM HIS MOTHER.

...ABSOLUTELY NO HIGHTOWER BLOOD WILL BE SPILLED IN THIS ENDEAVOR!

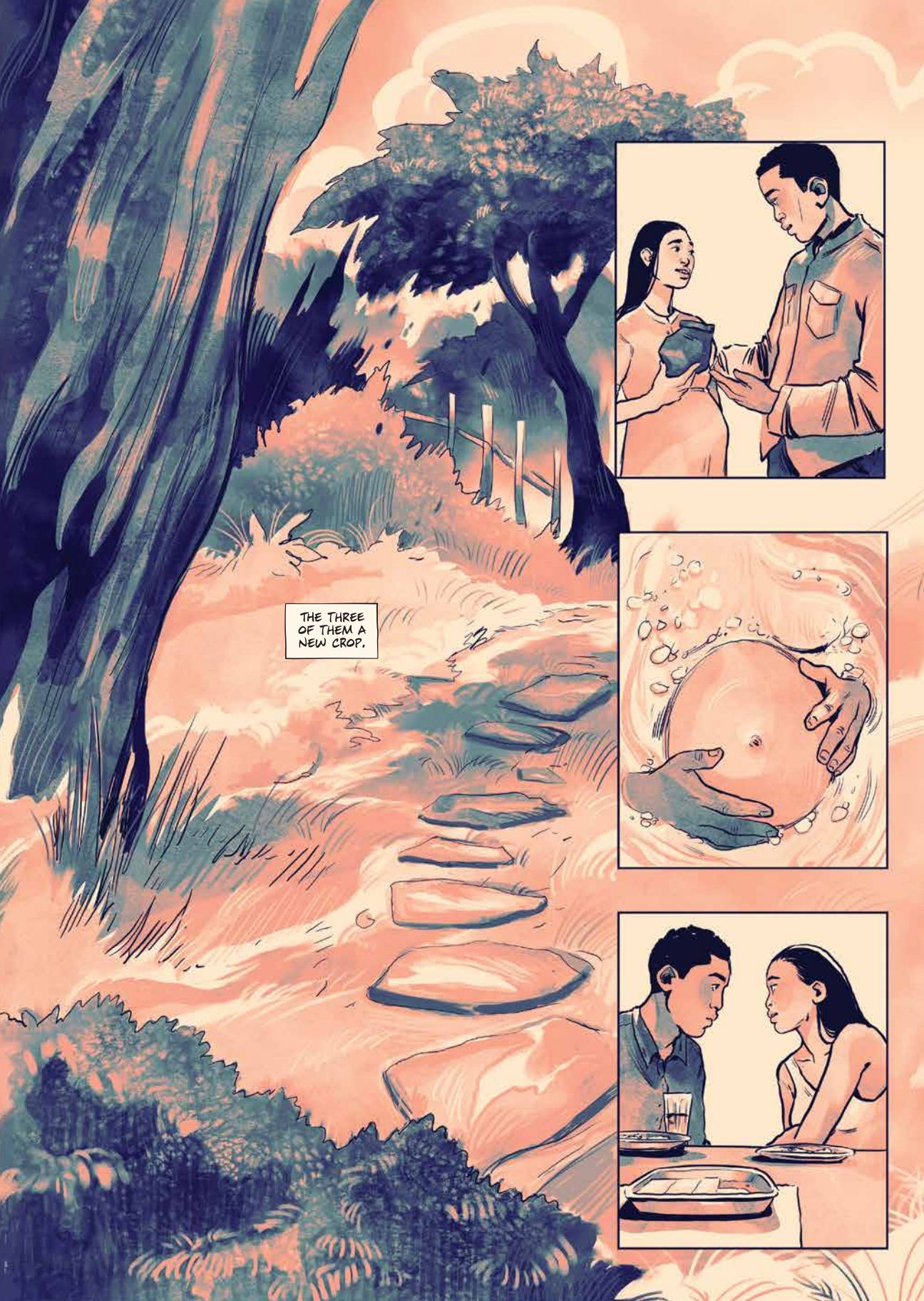
BEFORE...



IN THE HOURS AND DAYS AFTER HIRAM CARRIED MARA OVER THE THRESHOLD, THEY BEGAN CULTIVATING THEIR NEW LIFE TOGETHER.

CONSUMMATING THEIR MARRIAGE OVER AND OVER AGAIN UNTIL NEW LIFE BLOSSOMED IN MARA'S BELLY.





THE THREE
OF THEM A
NEW CROP.



AFTER...

MARA, BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE BY THEIR THREAT OF SACRIFICE, RESURRECTED HER GARDEN, IGNITING A JOY IN JOSHUA TO SEE HIS MOTHER LIVING AGAIN.



BLESS YOU, MRS. HIGHTOWER, FOR ALL THAT YOU'RE DOING FOR THOSE WHO CAN NO LONGER WORK THE MINES.



WE WILL BE WITH YOU IN BODY AND SPIRIT, WHEN YOU FACE THE COUNCIL TOMORROW.



AFTER EACH FAILED ATTEMPT TO BRING BACK THE SUN, THE HIGHTOWERS WERE SUMMONED.



AND IN LIGHT OF THIS MOST RECENT DEFEAT, YOU ARE ONCE AGAIN REMINDED THAT THE PROMISE OF SACRIFICE STILL HOLDS. ANY ATTEMPT TO--

COUNCILMEMBERS! HEAR ME NOW, AS IT APPEARS YOU HAVE YET TO HEAR ME DESPITE THESE REPEATED SUMMONINGS.



NO HIGHTOWER BLOOD WILL BE SPILLED FOR YOUR FAILED UNDERTAKINGS!





YET ANOTHER COUNCIL MEETING BEHIND US. THEY WILL NEVER RELENT, I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MORE I CAN WITHSTAND.



WHY DO THEY CONTINUE TO SUMMON YOU AFTER EACH OF THEIR FAILURES?

TO REMIND US OF THE BLOOD THEY WANT TO DRAW FROM US.



AS LONG AS I'M LIVING, THAT WILL NEVER HAPPEN.

