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Senior Projects Fall 2018

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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Fall 2018

## Angel Down

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*Bard College*

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Angel Down

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Alexander Sorensen

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2018



## Acknowledgements

Thanks to family, friends, and the indispensable Dinaw Mengestu, who all held me upright during my final year at Bard and without whom this project would not exist.







Hey.

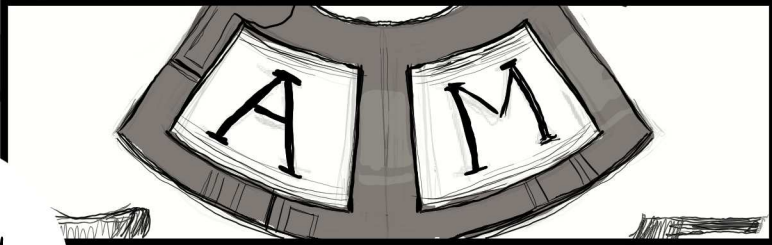
...

Lovely  
night,  
isn't  
it?

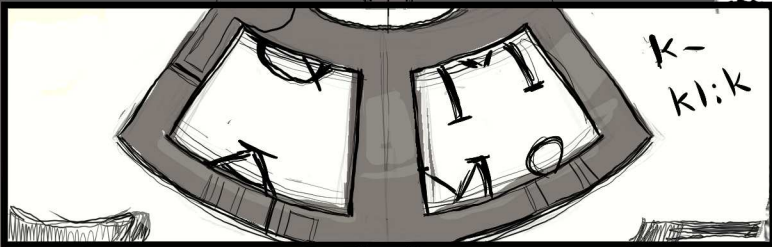
Do you  
want a seat  
or? no?

You sure?  
You look like  
you could use  
one.

Well, you  
won't find  
much anyone  
else out and  
about.

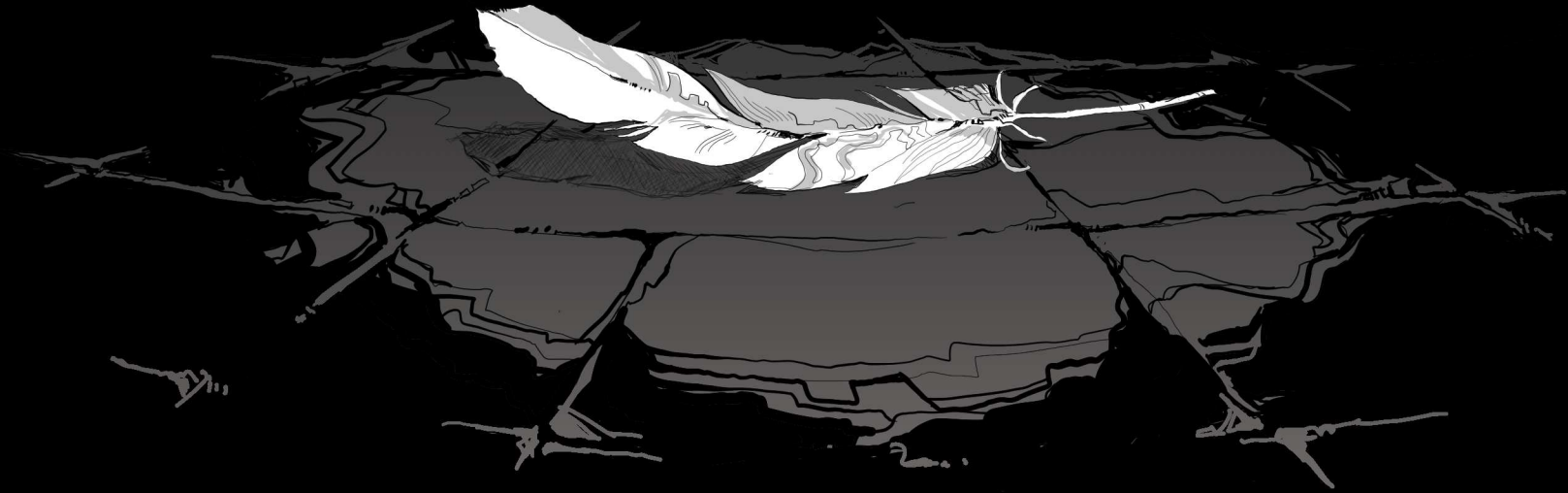


Night like  
this? The  
streets go  
empty.

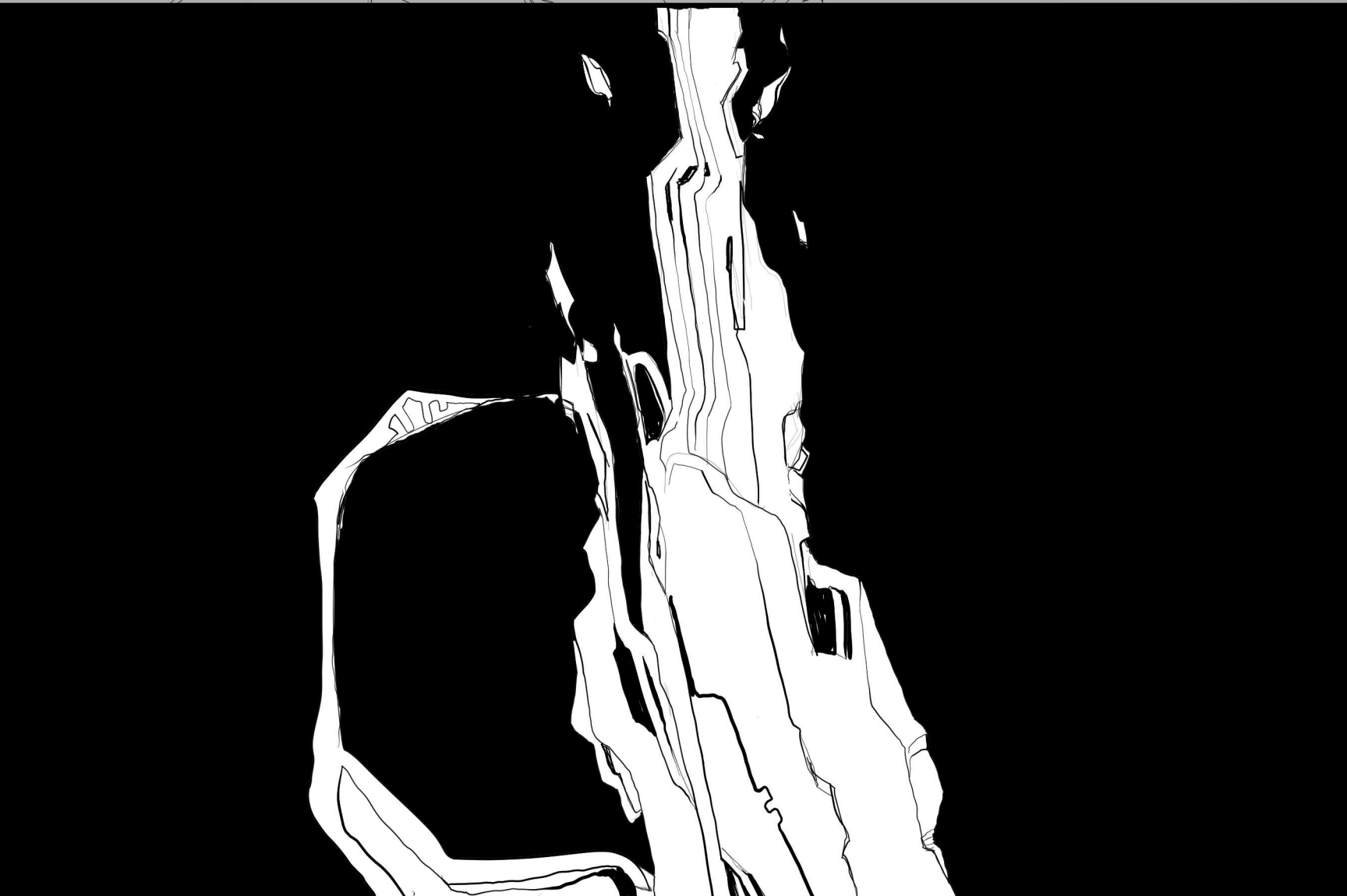


Everyone's  
indoors.  
or  
hiding.











Well.

Don't worry, friend.

I know everything there is to know about this town.

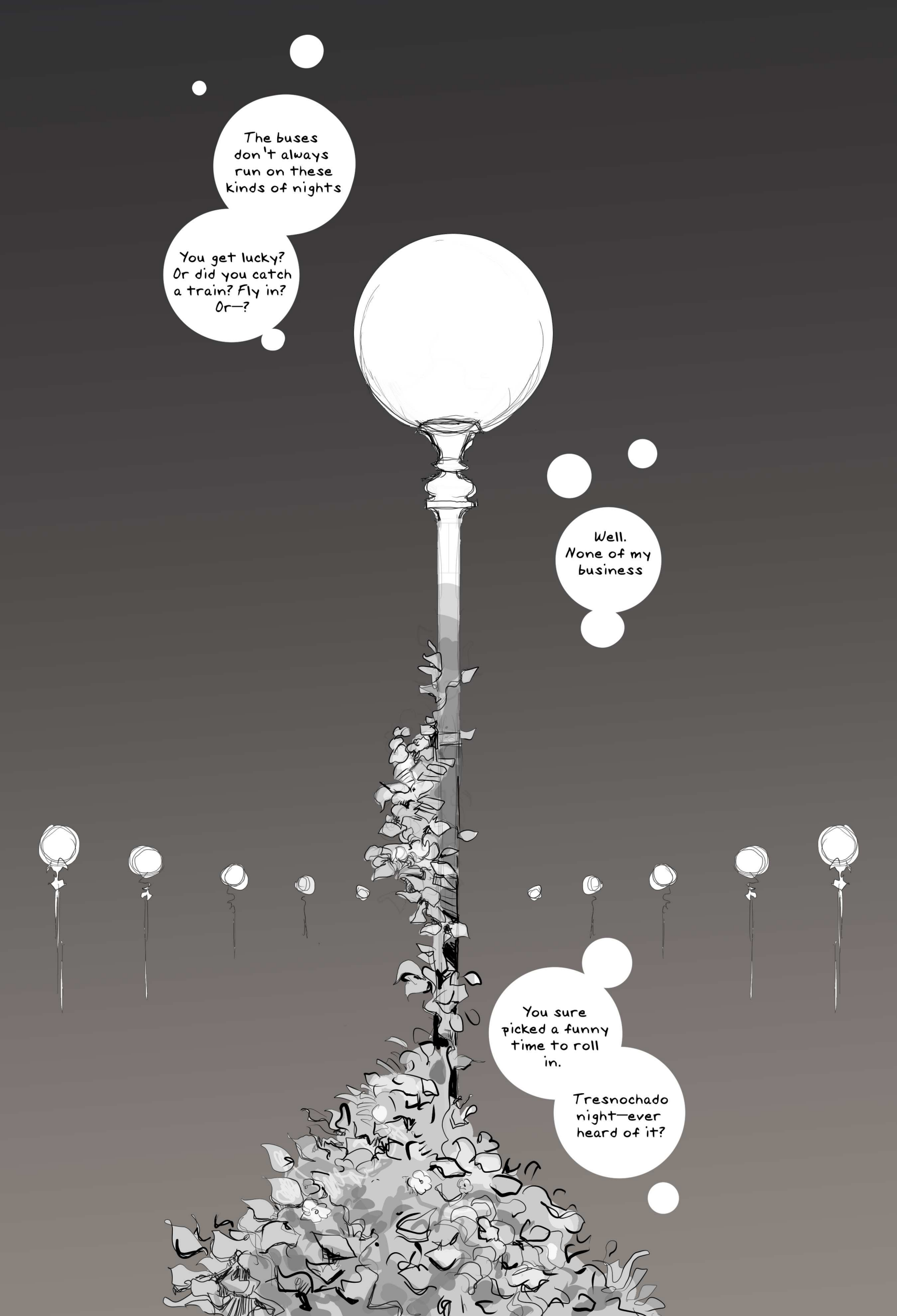
And most of what there is to know about everywhere else.

(Are you sure you don't want a seat?)

(...)

well

I'm always happy to give a hand to those lost souls washed up by the night. Always happy for the chance to be neighborly.



The buses  
don't always  
run on these  
kinds of nights


You get lucky?  
Or did you catch  
a train? Fly in?  
Or—?

Well.  
None of my  
business

You sure  
picked a funny  
time to roll  
in.

Tresnochado  
night—ever  
heard of it?





It can only  
happen here, in a  
countr where the  
sun never rises.

Hey, don't get me  
wrong. No sun, no moon,  
okay, sure. But we're not  
so different from  
anywhere else.

You get  
used to it.

Honest..

Our clocks are  
set to AM and  
PM. Just like  
anywhere else.

Even without  
the sun, there's  
morning

and night.





But  
sometimes

on a very

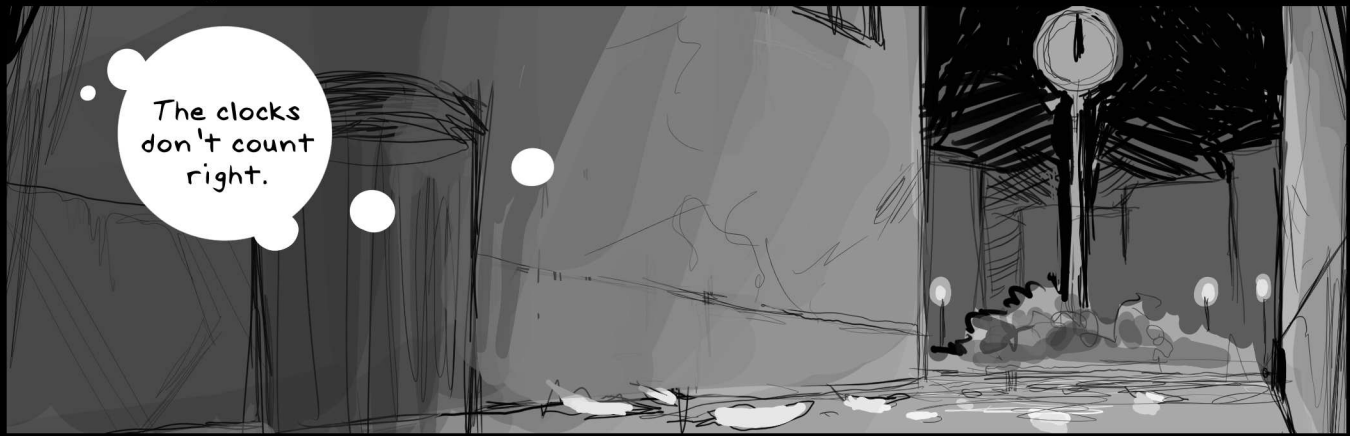
special

kind

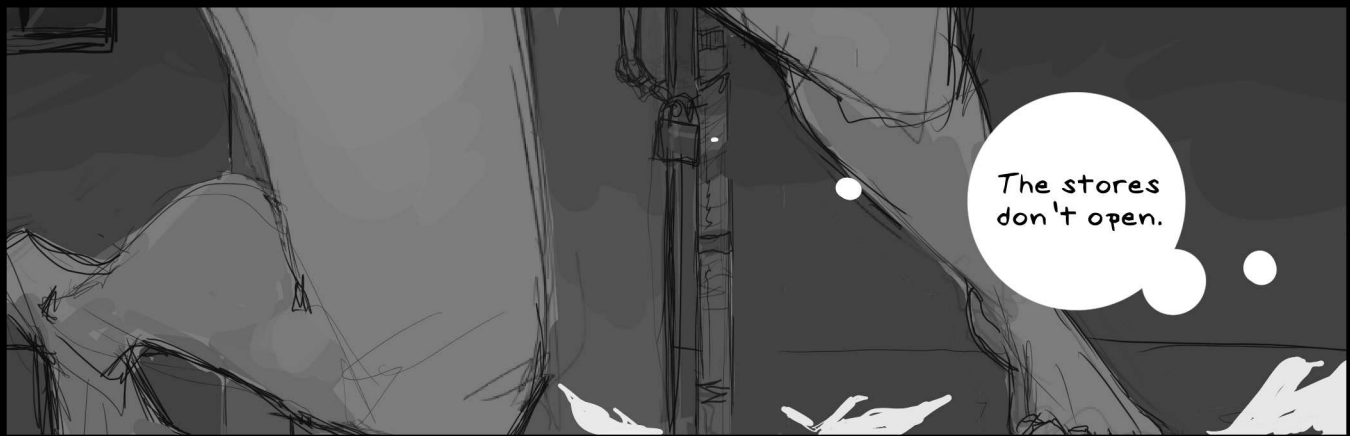
of night



THUD



The clocks  
don't count  
right.



The stores  
don't open.



Children  
stay  
asleep.



Ghosts don't  
go back to their  
cemeteries.



It's hard to keep your head on straight on nights like this.

When it's night for hours and hours and hours.

Time is like a child, lost in the woods

stumbling directionless as it looks for its parents.



Hey, you're not a ghost, are you?



Sorry, rude question.

None of my business

Ghost, god, weirdo, be whatever you want. Free country.

(Depending who you ask.)



No promises you'll be able to walk around like that when the tresnochado ends.

You might want to find some clothes.





Are you sure you don't want a seat?



Hey.

I know, not the chatty type. It's cool. I can respect that.

I'm Hugo.



Lovely night, isn't it?



Would you like me to read your fortune?



