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READERS

1

Blossom for a lady



brief

THE

## SANDMAN™

lives

written by

NEIL GAIMAN

illustrated by

JILL THOMPSON

The view from the backs of mirrors



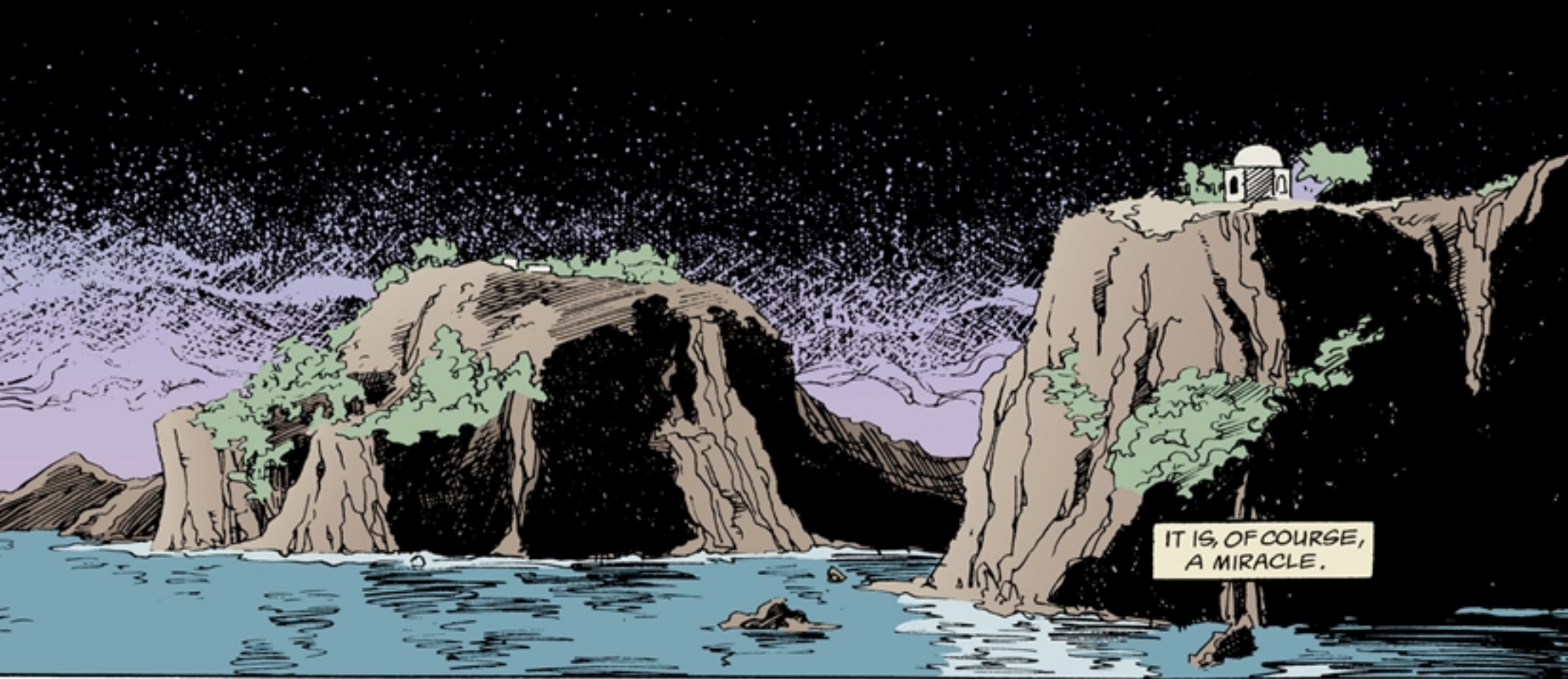
Not her sister?

Rain  
in the  
doorway"The  
number  
you  
have  
dialed..."Journal  
of the  
plague  
year

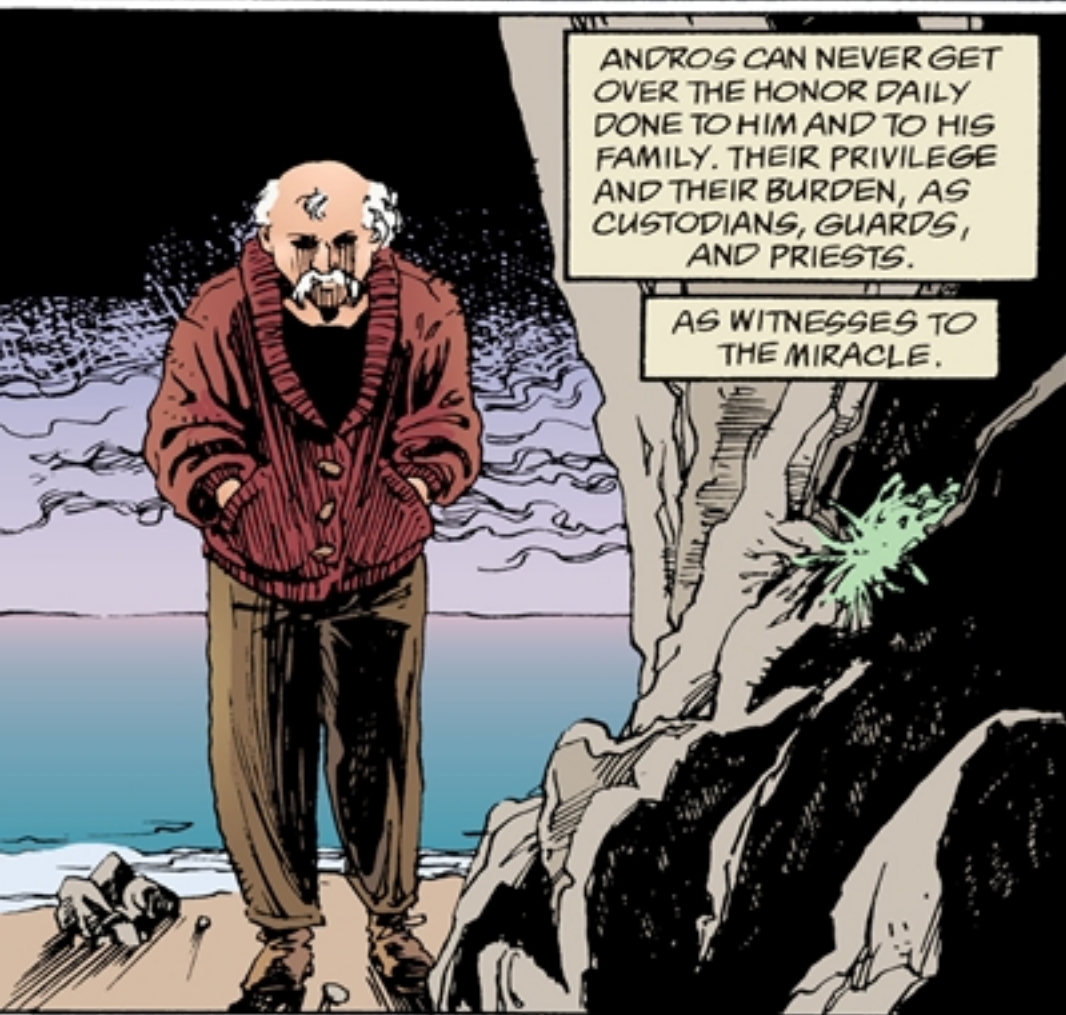
and

VINCE LOCKE



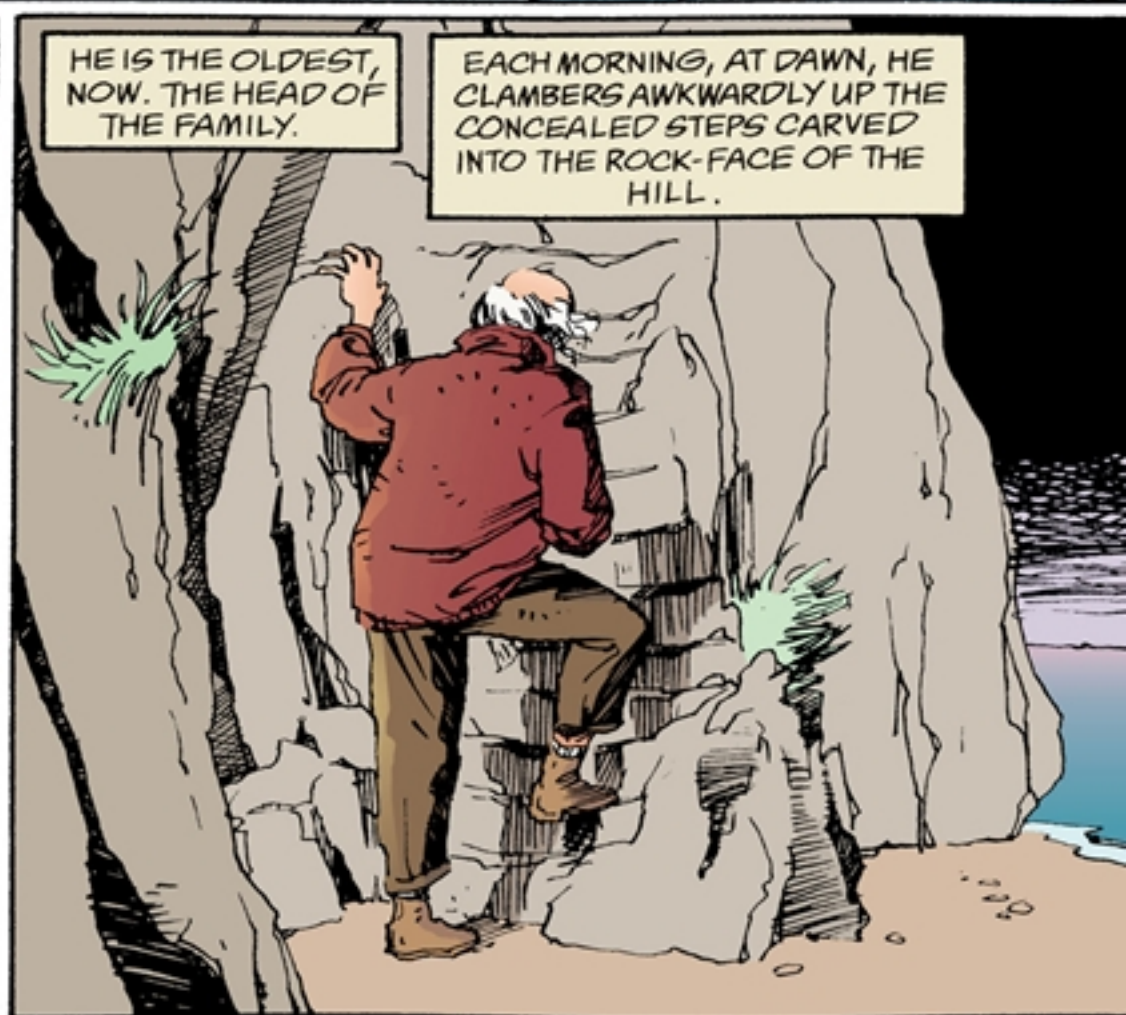


IT IS, OF COURSE,  
A MIRACLE.



ANDROS CAN NEVER GET  
OVER THE HONOR DAILY  
DONE TO HIM AND TO HIS  
FAMILY. THEIR PRIVILEGE  
AND THEIR BURDEN, AS  
CUSTODIANS, GUARDS,  
AND PRIESTS.

AS WITNESSES TO  
THE MIRACLE.



HE IS THE OLDEST,  
NOW. THE HEAD OF  
THE FAMILY.

EACH MORNING, AT DAWN, HE  
CLAMBERS AWKWARDLY UP THE  
CONCEALED STEPS CARVED  
INTO THE ROCK-FACE OF THE  
HILL.