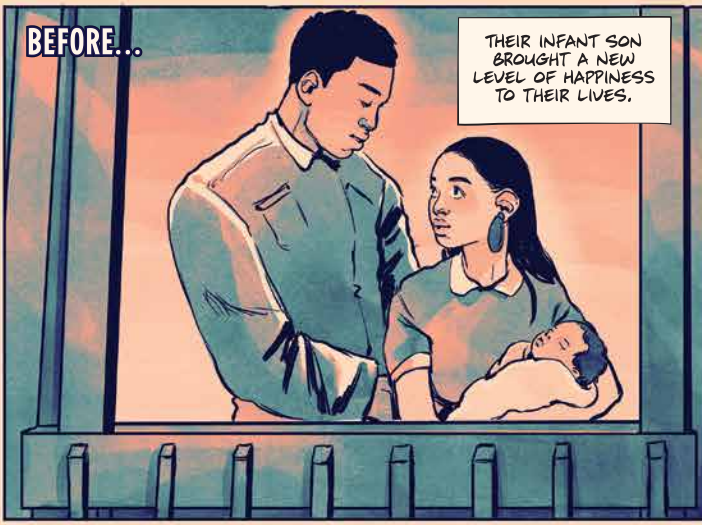


ESPECIALLY BECAUSE...



...WHO ELSE WILL BAKE THESE BISCUITS FOR YOU?

MOM!





YOU CANNOT TELL ANYONE OF THIS PLACE, JOSHUA.



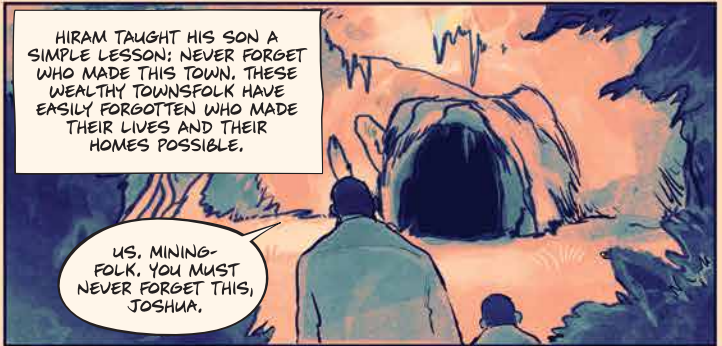
IT IS OURS.



C'MON.



IT IS A PLACE WHERE I WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO UNCOVER TREASURES.

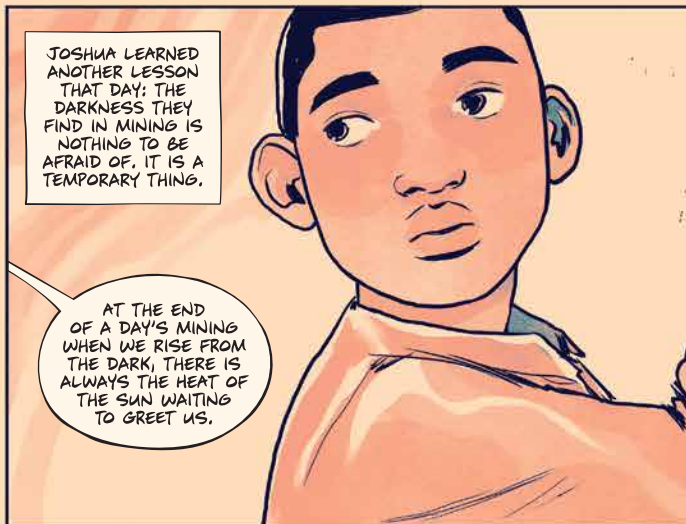


HIRAM TAUGHT HIS SON A SIMPLE LESSON: NEVER FORGET WHO MADE THIS TOWN. THESE WEALTHY TOWNSFOLK HAVE EASILY FORGOTTEN WHO MADE THEIR LIVES AND THEIR HOMES POSSIBLE.

US, MINING-FOLK. YOU MUST NEVER FORGET THIS, JOSHUA.



MY HANDS, MY FATHER'S HANDS AND HIS FATHER'S HANDS BEFORE HIM HAVE ALL BEEN MINER'S HANDS AND YOURS TOO, SON, WILL BE THE HANDS OF A MINER.



JOSHUA LEARNED ANOTHER LESSON THAT DAY: THE DARKNESS THEY FIND IN MINING IS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF. IT IS A TEMPORARY THING.

AT THE END OF A DAY'S MINING WHEN WE RISE FROM THE DARK, THERE IS ALWAYS THE HEAT OF THE SUN WAITING TO GREET US.



REMEMBER SON, MINING IS DISCOVERY. IT IS FINDING WHAT IS WAITING TO BE FOUND. WE ARE SEARCHERS. WE ARE FINDERS. WE BRING FORTH FRUIT FROM THE EARTH.

AFTER...

ANOTHER BRUTAL
SUMMONING FINALLY
TAKES ITS TOLL ON
JOSHUA.

JOSHUA!
WAIT!



SHE KNEW THE
SPECIAL PLACE
HE'D SHARED WITH
ONLY HER...



... AND HEADED
STRAIGHT FOR IT.



THERE HE WAS, IN THE HIDDEN CAVE WHERE HE MOST FELT HIS FATHER'S PRESENCE.

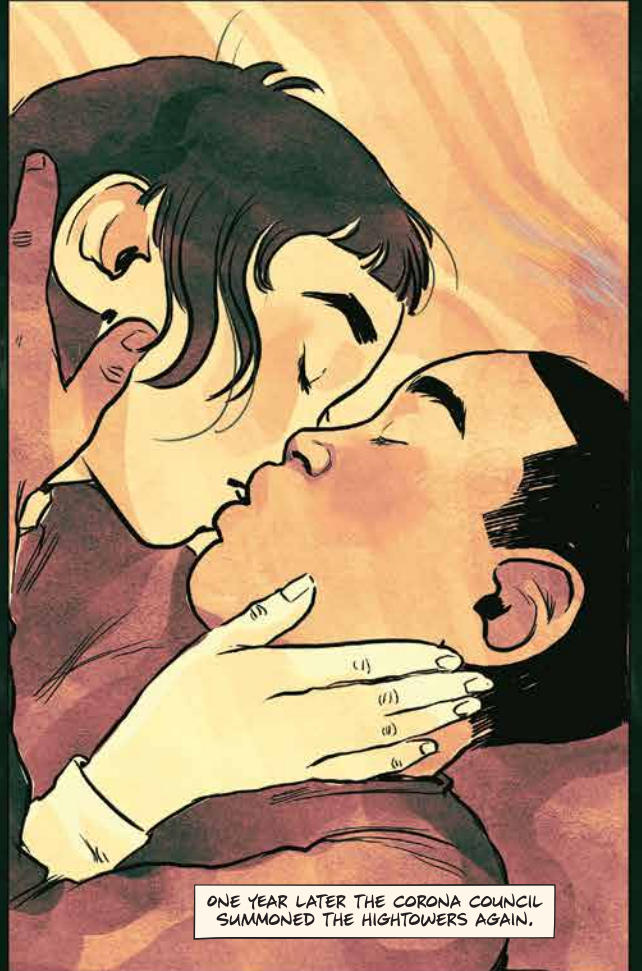
JOSHUA?