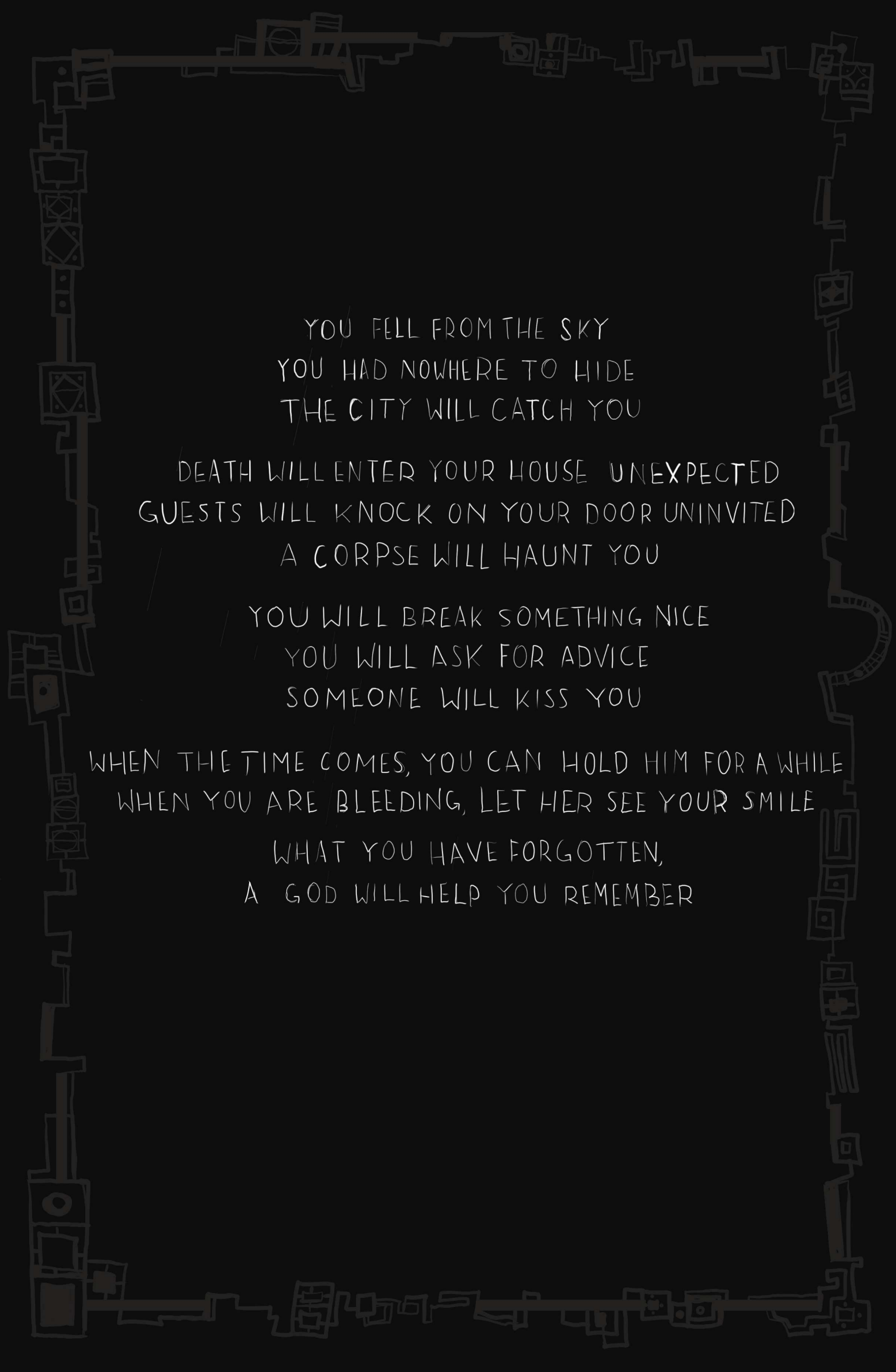
1



HERE IS A PROPHECY

LISTEN CLOSE





YOU FELL FROM THE SKY  
YOU HAD NOWHERE TO HIDE  
THE CITY WILL CATCH YOU

DEATH WILL ENTER YOUR HOUSE UNEXPECTED  
GUESTS WILL KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR UNINVITED  
A CORPSE WILL HAUNT YOU

YOU WILL BREAK SOMETHING NICE  
YOU WILL ASK FOR ADVICE  
SOMEONE WILL KISS YOU

WHEN THE TIME COMES, YOU CAN HOLD HIM FOR A WHILE  
WHEN YOU ARE BLEEDING, LET HER SEE YOUR SMILE

WHAT YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN,  
A GOD WILL HELP YOU REMEMBER



GOT IT MEMORIZED?



Me? I've lived here forever.



Plenty of family moved off, off to find adventure



DRIP



who-knows-where and anywhere-but-here



But Serafine's my home.



My address hasn't changed since the day I was born.



So you'd think I would get my packages on time, or at least almost on time,  
and if I got a letter it wouldn't be bent in half like a used-up glowstick.



Now, I pay my taxes. I pay em. So you'd think the government would listen to a taxpayer--

--when he writes them every month about the complete failure of a public institution.



I never went to the Drossarina asking for handouts, or pick-me-ups. I pay my taxes.



This is how it starts. The collapse of society. The destruction of civilization.

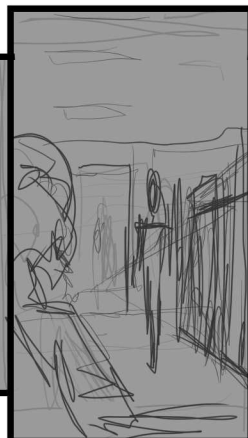
That'll be 200.

For a coffee! This country...



You have a good day now. Don't work too hard.

I try not to.



So what's bringing about the endtimes today?

The post office.



I did get a papercut last week, opening the mail.

It's a dangerous business.

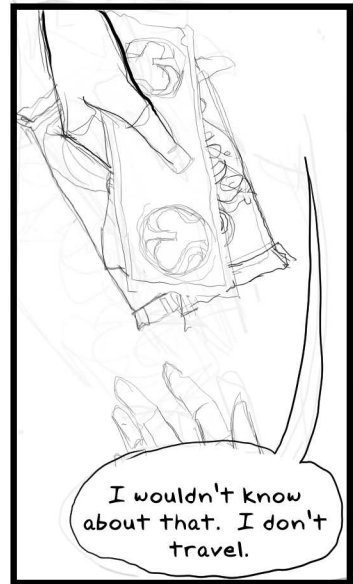


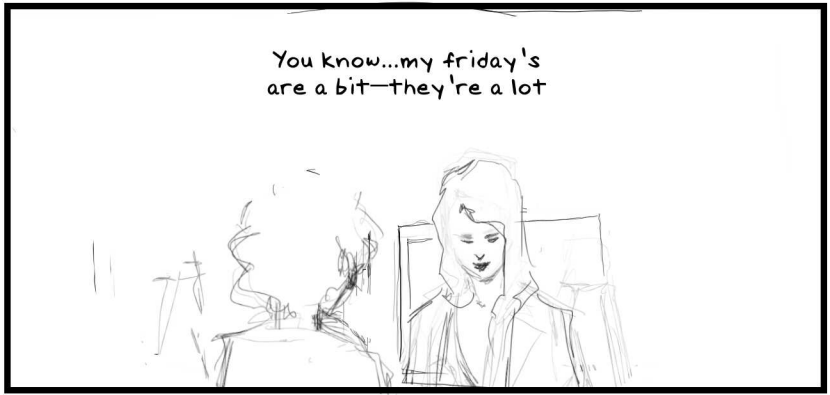
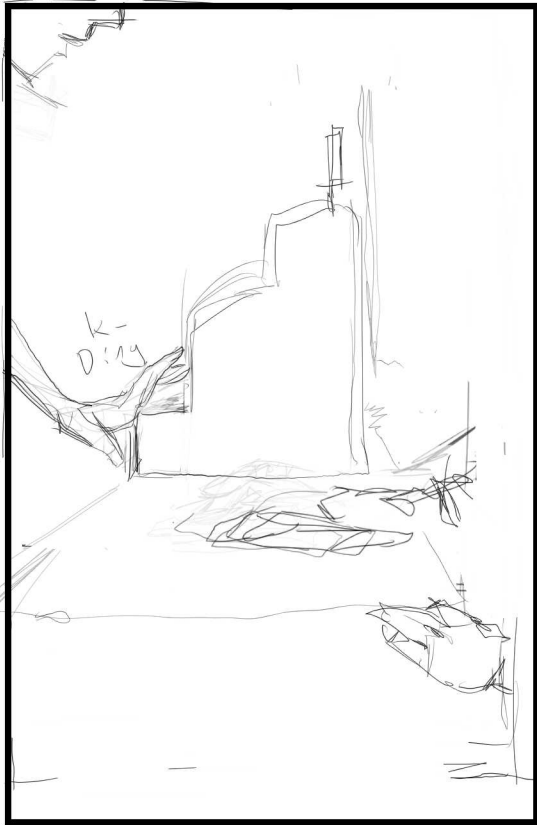
Well, you're more adventurous than me.

I hate mail, I just throw it all out

Really?







You know...my friday's are a bit—they're a lot



But there's something really nice, uncomplicated—coming, chatting with you, buying a candy bar.



I appreciate it.

Oh, ym, sure



So you're new? When did you first move here?



Six months ago?

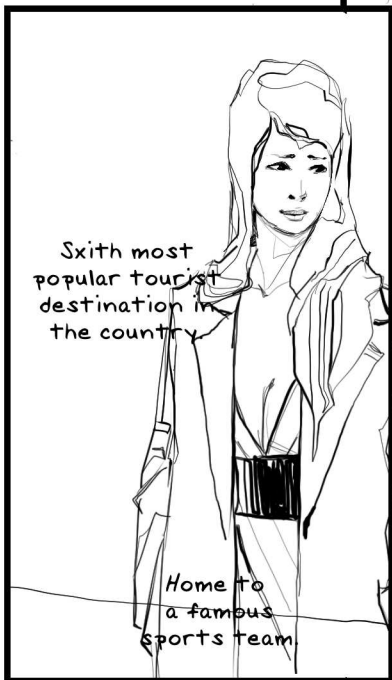
Been working at Logan's for the last three



And does our fair city make a good impression?

It's okay. I don't—it's cool.

For as long as I'm here, it seems okay.



Sxith most popular tourist destination in the country

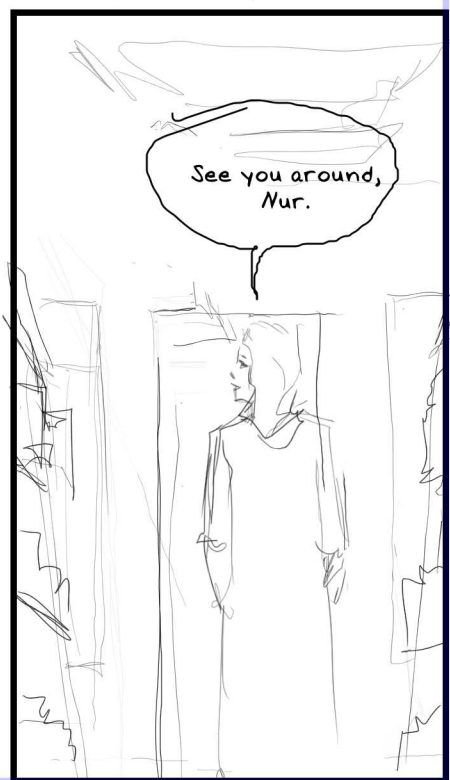
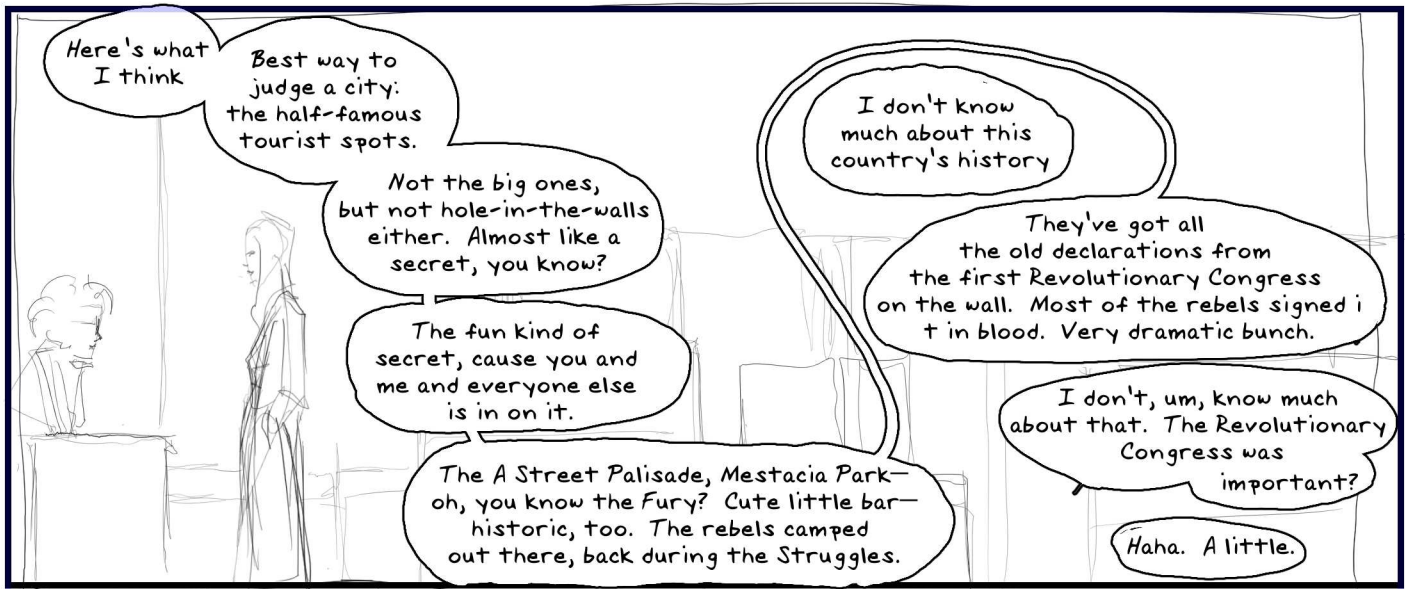
Home to a fambus sports team



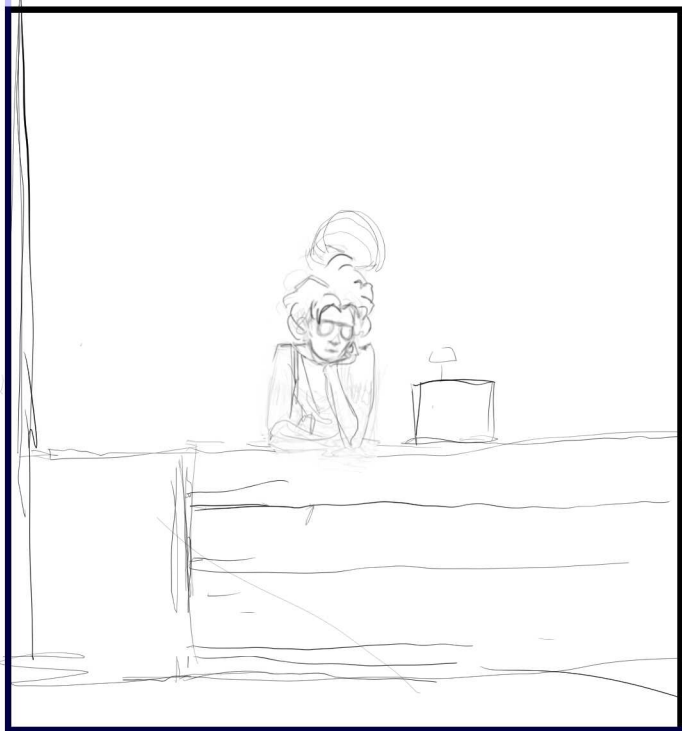
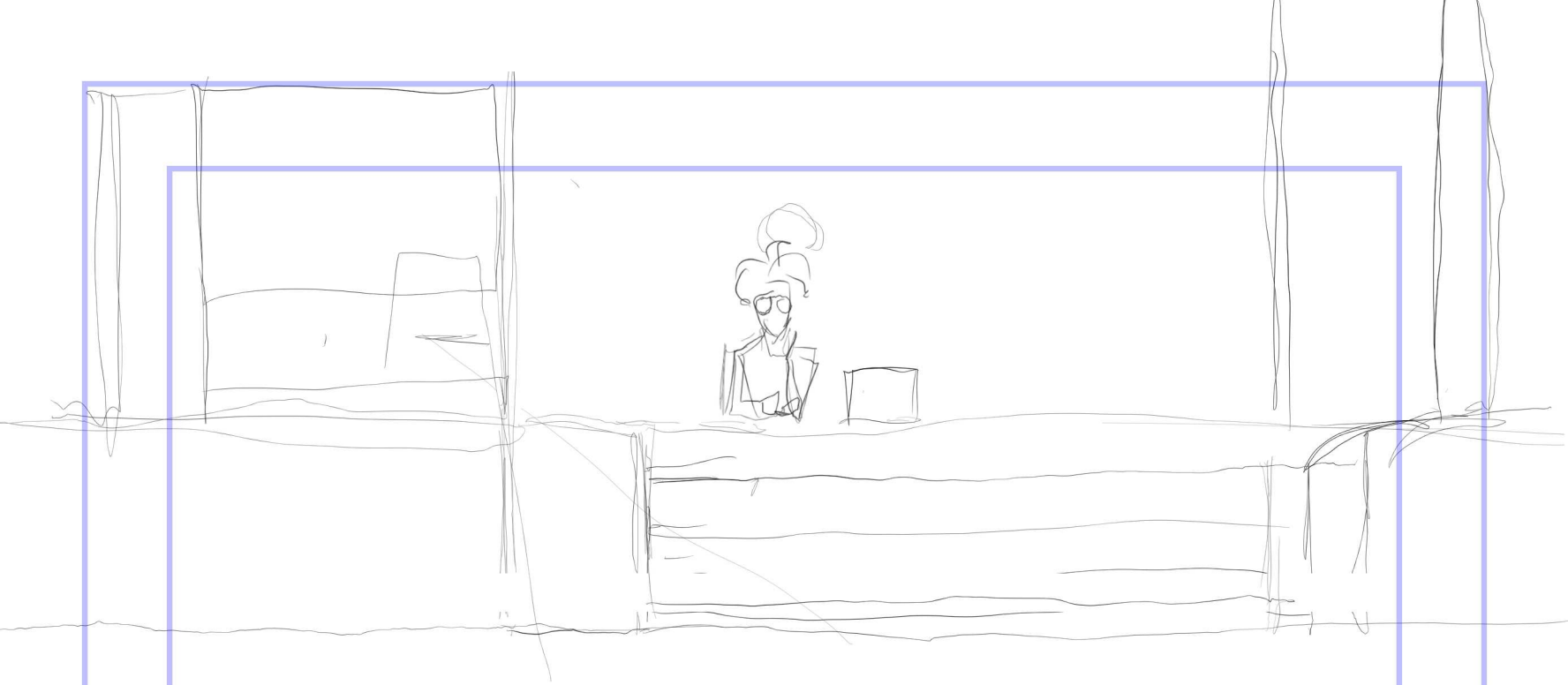
Some cities don't have any famous sports teams.