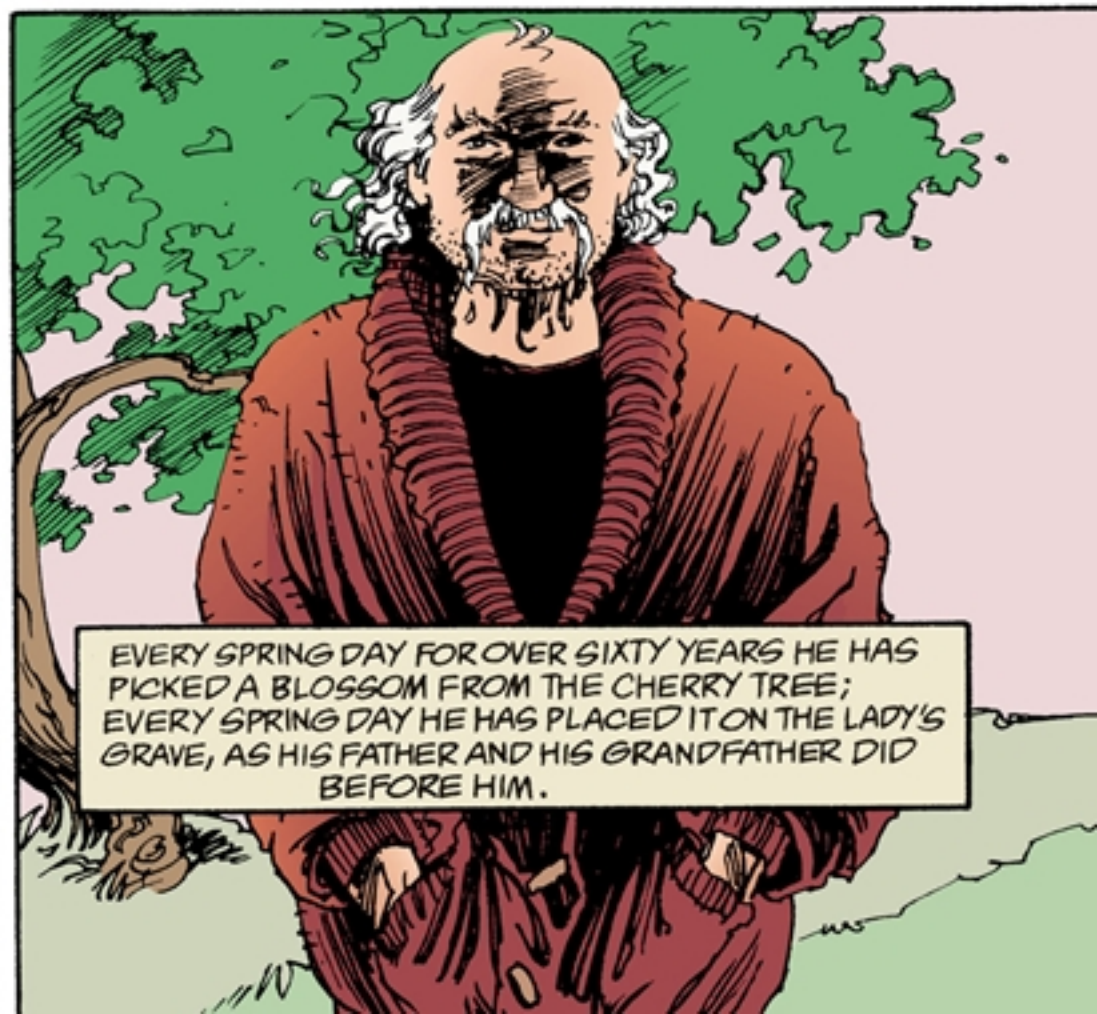
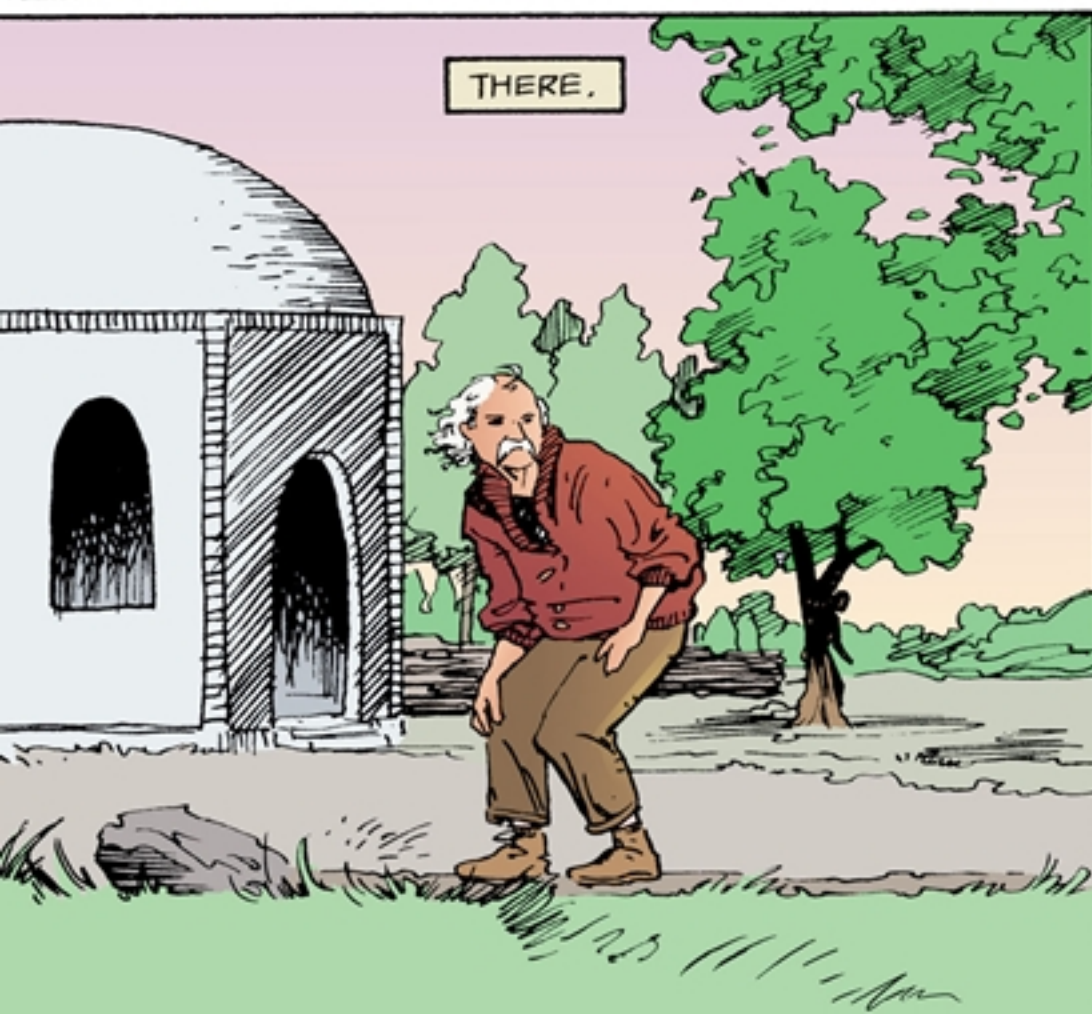


EACH STONE STEP  
CURVES DEEPLY IN  
THE MIDDLE, ERODED  
BY HIS BOOTS, AND BY  
THE BOOTS OF HIS  
ANCESTORS ...



AT THE TOP OF THE HILL  
HE PAUSES TO CATCH HIS  
BREATH. HE'S GETTING  
OLD.







KRIS IS HIS SON-IN-LAW. TWENTY YEARS AGO HE CAME TO THE ISLAND, FLEEING A WAR IN A FAR LAND, DRIVEN BY DARK DREAMS.

ANDROS'S FAMILY TOOK HIM IN: THEY HAD BEEN EXPECTING HIM.

HELLO, PAPA.

HOW WAS HE TONIGHT?

HE SLEPT FOR A FEW HOURS. THEN HE WANTED TO LOOK AT THE MOON. THEN HE WAS SILENT. NOW, HE SLEEPS ONCE MORE.

BEAT HIM, AND AS YOU DO, TELL HIM THAT WHEN THEY STOLE OUR CHARGE, TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, IT WAS THIRTY YEARS BEFORE HE RETURNED TO US.

THIRTY YEARS.

IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.

HM. TELL YOUR HALF-WIT OF A SON THAT I SAW HIM, WHEN I WAS COMING UP THE PATH. BEAT HIM FOR ME.

HE'S TOO OLD FOR A BEATING, ANDROS.

HE SHOULD NOT BE SEEN, WHEN HE IS ON GUARD.

HE KNOWS THAT, PAPA.

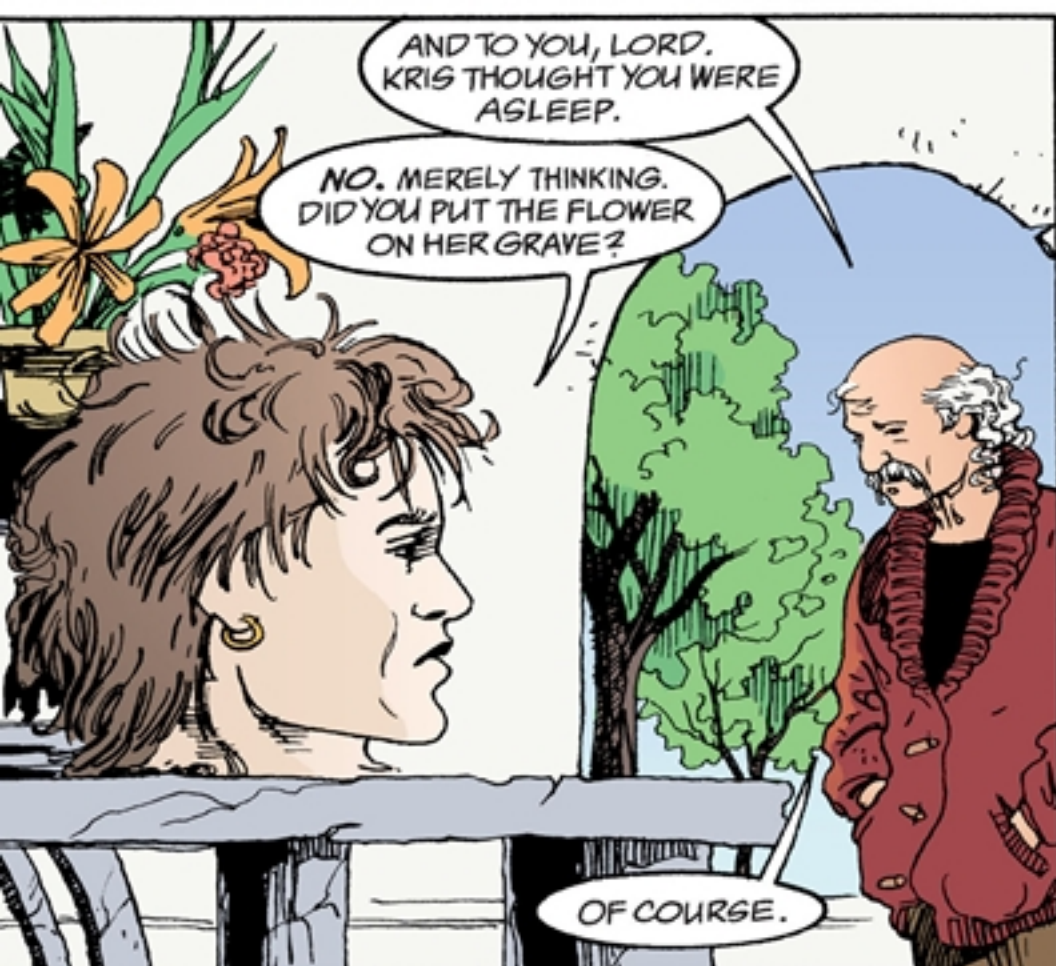
IF HE TRULY KNEW THAT THEN HE WOULD NOT HAVE LET HIMSELF BE SEEN.

GO DOWN AND EAT, KRIS. GO SLEEP. I WILL SEE YOU AT DUSK.





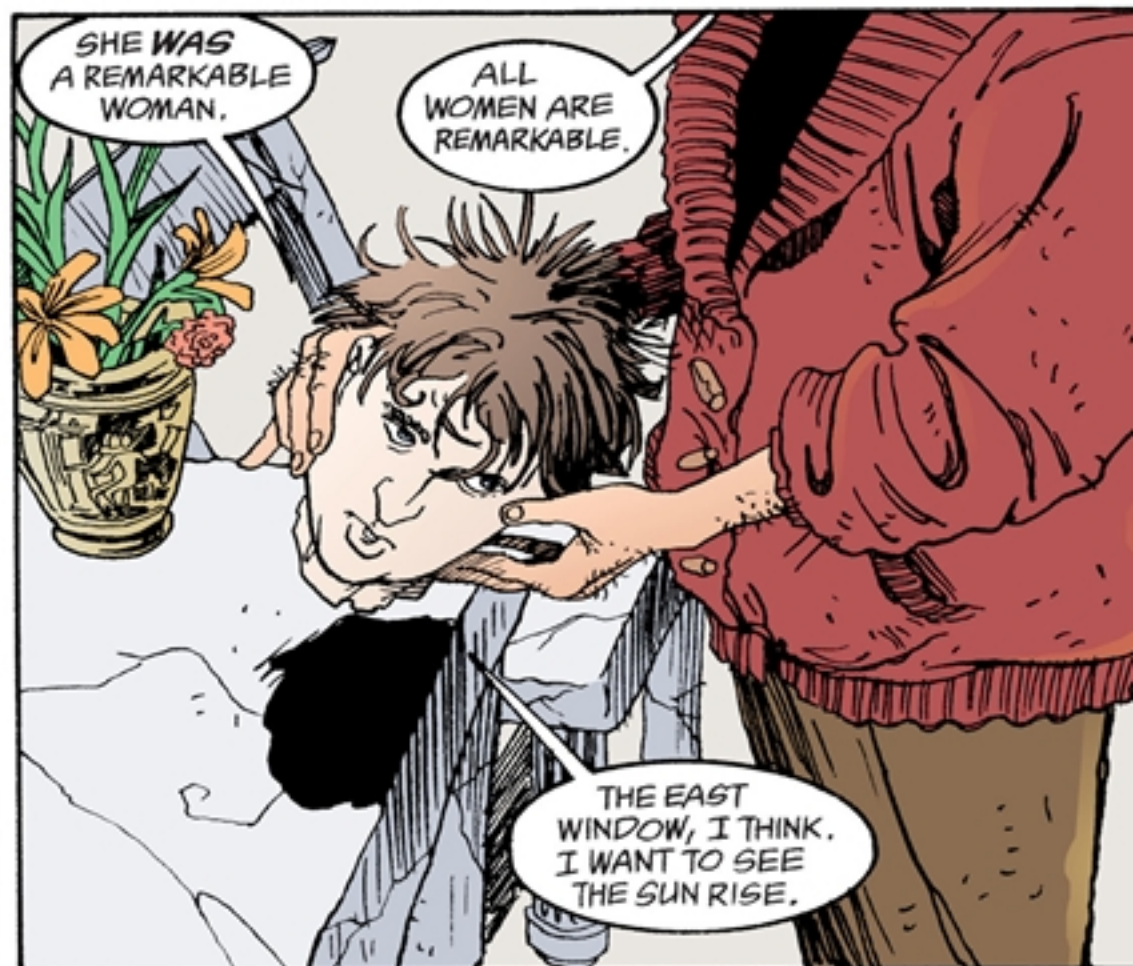
GOOD MORNING, ANDROS.



AND TO YOU, LORD. KRIS THOUGHT YOU WERE ASLEEP.

NO. MERELY THINKING. DID YOU PUT THE FLOWER ON HER GRAVE?