CLAIRE HELD HIM AS HE BROKE ALL THE WAY DOWN...



...RELEASING HIS SADNESS FROM THE MANY YEARS OF BEARING THE BRUNT OF HIS FATHER'S ACT.





PLEASE.



THE CRUELTY AND CONDEMNATION HAMMERED UPON THEM LIKE NEVER BEFORE.

HIGHTOWERS SHOULD DIE!
...YOUR HUSBAND'S BELFISH ACT!
YOU RUINED OUR LIVES!
...BRING BACK THE SUN OR DIE!
SACRIFICE!
HE TOOK OUR WORLD AWAY!
SACRIFICE!



SACRIFICE! SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!



SACRIFICE! SACRIFICE! SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!
SACRIFICE!

STOP!

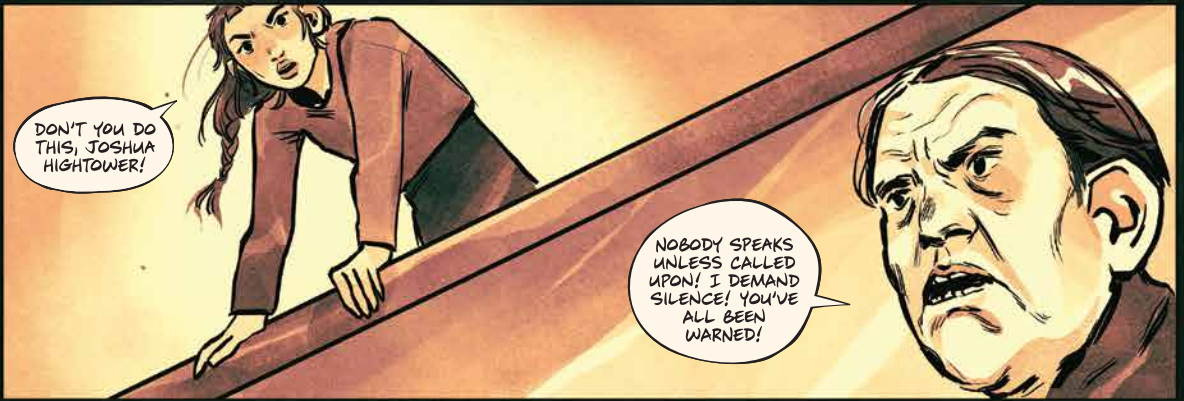


ENOUGH! I OFFER MY LIFE!
AND LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM...



...JOSHUA COULD NOT TAKE IT ANYMORE.

LET THIS CEASE.



BEFORE...

WE HAVE SUMMONED YOU HERE TODAY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TWELVE YEARS TO ANNOUNCE THE DISCOVERY OF FLAREON IN THE FOURTH SECTOR MINE, LEVEL II...

...A RARE AND PRECIOUS MINERAL, FLAREON COULD BRING GREAT WEALTH AND PROSPERITY TO THIS TOWN.

THE MINE OWNERS HAVE CONSULTED WITH OUR MAYOR AND, IN TURN, WITH THIS COUNCIL, AND WE ARE IMPARTING THE FOLLOWING DECREE...

...STARTING TODAY ALL MINES WILL BE RUN AT DOUBLE-SHIFTS; EIGHT-HOUR DAYS ARE NOW SIXTEEN, FIVE DAYS A WEEK WILL NOW BE SIX.

WE UNDERSTAND THIS WILL BE A TREMENDOUS SACRIFICE FOR OUR MINING FAMILIES, BUT WE KNOW YOU WILL DO WHAT IS EXPECTED.

YOUR LABORS WILL BE FOR THE BENEFIT OF US ALL.

YOUR SUCCESS IN MINING THE FLAREON WILL BE OURS.



AFTER...

WITH AN EMBEDDED NEED TO BRING BACK THE SUN, JOSHUA AND CLAIRE FOUND THEMSELVES ON THE PATH OF SCIENCE.

... THERE WERE SO MANY OFFSHOOTS, I ALMOST LOST TRACK.

AS SOON AS YOU DREW BLOOD AND THE CORONA COUNCIL HALTED IT, IT WAS AS IF OTHERS HAD TO PICK UP THE TORCH.

I THINK THE NUMBER OF OFFSHOOTS HIT FOURTEEN IN THE FOUR YEARS SINCE THAT LAST CONVENING.

DID YOU HEAR THE AURORA COUNCIL SHUT DOWN?

THAT LEAVES JUST SEVEN COUNCILS. I HEAR THE CELESTIAL WILL BE THE NEXT TO FOLD.

AS TIME WENT ON, THE STUDY OF ASTRONOMY BECAME A WAY FOR JOSHUA TO FIND HIS FATHER, AND CLAIRE NURTURED THAT UNSPOKEN NEED.

WHEN WILL THEY BEGIN TO EMBRACE THIS NEW WORLD AS WE HAVE? ONLY AN ANGRY FEW ARE UNWILLING TO LIVE IN THIS NEW WORLD, AS IF THEIR ANGER MIGHT MAKE THIS WORLD WHAT IT ONCE WAS.

IT'S THE ELDERS, THE ONES THAT LIVED THE LONGEST UNDER ITS LIGHT. THE REST OF US HAVE ADAPTED. WHAT OTHER CHOICE IS THERE?

WE WILL FIND A WAY TO THE STARS. TO OTHER PLANETS. WE WILL BECOME FOUNDERS OF NEW LIGHT... NEW WARMTH.

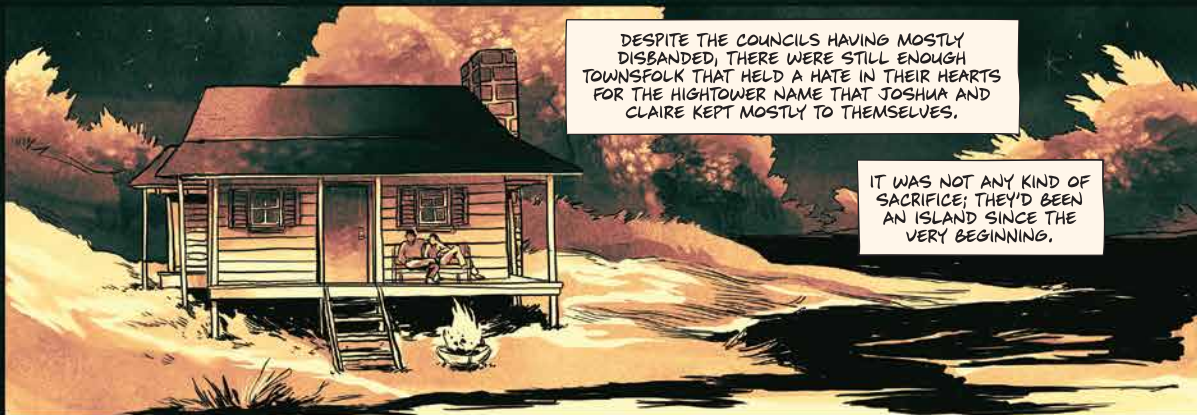






JOSHUA AND CLAIRE MARRIED ON THE LAWN OUTSIDE OF THE OBSERVATORY, EXCHANGING PROMISES MADE LONG AGO YET NEVER SPOKEN ALOUD.