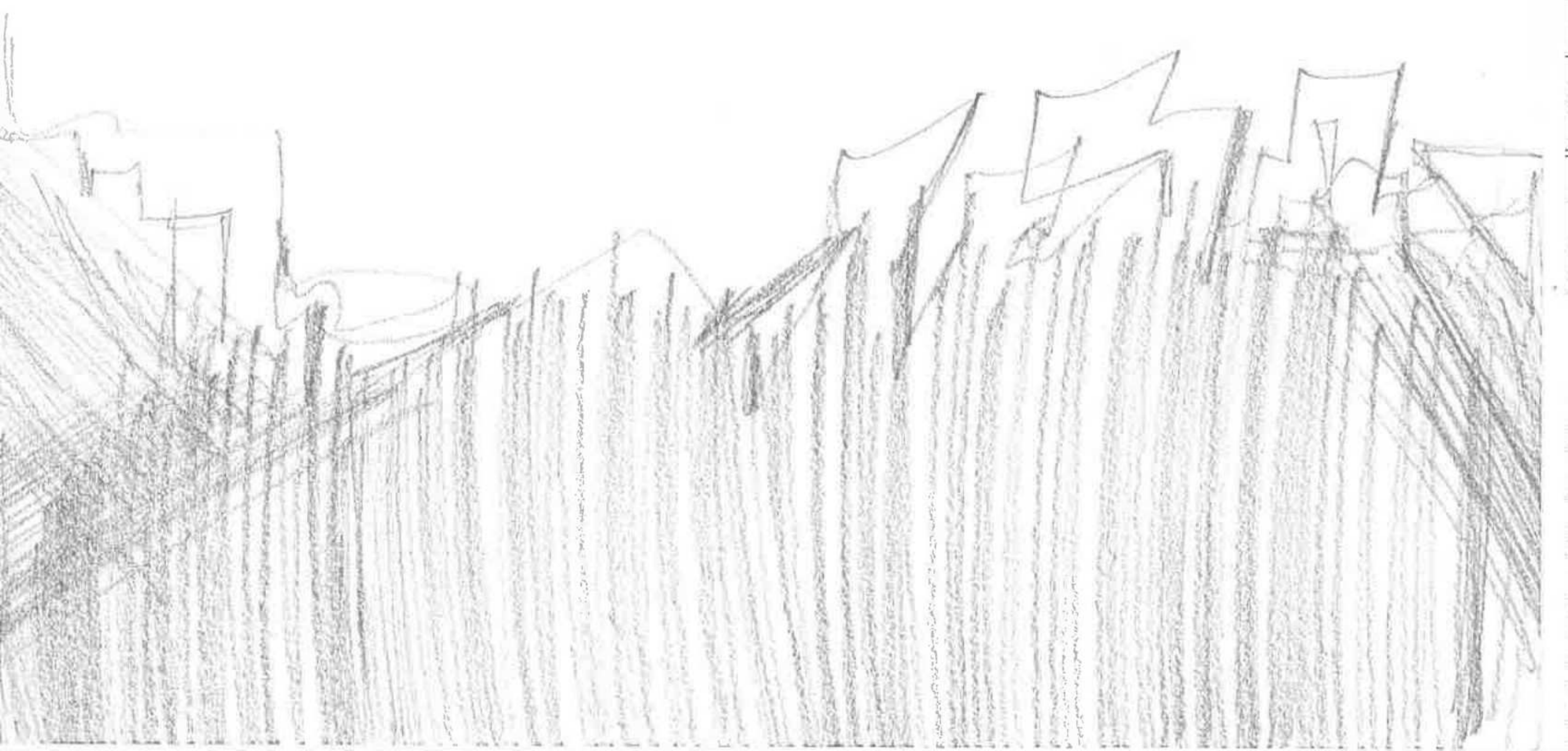
Must be a hard life.



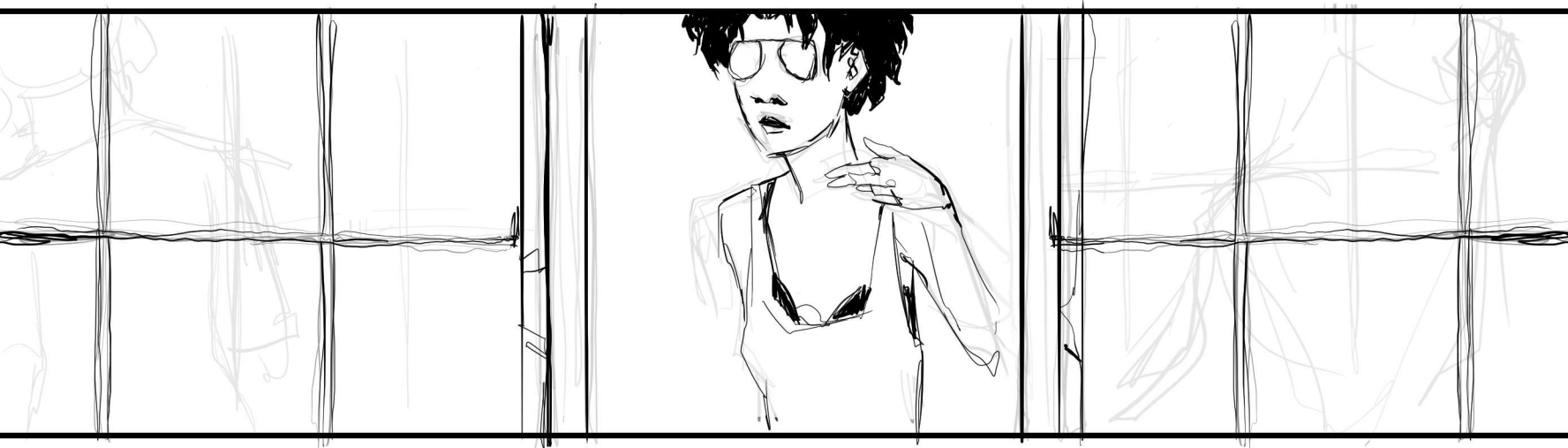














# **Angel Down**

Senior Project Manuscript  
Alexander Sorensen



## Prologue

### Page 1

*The comic opens on a full page shot of a city at night: Serafine, as seen from a distance, a web of glowing gold streets spiderwebbing through the darkness. The silhouette of the Dome of the Stars is prominent above the city at the top of its hill, and where the rest of the city is alive with light, the Dome and the city immediately around it is black like a snuffed candle. Speech bubbles in the form of perfect circles trail idly down the page as though blown from a child's toy, and have no obvious speaker to whom they could be attributed.*

**Voice:** Hey.

**Voice:** ...

**Voice:** Lovely night, isn't it?

*Some bubbles are empty, and hang soap-suddishly alongside the occupied ones.*

**Voice:** Do you want a seat, or? no?

**Voice:** You sure?

**Voice:** You look like you could use one.

### Page 2

*A clock on a pole. Both hands point straight up. A large dial in the face reads 'AM.' Three thin panels running down the page show the 'AM' label flip, both slots on the dial sliding in opposite direction. With a klik-klik, it now reads 'Ø M&.'*

**Voice:** Well, you won't find anyone else out and about.

**Voice:** Night like this?

**Voice:** The streets go empty.

**Voice:** Everyone's indoors. Or hiding.

### Page 3

*Darkness. A single feather on the ground.*

#### **Page 4**

*A young man sitting on the ground, addressing someone on the other side of the page. The only thing we see of her are her legs.*

**Voice:** ...

**Voice:** You're new here, huh?

*This panel cuts across the page as a single strip. In the background is blackness, and a plummeting streak of feathers.*

#### **Page 5**

*A scene inside the city. We see lamps and dark windows reflecting their light, and the twilight-colored edges of buildings turned into silhouettes.*

**Voice:** Well.

**Voice:** Don't worry, friend.

**Voice:** I know everything there is to know about this town.

**Voice:** And most of what there is to know about everything else.

**Voice:** (Are you sure you don't want a seat?)

**Voice:** (...)

**Voice:** Well.

**Voice:** I'm always happy to give a hand to those lost souls washed up by the night. Always happy for the chance to be neighborly.

#### **Page 6**

*A dark page. Distance lights in the background. A tall streetlamp rises up in the center of the page, glowing strong and orange. A creeping flowering plant winds like ivy up the pole.*

**Voice:** The buses don't always run on these kinds of nights. You get lucky? Or did you catch a train, or fly in, or—?

**Voice:** Well. None of my business.

**Voice:** You sure picked a funny time to roll in. Tresnochado night—ever heard of it?

## **Page 7**

*Full page view of a street, the street running down the center. The horizon line is high, the camera is low to the ground, and buildings rise up tall on either side. Most of the streetlights are out. Two shadows are walking down the street, questionably human. One has turned its hooded head to the camera, revealing a pair of eyes like little pale holiday lights. A white comet of something misshapen streaks through the sky overhead, breaking apart as it flies.*

**Voice:** It can only happen here, in a country where the sun never shines.

**Voice:** Hey, don't get me wrong. No sun, no stars, no moon, sure, okay—but we're not that different from anywhere else.

**Voice:** You get used to it. Honest.

**Voice:** Our clocks are set to AM and PM. Just like anywhere else.

**Voice:** Even without the sun, there's morning.

**Voice:** and night.

## **Page 8**

*A bird's eye view down into a long, rambling street not quite as well-lit as the rest of the city, surrounded by the dark suggestions of buildings. The page is mostly black. A comet streaks across the page, visible as a strange bundle of wings shedding huge chunks of feathers and light. This is Nur, not yet fully human, but her angelhood is quickly ripping away as she falls from the sky.*

**Voice:** But sometimes

**Voice:** on a very

**Voice:** special

**Voice:** kind

**Voice:** of night.

## **Page 9**

*The same full page panel as before, but Nur has passed from view, leaving only drifting feathers in her wake.*

*At the bottom of the page is a THUD, the sound of Nur landing.*

## **Page 10**

*For the first time we see panels, four of them, each panel a horizontal strip of the same size, one after the other moving down the page.*

### **Panel 1:**

*An alley, as seen from the side. Stray feathers litter the floor. In the street outside, a clock on a pole can be seen, both hands pointing straight up.*

**Voice:** The clocks don't count right.

### **Panel 2:**

*Nur's knees and legs on the ground, a balancing act, she struggles to hold up this unfamiliar body. A door is behind her, padlocked shut.*

**Voice:** The stores don't open.

### **Panel 3:**

*Nur's hands, trembling as they support her weight. An old stuffed animal lies behind them.*

**Voice:** Children stay asleep.

### **Panel 4:**

*A close up of Nur's lower face. You see a bit of her nose and her mouth, gasping for breath.*

**Voice:** Ghosts don't go back to their cemeteries.

## **Page 11**

*Another four panels. In each one the nude figure of Nur is upright, seen from behind as she stumbles her way out the alley.*

**Voice:** It's hard to keep your head straight on a night like this, when it's night for hours and hours and hours.

**Voice:** Time is like a child, lost in the woods, stumbling directionless as it looks for its parents. A person can drown in the tresnochado.

**Voice:** Hey, you're not a ghost, are you?



**Voice:** Sorry, rude question, none of my business.

**Voice:** Ghost, god, weirdo, be whatever you want. Free country.

**Voice:** (Depending who you ask.)

**Voice:** No promises you'll be good to walk around like that when the tresnochado ends. You might want to find some clothes.

## **Page 12**

*Nur has emerged from the alley. In the second panel, we see a young man seated on the sidewalk in a bed of cushions and rugs, just to her left. He seems surprised, but not too surprised. He speaks in little semi-transparent speech bubbles that show the dialogue first seen in the opening of the Prologue. The frothy circular speech bubbles, superimposed over the panels throughout the prologue, continue down the page, in addition to the young man's talking.*

### **Panel 1:**

**Voice:** Are you sure you don't want a seat?

### **Panel 2:**

**Young Man:** *Hey.*

**Young Man:** ...

**Voice:** Not the chatty type, I can respect that.

### **Panel 3:**

**Young man:** *Lovely night, isn't it?*

**Voice:** I'm Hugo.

### **Panel 4:**

**Voice:** Would you like me to read your fortune?

## Chapter 1

### Page 1

*A black page. White chicken-scratch text:*

Here is a prophecy.

Listen close.

### Page 2

You fell from the sky  
You had nowhere to hide  
The city will catch you.

Death will enter your house unexpected  
Guests will knock on your door uninvited  
A corpse will haunt you.

You will break something nice  
You will ask for advice  
Someone will kiss you.

When the time comes, you can hold him for a while  
When you're bleeding, she must see you smile  
What you've forgotten, a god will help you remember.

### Page 3

Got it memorized?

### Page 4

*A shot of a corner store, Logan's, middleground, not too far away but not very close up. It is still dark. It is always dark in the land of Nightmare. But now the tresnochado has passed, and the gold-lit streets are alive with people. The next panels move into the store, close-ups of food and supplies and shelves, and a CAUTION: WET FLOOR sign. Rambling dialogue runs through the panels, though the source of the speech bubbles is not shown. Eventually, we see the back of the store and the checkout counter, where a customer is chatting with the cashier.*

*The cashier, Nur: as a human, she is a tall and gangly young woman in loose-fit clothing. Her arms are tattooed with odd-looking symbols. Large aviator sunglasses cover her face.*

*In this last panel, the customer is shown to be the speaker.*

**Customer:** Me, I'm city boy. Lived here all my life.

**Customer:** Plenty of the family moved out, off to find adventure who-knows-where and anywhere-but-here

**Customer:** —off-planet, can you believe it!—

**Customer:** but, look, this is my home.

**Customer:** Serafine's my home.

**Customer:** My address hasn't changed since the day I was born.

**Final Panel:**

*A close up view of a casually talking middle-aged man, the customer, and a blank-faced Nur, whose apparent lack of interest does not daunt the man in any way whatsoever.*

**Customer:** So you'd think I would get my packages on time, or at least almost on time, and if I got a letter it wouldn't be bent in half like a used-up glowstick.

**Customer:** But there you are. Quality government service.

## **Page 5**

**Customer:** Now, I pay my taxes. I pay em. So you'd think the government would listen to a taxpayer when he writes them *every month* about the *complete failure* of a public institution.

**Customer:** I never went asking the Drossarina for handouts, or pick-me-ups. I pay my taxes. But I have never, *ever* gotten a reply. This is how it starts. The collapse of society. The destruction of civilization.

**Nur:** That'll be 200.

**Customer:** For a coffee! This country....

*The man speaks pleasantly. He seems glad to have someone to talk to.*

**Customer:** You have a good day. Don't work too hard.

**Nur:** I try not to.

*We look down the aisle. We see the Customer approaching the exit, passing someone on his way out.*

*The new customer is Lynn. An elegant woman with cool eyes and a friendly smile, a fashionable overcoat and a yellow dress. She glances over her shoulder at the Customer as he exits the store.*

**Lynn:** So what's bringing about the endtimes today?

**Nur:** The post office.

*Lynn leans in to inspect the candy rack in front of the register.*

**Lynn:** I did get a papercut last week, opening the mail. It's a dangerous business.

**Nur:** Well, you're more adventurous than me. I hate mail, I just throw it all out.

**Lynn:** Really?

## **Page 6**

*Close-up of Lynn's face, bemused laughter winding up her smile.*

**Lynn:** So if you got an important letter, eviction notice, special invitation, congratulations-you-just-won-one-million-dollars...?

**Nur:** Sure would suck to be me.

*Lynn laughs, Nur almost smiles.*

**Nur:** The usual?

**Lynn:** Mm-hmm.

**Lynn:** You know, it's funny. I've been all over this city, and I mean all over, and I haven't found this candy bar anywhere else but here.

**Nur:** I don't think they're local. The boxes they come in are addressed from way down south.

*On the counter, you can read the candy bar brand: Bluejoy*

**Lynn:** Its beautiful country down there. The mountain terraces, Old Man's Palace, valley country.

**Nur:** I wouldn't know about that. I don't travel.

**Next panel:**

*The ding of the cash register.*

*A simple shot of Nur's hand depositing the money.*

**Next panel:**

**Nur:** ...

**Nur:** I traveled to get here. It was a long trip.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** But I don't think I'm leaving any time soon.

**Lynn:** There are worse places to languish than Serafine.

**Page 7**

**Lynn:** You know, my Fridays are a bit...they're a lot. But there's something really nice, uncomplicated—coming in, chatting with you, buying a candy bar. I appreciate it.

*Nur's expression of taken aback-ness is mostly but not entirely masked by her sunglasses.*

**Next Panel:**

**Lynn:** So you're new in town?

**Nur:** Came in six months ago. Been working at Logan's for the last three.

**Lynn:** And does our fair city make a good impression?

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** *Somewhat distant looking, maybe a bit more standoffish than how she's previously been with Lynn* It's okay. I don't—it's cool.

**Nur:** For as long as I'm here, it seems—it's okay.

**Next Panel:**



**Lynn:** *Not quite meeting Nur's gaze, smiling with the kind of smile that gives space and won't press for details.* Sixth most popular tourist destination in the country, home of a famous sports team.

**Lynn:** Some cities don't have any famous sports teams.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** *\*Half smiling again\** Must be a hard life.

## **Page 8**

**Panel 1:**

*Lynn has pocketed the candy bar, but lingers a bit by the counter.*

**Lynn:** Here's what I think. Best way to judge a city: the half-famous tourist spots. Not the big ones, but not hole-in-the-walls either. Almost like a secret, you know? The fun kind of secret, cause you and me and everyone else is in on it.

**Lynn:** The A Street Palisade, Mestacia Park—oh, you know the Fury? Cute little bar—historic, too. The rebels camped out there, back during the Struggles.

**Nur:** I don't know much about this country's history.

**Lynn:** They've got all the old declarations from the first Revolutionary Congress on the wall. Most of the rebels signed it in blood. Very dramatic bunch.