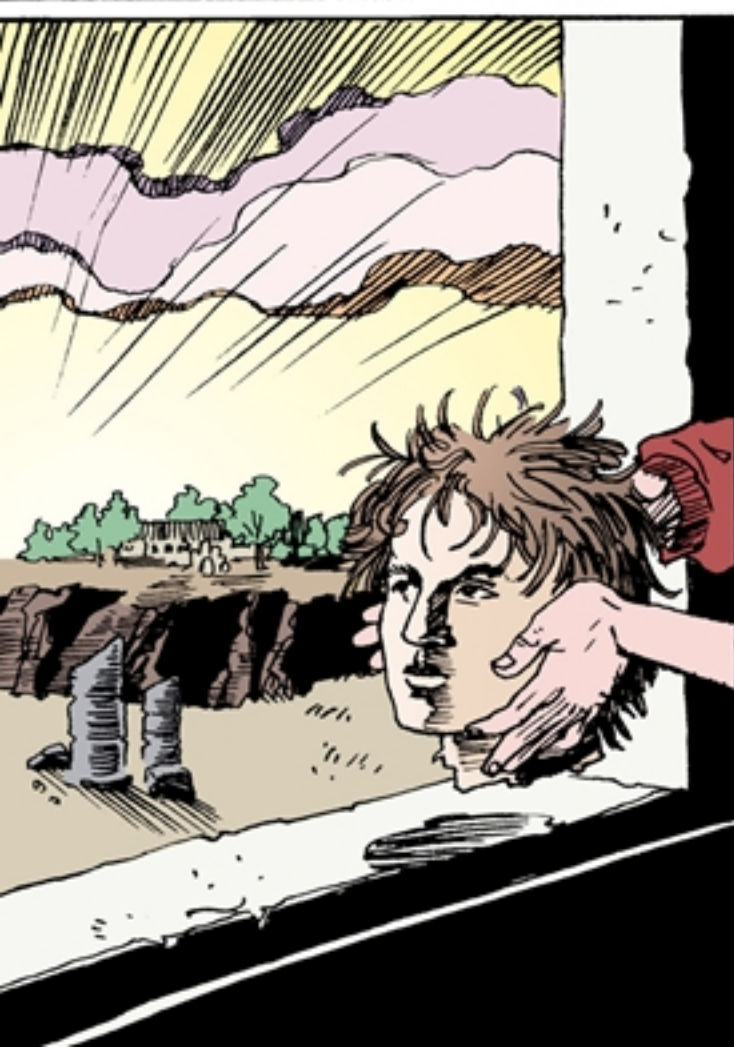
OF COURSE.



SHE WAS A REMARKABLE WOMAN.

ALL WOMEN ARE REMARKABLE.

THE EAST WINDOW, I THINK. I WANT TO SEE THE SUN RISE.

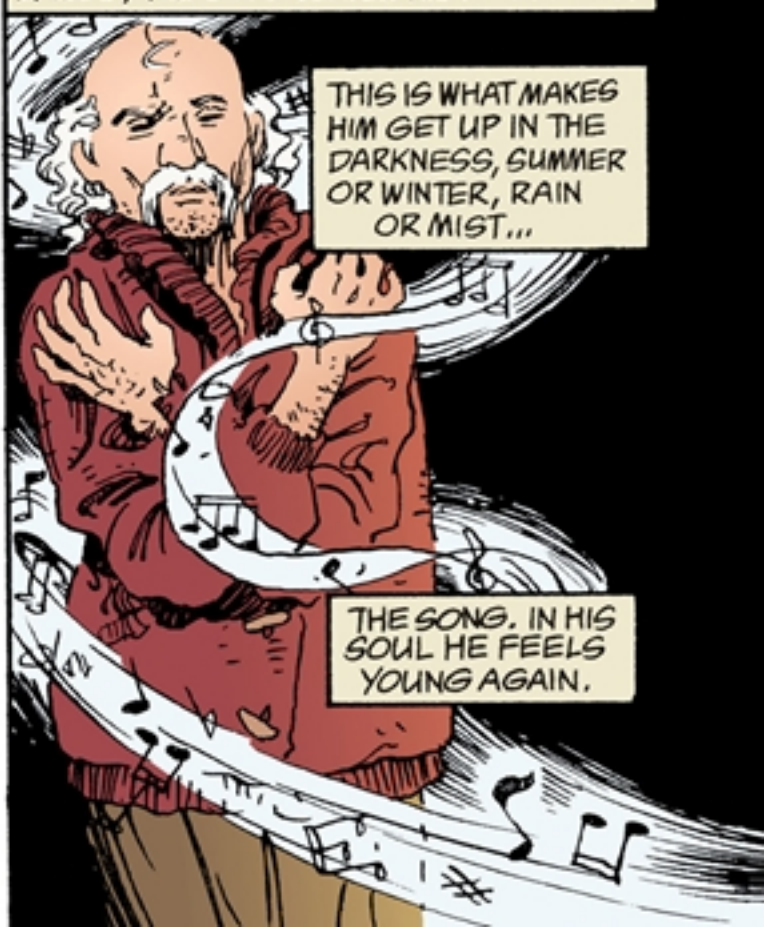


HE STARES UNBLINKING INTO THE LIGHT.

THEN HE BEGINS TO SING TO HIMSELF, HIS VOICE LITTLE MORE THAN A WHISPER. HE SINGS TO THE SUNRISE, IN A LONG-FORGOTTEN TONGUE.



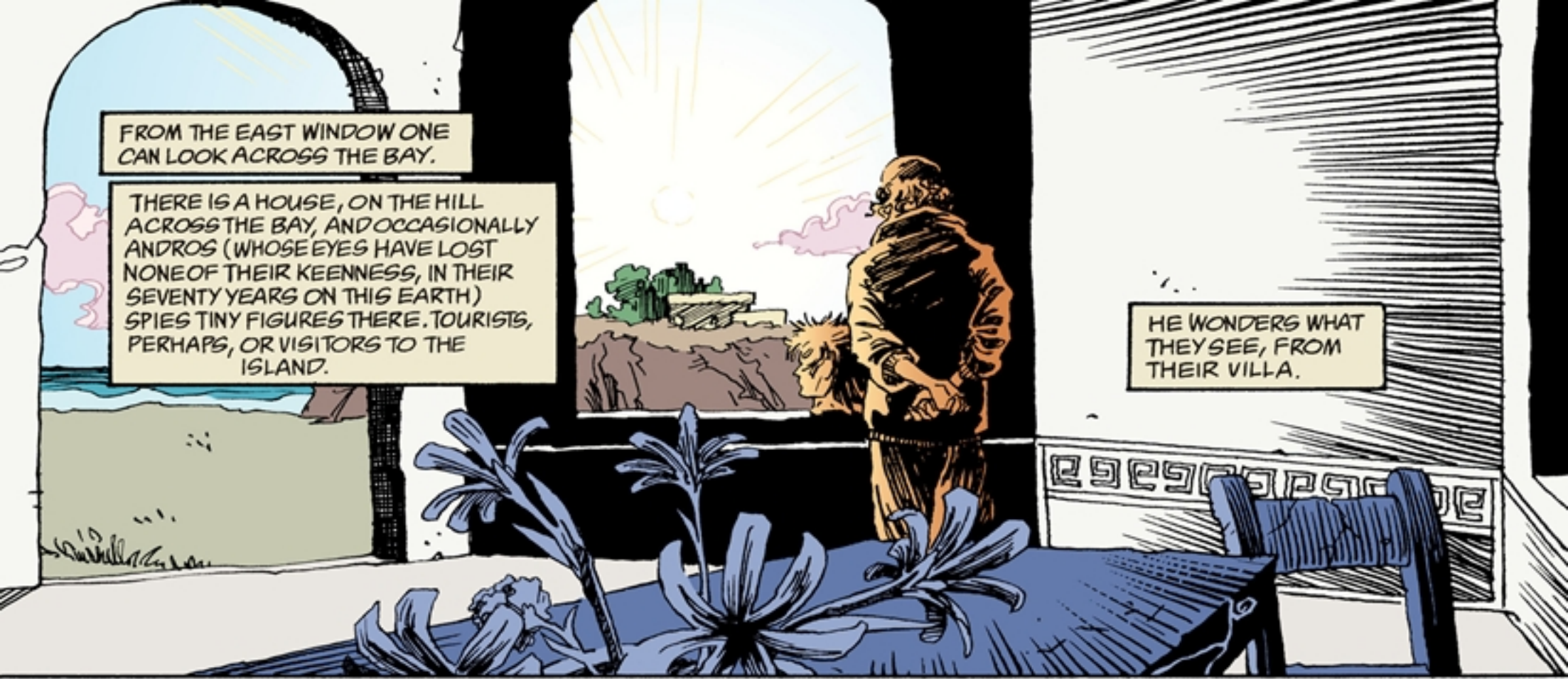
ANDROS LISTENS TO THE SONG OF ORPHEUS, AND THE ACHE IN HIS JOINTS EASES; THE COLD LEAVES HIS FINGERTIPS.



THIS IS WHAT MAKES HIM GET UP IN THE DARKNESS, SUMMER OR WINTER, RAIN OR MIST...

THE SONG. IN HIS SOUL HE FEELS YOUNG AGAIN.

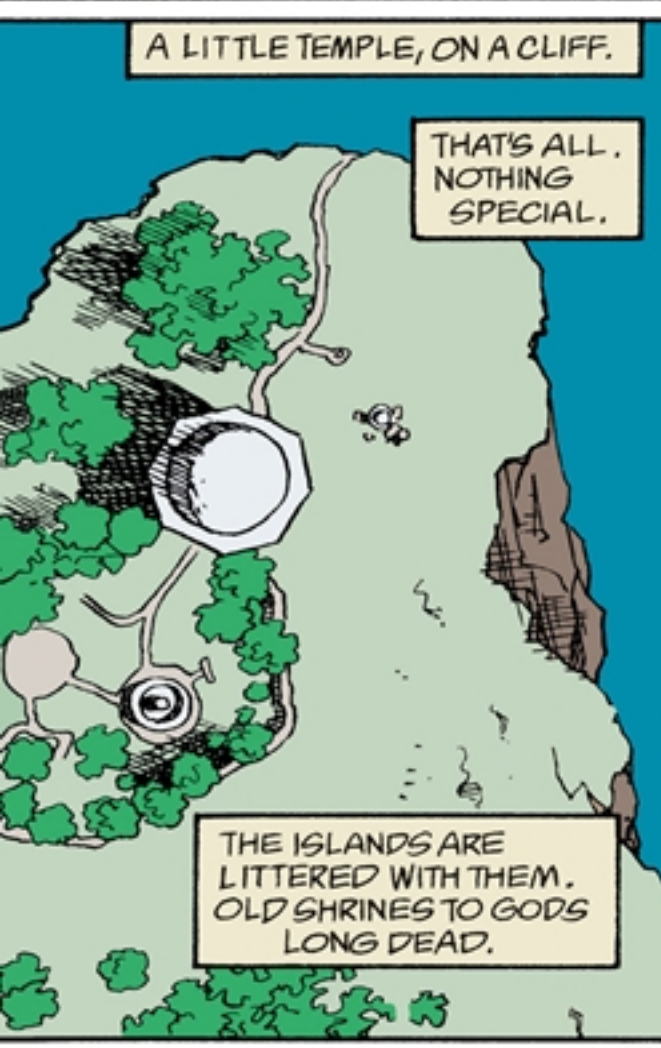




FROM THE EAST WINDOW ONE  
CAN LOOK ACROSS THE BAY.

THERE IS A HOUSE, ON THE HILL  
ACROSS THE BAY, AND OCCASIONALLY  
ANDROS (WHOSE EYES HAVE LOST  
NONE OF THEIR KEENNESS, IN THEIR  
SEVENTY YEARS ON THIS EARTH)  
SPIES TINY FIGURES THERE. TOURISTS,  
PERHAPS, OR VISITORS TO THE  
ISLAND.


HE WONDERS WHAT  
THEY SEE, FROM  
THEIR VILLA.



A LITTLE TEMPLE, ON A CLIFF.

THAT'S ALL.  
NOTHING  
SPECIAL.

THE ISLANDS ARE  
LITTERED WITH THEM.  
OLD SHRINES TO GODS  
LONG DEAD.



THE PRIESTS OF ORPHEUS HAVE HAD  
THOUSANDS OF YEARS TO LEARN  
THE ART OF MISDIRECTION.

EVEN THE MOST INQUISITIVE  
TOURIST WOULD FIND IT ALMOST  
PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO  
FIND HIS WAY TO THE TEMPLE.

AND IF IT CAME TO MORE THAN THAT...?

WELL, THE CUSTODIANS HAVE NOT BEEN  
IDLE.

KRIS HAS DRAWN UP PLANS  
THAT COVER ALMOST ALL EVENTUALITIES  
-- UP TO AND INCLUDING A HELICOPTER  
ASSAULT ON THE TEMPLE ...

THIRTY YEARS. IT SHALL  
NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.