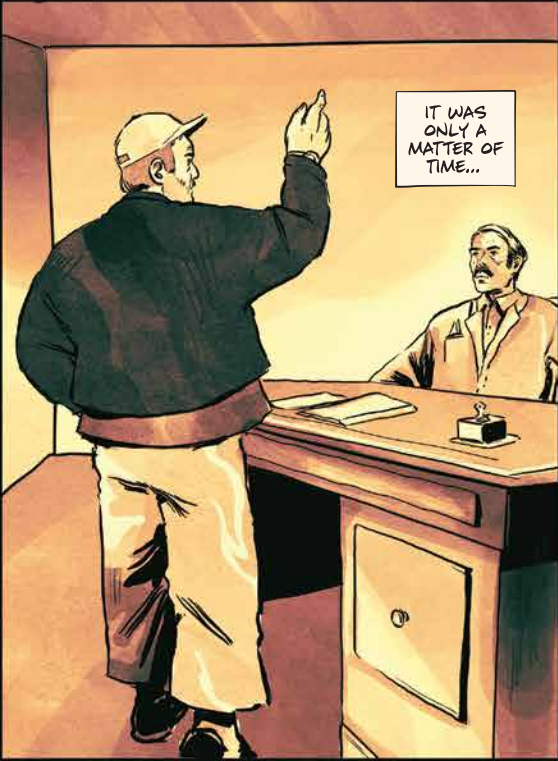




DESPITE THE COUNCILS HAVING MOSTLY DISBANDED, THERE WERE STILL ENOUGH TOWNSFOLK THAT HELD A HATE IN THEIR HEARTS FOR THE HIGHTOWER NAME THAT JOSHUA AND CLAIRE KEPT MOSTLY TO THEMSELVES.

IT WAS NOT ANY KIND OF SACRIFICE; THEY'D BEEN AN ISLAND SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING.

WHEN JOSHUA BEGAN THE TEST FLIGHTS OF HIS ENHANCED AIR MACHINE, HE TRIED TO KEEP IT SECRET, KNOWING THE UPROAR IF WORD GOT OUT THAT ANOTHER HIGHTOWER WAS MAKING HIS WAY INTO THE SKY.



IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME...

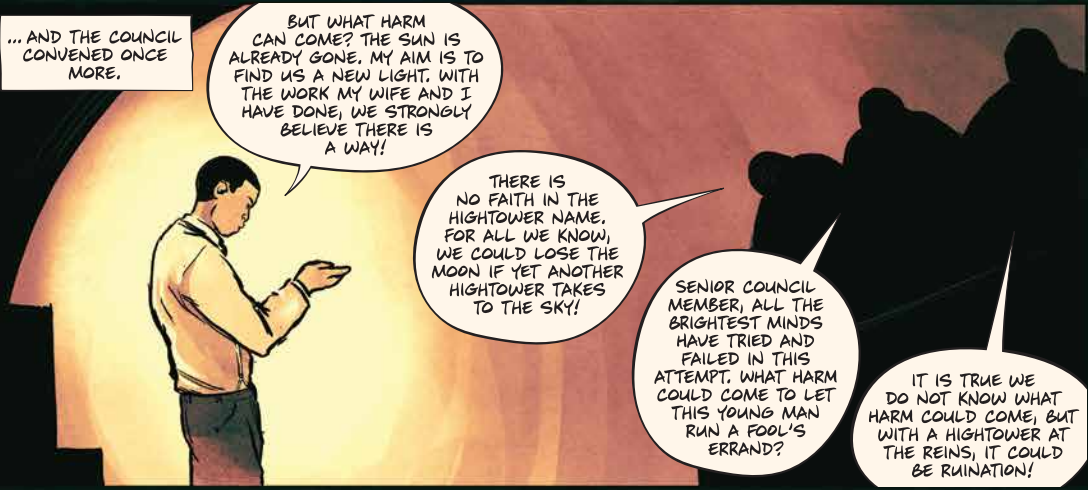
... AND THE COUNCIL CONVENED ONCE MORE.

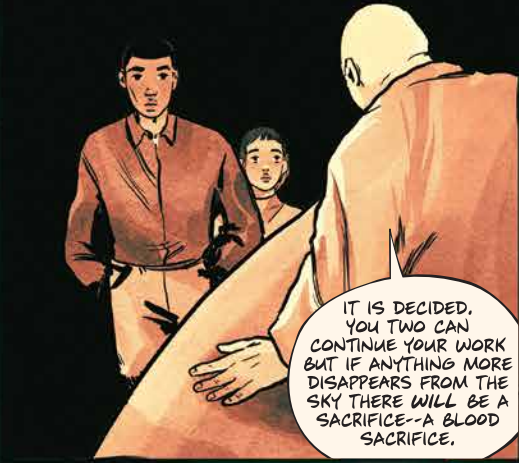
BUT WHAT HARM CAN COME? THE SUN IS ALREADY GONE. MY AIM IS TO FIND US A NEW LIGHT. WITH THE WORK MY WIFE AND I HAVE DONE, WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THERE IS A WAY!

THERE IS NO FAITH IN THE HIGHTOWER NAME. FOR ALL WE KNOW, WE COULD LOSE THE MOON IF YET ANOTHER HIGHTOWER TAKES TO THE SKY!

SENIOR COUNCIL MEMBER, ALL THE BRIGHTEST MINDS HAVE TRIED AND FAILED IN THIS ATTEMPT. WHAT HARM COULD COME TO LET THIS YOUNG MAN RUN A FOOL'S ERRAND?

IT IS TRUE WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HARM COULD COME, BUT WITH A HIGHTOWER AT THE REINS, IT COULD BE RUINATION!