**Nur:** I don't, um, know much about that. The Revolutionary Congress was

**Nur:** important?

**Lynn:** Haha. A little.

**Panel 2:**

**Lynn:** It's a cute little bar. You don't need the history to enjoy the drinks.

**Panel 3:**

*Zoom out. See them from behind, Lynn glancing up at the clock behind Nur's head.*

**Lynn:** Ah, I better get going. Have a good one.

**Nur:** Yeah. You too.

**Panel 4:**

*Same angle as the last one, Nur watching Lynn make her exit.*

**Panel 5:**

*Lynn's voice pops in from out-of-panel.*

**Lynn:** Hey, you know, I don't think I've ever gotten your name.

**Nur:** It's Nur.

**Panel 6:**

*We see Lynn, giving Nur a smile.*

**Lynn:** I'm Lynn.

**Panel 7:**

*On her way out again.*

**Lynn:** See you around, Nur.

**Page 9**

*A silent page.*

**Panel 1:**

*Nur leans on the checkout counter*

**Panel 2:**

*Zoom in. She is looks a bit surprised.*

**Panel 3:**

*Zoom out. Nur smiles, and relaxes.*

**Panel 4:**

*Zoom out.*

**Panel 5:**

*A view from the front of the store, capturing most of Logan's insides along with the vague silhouette of Nur deeper inside.*

### **Page 10**

*We see the Logan's from far away, and the city skyline rising overhead like a crown.*

### **Page 11**

*Back inside Logan's. Nur hears commotion outside, and we see people hurrying somewhat anxiously past the front windows. Nur gets up from her seat. Exiting Logan's, Nur finds a sparse little crowd gathering just past the store.*

### **Page 12**

*Nur pushes through the crowd. Fucking Saints, someone says. Oh God, someone says. Did anyone call an ambulance? someone says. In the phonebooth, —In Goldgyre, that's what I said, right by the fucking corner store—*

*Eventually, she finds her way to the front of the crowd.*

### **Page 13**

*A full page shot of Lynn's bloody body. She has been stabbed, and lies dead across the sidewalk.*

### **Page 14**

*Nur backs out of the crowd.*

*She stumbles her way through four panels, one on top of the other, one after the other, one two three four. Back to Logan's. The body looms in the page's background, behind the retreating Nur.*

*Lynn's lower face is visible in the crack between the first two panel. Her right hand slightly overlaps the 1st, her spilled hair intruding into the 2nd and 3rd, her left hand straying into the 4th.*

### **Page 15**

#### **Panels 1-4:**

*Four simple rectangles showing different shots of specific mundane items and features of the store.*

#### **Panel 5:**

*The panels make a clearing for what would be panel 5, opening up a gap in the middle of the page where we can see a shot of Nur looking down the central aisle, from the same angle she had just looked down on Lynn's body.*

**Panel 6-8:**

*Panels resume, three mini panels here, snapshots of Nur pouring herself a slushie from the slushie machine. Get a cup, turn the machine crank, pour it out. In the final panel, 8, we see Nur from behind. A disembodied speech bubble from off-panel: Hey.*

**Page 16**

**Panel 1:**

*A shot from the front, showing Nur sipping from her slushie. In the background, Hugo sits perched on a cooler, wearing that same big orange coat from when they first met.*

**Panel 2:**

*Nur continues to drink, adjusting her grip. She ignores him.*

**Hugo:** You're gonna get brainfreeze.

*Hugo's speech bubbles, as in the prologue, are surrounded by lingering empty ones, like soap sud.*

**Panel 3:**

**Nur:** Get off the cooler. You might break something.

**Panel 4:**

*Hugo hops off, while Nur continues to speak.*

**Nur:** So this's it? Your prophecy, home to roost?

**Hugo:** Guess so, guess so.

**Hugo:** How's the slushie?

**Panel 5:**

**Nur:** It's okay.

**Panel 6:**

*Nur sets it aside.*

**Nur:** I'm not hungry.

**Panel 7:**

**Nur:** *She doesn't turn to face him.* How's business?

**Hugo:** Oh, well, you know. Not great. I mean, it's not awful, but this isn't the kinda economy where fortunetelling makes you a killing, y'know?

**Page Fourteen**

**Panel 1:**

*This panel and the next zoom out from the store, viewing Logan's and Anciliar Circle from a distance, head-on. An ambulance is coming down the street from the right side of the store.*

**Hugo:** But even in the good ol days, Nightmare was never a friendly country for folks like me. They don't really like superstition here.

**Hugo:** Maybe I should move to Daydream, or the Isle. Off-planet, y'know? Exotic beachfront lifestyle, tropicana, sand and sun and shorts and waves...

**Hugo:** But I'm alright. I'm doing alright. Thanks for asking.

**Nur:** Sure.

**Panel 2:**

*The ambulance parks on the left side of Logan's. Two men get out, one pushing a stretcher, the other carrying a body bag.*

**Hugo:** I don't tell fortunes to show off, y'know.

**Hugo:** That's what some Seers do.

**Hugo:** You know the type. They've got these glitized up temples, or caves, so much incense you can't even breathe, and lil plastic spiders or snakes everywhere, for effect.

**Hugo:** They go on radio shows. They hand out prophecies like candy. Send unwitting heroes one after the other into monsters, and war, and heartbreak.



**Hugo:** I like to think I'm a bit more responsible than that.

**Next panel:**

*We go back inside. Hugo watches Nur for a moment.*

**Next panel:**

**Hugo:** Are you okay?

**Next panel:**

**Nur:** More of the same. Same-old same-old.

**Nur:** Got fired. At the other place, I mean, so rent's been kind of shitty. I don't think shifts at Logan's are covering things. Might have to move.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Hard times for moving.

**Hugo:** Hey, if you go off-planet—you know, something exotic, tropicana lifestyle—send me a postcard.

**Nur:** I don't do mail.

## **Page Fifteen**

**Hugo:** I don't tell fortunes just to show off.

**Hugo:** I hope it helps.

**Hugo:** I really do.

**Next panel:**

**Nur:** I've seen dead bodies before, Hugo. Plenty of them.

**Nur:** I'm fine.

**Next two panels:**

*Small and box shaped. We've gone back to Hugo, who is looking off at a wall. Then he looks back at Nur, a bit quizzical.*

**Next panel:**

**Hugo:** You got your ears pierced.

**Nur:** Oh. Yeah.

**Next panel:**

**Nur:** Yeah, I was—I was reading the paper a while back, and that woman from Daydream was on the front page.

**Hugo:** Heller?

**Nur:** Yeah. Are you following all that?

**Hugo:** A little. Pretty fucking crazy.

**Nur:** I was looking at the picture they had of her. She had a tattoo, in the same place as one mine. She had her ears pierced.

**Hugo:** So that's why you got em?

**Nur:** It sounds dumb when you say it out loud.

**Hugo:** Well. That's most stuff.

*He gives her a smile.*

**Hugo:** They look nice.

## **Page Sixteen**

*Nur smiles faintly, then, in the next panel, runs a hand through her hair, as though searching for something in the tangle.*

**Nur:** Look, Hugo, can you—

**Hugo:** I gotcha.

*Hugo moves to the exit.*

**Hugo:** Don't be a stranger. And call me up whenever.

**Nur:** Flip the sign on your way out.

*As he exits, Hugo turns the open sign to 'closed.' Nur lingers at the checkout counter.*

*We see the clock. Several hours have now passed. At the end of the day, Nur grabs her backpack and exits the store. She locks the door and pulls down the front grate with a rough metal rattling. The streets are a little sparse, but a few people are still out and about. A spirit can be seen walking in the background, the spidery kind that's just darkness and a hovering pair of pinprick-eyes.*

*The next few panels are Nur walking along the streets of Goldgyre.*

*After some walking, she stops. The camera pans out, and we see her from the other side of the street. She is looking up at a sign for the building in front of her. It's a bar: The Fury.*

*A moment of hesitation.*

*She enters.*

*It's not too crowded inside, but whenever someone bumps into her Nur is visibly uncomfortable. Chatter rises up in a scattered cloud of speech bubbles, some in unusual fonts, some in unusual shapes.*

*(Where were you?) // (I'm telling you, that Heller woman is a crazy bitch, things are gonna go south any day now.) // (You know what this means, right? Another fucking poll tax.) (She's a murderer! It's—this isn't complicated, c'mon—) // (I hear she's visiting Nightmare soon.) // (So I'm lying through my teeth, totally drenched, wetter than I've ever been in my goddamn life, *haha* okay, laugh it up! But then—) // (Hey, c'mon, please, please, no, I promise, please please please please—) // (Thanks for making it!) // (fuck)*

*Then, cutting through the din, a speech bubble mentioning Lynn.*

*(Why not? I'll be meeting with the police at Lynn's place tonight.)*

*(Are we really thinking of the funeral already?)*

*Nur tracks the bubble to the bar, tracing its tail. At the bar are a man and a woman, talking. Are we talking, is coming from the woman*

*(It's all—fuck, this is crazy, it's been like five hours Hextor.)*

*The man replies.*

**Man (Hector):** (We have no idea how long the police might drag this thing out. I don't want to have to—)

**Nur:** Hey.

**Man:** Sorry, ah, we're in the middle of something —

*Unlike the polite standoffishness of the man, the woman is giving Nur a smile, pointy and hard and sagging under some kind of weight.*

**Woman:** What's up?

**Nur:** You knew Lynn?

**Woman:** What?

*A panel where Nur doesn't talk, but it's unclear if this is hesitation, or if Nur is just collecting her thoughts, or if there's barely any pause at all and this panel is nothing but a split-second before the next.*

**Nur:** I knew her too.

**Nur:** We were close. We were friends.

*Stinger: Hugo, walking down the street and humming a song.*

## Chapter 2

### Page One

*The panels of this page travel through Nur's cramped little apartment. Nur is nowhere in sight, but her clothes are lumped unceremoniously in front of the bathroom, out of which comes steam and shower-sounds. The radio is playing on her desk.*

**Radio:** Look, I'm not here to give speeches. I'm not here to waste my time on speeches.

**Radio (Interviewer):** *Differentiated from Vienna, the first speaker, by a different shape to his speech bubbles.* Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't you giving a speech in front of the Drossarina, after your meeting with the Prime Minister?

**Radio:** It's perfunctory. And, I assure you, I'm going to hate every minute of it.

*The panels of Nur's apartment are interrupted by a close-up panel of a young, punk-looking woman seen from the nose down, as someone in front of her holds up recording equipment. They are apparently out in public.)*

**Radio:** Don't think it's anything to do with you, or your country, it's me, I just—I don't like speeches. It's not why I'm here.

*The next panel is back in Nur's apartment, a view from the ground up at the desk and the radio, with Nur's legs and hand in view, as she bends down to pick up some clothes from the ground.*

**Radio:** You don't want an asshole like me making speeches anyway.

**Radio:** Or maybe you don't want me at all.

**Radio:** That's okay.

### Page Two

*On this page, Nur is putting on clothes, turning off a steaming kettle, and pouring out a mug of tea. With her sunglasses off, you see her eyes are interested, open, engaged.*

**Radio:** Look—I'm here for the technical stuff, the politics stuff, the tedious stuff, all the stuff you couldn't air on radio because it's just so damn boring. Because that's what makes the world work.

**Radio:** Paying attention to all the little, stupid, boring things that keep everything running.



**Radio:** No one else seemed bothered to do it.

**Radio:** If you want a nice fuzzy speech to—to bring in the fuzzy feelings, or attract the crowd, find someone else.

**Radio:** I have an economy to pull back together.

### **Page Three**

*Nur is fully-dressed, ready for the day.*

#### **Panel 1:**

**Radio:** Well, thank you for your time, Ms. Heller.

**Radio:** This is Volina Public Broadcast, live from the Drossarina, with Ms. Vienna Heller. Ms. Heller is here for a diplomatic meeting with five Nightmare government officials, including Lady Duermo. Prime Minister Duermo will be—

*Nur turns off the radio.*

#### **Panel 2-4:**

*Nur picking up various items, her bag, her keys. These and the next panels are watching her from the opposite side of the room, so she and the door are a little small and a little far away.*

#### **Panel 5**

*Exit Nur.*

#### **Panel 6**

*The door shuts. This last panel has zoomed out to the outside street, and is looking into Nur's apartment through the window.*

### **Next Pages**

*There are several shots of Nur walking the populated variety of Goldgyre's streets. While she walks, you see people talking, and you see their speech bubbles. They are all empty.*

*A row of panels cut off the final ones. We see Nur's feet, her hands on the store's metal grate, the darkened interior of Logan's.*

*The final row of panes, four panels—Nur entering the store, Nur pausing in front of checkout, Nur running a hand through her hair, and finally Nur stepping*

*behind the counter. In each panel, the camera moves slightly further away. In each panel, the store is dark, and Nur is little more than a black silhouette, the lights not yet hit.*

*The following page is two panels, one with the store lights off, the other with the lights turned on.*

*It's just another day.*

*Throughout this chapter, speech bubbles bloom in and out of the panels in a variety of sizes, but they are blank. Even while Nur is conversing with customers at the store: blank, empty, nada, both hers and the customers'.*

*Nur arranges a shelf. Nur cleans her sunglasses on her shirt. At one point, we see a customer snooping around the aisle. He appears to pocket a bag of something, and Nur notices.*

*Nur confronts him.*

*There is a fist fight.*

*The two fall out of panel for a moment. The next panel shows the man limping off, while Nur, somewhat ruffled-looking but apparently unfazed, holds the bag he had attempted to steal.*

*The next page, snapshots: Nur checking the time, Nur stepping outside and putting on the Out for lunch, be back soon! sign, Nur returning with a sandwich from next door, Nur speaking somewhat uncomfortably with a pair of excitable children wandering around the store.*

*At one point, one of the kids puts a pair of Bluejoy candy bars on the checkout counter. Nur hesitates before checking the kids out, some passing dialogue, still in those blank, featureless bubble.*

*The day is over.*

*Nur closes up shop and prepares to head home. Blank bubbles overheard all round her. As she walks, she notices a nearby clock, and begins to move quicker, then she begins to jog, then she's running.*

### **Next Page**

*A shot of her empty apartment. At first empty, Nur quickly appears in the following panels, shoving open the door and hurrying over to the radio. She flicks it on, and Vienna's speech begins to come through.*

### **Next Page**

*Vienna in front of the Minister's Palace, crowded by reporters. Short purple hair, piercings, a pretty badass tattoo on her left arm. The massive shadow of Lady Duermo sits politely behind her.*

**Vienna:** —and that's the truth. We have to come to terms with the fact that, once upon a time, someone shoved us all in a room together and locked the door behind them. That's the truth.

**Vienna:** There's no cheating that.

**Vienna:** I'm not an optimist. I'm not—well. I'm not an optimist, that's the polite way—the political way to put it. But here we are, locked in a room together. We pay for mistakes that aren't ours. We spit and make messes and—and share our dirty laundry. And, sometimes, if the cards line up, if they line up just right, we can share our victories.

**Vienna:** No sugarcoating, no secrets—politics is slow, playing nice is slow, it's all grueling and petty and sometimes it feels like a waste of time. One step forward, two steps back. But today we talked. We made agreements. I don't call a lot of things successes, but I could call today a success.

*We move back to Nur.*

**Vienna:** Things got bad because we allowed it to get bad. Things will get better if we force it to get better.

**Vienna:** I know the things I've done, the prices I've paid, the sacrifices I'm willing to make for you. To the people of Nightmare, of Daydream, of Demiurge, of the Isle and the Crown, of every country and every planet—

**Vienna:** I'm not asking for your trust. I'm not asking for faith. I'm asking that you not let me do this alone.

**Nur:** Hah. You can't do this alone?

*Nur smiles faintly.*

**Nur:** I thought you could do anything.

*Nur rolls over in bed as the radio continues to rattle off half-heard phrases, applause, closing statements. A lingering "Hah" trails over her shoulder.*

*Stinger: Vienna and Lady Duermo, inside the Palace. "I thought that was quite good," Duermo remarks, as Vienna rests her head in her hands and grumbles tiredly.*

## Chapter 3

### Page 1

*Rows of small square panels run horizontally through the space between this page's larger panels. These small panels show snapshots of Nur getting ready for another day; bed, shower, radio, getting dressed. The larger, primary panels show her on her way to work on the streets of Goldgyre. As she walks, Nur passes below the sign for the Fury, and she pauses.*

*The panels move into a flashback of the previous night, of Nur entering the Fury and meeting Lynn's two friends.*

### Page 2

**Woman (Sofia):** What are you talking about?

**Nur:** I heard you talking and—heard you mention—

**Man (Hector):** *A sheer wall of politeness.* Sorry miss, I think you must've misheard.

**Nur:** You said 'Lynn,' right?

**Man (Hector):** I think we're talking about different Lynns. Easy to mix up, don't worry. If you could—

**Woman (Sofia):** Where?

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** What?

**Next Panel:**

*The woman has been watching Nur closely, a kind of joyless smile on her face.*

**Woman (Sofia):** You said you were there when she died.

**Next Panel:**

**Man (Hector):** Sofia, what are you...?

**Woman (Sofia):** Hey, we're all friends here, right? You, me, us, Lynn? You said you knew her, right?

*There is a kind of cold, eager expression on the woman's face, as though watching for Nur to expose her vitals.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur looks taken aback.*

**Nur:** It was—

**Woman (Sofia):** Yeah?

**Nur:** Logan's. Just near the corner store on Anciliar. Just down the street, on the left.

**Next Panel:**

**Man (Hector):** How'd you know about that? The radio hasn't even—

**Woman (Sofia):** God, Hector, she just told you.

**Woman (Sofia):** *To Nur* Sorry. He's in politics. They're not great with listening.

**Nur:** It's, um, it's cool.

*The woman's chilly eagerness is replaced by quietly furrowed eyebrows. She watches her drink.*

*A moment of awkward silence.*

**Woman (Sofia):** Pretty fucked up. Right?

**Nur:** *Blank faced.* Yeah.

**Woman (Sofia):** So you were there when it happened?

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Woman (Sofia):** Pretty fucked up.

**Nur:** Yeah. I'd, um, I'd just heard you talking, earlier

**Nur:** and I wanted to...

*She trails off. Then the woman looks up and meet's Nur's gaze.*

**Woman (Sofia):** Hey, did Lynn—did she say anything, before—?

**Nur:** No.

**Nur:** I'm sorry. Not really.

**Nur:** "Have a good one. See you around." Then she left. Next time I looked she was, um—

**Nur:** You, um, you said something about a funeral?

**Woman (Sofia):** We're figuring it out. Might be a while.

**Man (Hector):** It's a lot to figure out. But it should be soon. We want to sort things out now, not wait around.

*The woman seems to be thinking, then turns to Nur.*

**Woman (Sofia):** If you give me your number, I can let you know the details, whenever the hell that gets settled—

**Man (Hector):** Wait, Sofia...?

**Nur:** *Nur sticks her hands down her pocket, searching for something.* My—um—my phone is busted. But, here—

*She takes out a pen, then hesitates. Before she can decide otherwise, Sofia slides a napkin over.*

*Automatically, Nur scribbles something on a napkin: 81 S. Espina, Ap. 2D, Goldgyre. City of Serafine.*

**Nur:** You can send me a letter.

**Woman (Sofia):** Sure. 'Course.

**Woman (Sofia):** What's your name, Lynn's friend?

**Nur:** It's, uh, Nur. Just Nur.

**Nur:** You're, um—?

**Woman (Sofia):** Sofia.

**Man (Hector):** Hector.

**Nur:** I'd—I'm sorry, I have a lot to—I'd better get going. Have to go and—well, thanks. Sofia, Hector. I'll see you. I'm sorry.