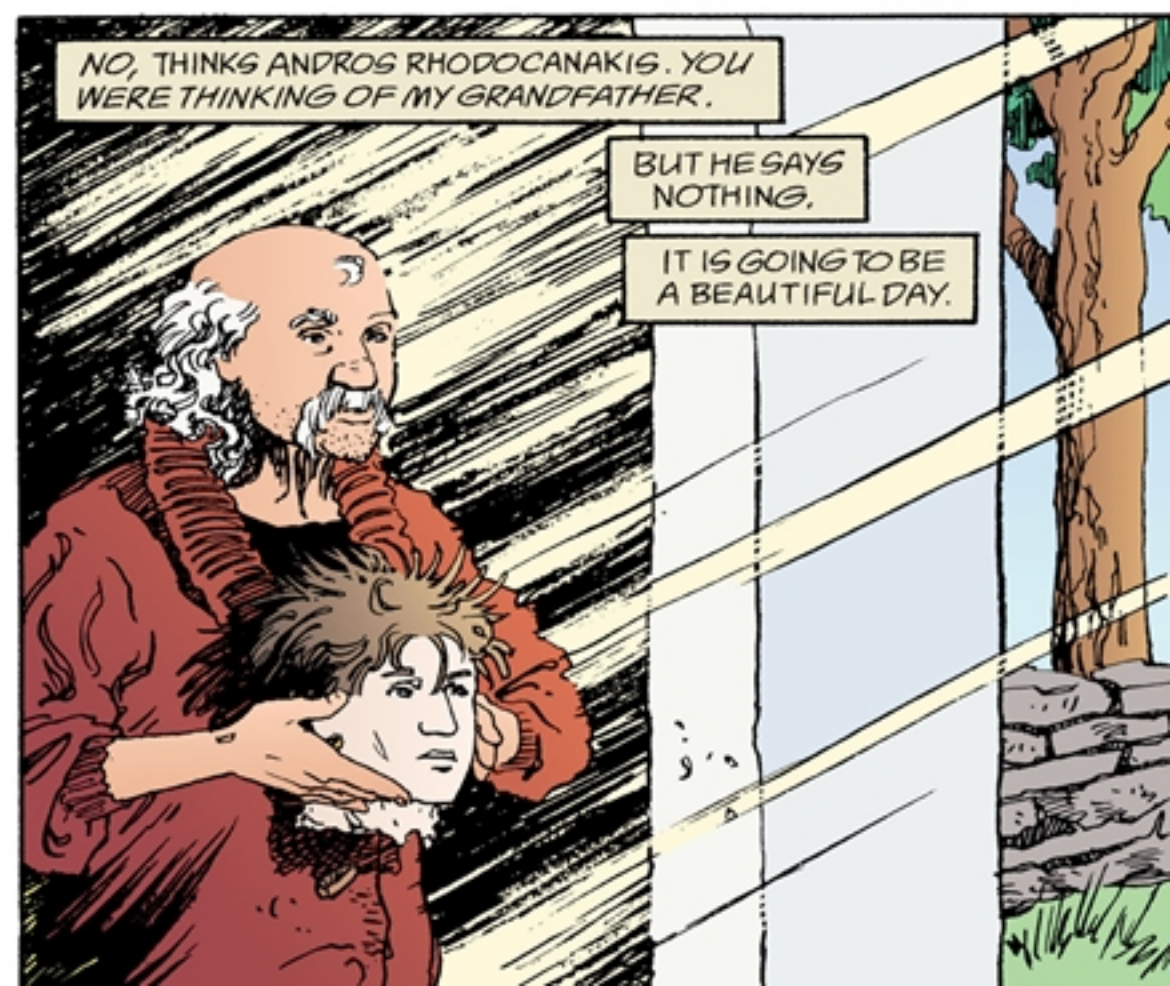
"THERE.  
ENOUGH."



PLEASE, CHRESTOS,  
CARRY ME INTO THE  
GARDEN.

I'M  
ANDROS,  
LORD.

DID I SAY  
CHRE...? I'M  
SORRY. I WAS  
THINKING OF YOUR  
FATHER.

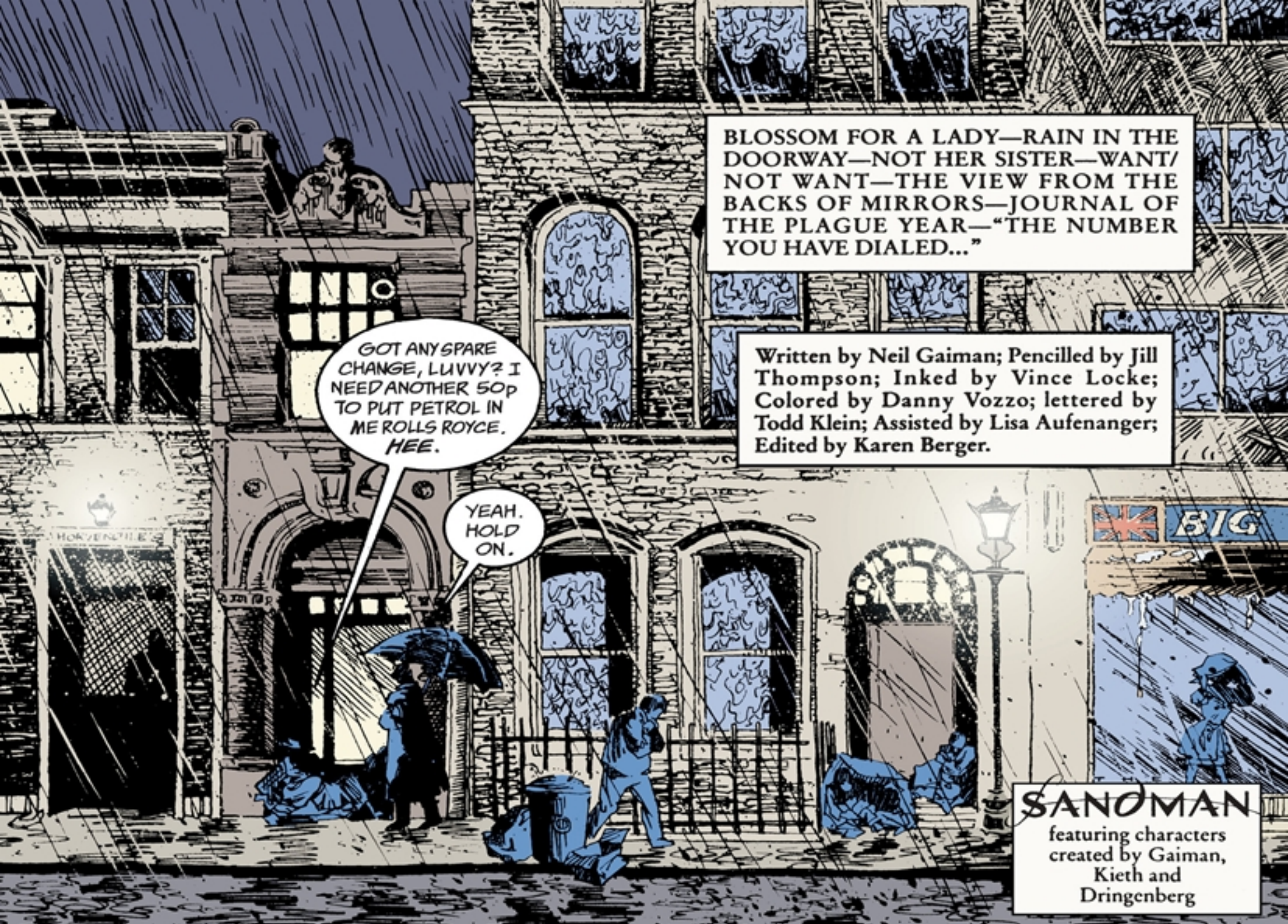


NO, THINKS ANDROS RHODOCANAKIS. YOU  
WERE THINKING OF MY GRANDFATHER.

BUT HE SAYS  
NOTHING.

IT IS GOING TO BE  
A BEAUTIFUL DAY.





BLOSSOM FOR A LADY—RAIN IN THE  
DOORWAY—NOT HER SISTER—WANT/  
NOT WANT—THE VIEW FROM THE  
BACKS OF MIRRORS—JOURNAL OF  
THE PLAGUE YEAR—"THE NUMBER  
YOU HAVE DIALED..."

Written by Neil Gaiman; Pencilled by Jill  
Thompson; Inked by Vince Locke;  
Colored by Danny Vozzo; lettered by  
Todd Klein; Assisted by Lisa Aufenanger;  
Edited by Karen Berger.

GOT ANY SPARE  
CHANGE, LUVVY? I  
NEED ANOTHER 50P  
TO PUT PETROL IN  
ME ROLLS ROYCE.  
HEE.

YEAH.  
HOLD  
ON.

**SANOMAN**  
featuring characters  
created by Gaiman,  
Kieth and  
Dringenberg



HERE YOU GO. NOT A NICE  
NIGHT TO BE OUT.

NO. AT LEAST  
IT'S WARMING UP A BIT,  
THOUGH. THE WINTER  
WAS SOMETHING  
CRUEL.

WHAT  
ABOUT YOUR  
FRIEND?



HER? SHE'S ASLEEP. I THINK.  
SHE WAS HERE WHEN I GOT HERE.

IT'S A SHAME, WHEN IT'S  
THE KIDS. I FIGURE, US OLD  
FOLKS, WELL, WE'VE HAD A  
GOOD INNINGS.

BUT KIDS.  
TCH.



I HAD A SON ONCE, DEAR, BUT  
HE'S NO LONGER WITH US. WELL,  
THEY SAID IT WAS A HINDUSTRIAL  
HACCIDENT, BUT I KNEW WHAT  
WAS WHAT, OH YES. I WASN'T  
BORN YESTERDAY.

IT'S NOT FAIR,  
WHEN THE YOUNG ONES  
DIE BEFORE THE OLD ONES.  
I MEAN, THEY'RE ALL WE'VE  
GOT TO LOOK FORWARD  
TO.

THIS END

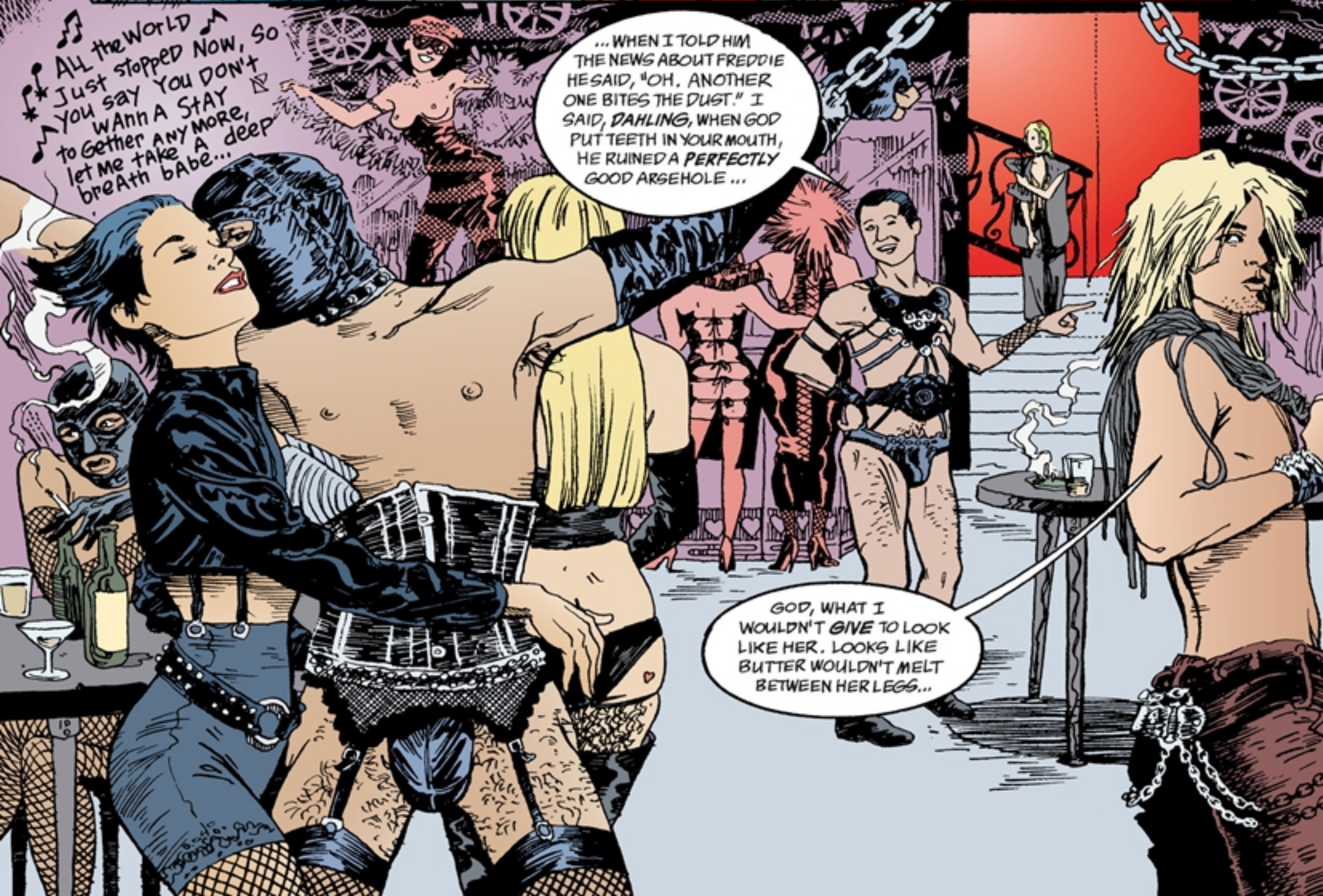
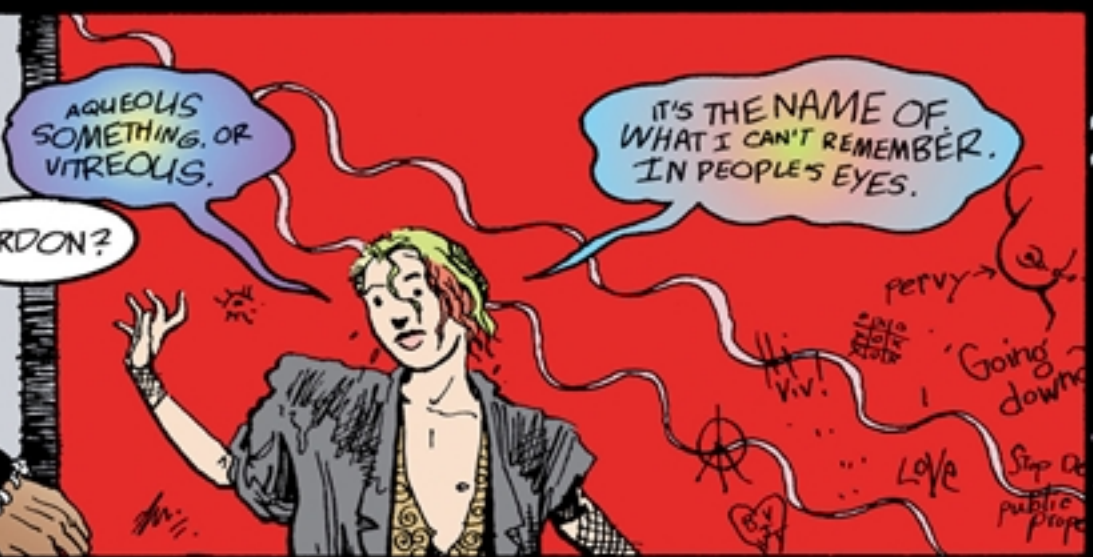