IT IS DECIDED, YOU TWO CAN CONTINUE YOUR WORK BUT IF ANYTHING MORE DISAPPEARS FROM THE SKY THERE WILL BE A SACRIFICE--A BLOOD SACRIFICE.



BEAR, PLEASE DON'T WORRY, THE COUNCIL GAVE US PERMISSION TO CONTINUE OUR WORK. THIS SHOULD BE CELEBRATED.



CELEBRATED? THEY SAID THERE WILL BE A BLOOD SACRIFICE IF ANYTHING MORE DISAPPEARS FROM THE SKY!



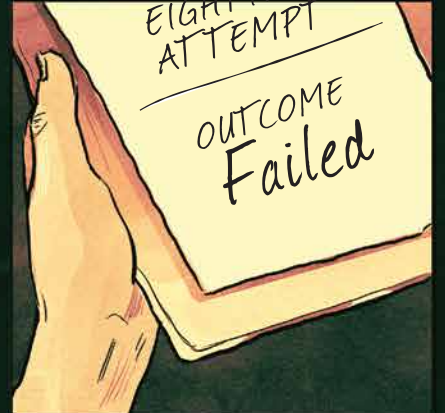
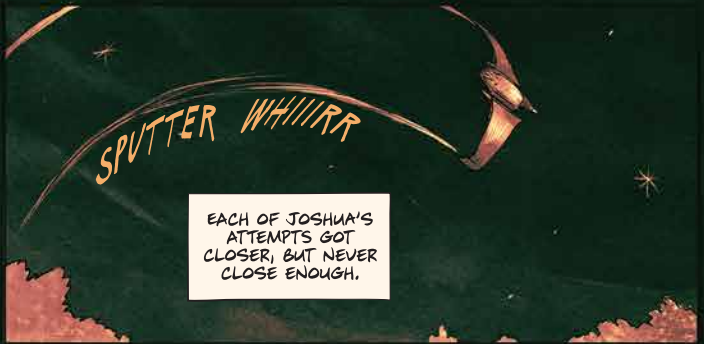
ALL THIS TIME WE'VE BEEN TRYING AND FAILING TO HAVE A FAMILY. WHAT IF WE FINALLY HAVE A BABY AND THEY...



NOBODY WILL TAKE OUR CHILD FROM US. OUR AIR MACHINE WILL NOT TAKE ANYTHING FROM THE SKY. THERE WILL BE NO REASON THEY WILL EVER JUSTIFY SUCH A THING.



NOW, ABOUT THAT BABY-MAKING. HOW ABOUT WE GIVE IT ANOTHER TRY RIGHT NOW?



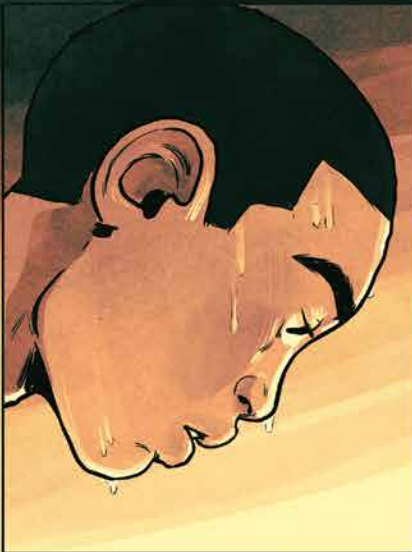




... AT HIS FATHER'S CAVE.

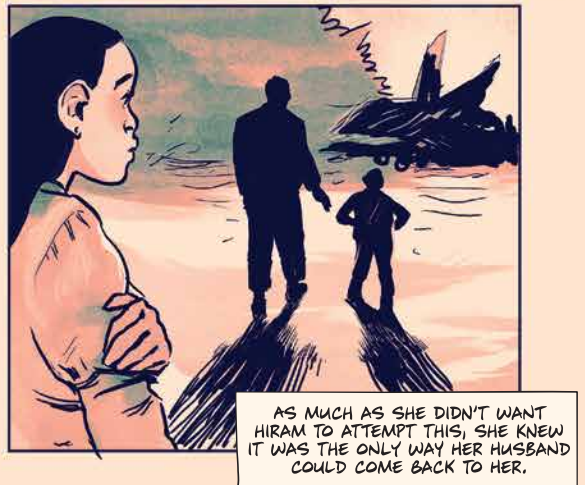
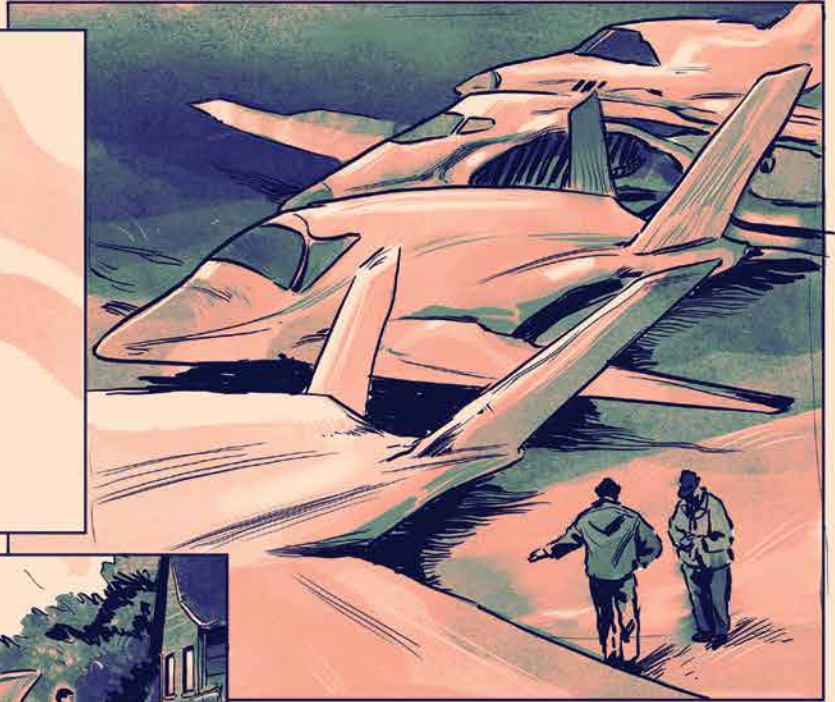


"MINERS BRING FORTH FRUIT FROM THE EARTH," JOSHUA HEARD HIS FATHER'S WORDS ECHO IN HIS HEAD AND HIS FEELING OF FAILURE EXPLODED.