*Sofia and Hector watch her go.*

**Hector:** What the hell was that?

**Sofia:** What?

**Hector:** Don't go starting shit, Sofia, please—"

*Unclear if Nur's out of earshot. The panels move outside, where Nur falls back against the outside wall of the Fury, looking up into the dazzling thoroughfare lights.*

**Next panel:**

*A wide horizontal strip that runs across the page, the camera positioned across the street from Nur. She leans against the wall, running a hand over her face.*

**Nur:** Stupid.

*Nur lingers a moment, as though catching her breath. Another panel, same as the last.*

*Finally, she walks off.*

**Next Panel:**

*Same view, same angle, but now the streets are busy with morning commuters, and the Nur of the present is looking up into the darkened Fury. Closed, for now.*

**Next Page**

*Three horizontal panels, one on top of the other. The camera is positioned inside of the Fury, the bartender's silhouette prominent in the gloomy foreground as he wipes down the counter. Through the windows, Nur can be seen just outside in the bright-lit street.*

*She is looking inside.*

*She walks off.*

*Nur is walking down the thoroughfare. Rows of small square panels run between these three larger ones, like mortar between bricks, each a small shot of opening up Logan's (Nur: pulling up the shutters, turning on the lights, checking the register, etc).*

**Next Page**

*Nur sits at the desk.*

*She glances at the clock behind her, then slouches lower. Apparently a slow day. The view moves outside to Anciliar Circle, the store in the background, a mounted clock in the center of the plaza taking primary focus. Three panels follow, and in each one the clock moves forward an hour or so. Definitely a slow day. In the last panel, some four hours after opening, Nur exits, and the camera zooms in to show the Out for lunch, be back soon! sign on the door.*

*Nur makes her way to Soledad Grocers, just down the street. (On the right hand side of Logan's, the opposite direction from the street where Lynn was killed)*

### **Next Page**

*A diminutive figure is perusing a rack of cabbages. His head is strangely crescent-moon-shaped, and seems to be hewn from rock or clay. This is the god Morrigan. He hears a bell tinkle behind him and says, without looking over his shoulder:*

**Morrigan:** Welcome to Soledad Grocers, how can I help you today?

**Nur:** Hi Morrigan.

### **Next Panel:**

*Nur closes the door behind her, and Morrigan looks over.*

**Morrigan:** Oh, hi Nur.

### **Next Panel:**

*Return to a view of Morrigan.*

**Nur:** How're the cabbages?

**Morrigan:** Oh, you know. Cabbagey.

### **Next Panel:**

**Morrigan:** *He moves to the deli near the checkout register.* The usual?

**Nur:** Thanks, Morrigan.

**Morrigan:** *As he busies himself with preparing a sandwich,* Stone dead today. Dead dead dead. Did the whole city go somewhere and forget to invite us?

**Nur:** We're too good for them.

**Morrigan:** Well, I'm still a little hurt.

*Nur seems comfortable around Morrigan. At one point, she even takes off her sunglasses and cleans them on her shirt.*

**Morrigan:** Slow morning for you?

**Nur:** Yeah. Peace, quiet, boring as all shit—doesn't get better than this.

**Morrigan:** I kind of miss it. Not the rush, but the one or two folks. Just enough for conversation, y'know?

**Nur:** Doesn't do much for me, sorry.

**Nur:** Eight hour shift in the morning, eight hour shift at night. Customers, no customers, it's all just waiting.

*We can't see her face from this angle*

**Nur:** Waiting waiting waiting

**Next Panel:**

**Morrigan:** Sure, sure.

**Morrigan:** Hey, maybe Friday scared em off. I mean, holy shit.

*Nur looks a bit uncomfortable.*

**Morrigan:** Were you here? When the stabbing happened?

**Morrigan:** Right outside—you'd think we're far enough from the Plague District for that kind of thing, but damn, guess again—

**Nur:** I had Friday off.

*She cuts him off a little quickly.*

**Nur:** So. Yeah. Missed the party, I guess.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Hey, can I

**Nur:** can I ask you something?

**Morrigan:** Yeah. Uh. Sure.

**Nur:** Do you think about moving, Morrigan? Or is Serafine your home now?

**Morrigan:** Hmm. I don't know.

**Morrigan:** Serafine's a fine city. There are worse cities.

**Morrigan:** I guess it is my home.

**Morrigan:** Where else could I go?

**Next panel:**

**Morrigan:** It's funny, I thought you were going to ask for a miracle.

**Morrigan:** They do that sometimes. The humans.

**Morrigan:** If it's just them and me in the store, if it's late and no one's outside.

**Morrigan:** I think they're ashamed.

**Nur:** Do you ever grant any? Miracles, I mean.

**Morrigan:** Sometimes. I can't do much. But then, most miracles are very small.

**Morrigan:** They don't come back though. No prayers or offerings or extra customers on the weekend; they come, they ask, they vanish.

**Nur:** Ashamed, yeah, that's what it sounds like.

**Nur:** This isn't a good place for gods.

**Morrigan:** Oh, I'm fine with it!

**Morrigan:** I don't know what I'd do if they came back with offerings. I don't think I'd like it.

**Morrigan:** I'm a god of bogeymen, and night terrors, and riverbeds, and clay. I made a living haunting children's dreams, back in the old days.

**Morrigan:** But mostly I'm just the guy behind the counter.

**Nur:** Sometimes I fight with shoplifters. I'm the girl that gets black eyes beating up shoplifters.

**Nur:** Sometimes it gets to me.

**Nur:** People don't shoplift from angels.

**Morrigan:** Oh, I think you're tougher than me, even without your wings.

**Nur:** Yeah?

**Nur:** Well. It'd be nice to have them back.

**Nur:** I don't think I ever appreciated that. Knowing for a fact no one would ever shoplift from you.

**Morrigan:** Hey, did I tell you? The other day, some guy came in, picked up a pack of chicken thighs, stuffed em down his jacket—and he didn't take it to the register, oh no. Right for the door. Quick as you like. I didn't say anything, I just let him go.

**Morrigan:** Dunno. I guess I didn't want to start a fight. Maybe I thought he looked like he could use the chicken.

**Morrigan:** *Shrugging his shoulders pleasantly.* Guess that's life. Sometimes you just shrug your shoulders.

**Nur:** Guess he's lucky it was a shrugging day.

**Morrigan:** Hmm.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Bet he didn't see you behind the counter. You are pretty short.

**Morrigan:** Well, it's not that uncommon. We get shoplifters every few weeks.

**Nur:** But you're a god.

**Morrigan:** Sure, yeah. I guess so.

**Morrigan:** I don't know if that's a question I want to ask right now. I don't know if I'd like the answer.

**Nur:** ...

**Morrigan:** What about you? You don't really like it here, do you? In Serafine? Are you planning on leaving?

**Nur:** *Surprised.* Why d'you think I don't like it here?

**Morrigan:** Oh, I'd just—it's nothing, I mean, it's just the impression I got.

**Morrigan:** *Do you like it here?*

**Nur:** *It's okay.*

**Nur:** *Okay place to wait things out.*

*Nur makes a somewhat silly gesture with her hands as she makes for the door with her sandwich.*

**Nur:** *Until it's time for this bird to fly.*

**Next Panel:**

*View shifts to Morrigan.*

**Morrigan:** *Don't forget to tell your bird friends we've got a big sale next Saturday!*

**Nur:** *Pushing the door open with her back. Bye, Morrigan.*

*The camera moves out to the street. Nur is not seen in the bustling crowd. The next panel shows her inside the store, closing the door behind her. A shot that moves outside for a moment reveals the Out for lunch! sign still hanging. Inside, Nur goes behind the checkout counter and slides to a seat behind it, invisible to the outside street. She eats her lunch in silence.*

*When she's finished, she doesn't go to flip the sign, but spends a page loitering, picking at the treads of her shoes, staring at nothing—she has the air of someone waiting for a bus at a bus stop. Logan's remains closed.*

*Time skips forward.*

*We see panels of Nur's hands; she locks the door, she pulls down the grate, then we see her shoes as she walks. Pan out: Nur, walking home.*

*The camera is looking down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Thoroughfare. The Fury can be seen on the left side of the Thoroughfare, lively and bright. After a moment, Nur emerges from a side street, some ways ahead of the Fury. She goes on her way without looking back.*

*At her apartment building on South Espina, Nur makes a detour into a cramped little room on the ground floor, lit by a single heavily decorated light. She sticks a tiny grey key into one of the many mailboxes lining the wall, and unstuffs her box of its many, many letters.*



*Nur goes through the mail, checking the front of each letter. She doesn't find what she's looking for, and in the next panel she can be seen tossing them down her floor's waste chute before she reaches her door.*

*Inside, Nur kicks off her shoes and pants, and undoes her bra beneath her shirt. They all get thrown onto a laundry mound growing on the floor. Nur plops down on the edge of her bed, then, like under the weight of some terrible spell, slouches off of it onto her butt on the floor.*

*Nur sits on the ground, her back to the bed. She stares at her feet, thrown under the cool shadow of the desk on the opposite wall. The camera takes her POV, staring down at her legs and feet. In the next panel, from the same angle, a pair of boots are standing now on either side of her legs.*

*Pan out. Vienna Heller is seen standing over Nur. The tail of a speech bubble originating from Nur's lips entwines Vienna's body, and comes around in a facsimile of emerging from Vienna's own mouth.*

**“Vienna”:** You're sitting on the floor in the dark. You're alone in your room. It's 4-o'clock on a Sunday.

**“Vienna”:** Having fun?

*The camera goes back to look at Nur, head-on. ‘Vienna’ cannot be seen from this angle.*

**Nur:** I beat up a shoplifter the other day. He got a few punches in. But they were shitty punches.

**“Vienna”:** You kicked his ass.

**Nur:** Hell yeah I did.

*The camera moves to the front of Nur's apartment, and she is sitting on the ground, alone. Reaching up to her nightstand, she turns on the radio.*

**Radio:** —For only 80,000 a month, prime rental space on North Boulevard! Prospective tenants, call in at—

*bzzt*

**Radio:** —No, Amelia. You'll take our love to your grave. *BANG!*—

*bzzt*

**Radio:** —So, what, does the flat wage rate suddenly skyrocket? Vienna Heller, I'm telling you, people are catching her like a sickness and expecting a panacea. That's not how the economy works.

*Nur pauses.*

**Next Panel:**

**Radio:** Thanks for that, Mr. Olise. Economics Professor Alvin Olise, everyone, on the latest market signposts three months into Ms. Vienna Heller's tenure as CEO of Sunshine Mechanical.

**Radio:** A word from our sponsors, then, a recording of last week's interview with Ms. Heller...

*Nur leaves this station on, as a cheery jingle with accompanying word-from-sponsor chimes in.*

*The next day, Nur's apartment is empty.*

*Throughout these next panels/pages, Nur is nowhere to be found, but dialogue trails through the pages.*

**Voice 1:** I'm telling him, look, you clearly didn't buy this here.

**Voice 2:** I bet he took that well.

**Voice 1:** Oh he took it. Took it and threw it on the ground like it was the big game and he was star player.

*Her bed is messy and unmade, with some clothes scattered over it.*

**Voice 2:** Fun.

**Voice 1:** And, get this, get this, he *still* asks for a refund. Soup is soaking up my pant legs, all over the floor. He asks for a refund.

*The camera moves to Anciliar Circle. The front door of Logan's has the Out for lunch! sign up, and the store inside is empty.*

**Voice 2:** Can you even get wet? I thought you were a river god.

**Voice 1:** I'm a river god, not a soup god. Soup, all over my pants.

**Voice 1:** I try *one last time* to convince him we sell bulk meat, vegetables, *not* soup, this is clearly not our product, and then, by divine mercy, another customer walks in.

**Voice 1:** It goes on a bit longer, but the other customer helps me gang up on the guy, eventually he chickens out and leaves.

*The camera moves to just outside Soledad Grocers. Nur can be seen inside, at the register.*

**Nur (Voice 2):** And they all lived happily ever after.

**Morrigan:** The end.

*Inside the store, the camera focuses in on Nur and Morrigan, chatting by the counter.*

**Morrigan:** I mean, I still had to clean up the soup, but, y’know, sure, happy ending.

**Morrigan:** What’s this?

*Nur has placed a few bags of produce on the table.*

**Nur:** Groceries.

**Morrigan:** Since when do you buy groceries?

**Nur:** I’m making dinner tonight.

**Morrigan:** Wow.

*Another customer (a human) enters the store. Morrigan greets them brightly, “Sal, hey!” Focus shifts away from them to Nur, though in the background, Sal’s “Hey! Listen, I talked to her, and you’ll never guess what she said—“ can still be seen.*

*Nur’s smile fades as she leaves the store. Outside, the speech bubbles of the surrounding street and its passersby are empty. A person bumps into Nur. He says something apologetic, but the speech bubble is empty. She replies, her own bubble also empty.*

*Nur goes back to Logan’s. She helps customers, still with all blank-bubble dialogue. At the end of the day, she leaves, and when she does the camera looks at her at an angle that goes down the side street where Lynn’s body was found. It’s empty now, and Nur has her back to it as she leans on the door for support.*

*Then, she’s off.*

*In the background behind the panels, the outstretched hand, hair, jacket of Lynn, as seen when Nur first found her, is repeated once more. Hair, hand, hem of her shirt, intruding just so slightly.*

*Nur goes to a payphone on her way home and calls up Hugo. It rings once, twice, three times, across two panels. Then, an answer.*

**Hugo:** Evening. Hugo speaking.

**Nur:** Hey.

**Hugo:** Wow, Nur, is that you? Hey, yeah, what's up? What brings you to a telephone? Did you finally get that thing fixed?

**Nur:** Nothing's up.

**Nur:** You make everything into a production, you know that?

**Hugo:** Do I? No I don't. I'm not that bad.

**Nur:** Not that bad.

**Hugo:** So no special occasion? Just wanted to say hi to your favorite Seer?

**Nur:** Well. I was making dinner tonight. Bought too much food though.

*The camera slowly zooms out in the next few panels, further and further, until Nur is little more than a stick figure silhouette.*

**Nur:** D'you want to come over?

**Hugo:** Oh, sorry Nur.

**Hugo:** I'm stacked for the rest of the night.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Ah.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** But I'm pretty free afterwards. Just have to finish some stuff up in Weatherview, but anytime after—yeah, let's get dinner tomorrow.

**Nur:** Oh. Cool, yeah, that sounds good. Thanks.

**Hugo:** Haha, what're you thanking me for? I hope your cooking's not that bad.

*Close up with Nur again, who has hung up. She's smiling, just a little, as she gets out of the phonebooth and goes on her way.*

*Stinger: Morrigan locking the doors to Soledad Grocers.*

## Chapter 4

*In the loading dock behind Logan's, Nur is helping a man unload a delivery truck. Nur is framed in the gap between the dark masses of the truck and the wall, a lone silhouette in the nightlights, while the suggestion of the man can be seen inside the shadowed back of the vehicle.*

**Nur:** This the last one?

**Worker:** Yep. You can handle the rest?

**Nur:** Yeah. No problem.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur signs for the shipment. We see her hands, and the man's hands, and the paperwork.*

*In the next panels there's a clattering as the back of the truck is pulled shut and padlocked. Nur puts down her box indoors and comes out just as the truck is pulling away down the main alley. It's gloomy in the loading dock, grey and yellow-lit, and green from hanging plants.*

*She watches the truck go.*

*Nur's shoe is seen kicking open the door. Her hands are setting down one box; next panel, another box; next panel, another box. Then inside, after apparently moving everything else that had been left on the loading dock. Nur shuts the loading dock door behind her. In front, an opposite door opens up into the rest of Logan's (apparently the storage room is just behind the checkout counter).*

*Nur pokes her head through, not this door, but one to the right of it, this one leading into a small office.*

**Nur:** Hey. Got everything inside.

*Inside, a man is going through a stack of documents. He's an older man, with a long unsmiling mouth and sharp eyes.*

**Man (Min):** Refill the essentials: candy, beer, magazines, cigarettes. Get everything else out anytime whenever-the-hell before Saturday.

**Nur:** Gotcha.

**Man (Min):** You got any days off you need to schedule?

**Nur:** Maybe some other week.



**Man (Min):** Some other week, sure. You're a pretty boring person, y'know that?

**Man (Min):** I'm not complaining, but, y'know, just in case no one's told you before.

**Next Panel:**

**Man (Min):** Nothing's on fire, so I'll head out soon. If it's slow just close up early.

**Nur:** Will do.

*Nur takes a few boxes out and begins unloading. She starts with the candy bars, a box of Bluejoys. Halfway through, however, she pauses and picks one up, and pays for them at the counter. As she does, Mr. Min comes out from the storeroom door.*

**Man (Min):** Bluejoys?

**Nur:** A friend of mine likes them.

*Min picks up one of his own from the box and begins to unwrap it.*

**Man (Min):** Friend a southerner? Company's pretty new, and they don't market much outside the Riviera.

**Nur:** Really? Why do we order them? They're not that big a seller.

**Man (Min):** Heard an ad for em on the radio once, so I ordered 5,000 bucks of stock for the hell of it. After a while they sent me a letter asking if I wanted to order more.

**Man (Min):** I never wrote back, but it must've been one of those reply-to-cancel things, cause they charged me another 5,000 and sent me a shipment the next month, and the next month, and I never bothered to write back so I guess we're getting these damn things until judgment day.