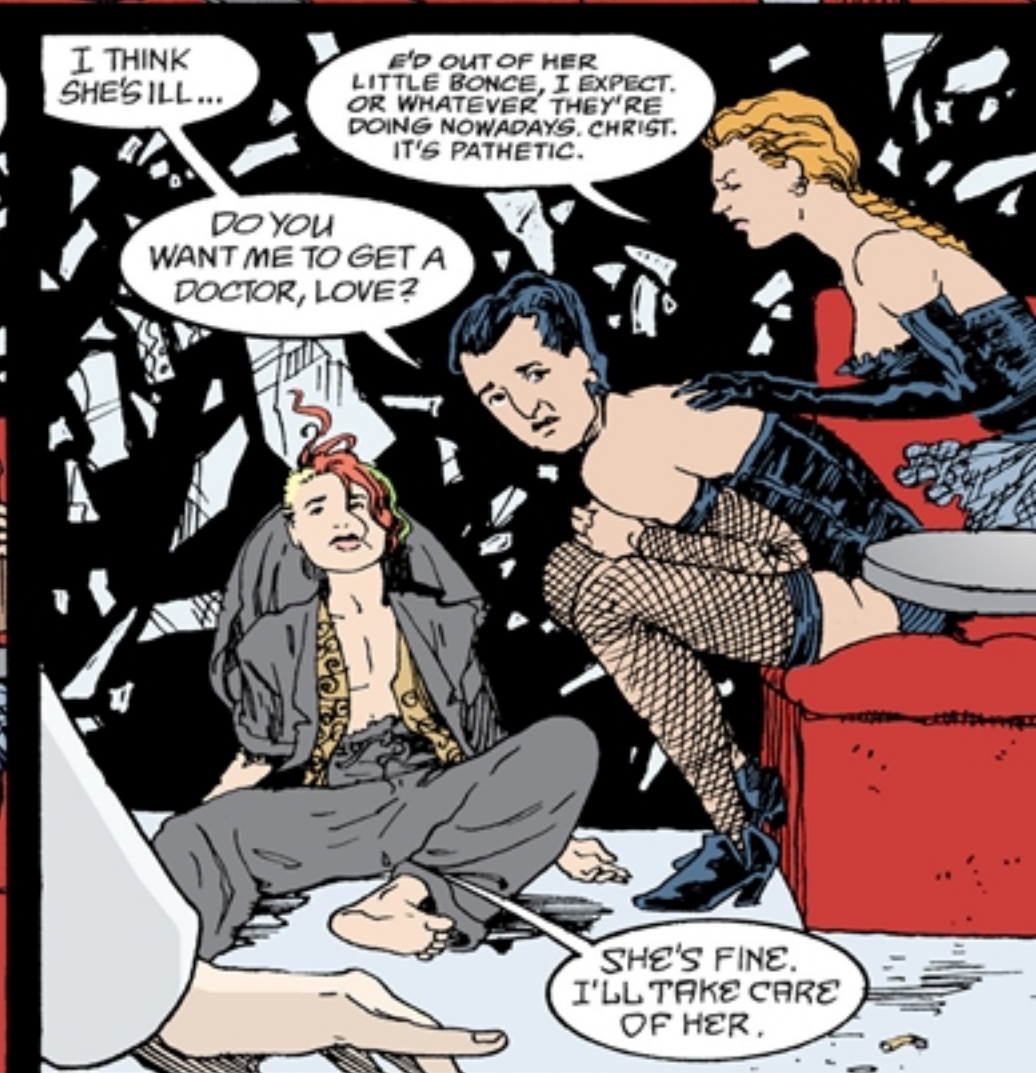
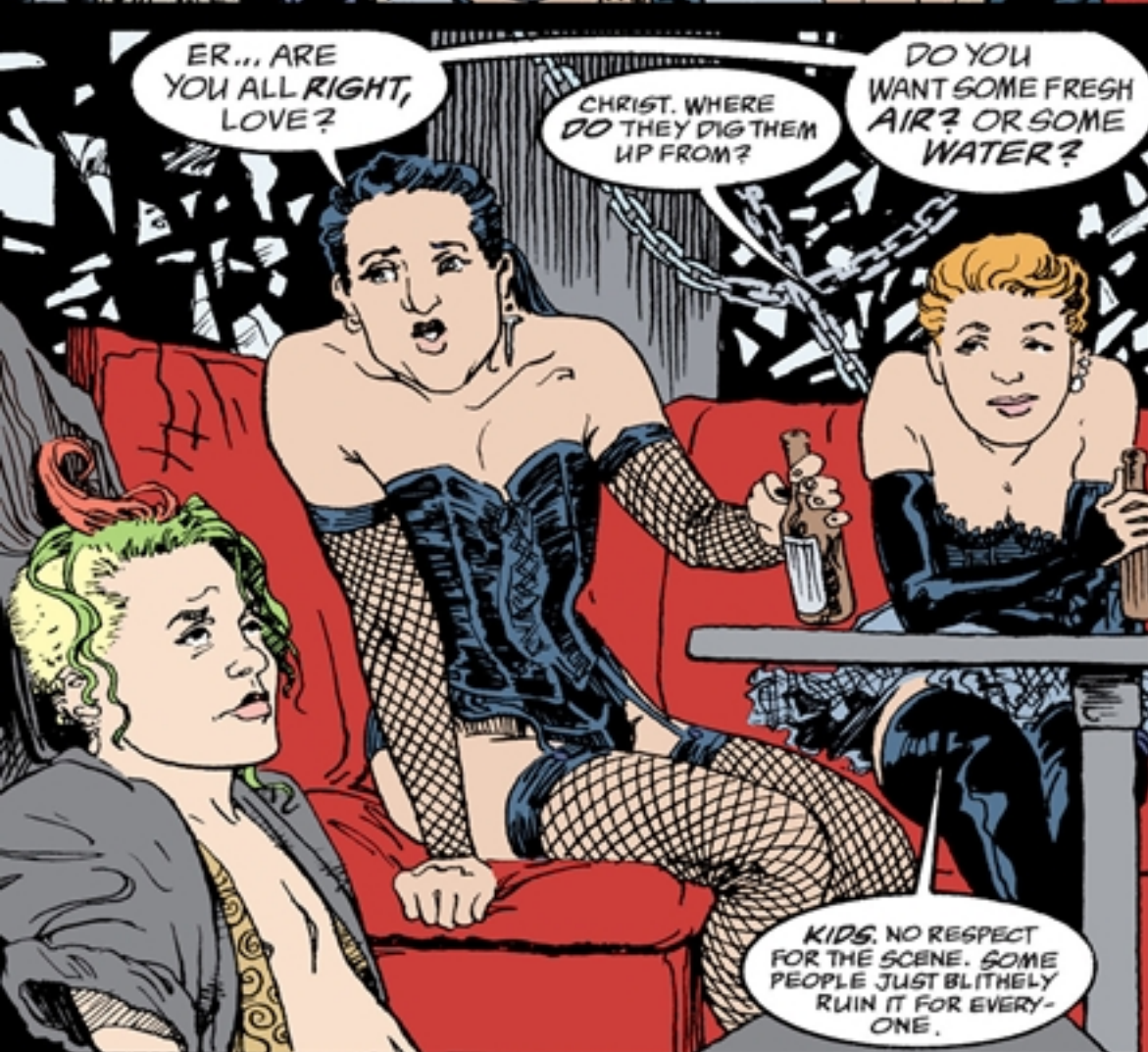
















HONESTLY, GIRL. SHE'S RIGHT: YOU ARE PATHETIC, MAKING A SCENE LIKE THAT. I COULD HEAR YOU SCREAMING TWO CONTINENTS AWAY.

DESIRE?

WHO ELSE?



EXCUSE ME. I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU. UM. I MEAN. YOU'RE GORGEOUS. SO. UH. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

NO.

YOU SEE THAT YOUNG LADY IN RED? OVER THERE?



GO AND TALK TO HER. HAVE A PASSIONATE WEEKEND DURING WHICH BOTH OF YOU MAKE LOVE UNTIL YOU'RE SORE AND BLEEDING. THEN, WITHOUT KNOWING WHY, REFUSE TO SEE HER AGAIN.

SHE'LL PHONE YOU UP, AND HANG AROUND YOUR HOUSE. WHEN YOU ASK HER TO LEAVE YOU ALONE SHE'LL JUST CRY AND NOT SAY ANYTHING-- LOOK AT YOU WITH HURT EYES AND FOLLOW YOU AROUND.



EVENTUALLY THIS WILL MAKE YOU SO ANGRY YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF NEEDING DESPERATELY TO MAKE HER SAY SOMETHING. TO MAKE HER REACT. TO HURT HER. TO GET HER EYES OUT OF YOUR MIND.



AFTER THAT IT WILL BE JUST A MATTER OF TIME.



UH. OKAY...

THANKS. YEAH. WOW. THANKS A LOT.



WILL YOU. WILL YOU TAKE ME AWAY FROM HERE?

PLEASE?



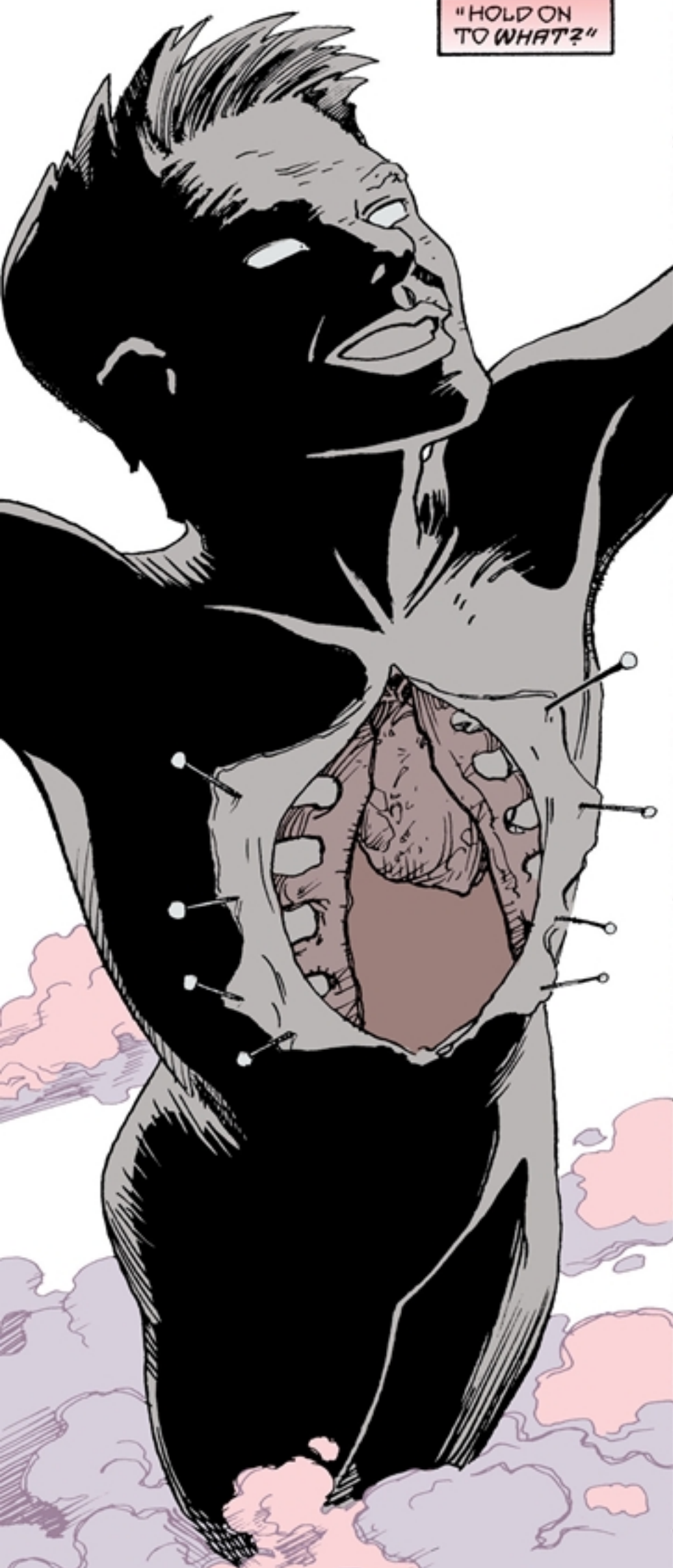
HOLD MY HAND. WE'LL GO TO MY PLACE.



"I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU THIS BAD  
IN A WHILE. ROTTEN NIGHT, HUH?"

"I. I'M FINDING IT HARDER  
TO HOLD ON."