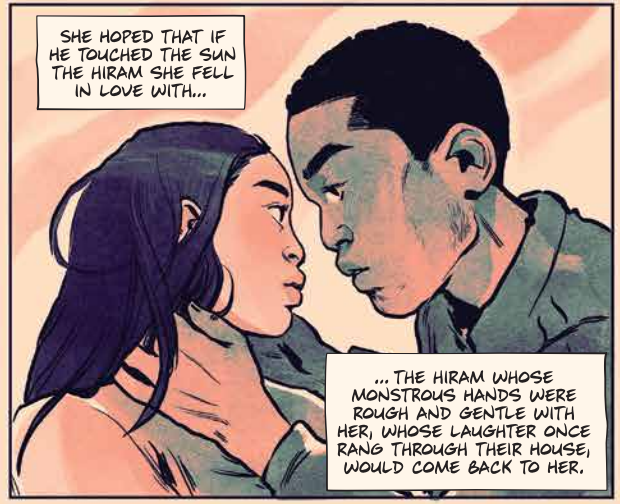
FLAREON?!

BEFORE...





SHE THOUGHT THAT MAYBE IF HE GOT ALL THE WAY TO THE SUN AND IT GAVE HIM ITS HEAT, HIS MINER'S HEART WOULD BE REBORN.



SHE HOPED THAT IF HE TOUCHED THE SUN THE HIRAM SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH...

... THE HIRAM WHOSE MONSTROUS HANDS WERE ROUGH AND GENTLE WITH HER, WHOSE LAUGHTER ONCE RANG THROUGH THEIR HOUSE, WOULD COME BACK TO HER.



TO THEM.



RUMBLE



BOOM



HE WOULD NEVER COME BACK.

AFTER...



I THINK THIS IS IT, BEAR. WITH THE FLAREON DUST, MAYBE MY MACHINE HAS WHAT IT NEEDS TO MAKE IT PAST.

THERE'S A REASON WHY THE WEALTHY MEN OF THIS TOWN WANTED THE FLAREON, JOSHUA.

THE HUNT FOR THIS MINERAL DROVE MY FATHER TO DO WHAT HE DID.



TODAY I USE IT TO UNDO THAT THING.



SHE WATCHED UNTIL NOTHING WAS LEFT.



IT WAS THEN SHE BEGAN TO WAIT AND PRAY...



...THAT WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST DOES NOT REPEAT.



JOSHUA WASN'T ALONE IN USING FLAREON'S SIFT TO HELP SOLVE A PROBLEM.



BETWEEN THEIR WORK AND THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVING, THEY DID THEIR BEST TO CONTAIN THEIR JOY.



DAMN, BEAR! THIS WATER IS HOT!

I LIKE IT THAT WAY. IT HELPS ME REMEMBER THE SUN.




OKAY, NOW WHAT MAGICAL THING DO YOU NEED TO TELL ME THAT CAN ONLY BE DONE IN A BATHTUB?


WE HAVE A CHILD BETWEEN US.




SPLASH




WE MUST KEEP THIS BETWEEN US FOR AS LONG AS WE CAN. THERE ARE MANY WHO WOULD BE FAST TO TAKE THIS JOY FROM US. I WANT IT TO BE JUST OURS FOR AS LONG AS WE ARE ABLE.




THEY KEPT TO THEMSELVES MORE THAN THEY EVER HAD BEFORE, ONLY VENTURING INTO TOWN WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.



JOSHUA FOUND HIMSELF DEVELOPING THE PROTECTIVE GROWL OF A FATHER; BARING HIS TEETH SHOULD ANYONE EVEN LOOK AT HIS WIFE UNKINDLY.



JOSHUA HIRAM HIGHTOWER! I'M PREGNANT, NOT PORCELAIN!



MARRYING A HIGHTOWER WAS A BOLD CHOICE AND WHAT YOU'VE HAD TO ENDURE HAS NOT BEEN EASY. I JUST WANT THIS ONE THING FOR YOU... FOR US... TO BE EASY.

YOU'RE THE EASIEST DECISION I'VE EVER MADE IN MY LIFE, JOSHUA.



SHALL I TAP OUT A TUNE ON THE BOARDS LIKE WHEN WE WERE LITTLE?

DON'T YOU DARE, BEAR!



THE HIGHTOWER HATE STILL SIMMERED, RIPE WITH NEW RUMORS...

TIME TO LET ME GO, MR. HIGHTOWER. THE AISLES IN THIS SHOP ARE TOO NARROW FOR US TO BE WALKING AS ONE.



...THAT REOPENED DEEP WOUNDS.

WIFE OF A SON OF A SUN-STEALER!



SHE'S PREGNANT! HOW DARE YOU! HAVE WE NOT SUFFERED ENOUGH?!



JOSHUA, LEAVE HIM BE! I NEED YOU!

YOU'RE OKAY,
BEAR. YOU AND
OUR CHILD ARE
GOING TO BE
FINE.



HELP HER,
DOCTOR.
PLEASE!

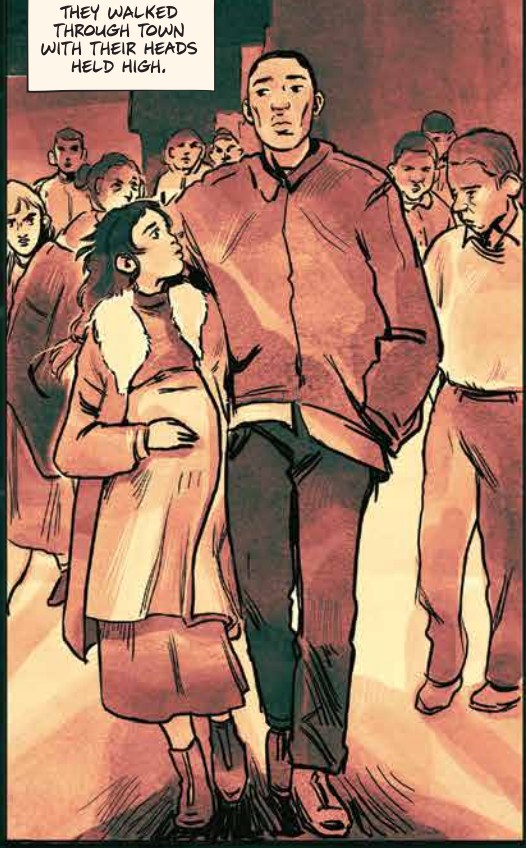


I'M SO
COLD.

SEVERAL DAYS
LATER, CLAIRE WAS
WELL ENOUGH TO
GO HOME.



THEY WALKED
THROUGH TOWN
WITH THEIR HEADS
HELD HIGH.