*He takes a bite.*

**Man (Min):** They're...okay? I've made worse investments.

*The man goes to leave.*

**Man (Min):** See you next week. Don't steal anything, or whatever.

**Nur:** Sure thing Mr. Min.

*A shot down the central aisle of the store, with Nur by the checkout counter in the background. It's a familiar panel, and you've probably seen similar ones several times already.*

*The day goes by uneventfully.*

*At the end of the day, she leaves. As she does, she goes by Soledad Grocers, but, about to enter the shop, she overhears Morrigan talking animatedly to a (human) customer inside.*

**Morrigan:** —And, get this, get this, he *still* asks for a refund. Soup is soaking up my pant legs, all over the floor. He asks for a refund—

*The camera goes inside.*

**Morrigan:** I try *one last time* to convince him we sell bulk meat, vegetables, *not* soup, this is clearly not our product

*View returns to Nur, outside.*

**Morrigan:** and then, by divine mercy, another customer walks in.

*Nur turns and leaves. On the way home, she stops by a phonebooth and puts in a call. And a few panels of unanswered ring-ring-rings—then:*

**Hugo:** Hello?

**Nur:** Hugo? You still okay for tonight?

**Hugo:** You're calling from a payphone aren't you? I called this morning and it went straight to static.

**Hugo:** Man you really gotta get that thing fixed.

**Nur:** Eventually. Some time.

**Hugo:** I'll be over in an hour, but I'm not fixing that thing for you if that's what you're hoping for.

**Nur:** See you soon.

*The way home is uneventful. We do not see Nur pass by the Fury as she goes.*

*Indoors, she checks the time, then flops over into bed. She picks up a book from a stack on her desk. Inside the first one she opens (Cooking Lean, 24 Recipes) is a receipt from the Serafine Public Library.*

*Nur keeps an eye on the clock. She's not wearing her sunglasses, and doesn't put them back on for the duration of this scene.*

*At one point, she sticks her hand out and points it vaguely out the window.*

*In the next panel, Vienna is revealed to be sitting next to her.*

**“Vienna”:** What're you doing?

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is not in this panel, neither is Vienna. It's just Nur's hand, pointed out the window.*

**Nur:** I flattened the entire city. All it took was one wing.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Swoosh. Just had to wave it like that. And it's gone.

**Next Panel:**

*We see Nur and Vienna again, Nur still looking out the window, her expression unreadable.*

**Nur:** If you were an angel, what would you do?

**“Vienna”:** Dunno. I guess I'd save the world. Or something like that. Something big.

*Nur sets down the book and gets out of bed; pops open the fridge, fires up her tiny one-burner stove, gets to work. Vienna is gone. Soon, there's a voice from behind the door.*

**Voice (Hugo):** Party's here!

**Nur:** It's unlocked.

*Hugo cracks it open and enters the apartment.*

**Hugo:** Holy shit, is this your place?

**Nur:** You like it?

**Hugo:** Well, it's cleaner than I expected. But isn't it kinda small? You don't feel cramped?

**Nur:** Doesn't bother me much.

**Hugo:** *Making a gesture at Nur with his hands, as though framing her in a picture.* But you're like a big tall stick figure.

**Nur:** *Not looking up from her cooking.* And you're like a short little elf, so this should feel nice and cozy.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Where're we eating?

**Nur:** On...the bed, I guess?

**Hugo:** Fancy.

*There is a small production as Hugo tries to squeeze past Nur, who is near the front of the apartment and blocking the rather skinny path to the bed in the back. This is difficult production, and takes about three panels.*

*Hugo makes it past her and flops to a seat on her bed. He looks out the window.*

**Hugo:** Not a bad view.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Get that nice easterly sunlight.

**Nur:** Right. Love that sunrise.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur joins Hugo on the bed with a pair of plates.*

**Hugo:** Hi.

**Next Panel:**

*A view from above of their plates and hands and utensils, as Nur and Hugo eat. This view continues through the next panels.*

**Nur:** Vinegar chicken. Some salad. Nothing fancy.

**Hugo:** Smells good.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** When did you get into cooking?

**Nur:** About, uh, forty-five minutes ago.

**Hugo:** Oh. Alright.

**Nur:** Phone's still not working, so I hope you don't have to call the ambulance or anything.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Hey, this is pretty good.

**Nur:** Pretty good?

**Hugo:** Well. More like okay.

**Hugo:** It's okay.

**Hugo:** Sorry. Seer. Not supposed to lie.

**Hugo:** It'd be unethical. Professionally speaking.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Worst case scenario was poisoning you so

**Nur:** Okay is fine.

**Nur:** Great.

**Nur:** Wow, first time on the stove, no casualties.

**Hugo:** Hey, don't joke, I'll have you know I definitely saw a future where you poisoned me. Bad meat.

*They are laughing together. In the next panel they settle back into eating, with quiet smiles or lingering laughs. Then, in the panel after, some dialogue.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** You're doing well, Nur.

**Nur:** Luck, mostly. I don't think my boss cares much about the store, he pays me more than he should and lets me do whatever.

**Next panel:**

**Hugo:** So things didn't work out at the packing plant?

**Nur:** Nah. I mean, I told you they fired me, but, not really?

**Hugo:** What happened?

**Next Panel:**

*An empty packing room, discarded cardboard boxes and loose papers. The boxes are printed with a logo of a grinning cartoon face surrounded by sunbeams.*

**Nur:** They kept telling me I had to stay a little bit longer. Another 30 minutes, another hour, another two hours, a little past midnight. But, like, not on overtime pay.

**Nur:** 'It's called being a team player, Nur.'

**Nur:** So one weekend my boss literally came to my place to ask why I'd left so early.

**Hugo:** Fuck, really?

**Nur:** Yeah so I told the guy go choke on literally one thousand dicks anddddd

**Nur:** I don't know if they fired me or not actually, I guess I just assumed.

**Hugo:** Haha, wait, so, maybe you still have a job?

**Nur:** That place is probably falling apart without me.

*They're laughing again.*

**Nur:** Maybe I sparked a revolution. Everyone else walked out too. An exodus.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is laughing a bit less.*

**Nur:** Or maybe not. No one'd left while I was there. I guess they didn't want to, y'know, lose their house or whatever. Like I'm probably gonna.

**Nur:** Rent isn't great.

**Nur:** But I can make it work.

**Hugo:** Yeah. You'll make it work.



**Hugo:** You can crash at my place again, y'know. If you need to.

**Nur:** Nah. It's fine.

**Nur:** Your place is gloomy. Very vampire.

**Hugo:** Hey look, I've seen coffins roomier than this shoebox, don't start.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** By the way, I hear Heller is supposed to make another visit next month. You're trying to follow all that, right?

*We see Vienna in her office in this panel. She is somewhere with sunlight, as the windows behind her are bright with a glow that outshines the flimsy ghostliness of the Serafine streetlights.*

**Hugo:** Something about the old Sunshine Mechanica factories they still have set up here. Some mines and plants, too.

**Nur:** So she's not on Nightmare anymore?

*Vienna argues a bit with a man who has just entered her office. The man is tall, and has horns.*

**Hugo:** Nah, took a shuttle back to Daydream the other night.

**Hugo:** I think she's got a few more planets to visit this week. Busy schedule. Saints in the sky, can you imagine, running around from country to country like that?

**Hugo:** Like a chicken with its head cut off. No thanks.

*Vienna is apparently unsatisfied with whatever he's come to tell her, as she has just stood up and moved to march past him.*

**Nur:** Fuck, just leaving Goldgyre stresses me out.

**Hugo:** Honestly, one city should be enough for anyone.

*It's a view of Serafine now, as seen from above. Glowing streets veining through the night, and hundreds of windows and side-roads.*

**Hugo:** Cities are bottomless. Trust me on that. And if you do hit the bottom, you'll look up and realize, oh, fuck, this isn't the bottom, this is just a little side-shaft, and they went and added ten more side-shafts while I wasn't looking.

**Nur:** I get lost on the halfish mile walk home from work.

**Hugo:** Maybe you should take fortunetelling classes.

**Next Page**

**Nur:** So, do you really never lie?

**Hugo:** I try not to.

**Nur:** Weird. I thought humans loved lying.

**Hugo:** Well it's not just lying, y'know. Cause you can never lie, but still say lotsa stuff you don't really mean. And that's in own thing, but I think I'm good about saying what I mean.

**Nur:** Is that why you're kind of annoying?

**Hugo:** Wow, wasted zero time sticking that knife in my back, huh?

**Hugo:** But yeah. Sure.

*The two are laughing.*

**Hugo:** Hey, they take this stuff pretty seriously at the Office of Prophecy. I didn't get my degree for nothing.

**Nur:** Is that how it works?

**Hugo:** Yeah, took night classes to get all the credits. Textbooks cost a fortune.

**Nur:** They don't send you to the top of a mountain to meditate for a year or whatever?

**Hugo:** That's what assholes who want to be on the radio do. Me, I took night classes.

*The two are casually lounging in bed, opposite each other, plates in their laps, tangled up a bit with his leg resting on hers or her foot on his elbow. Not much room, but it's cozy.*

**Hugo:** Trust me. I See way better than those chumpos.

**Nur:** Well, you Saw a murder coming, so I guess that's pretty good.

**Hugo:** Yeah.

**Next Panel:**

*He's watching her carefully, he speaks gently.*

**Hugo:** Did you know her?

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Not really.

**Nur:** She came in every week. Every Friday.

**Nur:** She was nice.

**Nur:** Sometimes it's kind of annoying when customers get all buddy-buddy with you, all long-lost-best-friend, that kind of routine. But she was nice.

*Nur is biting the metal prongs on her fork. She looks like she swallowed something funny.*

**Nur:** I didn't know her, but—she was nice. Yeah.

**Hugo:** If it's any consolation, they catch the guy in about, I dunno, three hours? Spitballing. Maybe four.

**Nur:** Oh.

**Hugo:** They think it was a guy who'd been stalking her for a while, but it was just some random mugger.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur: A blank speech bubble trails from her mouth, white and empty. In the next panel, she finds more concrete words.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Do you know where she lives?

**Nur:** lived.

**Hugo:** Oh. Uh, yeah, gimme a sec.

**Next Panel:**

*He seems lost in thought for a moment. We're not in Nur's bedroom anymore, in Nur's bed, but a dream city of blue panes of light, and Nur and Hugo are sitting together on a lonely black stone wall.*

**Next Panel:**

*Hugo gets up and looks around.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** In Arbors, I think. Near 10<sup>th</sup>, far side of the park.

**Nur:** Guess you did pay attention in class.

**Next Panel:**

*We're back in Nur's apartment. Nur and Hugo are seated again.*

**Nur:** Do you know the exact address?

**Next panel:**

**Hugo:** I think I could find it.

**Next panel:**

**Nur:** Thanks, Hugo.

**Next Panel/Next Page**

*It's a new day. Nur is at work. Empty boxes are on the floor behind checkout. There's a half-eaten Bluejoy on the counter.*

*A customer is there, the same customer from the day Lynn died. He's put a cup of coffee on the counter.*

**Customer:** —I was just down by the Scram today, would you believe how dirty it's gotten? When I was little, my papa would take me out to the Esplanade every weekend. The grass was green. We could fish! Can you imagine that, these days? Course not. None of you could imagine the Scram when it was clear and see-through, like a river should be.

**Customer:** But it was good. It was really good.

**Nur:** I'll take your word for it. I'm new in town.

**Nur:** That'll be 200.

*These panels look at their hands as they exchange money, and the customer takes his coffee.*

**Customer:** Would you believe that's the cheapest you can find decent coffee in this city?

**Customer:** You take care.

*Nur waves vaguely as the man leaves.*

*In the next panel, a hand flips the Out for lunch! sign on the door, and in the next, Nur's feet are moving down the sidewalk. Disembodied dialogue:*

**Voice (Nur):** I don't think I'm doing groceries anymore.

**Voice (Morrigan):** No?

**Voice (Nur):** It's the cooking. It's so fucking slow, it's unbelievable. I hate just sitting over the pan, stirring or changing the heat or adding this or that or whatever every few minutes.

**Voice (Nur):** Maybe I'll buy a microwave.

**Voice (Morrigan):** Not that I actually have to eat.

**Voice (Morrigan):** But I hear home cooking is way healthier for you.

*Inside Soledad Grocers. Nur is eating her sandwich inside, by the counter, as she chats with Morrigan.*

**Nur:** I dunno, I added a lot of salt, can't imagine how healthy that could've been.

**Nur:** I'd rather have a microwave.

**Morrigan:** Is it really okay for you to eat here?

**Morrigan:** I mean, won't the boss get mad if you're out too long?

**Nur:** I could probably stop coming to work and he wouldn't care. No idea why Mr. Min keeps the store running.

**Nur:** I kind of wonder if he's got some insurance fraud scheme going on, plans on burning the store down.

**Morrigan:** Don't think I ever met the guy.

**Morrigan:** I'll keep in mind that Logan's could burn down any day now, thanks.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Hey, Morrigan. I know you have the afternoon off today, and I was...I was wondering...

**Nur:** If you could help me with something.

*Morrigan is looking at her quietly. Without the usual dialogue, or gestures, or body language, his clay face is starkly expressionless.*

**Nur:** I need to go somewhere, but there's—there might be police. Or cameras. I don't know. I think it's a crime scene. But maybe you could help me get in. If you...I mean, if you can. Do some divine stuff, god powers, or whatever.

**Nur:** *A little jokingly,* I've only been human a few months, never really got a chance to learn how to break and enter. Should be fun. If you're up for it...?

**Next Panel:**

**Morrigan:** Nur, I don't—I don't really know you. You know that, right?

**Next Panel:**

**Morrigan:** You barely ever spoke to me before last weekend. You can't just suddenly decide we're best friends and get all—

**Next Panel:**

**Morrigan:** I don't know why you're coming in to pour your heart out every day. Or why you think you used to be an angel. But, please

**Morrigan:** don't

**Morrigan:** ask personal stuff like that.

*The camera looks straight on at the Soledad Grocers checkout counter. Morrigan is seen head-on, while Nur is seen from behind.*

**Nur:** Right.

**Nur:** Sorry.

**Morrigan:** That'll be 500 for the sandwich.

*The camera moves outside the store.*

**Nur:** Do you have change for a 1000?

**Morrigan:** Sure.

*The camera moves further back, looking down the whole of the two branching streets where Logan's, Soledad Grocers, and several other stores sit. The light crowds sift back and forth across the streets.*

**Nur:** Thanks.

**Morrigan:** Any time.

**Next Panel:**

*It's the same view. The crowds continue to move. There's a tinkling sound, the same one that plays whenever the door to a store is opened or closed, and if you look close you can see that Nur has opened and left through the grocery door.*

**Morrigan:** Have a good day.

**Next Panel/Page**

*Nur is wearing her sunglasses again, and her face is neutral, seemingly unconcerned. She walks by a payphone and puts in a call, but no one answers. She steps back. She returns to Logan's.*

*Inside, Vienna is behind her.*

**“Vienna”:** You can borrow something from the back room. Something to force the apartment door.

**“Vienna”:** If I was an angel, I could point my finger at the door, and it'd be dust and ash before you could blink.

**“Vienna”:** If I was an angel, I would hold a big meeting, somewhere like a plaza, somewhere to give a speech. But instead of a speech I'd raise my wings.

**“Vienna”:** No politics, no interviews, no red tape or bullshitting with politicians, they'd just look at my spread wings, and if I need them to do something

**“Vienna”:** they do it.

**“Vienna”:** Not that I need to. Never needed wings before. Not even to take over a country.

**Nur:** I think there's a hammer in the back room. Some other tools.

**“Vienna”:** Hammer'll do.

**“Vienna”:** Don’t need wings when a hammer’ll do.

*The day is over.*

*Nur exits the store and closes up. Some kind of toolbag is slung over her shoulder.*

*She tries a payphone again.*

**Nur:** Hey, Hugo?

**Nur:** Hey.

**Nur:** I’m okay.

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Nur:** Listen...did you ever find that address?

### **Next Page**

*A bus is rumbling down the street. The next panel goes inside to look at Nur, seated, looking down at her palms. The bus comes to a stop, some people emerge, then out comes Nur. She’s reading instructions that’ve been scribbled onto her left hand in pen.*

*She starts walking.*

*Nur turns down an alley. She turns down another alley. Now she’s on a nice little street, looking up at a tall and elegant building. She checks the address on her hand, then goes up the steps to try the door. It doesn’t open.*

*Zoom in. Nur looks confused.*

*She tries the doorknob again. It doesn’t open. Confusion turns into an awful, righteously hurt anger, as she tries it again, and again, and this one simple door has defeated her. The confidence bleeds out from her shoulders.*

*For a moment, the door has defeated her.*

*Then Nur moves away from the building and finds a laundromat next door, where she waits. She, the laundromat, and the apartment building are all in the background, viewed from across the street.*

*Eventually, a woman walking down the street makes a turn and moves for the apartment building door. Nur exits the laundromat and hurries towards the building.*



**Nur:** Hey! Sorry, could you hold the door?

*The woman pauses, the door open, and Nur hurries up the steps to join her.*

**Nur:** Sorry, I uh, I just moved in, keep forgetting my key. Thanks

**Woman:** It's, um, no problem, sure.

*Nur quickly squeezes past her.*

*Inside, she checks her hand again, then hurries up a spiral staircase at the end of the hall. One floor, two floors, on the third she gets off.*

*She walks down the hall, counting off the numbers "C3, C5, C7, C9..." and at C11 she stops.*

*Nur goes through her bag and finds a hammer. She brings it to the doorknob. But she pauses, thinks, gives the handle a turn instead, and the door swings open.*

*Nur enters Lynn's apartment.*

*It's roomy in here, much roomier than Nur's little coffin in Goldgyre. Roomy, but comfy, well decorated, a little messy. A little stained. This is a place that's been lived in.*

*The bookshelves along the wall are mostly empty, and where they aren't empty they boast curiosities and knick-knacks and old records, but very few books. Nur rests her toolbag on the couch.*

*The apartment is more or less one room, a bed in one corner, a kitchen in the other, a door leading to what might be a bathroom.*

*Nur goes to the nook of the room with a bed. The bed is unmade, and whoever last used it seemed to have flopped from the sheets as gracelessly as possible. It's quite a mess.*

*Near the bed, by the front window, is a record player. Nur rests her hand on it. She picks up the record that had been sitting there, unplayed, reads it (Haley Starr and the Comets), then puts it back and sets the needle on the vinyl. A song begins to play.*

*Nur nods her head to the beat, as the instrumentals pave the way for lyrics. She dances, just a little, hip-shake, head-bob, shoulder-shimmy. Just a little.*

**Record-Player:** I would've walked the world for you.

**Record-Player:** I would've talked the talk, it's true.

*Nur goes to the bookshelves. She watches her feet, and on the floor she passes: a post-it note with a date on it, a receipt, a vacuum cleaner that's been unplugged, a stretch of yellow police tape they must've left behind.*

**Record-Player:** I could've been the gal you wanted me to be.

**Record-Player:** But I would be that gal for someone else too.

*There are several framed pictures. Nur takes her sunglasses off to look at them more closely. She picks one of them up.*

*Lynn and the woman from the bar, Sofia, are in one of them, laughing like kids. In several others are a little girl, in some she's alone, in others she's with Sofia.*

**Record-Player:** By God, you ain't the special boy you think you are.

**Record-Player:** You ain't the boy you dress up to be.

**Record-Player:** You ain't my star.

*Nur lingers on each picture. Lynn and Sofia. The little girl. And there are other strangers she doesn't know. Bland, blank faces. Nur smiles as she looks at them.*

**Record-Player:** It's nothing special, my heart, my core.

**Record-Player:** But neither is yours.

*Nur reads the names on the vinyls, but gives no reaction to the bands or labels. Does she recognize any of them?*

*There are a few books on the shelf. Nur removes her sunglasses, then picks up a pair of keys that sit on one of them. The keychain is a simple little thing, with only two keys. The book is titled In Vain: The Brief Democracy.*

**Record-Player:** So if a bit of me loves you after I've left, after I'm gone for distant shores, there'll still be something else, something more.