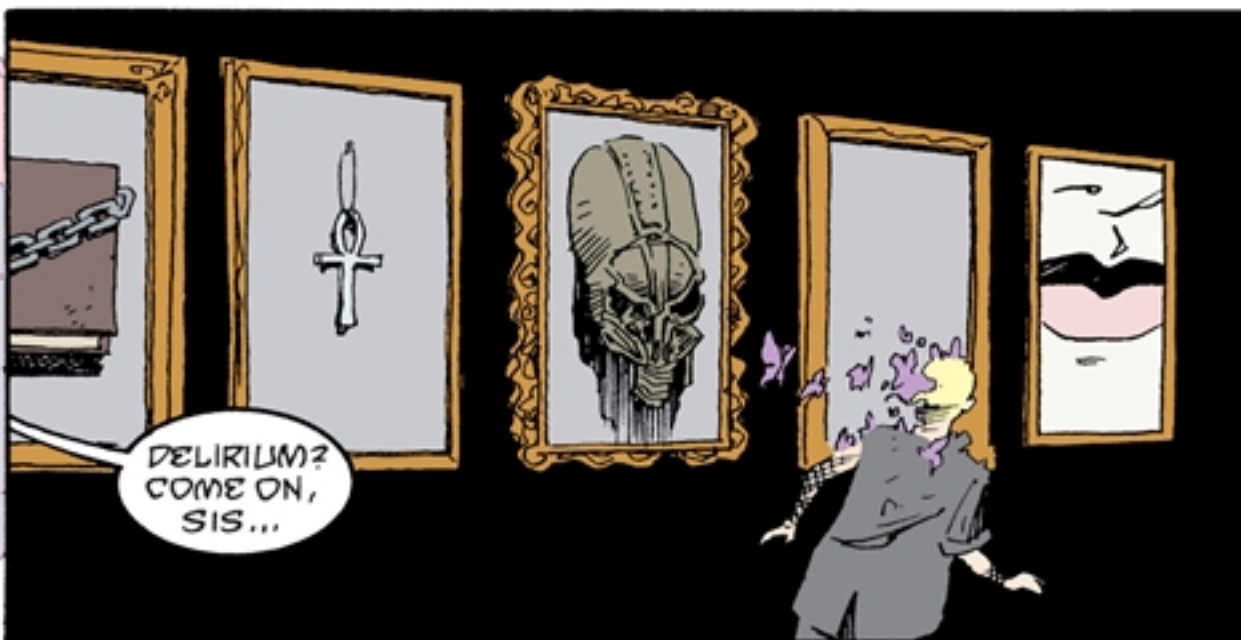
"HOLD ON  
TO WHAT?"



EVERYTHING. IT ALL  
KEEPS MOVING AND IT WON'T  
STOP AND I JUST WANT IT TO  
STOP AND THEN I WON'T STOP  
AND THEN I THINK WHAT  
IF IT GETS WORSE? I  
MEAN, YOU KNOW?

WHAT IF IT  
GETS WORSE?

OH COME  
ON, LITTLE SISTER.  
PULL YOURSELF  
TOGETHER.

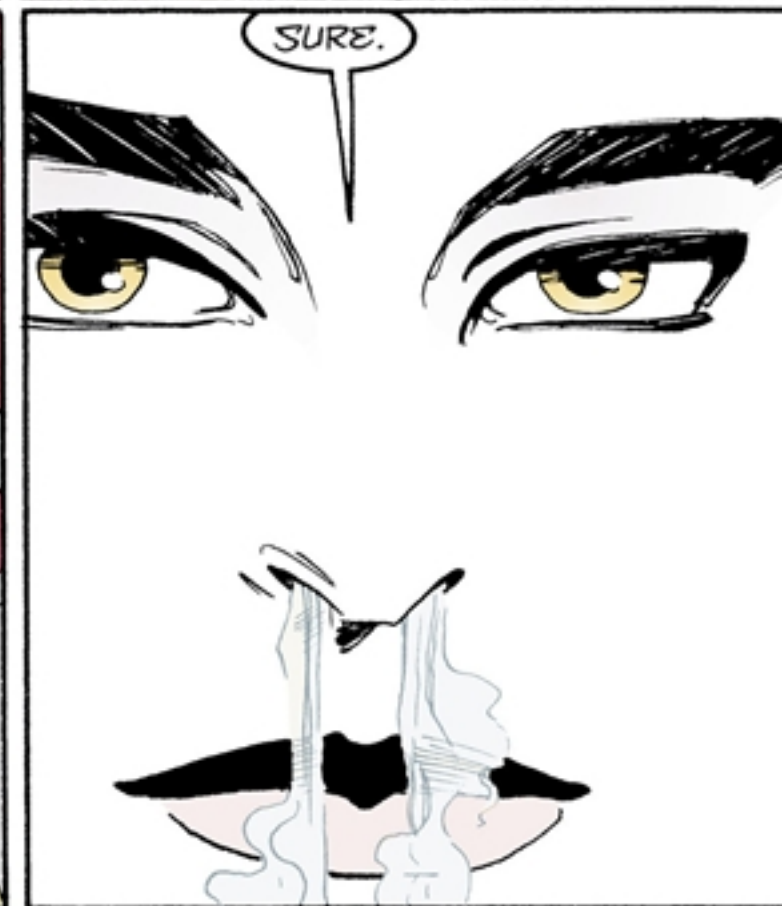


DELIRIUM?  
COME ON,  
SIS...











DELIRIUM HAS, FROM TIME TO TIME, VISITED DESPAIR'S GRAY REALM. IT IS THE ANTITHESIS OF HER OWN CHURNING DOMAIN: FORMLESS AND SILENT AND STILL. APATHY HANGS LIKE DAMP MIST IN THE CHILL AIR.

NO WINDS BLOW, NO BIRD SINGS, NOTHING MOVES.

SHE FEELS THE COLD TOUCHING HER, SOBERING HER. COOL TENDRILS MOVE INSIDE HER, QUESTING, WHISPERING...

SHE STARES AT THE WORLD WITH TWO MISMATCHED EYES: ONE EMERALD GREEN, THE OTHER PALE BLUE FLECKS FLICKER AND SWIM LIKE A SHOAL OF TINY FISH.



DELIRIUM SEES THE GRAY PLACE THAT WAITS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF EVERY MIRROR.

AND SHE SHIVERS.

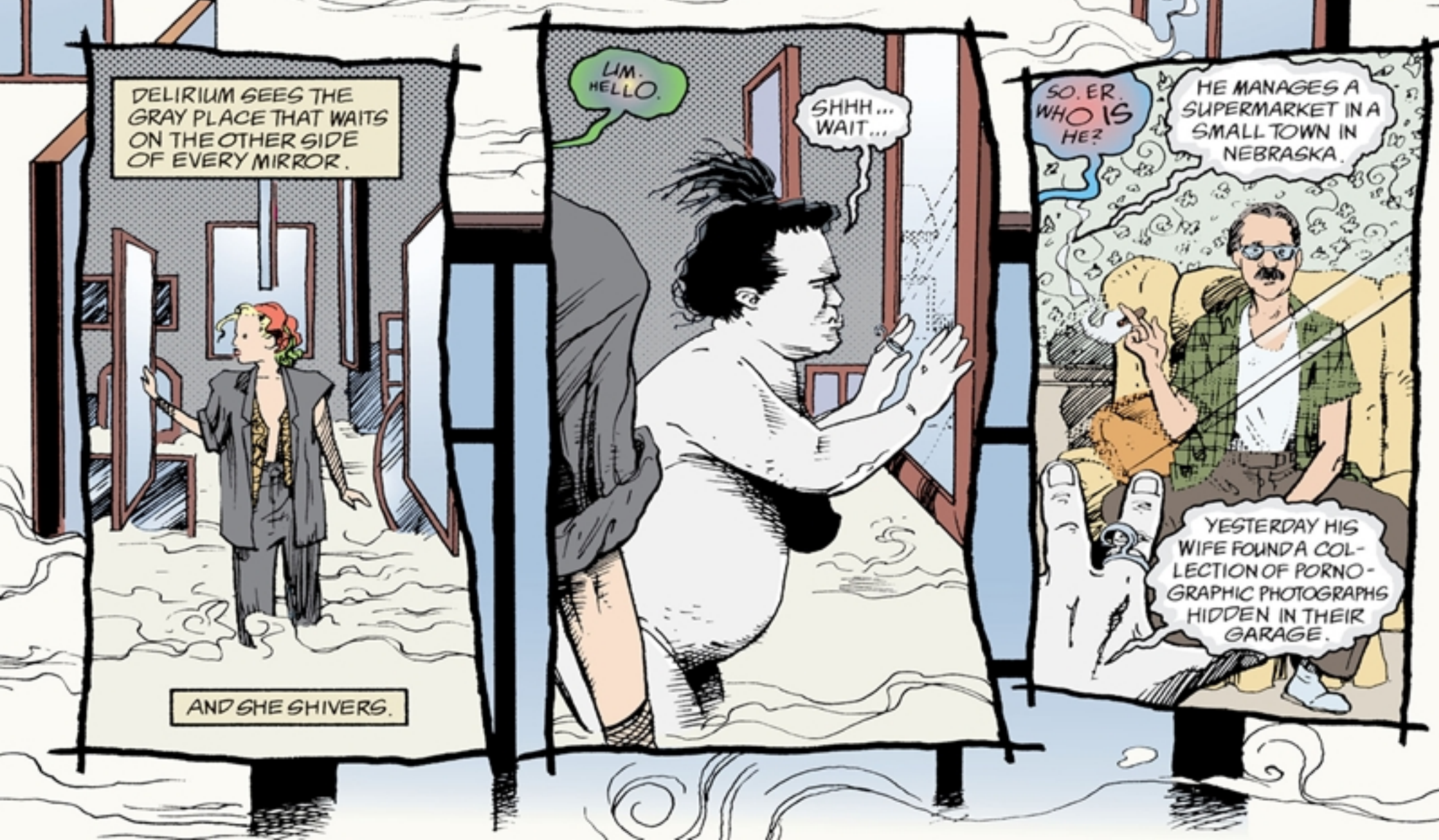
LIM.  
HELLO.

SHHH...  
WAIT...

SO, ER.  
WHO IS  
HE?

HE MANAGES A  
SUPERMARKET IN A  
SMALL TOWN IN  
NEBRASKA.

YESTERDAY HIS  
WIFE FOUND A COL-  
LECTION OF PORNO-  
GRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHS  
HIDDEN IN THEIR  
GARAGE.







MOST OF THEM  
SHOWED SMALL  
CHILDREN PERFORMING  
VARIOUS SEXUAL ACTS  
WITH ADULTS.

SHE  
RECOGNIZED HER  
HUSBAND, AND THEIR  
FIVE-YEAR-OLD  
NIECE.

SHE LEFT HIM,  
TAKING THE PHOTO-  
GRAPHS WITH HER.  
HE FEARS SHE MAY  
ALREADY HAVE GIVEN  
THEM TO THE  
POLICE.



TODAY HE'S  
SITTING IN THEIR  
FAMILY ROOM,  
REALIZING THAT  
HIS LIFE IS OVER,  
WONDERING IF HE  
HAS THE COURAGE  
PHYSICALLY TO  
END IT.

HE DOESN'T.

ISN'T IT  
BEAUTIFUL?



IT'S OKAY. I  
SUPPOSE. IF YOU'RE  
INTO THAT KIND OF  
THING.

LISTEN. I UM  
SORT OF HAVE TO  
TALK TO YOU.

AH? SO  
TALK.



IT'S ABOUT,  
LIM, OUR FAMILY.

WHAT  
ABOUT  
IT?

I ALWAYS THOUGHT  
THAT MAYBE I OUGHT TO  
HAVE A PET. I MEAN,  
YOU'VE GOT YOUR RATS  
AND OUR SISTER'S GOT  
HER GOLDFISH AND I MEAN  
EVEN STUFFY DREAM'S GOT  
THAT BIG BLACK BIRD.

AND DESTINY'S  
GOT THE LITTLE FLAPPY  
THINGS...

I DON'T KNOW. WHAT  
DO YOU THINK?



WHAT  
ABOUT OUR  
FAMILY?

OH YEAH. I THINK  
MAYBE SOMEBODY SHOULD  
DO SOMETHING. THAT'S  
ALL.

ABOUT WHAT,  
DELIRIUM?



DIDN'T I SAY?

NO.

OH. I THOUGHT  
MAYBE I DID.

LOOK, DESPAIR,  
DO YOU REMEMBER...  
LIM...

I MEAN,  
DO YOU REMEM-  
BER...

REMEMBER  
WHAT?

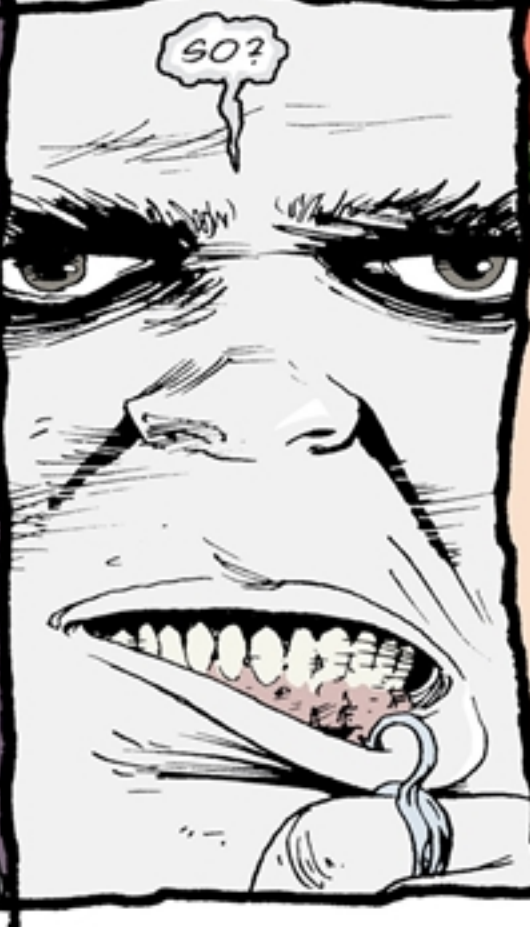


THE NAME OF THE GUNKY  
JELLY STUFF IN PEOPLE'S  
EYES?

VITREOUS  
HUMOR.

OH YEAH. I KNEW  
THAT. THANKS. WELL...  
HANG IN THERE. I MEAN,  
I'LL SEE YOU. B'BYE.







IF I SAY  
NO, WHAT WILL  
YOU DO THEN?