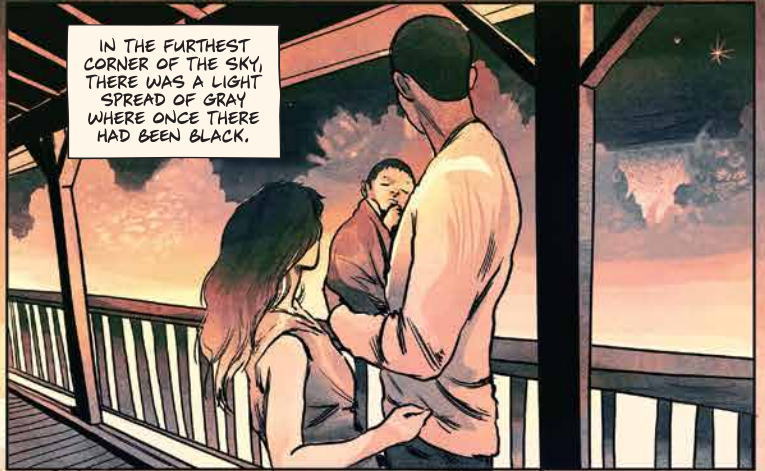


DESPITE EVERYTHING, JOSHUA AND CLAIRE'S DAUGHTER WAS BORN IN THE BRIGHTEST SPACE OF THE NIGHT...

...EARLY IN THE NEW YEAR, IN THE VERY BED SHE WAS CONCEIVED IN.



WELCOME, DAWN EMMA HIGHTOWER. MAY SHE BRING A WARM LIGHT.

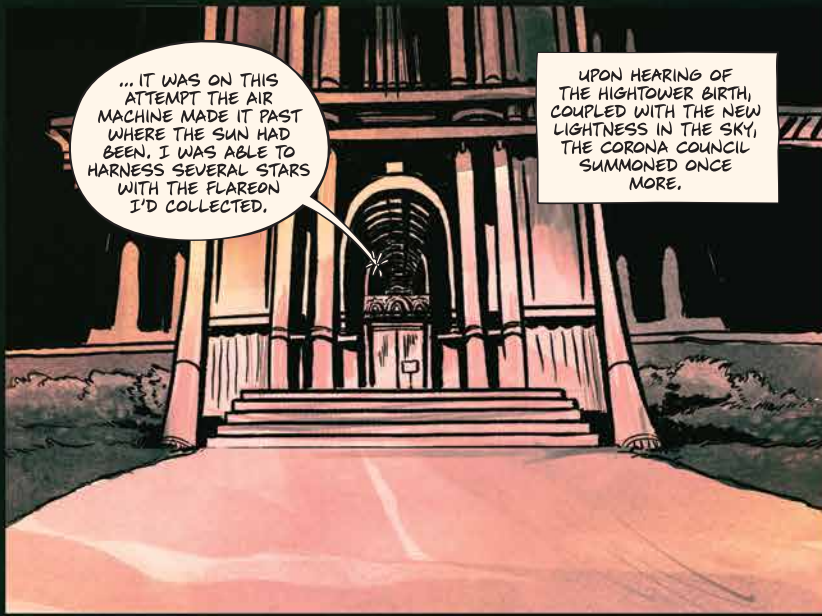


IN THE FURTHEST CORNER OF THE SKY, THERE WAS A LIGHT SPREAD OF GRAY WHERE ONCE THERE HAD BEEN BLACK.



DO YOU SEE THAT? ISN'T IT STRANGE?

DOES IT FEEL WARMER TO YOU? I FEEL... WARMER.



... IT WAS ON THIS ATTEMPT THE AIR MACHINE MADE IT PAST WHERE THE SUN HAD BEEN. I WAS ABLE TO HARNESS SEVERAL STARS WITH THE FLAREON I'D COLLECTED.

UPON HEARING OF THE HIGHTOWER BIRTH, COUPLED WITH THE NEW LIGHTNESS IN THE SKY, THE CORONA COUNCIL SUMMONED ONCE MORE.



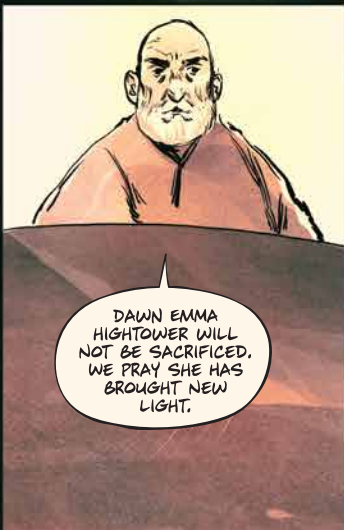
WE BELIEVE THAT ONCE THE FLAREON FUSES WITH THE STARS, THEIR GLOW WILL INTENSIFY WITH NOT JUST LIGHT, BUT HEAT.



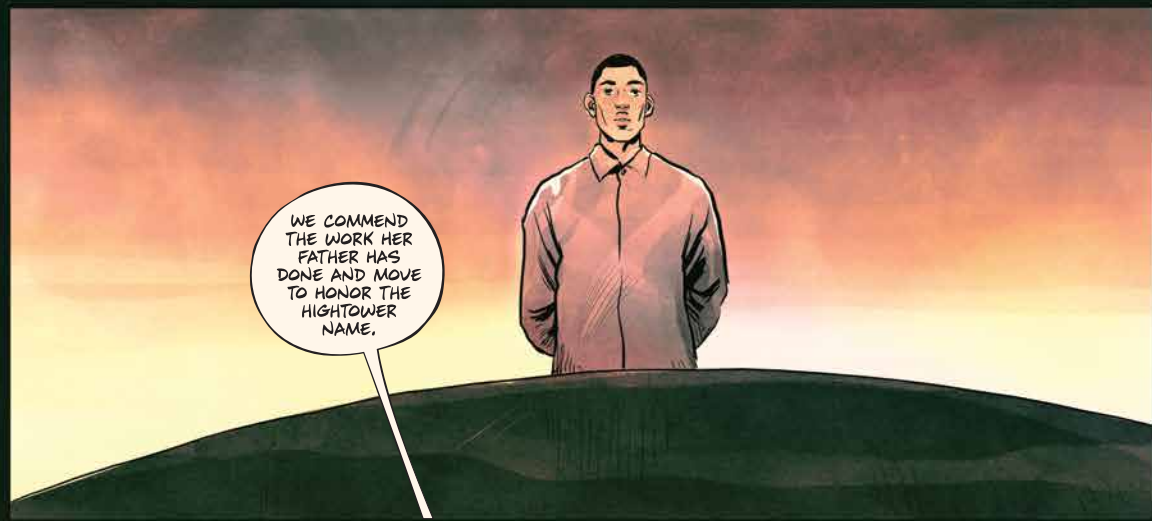
IT IS NO COINCIDENCE THAT ON THE DAY MY DAUGHTER WAS BORN, A GRAY HAD APPEARED IN THE SKY'S BLACK.