**Record-Player:** Something new in store.

*After inspecting the keychain, Nur picks up the book. A subtitle is on the cover, below the title: A History of the Land of Nightmare's Second Dictatorship, and the Road That Took Us There. She turns to a random page.*

**Record-Player:** Don't think I can't leave you by the side of the road, boy.

**Record-Player:** Don't think I won't leave you beggin on the floor.

*Nur half-dances over to the couch, skimming through the books pages. Then she stops. She's not dancing anymore. She's found a bookmark. A little blue flower that's been laminated onto a piece of yellowing paper. Nur takes it, her fingers soft as filament as she touches it. She takes a seat in the violently plush couch, turning over the flower bookmark.*

**Record-Player:** Love, love, love, love. Nothing special, no.

**Record-Player:** *Love, love, ooh-ooh, maybe so.*

**Voice:** Hey!

*Nur shoots to her feet, knocking against the table and dropping the book and the keychain.*

**Voice:** Who the—? What're you doing here?

*Nur catches the book and looks to the front of the apartment, where someone has pushed open the outside door and is looking in at her.*

**Person:** You, uh, you with the police, or...?

*Nur snatches up her bag of tools and shoves past the man at the door, sprints down the hall. The history book and the keychain are tight in her fists.*

*The next panels move outside, a view of the big elegant building and the sidewalk in front of it. Nothing in the first panel; then, Nur bursts out the door. She speed-walks down the street.*

*The next few panels look at her head on as she walks. She looks over her shoulder. She gets her sunglasses back on. She keeps on walking, then she's gone.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is walking into her own apartment building on South Espina. Up the steps. At the door. Keys jingle, then she's inside.*

**Next panel:**

*An ant's-eye view from Nur's feet, looking up at her face. Then, a panel from her POV, looking down at her feet. A letter.*

Nur  
81 S. Espina, Ap. 2D, Goldgyre  
Serafine, Las Vives

*She tears it open.*

Hi Nur,

I think we finally figured out a date. Funeral's this weekend, Saturday. Service starts at 5 at the Peonite Chapel, then the burial is at 6 at Cemetery of Las Vives. If you can only make it for the burial, try and be there a bit early, avoid the crowds.

Hope you're well,  
Sofia Camillagrantz

*Nur finishes reading the letter, her thumbs pressing so tight they crinkle the paper. She takes a long breath. Then, she takes out In Vain, and tucks the letter in next to the laminated flower.*

*Stinger: Sofia is studying a book inside what might be a library.*

## **Chapter 5**

*Nur is in bed, in her underwear and a nightshirt. In Vain is open in her lap. The windows are shut, the room is dark, the only light comes from a dingy little bulb hanging over her bed. On Nur's desk are the keys from Lynn's apartment.*

**“Vienna”:** It's late. It'll be hell waking up in the morning.

**Nur:** It's fine.

**Nur:** I'm not going to work tomorrow.

**“Vienna”:** You're not?

*Nur continues to read. Between her fingers is the laminated flower, which she plays with idly.*

**Nur:** I have to be prepared.

**Nur:** For the funeral.

*She turns the page with a fwip sound.*

**“Vienna”:** That's good.

**“Vienna”:** Don't let anything catch you unprepared.

*The camera moves up to the light above Nur's bed. For a while, the light is all we see, and the fwip sounds of Nur turning pages. Or shuffling in bed. Eventually, Nur's hand appears to turn it off.*

*In the dark, it's just Nur and Vienna.*

**“Vienna”:** It wasn't so hard, today.

**“Vienna”:** You didn't even need to break in.

*Nur gets down from her bed. She had been standing on it to reach the light.*

**“Vienna”:** That was nice. With the woman. *“I just moved in, keep forgetting my keys.”*

*Nur walks over to the desk and opens the front drawer. Inside, something is glowing.*

**“Vienna”:** Image what you'll be able to do when you get your wings back.

*Nur reaches in and produces what could only be a halo. It is a circle of light, not very bright, but even in the dark you can see the whole world twist and contort around the holy energy it radiates. Its blistering edges cut into Nur's hands, and they bleed.*

**“Vienna”:** It's pretty, isn't it?

**“Vienna”:** Your halo.

*Now Nur is alone. She takes the halo to her bed and sits down. It cuts like a razor blade into the pads of her fingers. She hugs the halo tight to her chest.*

*Stinger: A pair of larger hands are helping a pair of smaller hands laminate a flower.*

## **Chapter 6**

*Nur is walking down the street. It's an unfamiliar part of Serafine, with old brick buildings; at one point, a park can be seen in the background. Nur is following a map, with some directions scribbled on the margins. She's dressed well, the first time we've seen her in anything other than tank tops or pajamas—dressed for a funeral.*

*Nur passes a clock, which lists the time: 5:40. She mutters "5:40" to herself as she passes it. She's early, and it seems like she would've liked to be earlier. She looks...excited? Afraid? Flustered?*

*The next page is a shot of the sign that hangs over the cemetery gates: Cemetery of Las Vives. It's an old but well-kept sign, oxidized copper, lamps on either side that glow with a kind of amusement-park warmth.*

*The camera pans out. There is an enormous crowd thronging the gate, and inside the cemetery must be hundreds of people. More are coming in from the streets.*

*Their dialogue bubbles are full of scribbles, but in most of the scribbles, the word 'Lynn' is legible. The panels jump from person to person, stranger to stranger. There're so many of them.*

*The camera moves. We see a shot of Nur from behind, as she looks towards the crowd by the cemetery.*

*The panel repeats. Nur hasn't moved. The crowd is still trying to make its way through the gates.*

*The final panel of the page: Nur steps back from the funeral and slips away.*

### **Next Page**

*Four rectangular panels of the same size, each one a shot of a cooler.*

#### **Panel 1:**

*No dialogue, just the gentle humming of the cooler. It casts a pale blueish light on the floor.*

#### **Panel 2:**

*A tinkling of a bell, someone has entered the store.*

#### **Panel 3:**

**Voice:** Hey, uh, which side—you know where the beer is?

**Other Voice:** Over on the right.

**Panel 4:**

*Footstep sounds.*

**Next Page**

*Same layout as the previous page—shots of the cooler.*

**Panel 1:**

*Legs appear.*

**Panel 2:**

*The cooler is open, they are rummaging around.*

**Voice:** No Islos.

**Voice:** Hmm.

**Panel 3:**

*The customer is still inspecting the beers.*

**Voice:** Alright

**Panel 4:**

*The customer has scooped a pair of beers from the cooler.*

**Next Page**

*Same layout as the previous page—shots of the cooler.*

**Panel 1:**

*The customer is gone and the cooler is closed. Each panel on this page is the exact same.*

**Panel 2:**

**Voice:** 350.

**Voice:** Right, gotcha.



**Panel 3:**

**Voice:** Come again.

**Panel 4:**

*The tinkle of the bell by the door.*

**Next Page**

*Four horizontal panels of equal size, each one stretching across the page, one on top of the other. Nur is sitting casually on top of the checkout counter.*

*With the distance between her and the camera, her face is indistinct, and any expression she might have cannot be discerned.*

*In the four panels, she doesn't move from her seat. She does: scratch her head, lift a can-of-something for a drink, take a drink, set the can back down.*

**Next Page**

*Nine equal-sized panels, each of the clock in the center of Anciliar Circle. People passing, talking. There are occasional speech bubbles from the chatter. The clock moves: 9:12 AM in the first panel, 10ish, 11ish, 12sh, 1ish, 2ish, then, final panel, 2:45 PM.*

**Next Page**

*Nine more panels of the same size as the last. Six are disparate snapshots: Morrigan is wiping down the counter inside Soledad Grocers. Hugo is talking with a hunchbacked someone in a beautiful and intricate veil. Sofia is holding her head tiredly, while Hector stands behind her, a stack of paper in his arms. Vienna is writing something at her desk. The funeral invitation is crumpled up in a waste basket. The girl from the photo in Lynn's apartment is pulling apart a flower, different from the kind laminated in the bookmark, a stormy expression on her face.*

*Running down the middle, sandwiched between these disparate scenes: three shots of Logan's from the outside, seen from the distance. A simple shot of the store. Nur stepping outside. Nur pulling down the grate over the storefront.*

**Next Page**

*Three panels on this page; top, middle, bottom. Nur stops by a phonebooth, hesitates, then continues on her way. The Dome of the Stars looms high in the background.*

**Next Page**

*There are nine panels on this page.*

*Nur's apartment building; Anciliar Circle; Nur, from a distance, alone at the checkout counter; the city skyline; a man asleep on a warehouse doorstep; Nur's clothes on the ground of her apartment; and*

*A statue of an angel in a graveyard; the cash register at Logan's; the radio on Nur's nightstand chiming in: "I don't know what anyone was expecting, but the unemployment rate in the southern provinces is still nearly—"*

### **Next Page**

Darkness.

### **Next Page**

*Our point of view is that of something small on the desk, looking out at the large, indistinct shape of Nur. The distance and angle makes it hard to make out any specifics of Nur's face.*

*Her hand gives something out of sight a bzzzt-click.*

**Radio Personality 1:** —And, tonight, Heller is abroad yet again, this time on the sunny shores of the Isle. You gotta wonder if she's just using her position to go sightseeing—

**Radio Personality 2:** —Well hey, don't forget we're dealing with an actual child here. 22! This girl is 22 years old, you really think a 22 year old can do what she's trying to do?

*We see Nur's apartment, and her buzzing radio on the Nightstand.*

**Radio Personality 2:** I'm telling you, best case scenario, and I'm talking puppy-eyed idealist best case scenario, the kid burns through all her funds on dumbass vacations and bankrupts Daydream, then maybe we can start the hell over—

**Radio Personality 1:** Credit where it's due, the girl's got balls, am I right? Haha. I mean—

### **Next Panel:**

*A view at the table in a recording studio, where two men, seen from the lower head down, their eyes unseen, are speaking into recording equipment.*

**Radio Personality 2:** Don't forget, don't forget, this is a murderer we're talking about. A murderer, she murdered her way into power—

**Radio Personality 1:** —Not that anyone’s losing sleep over the folks she did in. Hey, our own lovely Minister Eternal didn’t exactly wishy wash her way into the position—

**Next Panel:**

*The radio, close-up.*

**Radio Personality 2:** —Yeah, and didn’t we revolt? She was a dictator, and we revolted the fuck out—!

**Radio Personality 1:** Lotta good that did.

**Next Panel:**

**Radio Personality 2:** But c’mon, a 22 year old girl-killer, huh? Fine basket to put our eggs in—

**Radio Personality 1:** Wouldn’t mind putting something else in her, if you knowwat I mean, huh? I mean, credit where it’s due. Hahaha—

**Next Panel:**

*Nur’s hand appears, turning the radio to another channel with a sharp bzzt.*

**Nur:** Assholes.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur swivels through the channels.*

**Radio:** —For only 2000, you can start your subscription today—!

**Next Panel:**

*A turn of the knob, a bzzt as the channel changes.*

**Radio:** —Tune in next week for another episode of *Aritas City Heartbreakers*—

**Next Panel:**

*Bzzt.*

**Radio:** —And what a game it was, honestly, the Serafine Pilots are gonna have an unstoppable season—

**Next Panel:**

*Bzzt.*

**Radio Announcer:** *(With a distinct speech bubble, more elegant than the other various talking heads) –this station’s personal favorites. And now, in memory of Lynn Villanueva, Glassheart...*

*Nur’s hand is frozen in place on the radio dial.*

**Next Panel:**

*Musical notes begin to swirl out of the radio. Nur’s hand hasn’t moved.*

**Next Panel:**

*Her hand retreats.*

**Lynn:** In a forest of hammers...

**Lynn:** In toppling breeze... *The speech bubble is rimmed on the sides with a few little ‘hahas,’ as though Lynn was laughing a little as she sang this.*

**Next Panel:**

**Lynn:** I stood on a teetering tabletop.

**Lynn:** With wobbly knees...

**Next Panel:**

*Now, we see Nur’s face. Finally. This is the first time we’ve seen it head-on since the funeral. Her sunglasses are gone, and her eyes are very red.*

**Lynn:** I’ve fallen here before

**Lynn:** onto that hard metal floor.

**Next Panel:**

**Lynn:** My pieces went everywhere...

**Lynn:** No surprise, that’s for sure...

**Next Panel:**

*Nur raises her fist to her face and bites down on her knuckles.*

**Lynn:** In a field of wrecking balls

**Lynn:** In a threshing sea.

**Lynn:** That's where I live, my ribs cracked open.

**Lynn:** My glass heart for all to see.

**Next Panel:**

*She's choking back sobs.*

**Lynn:** And I'm okay, ooh-ooh-oh.

**Lynn:** I'm okay, ooo-ooh.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Hi, Lynn.

**Lynn:** I'm ooh-kay.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur continues to cry, her mouth buried into her fist as she tries to hold it all rigid and still, don't cry don't cry don't cry—*

**Nur:** That's—*hic*—your voice.

**Lynn:** I'm in a million pieces, glittery and sharp

**Lynn:** Because we all got these shiny breaky glass hearts.

**Next Panel:**

**Lynn:** I'm back up high, knees tremblin', ready to fall again.

**Lynn:** Not a maybe, just a when.

**Next Panel:**

*Zoom out, we see Nur more completely now, just as there's a loud knock-knock on the door. Nur gives a start.*

**Lynn:** At the end of a long battered day.

**Lynn:** At the end of a long bloody fray.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is scrubbing hurriedly at her eyes.*

**Lynn:** I'm already putting myself back together.

**Voice:** Hey, uh, Nur?

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is still furiously drying her eyes.*

**Voice:** It's Sofia.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur jams her sunglasses on and moves for the door.*

**Nur:** Just a sec.

**Lynn:** And I'll be okay.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur opens the door. Standing there is Sofia Camillagrantz.*

**Nur:** Hey, um—hi. Sofia.

**Sofia:** Hey. Sorry to call on you out of the blue, I, uh, I didn't see you last Saturday, at the church, or the funeral, and I was in the area, so, well...I thought I'd come by.

**Nur:** Oh. Um, yeah, I'm sorry, I couldn't make it. I was going to, but, stuff just...yeah.

*Sofia has cocked her head slightly.*

**Lynn:** Come at me with your hammers, your sledges, your wrecking balls.

**Lynn:** I can't take it, but I'll catch them all.

**Sofia:** Hey, that's Glassheart.

**Nur:** That's, um, Lynn singing, right?

**Sofia:** Yeah. God, I could tell you stories about that song. Studio really wanted it to be a duet, kept trying to force this hot new singer on us, snivelly little asshole, I was running back and forth between his agent and Lynn—

**Sofia:** what a mess.

**Nur:** I, uh, I never knew Lynn was a singer.

**Sofia:** You—?

**Sofia:** You're kidding. What?

**Nur:** She would come to the store sometimes. Where I work, by Anciliar Circle. And she'd buy candy.

**Nur:** And, um, yeah. I'm new in town, so—only just rolled in a few months ago. I don't know, the, uh—celebrities, or music, or...

**Next Panel:**

**Lynn:** Do you care it's got splinters, pieces missing and gone?

**Nur:** She's really good.

*Sofia, who has a rather cunning, snide sort of resting face, breaks into a soft smile.*

**Sofia:** Yeah.

**Lynn:** If you do, well, that's fine.

**Lynn:** I'll break and move on.

**Next Panel:**

*A tall, vertical panel, camera positioned at the opposite end of the apartment, looking in at Nur and Sofia and the door.*

**Nur:** Do you, uh, do you want tea? or something?

**Sofia:** Hm. Lot of work to do tonight. Just got back from an afternoon at the Goldgyre Archive House, absolutely soul-sucking, and I've still got like two more books to skim.

**Sofia:** I'd love some tea. Or a beer, if you have one.

**Nur:** Let me check the fridge.

**Nur:** I picked some up while back. Wasn't really my thing, so there might be a few left.

*Nur goes to rifle through the minifridge under her desk, while Lynn enters and closes the door behind her.*

**Nur:** Yeah, two left.

**Sofia:** Thanks.

*Nur passes Sofia one of the beers, then takes a seat on the bed. Sofia perches herself on Nur's desk.*

**Sofia:** So this singer they wanted us to work with, total diva. Thought he was the hottest shit that's ever been shat, kept sending Lynn notes about what he wanted in the song.

**Sofia:** Heartbreak, an affair, a guitar solo for him near the end. We hadn't even signed him on yet, this was all unofficial, by the way.

**Sofia:** *Puts on a mocking face and raises her hands, claw-like.* "This isn't a song about love. It's a song about *real* love!"

**Sofia:** Fuckin loser. And he never sent us any lyrics, by the way, no writing, no sheet music, just his big ideas.

*Nur is smiling, almost laughing a little, as she watches Sofia recount the story.*

**Sofia:** No wait—there was one time, *one* time he sent in *one* stanza

**Sofia:** it was the worst thing I'd ever read.

**Sofia:** He tried rhyming "business" with "kiss your lip-ness."

*Nur snorts.*

**Nur:** Very sexy.

**Sofia:** Isn't it?

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** I helped Lynn bully the studio into dropping him. She was always too nice to do that kind of industry shit flinging.