ASK THE REST OF THE FAMILY.  
I SUPPOSE. DESIRE SAID NO ALREADY.  
SO I THOUGHT, OKAY, I'D ASK YOU  
NEXT. IT'S JUST ALL BEEN DIFFERENT  
SINCE HE WENT. IT'S SOUR AND  
ROTTEN AND I'M LONELY. WE NEVER  
SEE EACH OTHER. HE MADE  
THINGS OKAY.

NO. I  
WON'T HELP  
YOU.

OH.

WELL, THANK  
YOU FOR NOT DOING  
THE VOICE, ANYWAY.

SO WHO  
WILL YOU ASK  
NOW?

ARE YOU SURE YOU WON'T  
CHANGE YOUR MIND? I MEAN,  
DREAM'S MUCH SPOOKIER THAN  
YOU ARE. AND I'M ALWAYS  
SCARED HE'S LAUGHING AT  
ME, BEHIND HIS FACE.

UM. DREAM, I  
SUPPOSE. HE'S THE  
NEXT OLDEST, AFTER...

HE'LL SAY  
NO. YOU KNOW  
THAT?

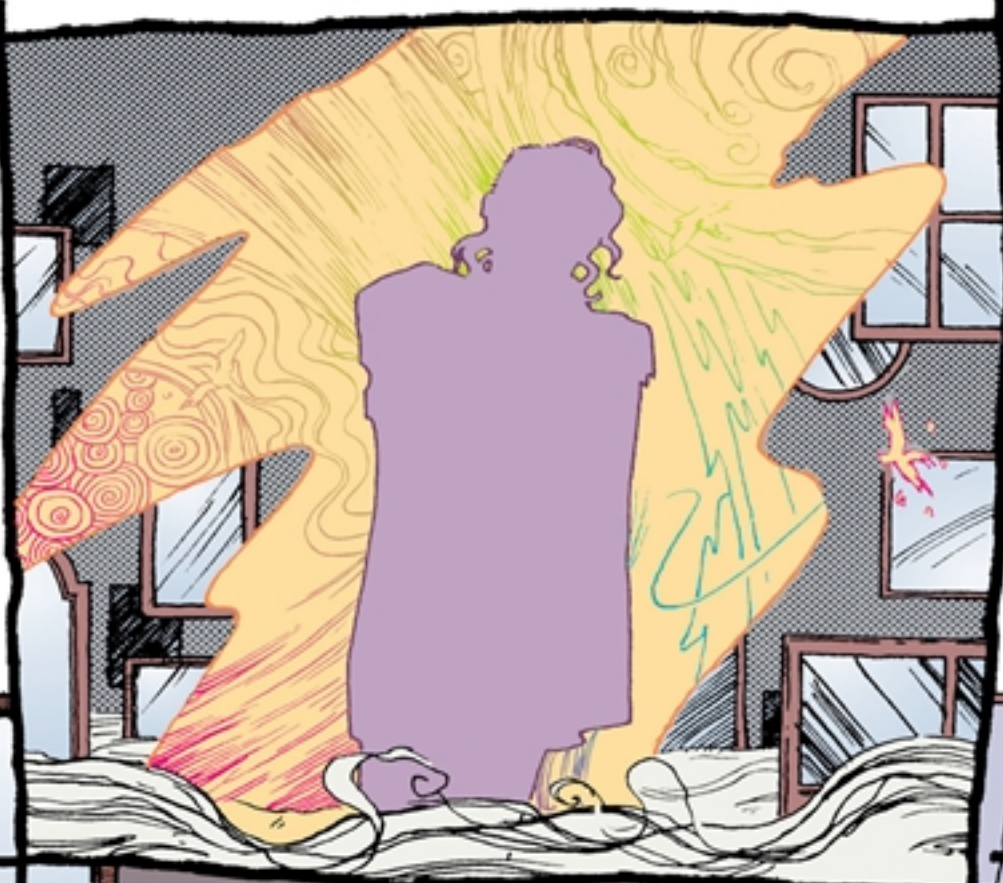
I HAVE MY OWN  
RESPONSIBILITIES. AND  
I RESPECT OUR BROTHER'S  
PRIVACY.

AND YOU DON'T  
WANT TO UPSET DESIRE,  
DO YOU?

PLEASE. DON'T  
LOOK AT ME LIKE  
THAT. I. UM. I...

I'M GOING  
BACK TO MY OWN  
HOME. I'M GOING  
TO THINK.





THREE BLIND HUMMINGBIRDS HANG IN THE AIR LIKE JEWELS OF IRIDESCENT SCARLET AND COBALT; THEN, ONE BY ONE, THEY FADE, ALL COLOR LEECHED FROM THEM, AND FALL LIFELESS INTO THE MISTS, TO BE EATEN BY THE RATS.

DESPAIR FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE.

IN HER WORLD THERE ARE SO MANY WINDOWS. EACH OPENING SHOWS HER AN EXISTENCE THAT'S FALLEN TO HER--SOME ONLY FOR MOMENTS, OTHERS FOR LIFETIMES.

ABLE AT THIS MOMENT NEITHER TO SAVOR THEM, NOR TO UNDERSTAND HER OWN DISQUIET, SHE STARES AWAY FROM ALL WINDOWS AS SHE WALKS.

SILENT RATS RUN UNMINDFULLY OVER HER FEET, INVISIBLE IN THE MIST.

SHE MISSES HIM.

IT IS OVER THREE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE LAST SHE AND HER BROTHER WERE ALONE TOGETHER...



LIKE A FLOOD, THE MEMORIES COME, AND SHE IS DROWNING IN THEM.

AGAINST HER WILL HER CHEST HEAVES, AND SHE BEGINS TO WEEP: DEEP, HELPLESS, RACKING SOBS...

NO.

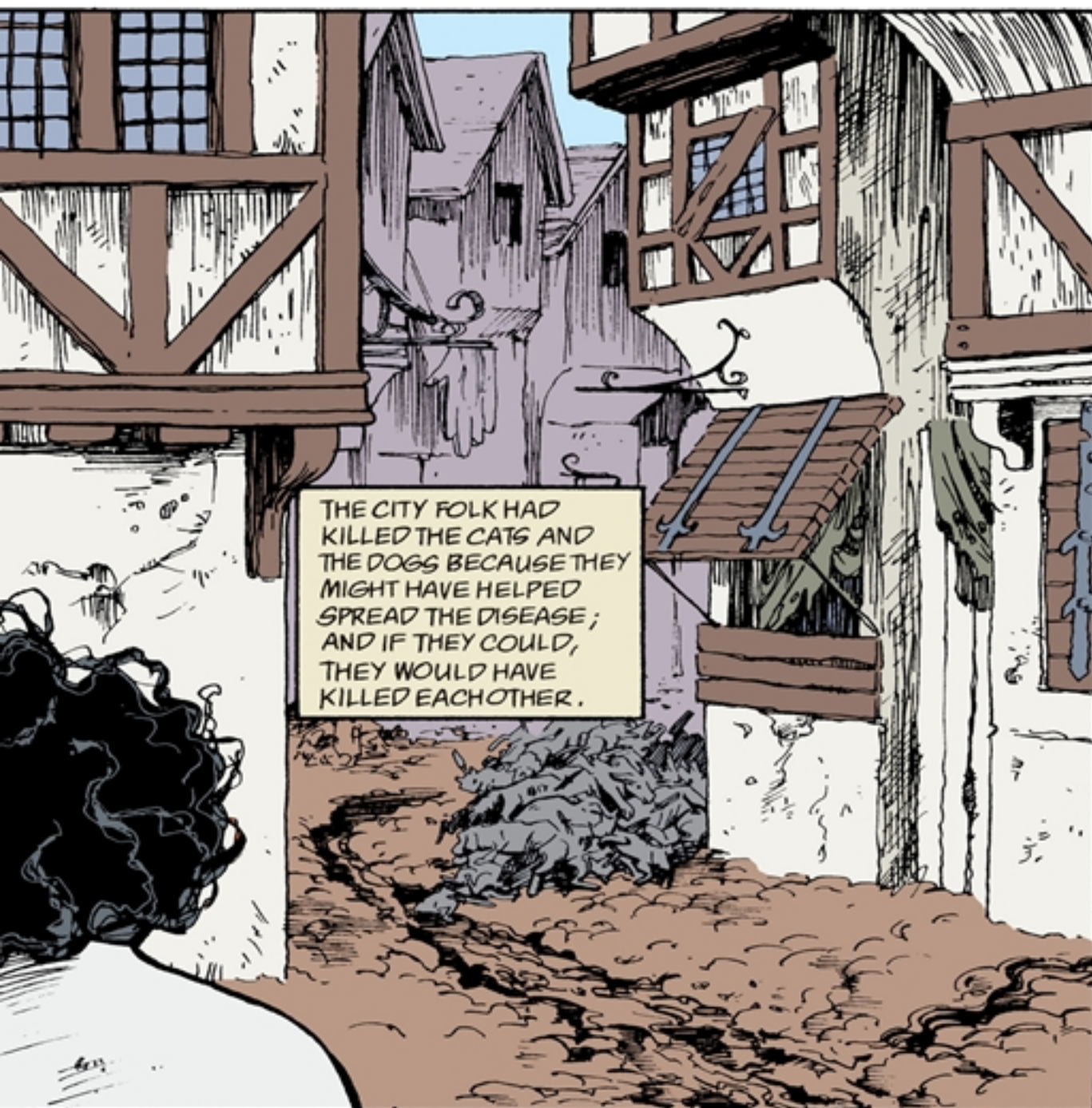
DESPAIR PLACES THE COLD METAL BARB OF HER HOOK ONTO THE SURFACE OF HER EYE. AND THEN SHE PUSHES (PIERCING CORNEA AND LENS) AND RIPS (FREEING THE AQUEOUS HUMOR AND VITREOUS HUMOR TO RUN LIKE TEARS DOWN HER CHEEK, INTO HER HAND)...

THE PAIN DISTRACTS HER, A LITTLE.

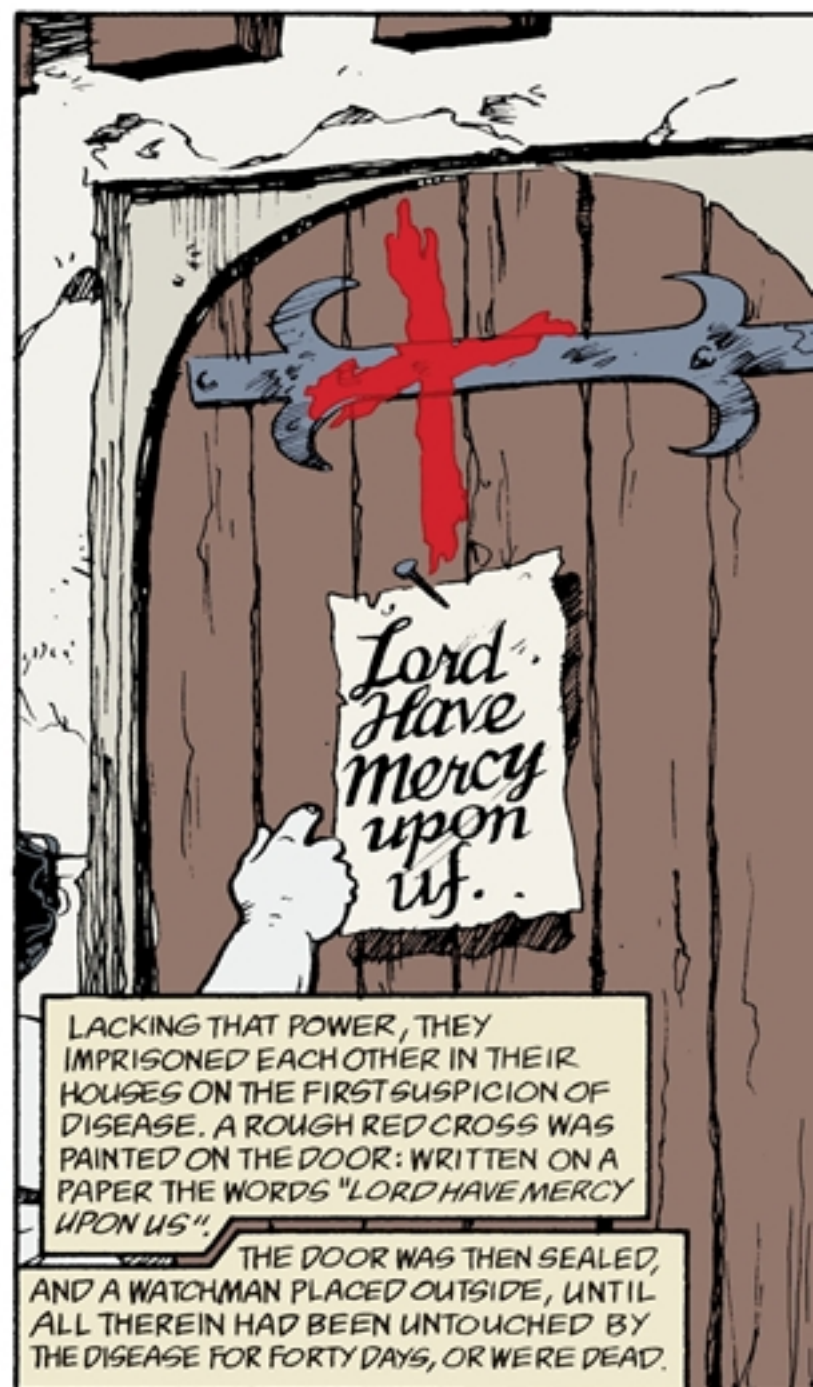
BUT STILL, SHE REMEMBERS...







THE CITY FOLK HAD KILLED THE CATS AND THE DOGS BECAUSE THEY MIGHT HAVE HELPED SPREAD THE DISEASE; AND IF THEY COULD, THEY WOULD HAVE KILLED EACH OTHER.