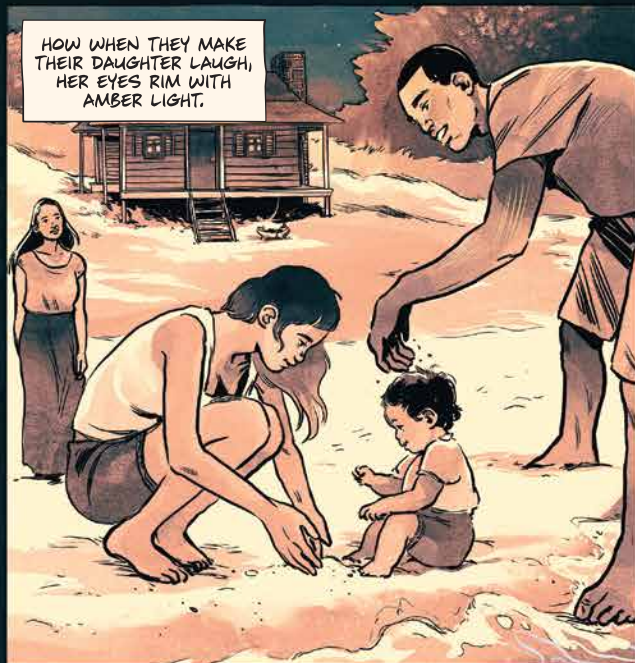
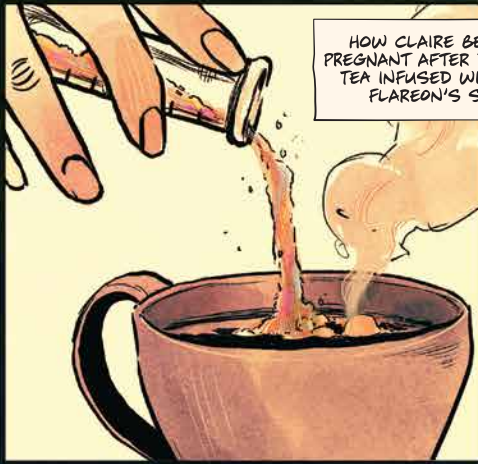
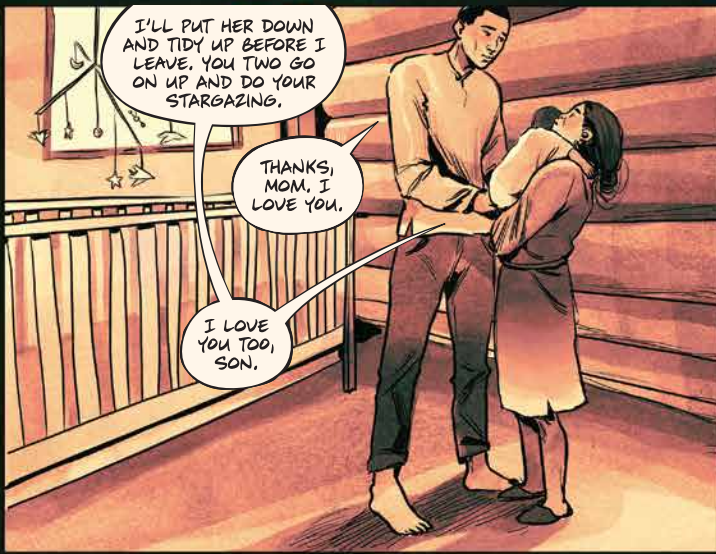
MY DAUGHTER IS THE NEW LIGHT. TO SACRIFICE HER WOULD CONDEMN ALL THE HOPE WE HAVE.



DAWN EMMA HIGHTOWER WILL NOT BE SACRIFICED. WE PRAY SHE HAS BROUGHT NEW LIGHT.



WE COMMEND THE WORK HER FATHER HAS DONE AND MOVE TO HONOR THE HIGHTOWER NAME.



ONE YEAR LATER, THE SKY IS NO LONGER BLACK. DAYS WERE NO LONGER A CONSTANT COLD, NOR WERE THEY WARM.

UROOM!
UROOM!

WHAT'S THAT, DAWN?
IS THAT DADDY?

THE GAS LAMPS THAT HAD BURNED BOTH DAY AND NIGHT, NOW ONLY BURNED AT NIGHT. THE MINERS THAT HAD ONCE MANNED THEM, WENT BACK TO MINING FOR FLAREON; THIS TIME ON THEIR OWN TERMS.

MINERS NOW BARTERED THE FLAREON AND OTHER MINERALS AND STONES FOR THEIR PROFIT, NOT JUST THE WEALTHY MINE OWNERS.

MOST OF THE FLAREON WAS USED FOR JOSHUA'S FLEET OF ENHANCED AIR MACHINES, TAKING IT INTO SPACE, HARNESSING IT TO THE STARS.



BRINGING A NEW
LIGHT BACK INTO
THE WORLD.



THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Roxane Gay's writing appears in *Best American Nonrequired Reading 2018*, *Best American Mystery Stories 2014*, *Best American Short Stories 2012*, *Best Sex Writing 2012*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *A Public Space*, *McSweeney's*, *Tin House*, *Oxford American*, *American Short Fiction*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and many others. She is a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*. She is the author of the books *Ayiti*, *An Untamed State*, the *New York Times* best-selling *Bad Feminist*, the nationally best-selling *Difficult Women* and *New York Times* bestselling *Hunger: A Memoir of My Body*. She is also the author of *World of Wakanda* for Marvel and the editor of *Best American Short Stories 2018*. She is currently at work on film and television projects, a book of writing advice, an essay collection about television and culture, and a YA novel entitled *The Year I Learned Everything*. In 2018, she won a Cuggenheim fellowship.

Tracy Lynne Oliver is a writer based in Los Angeles. She has been published online at a variety of places such as Medium, Fanzine and Occulum. Her story, "This Weekend" was chosen to be in *Best Microfiction 2019*. This is her first graphic novel adaptation.

Rebecca Kirby is a comic artist and illustrator based out of Philadelphia best known for her original comics, *Biopsy* and *Cramps*, which have been featured on Vice, and *Waves*, featured in *Fantagraphics' Now: The New Comics Anthology #4*.

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my husband’s father flew an
air machine into the sun. Since then,
the days have been dark, the nights bright.”*

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