LACKING THAT POWER, THEY IMPRISONED EACH OTHER IN THEIR HOUSES ON THE FIRST SUSPICION OF DISEASE. A ROUGH RED CROSS WAS PAINTED ON THE DOOR: WRITTEN ON A PAPER THE WORDS "LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US".

THE DOOR WAS THEN SEALED, AND A WATCHMAN PLACED OUTSIDE, UNTIL ALL THEREIN HAD BEEN UNTOUCHED BY THE DISEASE FOR FORTY DAYS, OR WERE DEAD.



SHE HEARD THE SCREAMS OF TWO CHILDREN IN A HIGH ATTIC ROOM, THEIR PARENTS LONG DEAD. A NEWBORN BABY SUCKLED THE MILK AND THE PLAGUE FROM A COLD BREAST...

DESPAIR WALKED THE STREETS OF LONDON IN 1665, THE PLAGUE YEAR.



ON THE EMPTY STREET, A CORPSE LAY, WAITING FOR THE CART TO TAKE IT TO THE PLAGUE PIT; NEXT TO IT LAY A POOR PIPER, UNTOUCHED BY DISEASE, BUT DEAD DRUNK.

HE WOULD COME TO HIS SENSES IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE FOLLOWING MORNING, IN THE PLAGUE PIT, WITH SOFT EARTH ON HIS FACE, AND COLD FLESH BENEATH HIM, AND BELIEVE HIMSELF IN HELL...



"LET ME OBSERVE HERE," SAID DEFOE, WRITING SOMEWHAT AFTER THE EVENT, "THAT WHEN I SAY THE PEOPLE ABANDONED THEMSELVES TO DESPAIR, I DO NOT MEAN TO RELIGIOUS DESPAIR, OR A DESPAIR OF THEIR ETERNAL STATE; BUT I MEAN A DESPAIR OF THEIR BEING ABLE TO ESCAPE THE INFECTION, OR TO OUTLIVE THE PLAGUE..."

"THE PEOPLE WERE BROUGHT INTO A CONDITION TO DESPAIR OF LIFE."

WHEN DESPAIR READ THAT, THROUGH A MIRROR, SHE NODDED WITH THE SATISFACTION OF ONE WHO HAD PERFORMED HER DUTY WITH DILIGENCE AND CARE.



WELL-MET, SISTER. LONG IT IS, SINCE LAST I SAW YOU AWAY FROM YOUR DOMAIN.

TRUE. SOMETIMES REFLECTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH. AND YOU? SHOULD YOU NOT BE IN YOUR KINGDOM?

I GET LITTLE CHANCE FOR THAT IN THESE DAYS. I WALK THIS WORLD MORE AND MORE...

THE WHEEL NEVER CEASES FROM TURNING.

STILL--  
HAH HAH HAH!--  
I HAVE NOTHING TO COMPLAIN OF, DO I?

I NEVER COMPLAIN.

NO.

SO, MY SISTER. THIS IS A GOOD TIME FOR YOU.

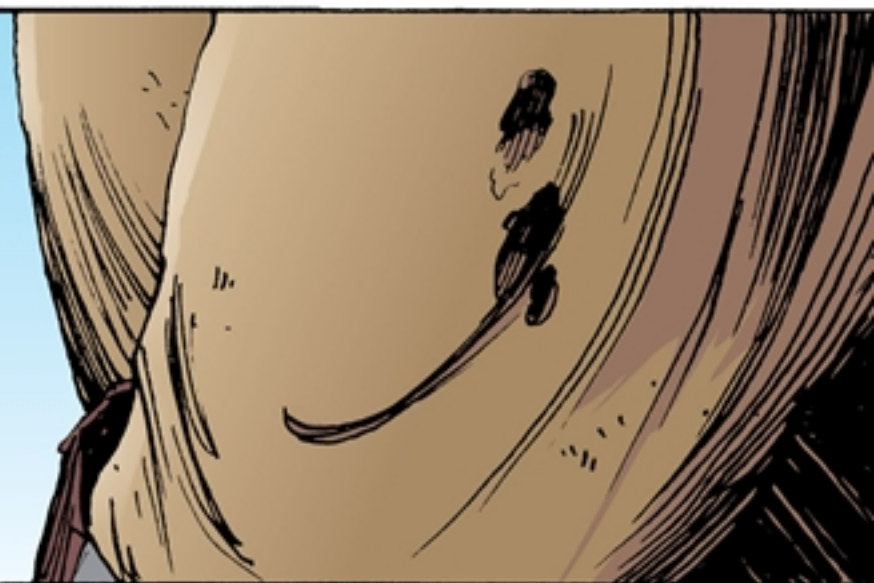
YES.

ARE YOU PLEASED?

PLEASED, OH MY LORD OF DESTRUCTION? I AM NEITHER PLEASED NOR DISPLEASED.

I SIMPLY AM.

OH.







THIS WON'T LAST FOR MUCH LONGER. ALREADY THE DEATHS ARE GETTING FEWER...

PLAGUES COME AND GO.

YES.

AND THEN IT'S MY TURN.



THINGS ARE CHANGING, MY SISTER.

THINGS NEVER CHANGE.

OH, BUT THEY DO. THAT'S MY PROVINCE, AFTER ALL.



SOME THINGS ARE CHANGELESS.

PEOPLE LOVE, AND DIE, THEY DREAM, DESTROY, DESPAIR, GO MAD. THEY FULFILL THEIR DESTINIES, LIVE OUT THE COURSE OF THEIR LIVES.

WE FULFILL OUR FUNCTION, AS THEY FULFILL THEIRS...



THAT WILL NOT CHANGE.

YOU THINK NOT?

AHHH. AYE WELL, PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT, AFTER ALL.

WE WILL SEE.



AH, ME. I HAVE MUCH TO DO, SCANT TIME TO STAND HERE GABBLING. FAREYE WELL, MY LITTLE SISTER. 'TIL NEXT I SEE YOUR PRETTY FACE...



HIS BEARD WAS ROUGH AGAINST HER SKIN.

NO ONE EVER KISSED DESPAIR, SAVE HER BROTHER.

BUT WHEN SHE NEXT SAW HIM IT WAS IN DESTINY'S HALL, THIRTY YEARS ON...

FOR THE LAST TIME.





DESPAIR?  
SWEET TWIN? I,  
DESIRE, CALL YOU.  
I STAND IN MY GALLERY  
AND I HOLD YOUR  
SIGIL.

WILL  
YOU TALK  
TO ME?

DELIRIUM  
VISITED ME. SHE  
SEEKS THE PRODIGAL.  
SHE SEEKS  
DESTRUCTION.

WHAT DID  
SHE SAY TO YOU?  
WE HAVE TO  
TALK...



HELLO?



YOU KNOW HOW  
SHE IS WHEN SHE GETS  
AN IDEA INTO HER HEAD.  
I MEAN, WHEN ONE  
FINALLY PENE-  
TRATES.

I'M... I'M  
REALLY WORRIED  
ABOUT THIS.

SHE'LL GO AFTER  
HIM. I KNOW SHE WILL.  
AND WHAT IF SHE  
INVOLVES OUR ELDERS  
IN HER MADNESS?



DESPAIR?

I'M IN MY  
GALLERY.

I'M  
HOLDING YOUR  
SIGIL.

I  
KNOW YOU'RE  
THERE.

TALK  
TO ME.



WE HAVE  
TO STOP  
HER.

PLEASE?

SISTER?

TALK  
TO ME?



FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES  
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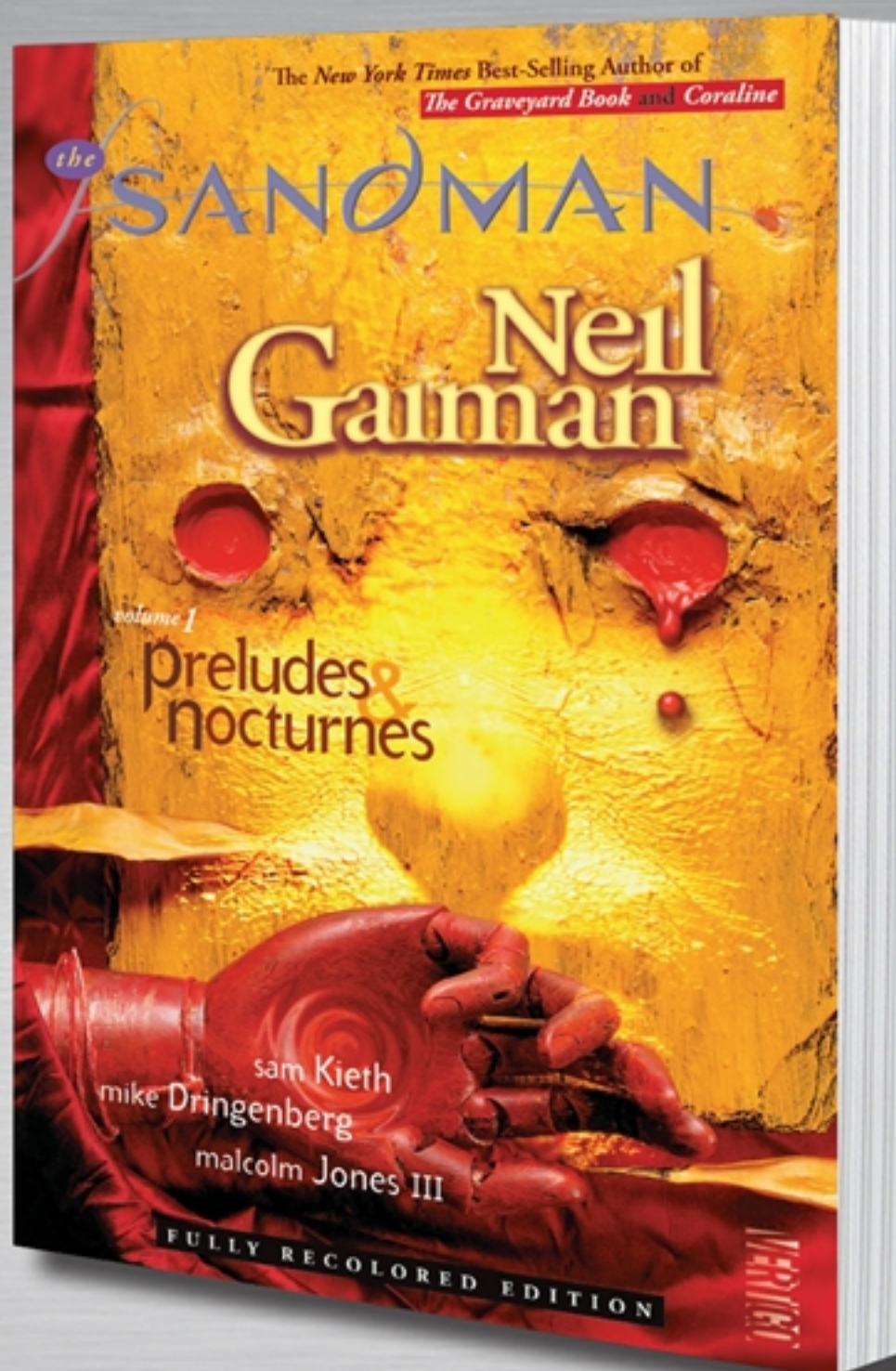
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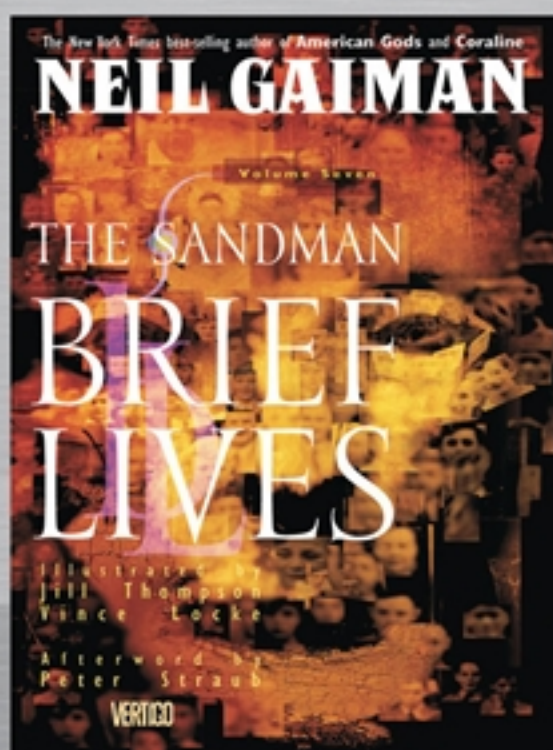
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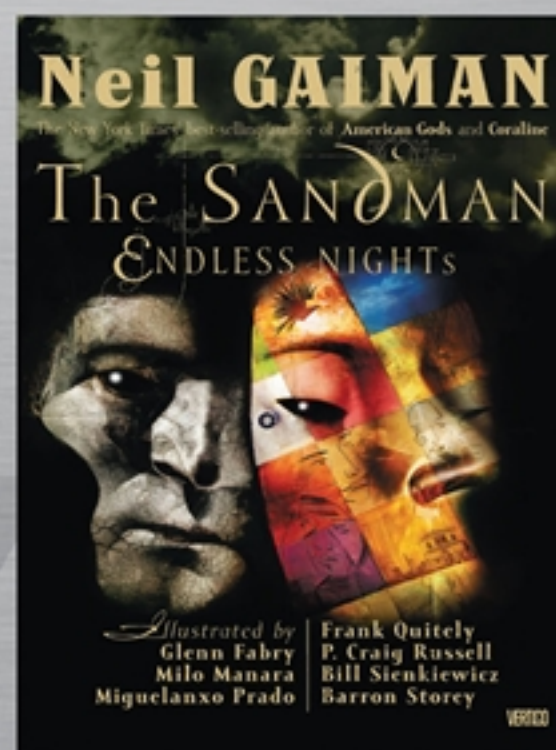
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