**Nur:** So, was she—was Lynn a popular singer, then?



**Sofia:** I can't tell if you're fucking with me.

**Sofia:** It's just—yeah, pretty popular.

**Sofia:** You should've seen the funeral.

**Sofia:** Fans pouring in from all over, like a jillion sardines in a can.

**Sofia:** We thought about making it private, but...I know Lynn would've liked to let her fans pay their respects.

**Sofia:** Whatever that means.

**Sofia:** Sentimental types. Never understood her that way. Never understood the sentimental types.

*Sofia has the can of beer resting against her lips, covering up her mouth. She's looking at something in the distance.*

### **Next Page**

**Nur:** She was always nice. Came by on Fridays, got the same thing each time. She—

**Nur:** Lynn was a...a good friend.

**Nur:** She was a southerner, right?

**Sofia:** Southerner? Lynn's a Serafine girl.

**Sofia:** Why'd you think that?

**Nur:** Oh, I just...she'd buy these candy bars, Bluejoys, apparently they only make them in the south, and...I guess I just thought—

**Sofia:** Huh.

**Sofia:** She was always busy on Fridays.

### **Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** So, you're not some crazy stalker fan, right?

**Sofia:** Some folks would've killed for the chance to peak into Lynn Villanueve's death. Get their rocks off on it.

**Next Panel:**

*Pan out. The two are sitting together on the bed. Side by side. Nur doesn't have the ceiling lights on, but there's a yellow glow coming in outside the windows and from the lamp on her desk, and Sofia and Nur are blue and dark and hallucination-colored.*

**Sofia:** I was kind of wondering if you were just some crazy stalker fan. Playing some kind of game.

**Nur:** Oh.

*Nur and Sofia nurse their beers for a panel.*

**Sofia:** I was kind of hoping for it.

**Sofia:** I kind of wanted someone to yell at.

**Sofia:** That would've been nice.

**Sofia:** Would've been nice to have someone to blame.

**Nur:** Oh.

**Sofia:** I guess this isn't the kind of week for getting what you want, huh?

**Nur:** No. It's not.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I'm sorry, Sofia.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Thanks.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** And thanks for the beer.

*Stinger: A music box is open on a table somewhere. The room is sad and old, and the box breathes a small tinkly tune.*

## Chapter 7

### Page 1

*The first page is a splash shot from a point-of-view high in the air, not far behind the Dome of the Stars. In the foreground is the Plague District. In the distance is a more metropolitan part of the city, with Millarose Tower rising up in the background.*

### Next Page

*The camera moves from the darkened Plague District to a busy plaza. The Tower seen from the first shot looms high over the area.*

*Now we look in on a café. Outside, Nur and Hugo are seated at a cute little table, though they are quite far away from the camera, the details of their faces and bodies unspecific. When the panels eventually move closer to Hugo, we see a strange mandolin leaning up on the side of his chair.*

**Nur:** This place is awful.

**Nur:** Coffee shouldn't be 400 dollars.

**Hugo:** Aw, but look at how tall they made the whipped cream. And all the sprinkles.

**Nur:** I didn't pay 400 dollars for sprinkles.

### Next Page

**Hugo:** Yeah, it's pretty bad here. Too many tourists, so they charge out the whazoo for everything.

**Nur:** You'll pay next time.

**Hugo:** I'll pay next time.

### **Next Panel:**

*Their hands on the table, similar to the view from when they had dinner together.*

**Hugo:** Thanks again for coming, I appreciate it.

**Nur:** Yeah, sure.

### **Next Panel:**

**Nur:** And this is...?

**Hugo:** Just Seer stuff. Nothing illegal, no serious business.

**Hugo:** But an extra pair of hands would really help.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** When do we have to get going?

**Hugo:** Soon. Not too soon. Half an hour, maybe more.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** *He gestures at Nur's coffee.* Plenty of time to enjoy every last cent.

### **Next Page**

**Next Panel:**

*We're watching at an angle behind Nur—her back right in front of us, Hugo's front and face across the table.*

**Hugo:** Hey, looks like Heller's giving a speech tonight. Big one. Journalists all over are gonna travel to Daydream to record, so I bet we can hear it over the radio.

**Nur:** What's it about?

**Hugo:** Probably some PR thing. Talk pretty, try and make some friends. No one really trusts her, y'know. Lot of folks think Daydream just traded one dictator for another.

**Nur:** What do you think?

**Hugo:** Well, I'm no journalist. So take all this with a grain of salt.

**Hugo:** But I'm also a pretty smart cookie so don't take too much salt with it.

**Hugo:** I don't think she's some corrupt crazyhead. I think she's probably got a good heart. But then, so do most folks, good heart doesn't keep em from doing dumbass things.

**Hugo:** Just one dumbass thing from someone with her kinda power...It's tricky.

**Hugo:** What about you?

**Nur:** Oh. Me? I dunno.

**Nur:** I don't really follow that kind of stuff.

**Hugo:** C'mon. There's gotta be something buzzing around under all that hair.

**Nur:** Hmm. Don't be so sure about that.

**Nur:** I told you, I'm not really a politics person.

**Hugo:** Hey, you asked first. Don't start a gunfight if you don't got no bullets.

*Hugo is leaning across the table, making finger-guns at her. Nur is still seen from behind, but she laughs a little, laughter that's visible even when all you can see is her back.*

**Nur:** I guess...I guess she seems to think things through. I don't know a lot of people who do that. She seems to want to talk. Lot of people would rather die than talk. Lot of people do. I remember that from when I was an angel, when I had my wings, when I had more eyes than there are stars in the sky, and I could watch humans die and die and die, and wonder why.

**Nur:** She seems—she seems strong.

**Nur:** But maybe most people are strong. Maybe I just need to get out more. Maybe I'm a bit jealous.

**Hugo:** I think it'd be nice. You, getting out more. Hitting the town. Maybe we should go clubbing sometime. Tear shit up, you and me.

**Nur:** With her, with...with Heller. Do you think she'll end up just another dictator?

**Hugo:** Well, I'm no gambling man.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** It's actually illegal, they've got laws against Seers doing that kinda thing.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** But if I was, I guess gambling on Heller wouldn't be the worst mistake I'd ever made.

**Nur:** Guess not.

**Hugo:** I guess she is pretty strong.

**Nur:** Yeah. She is.

**Hugo:** But I don't gamble. I don't like gambling on things that big. So, um

**Hugo:** I don't know.

**Hugo:** Honestly? I'd rather gamble on you than Heller.

*A crack of laughter bursts out of her.*

**Nur:** Haha, what?

**Hugo:** Sure. Bet on an angel. I can do that.

*Nur is still laughing.*

**Nur:** Sure. Yeah, bet on an angel. That's smart.

*She's smiling, and laughing.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I killed a demon once. Big fucking thing, bigger than a planet. Sun-sized. Seven heads, and firebreath, y'know. That was pretty cool.

**Nur:** Might've been eight heads.

**Nur:** Hard to keep track, mid demon-killing.

**Hugo:** Okay, now, I can't tell if you're fucking with me, and *I know you know I can't tell.*

**Nur:** Oh?

*She's thrown her arm in a cocky sort of movement over the back of the chair.*

**Hugo:** But I'm a nice guy, so I'm gonna take your word for it.

**Nur:** Alright.

**Hugo:** See, but you say things like that...!

*Hugo laugh-exclaims this, then falls into plain old laughter, which then subsides. There's a panel of him, not quite smiling, not quite frowning, maybe thinking, but not speaking. Then:*

**Hugo:** Busy week?

**Nur:** Mhmm.

**Nur:** Normal at the store. Nothing much going on..

**Nur:** The funeral was Saturday. I got there early. Called Mr. Min, he let me take the afternoon off.

**Hugo:** How was it? The funeral?

**Nur:** Oh.

**Nur:** I didn't go.

**Hugo:** But you went out to Cemetery of Las Vives, right?

**Nur:** Yeah. But there—I dunno. I was there early.

*She looks distracted. Confused.*

**Nur:** Fifteen minutes early.

**Nur:** Maybe I should've come earlier.

**Nur:** There was this big crowd. All these people. Were they...I dunno. Friends? Family? Who were they?

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** They were all there for Lynn.

**Nur:** I watched them filing in. Hundreds of bodies.

**Hugo:** Ah.

**Nur:** So then I left. One less body. I don't think anyone missed me.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** I guess they must've been fans.

**Hugo:** Trying to get there early. Pay respects.

**Nur:** Yeah.

*Nur plays with her coffee, stirring the spoon like it's a radio dial and she's trying to find the right channel.*

**Nur:** Fun story: Lynn's agent came by my apartment last night. We talked.

**Nur:** We met a few days ago, she was the one who gave me the invitation to the funeral, but

**Nur:** I never knew she was Lynn's agent. I didn't know Lynn had an agent. She told me that Lynn was a singer, a famous singer. Apparently.

**Hugo:** She...yeah. It was Lynn, Lynn Villanueva. *The Lynn*. There're posters of her, all around the city.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Nur:** I never knew.

**Nur:** So that was fun. The funeral. Lynn, and a couple thousand people, all in on a secret that no one bothered to fill me in on.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** It's like...I don't follow the news. I like hearing Heller talk, y'know, when she's on the radio, but...

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** And, the, uh, the glasses.

*She gestures to her shades, putting on a joking sort of air.*

**Nur:** It's kind of hard to see sometimes.

**Nur:** Must've missed the posters.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I only saw her once a week. Once a week, for just a few minutes. We get all sorts of customers.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Well hey, you knew her better than I did.



**Nur:** I didn't...

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Yeah. I guess.

**Next Panel:**

*The strumming of musical notes. Hugo has hiked the mandolin up into his lap.*

**Hugo:** Hey, Nur, did you ever get into music after you moved out? Pick up lessons, an instrument?

**Nur:** No.

**Hugo:** Man, we really gotta get you a hobby.

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Hugo:** I had to learn, but not for a hobby, nope.

**Hugo:** Music class, now that was an uphill battle. But you can't get your degree without four music credits.

**Hugo:** A Seer worth their salt's gotta know how to play.

**Nur:** Why's that?

**Hugo:** Why? I mean, isn't it obvious?

**Hugo:** Music and prophecy just go together. That's how it works.

**Hugo:** Like a dog goes with a game of fetch.

**Hugo:** Dum dee dum dum...

*Hugo gets to his feet, still strumming the mandolin.*

**Nur:** Prophecy business going well?

**Hugo:** Ah, uh, not really.

*An awkward pause. Nur doesn't inquire further.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Ready to go?

**Nur:** Sure.

*Hugo walks off, and Nur takes a moment to clean the surface of her glasses. Her eyes are a little red. Then she's put them back on again, and she's following Hugo into the crowd.*

*We see them from behind, as they walk off into the busy, glowing plaza.*

**[Next Page]**

*The next page looks in at a glass. Someone pours thick orange liquid into it. The next shots go between darkened figures at a darkened bar. Not the Fury. No one is talking; the few people there are busy nursing drinks.*

*Then, a haggard-looking man bursts through the door. No one pays him any mind.*

*Glancing left and right, he then darts off through the bar, shoving things aside (no one is acknowledging him, even as he shoves into other bar patrons). Then, from behind, Hugo appears in hot pursuit, the mandolin grasped in his hand. Ahead, the man throws open a back door and vanished into a bright-lit alley outside. Hugo follows.*

*In the alley outside, Hugo calls out, "Hey! Nur! Nur, it's—!"*

*The man hikes himself up onto a dumpster and takes a running jump onto the ladder of a nearby fire escape.*

*As he does, Nur emerges from behind the dumpster, leaps up, yanks on a red lever high up on the fire escape platform. The ladder rattles and shakes and falls, and the man slips and lands on his back.*

*Hugo walks over, stops for a moment to grab his knees and catch his breath. Then he reaches into the man's jacket pocket and produces what looks like a music box.*

**Hugo:** Easy peasy.

*In his hands are the mandolin and the music box, one stylized with moons, the other with a planet-like circle and scattered stars.*

**Nur:** So that's it?

**Hugo:** Yep.

**Hugo:** Saints, I hate when the job gets all athletic like this. Athlete I am not.

**Nur:** Mmh. I figured.

**Hugo:** Hey don't mmh me, your bony ass isn't winning any marathons either.

**Nur:** And look, I didn't get a job where marathon running is ever a thing.

**Next Page**

**Hugo:** The running isn't the biggest problem.

**Hugo:** All these high places, shelves and fire escapes and whatever.

**Nur:** Yeah?

**Hugo:** *Waving a hand over his head.* It's the height, bit of a roadblock sometimes, y'know?

**Hugo:** Thanks for coming over and being tall for me. Big help.

**Nur:** Any time.

**Nur:** But did you really need my help?

**Hugo:** I like having your help.

**Next Page**

**Hugo:** I told you, we gotta get you a hobby.

**Next Panel:**

*They're walking back into a main street with people and lights.*

**Nur:** *Gestures back towards the alley.* Is that guy gonna be a problem?

**Hugo:** Only for me. You don't have anything to worry about.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Hugo:** Hey, all part of the job. Nothing I can't handle.

**Next Panel:**

*The two are on a bus now, rumbling along a thoroughfare. We see the bus from the outside, Nur and Hugo invisible within.*

**Nur:** And your job, that you, uh, took night classes for—is chasing down drunks and stealing their music boxes just day-to-day business?

**Hugo:** Sometimes. Lotta things that no one but a Seer could do. Lotta things no one but a Seer could find.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Well. I get my weird clients, but tell you the truth it's mostly just spouses who wanna know if they're being cheated on.

**Next Panel:**

*Inside the bus, Hugo is tuning the mandolin.*

**Nur:** So, what, someone hired you to track down those things? Are they valuable?

**Hugo:** Only the box.

**Hugo:** The mandolin is worthless, because it likes to be lost, and if it can find a way it'll lose itself the fucking instant you're not looking. Not just anyone can track it down, and follow it into the dark places.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur takes the music box and inspects it.*

**Hugo:** But the box, that one's tricky. Cause the box wants to be found. Like a kid all alone at the supermarket, calling for mom and dad. Very, very valuable. You'd think that's a good thing, but, see, when you have it, the whole world knows.

**Next Panel:**

*A close up of the mandolin, as Hugo fingers a string.*

**Hugo:** They're sisters. Always looking for each other, but never meeting, not really.

**Hugo:** They live their lives apart, and their paths cross for a snap, then, well...different paths, different roads, no looking back.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Sometimes you get hired cause there's something valuable that needs finding, and someone out there knows how to sell it. And Seers are awful good at finding things.

**Hugo:** Sometimes you get hired cause something needs to happen. Say, two sisters need to meet. And you need a Seer to follow the threads, to feel the strings of time and read destiny's instruction booklet and make sure everything that needs to be in place is in place.

**Next Panel:**

*Hugo grins cheekily to Nur.*

**Hugo:** Well, I get paid either way!

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** So what happens when the sisters come together?

**Hugo:** You'd have to ask my client. A god, I think, she saw my ad in the classifieds and called me up.

**Hugo:** I couldn't get much outta her though. 'It's time for them to meet again' she says. 'Why?' I says. 'One thing leads to another' she says. 'It's time for them to meet again.'

**Hugo:** Gods, right?

**Hugo:** I did my due diligence, sure, yeah, made sure there wasn't, I dunno, some demon that pops out if you bring em together. No black magic or anything.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** But hey! Like I said, a payday is a payday.

**Hugo:** And now I'm here, ready for payday, enjoying the satisfaction of a job well done

**Nur:** I think my boss kind of hopes I do my job so badly the store burns down, and he doesn't have to bother with it anymore.

**Nur:** No fires yet, but there's always tomorrow.

*Hugo laughs.*

**Next Page**

*We move outside the bus, as it meanders its way down the street.*

**Hugo:** You're a funny egg, y'know that?

**Next Panel:**

*The bus comes to a stop.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Aren't you getting off, Nur?

**Nur:** Oh, I—I just gotta go somewhere before I head home. Other side of the city.

**Next Panel:**

*The bus starts moving again.*

**Hugo:** Where you headed?

**Nur:** It's, um...

**Hugo:** Hey, if it's secret, it's secret. Nothing wrong with a secret or two.

**Next Panel:**

*The next three panels are tall ones, a row on the last tier of the page, each showing the same shot of the city, as seen from above. The first is silent.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Well, this's my stop. Better let my client know everything's taken care of.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** See ya, Nur. Thanks for coffee.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Bye.

**Nur:** Don't forget, you're paying next time.

**Next Page**

*Nur is looking out the window of the bus. Then, in the next panel, the bus reaches its stop. Nur exits.*

*She walks down familiar streets, and passes a familiar laundromat. This is Arbors, and Nur is standing in front of Lynn's apartment building. She removes Lynn's keychain, which she had taken from the apartment previously, and tries keys on the front door until, a few panels later, a click. The door opens, she steps inside.*

*Up the stairs. Down a hallway. Then she's at door C11 once more.*

**Nur:** Hi.

**Nur:** I'm back.

*Nur runs a hand through her hair, takes off her sunglasses, then inserts a key into the lock. On the first try, there's a click, and she hips the door open. The view shifts to inside the apartment, looking at the door and at Nur as she backs into the apartment, closes the door, then turns around. She freezes.*

*The camera pans out. There is a man inside the apartment, frozen in place, the back of his head is facing us as he stares at Nur. He is surrounded by folders and official-looking documents; apparently he's been sitting on the floor reading them.*

*A close up of Nur's face. She is understandably surprised.*

*A close up of the man's face—snide and cool, with an eyepatch over his right eye. He has silver hair, and a simple black collared shirt. Right now, he looks like a deer in the headlights. This is Correstas.*

*Correstas has a slightly unique font and speech bubble, different from Nur or Hugo or anyone else in Serafine.*

**Correstas:** Uh.

*The camera returns to Nur.*

*Then, back to Correstas.*

*Then, in a scramble, he rushes for the window.*

**Nur:** Hey! *She shouts, from off-panel.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur charges and tackles him by the legs, they fall sprawling to the floor. They wrestle, like children.*

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Get *off*, getoffgetoff—

**Nur:** Who—what're you doing here?

*Disjointed grunts, oofs, exclamations of pain.*

**Correstas:** Look, truce, truce, truce, truce this isn't going anywhere, someone's gonna hear, just *stop*—

*They break apart, panting. Nur eyes the man.*

**Nur:** You're \*pant\* I know you

*We zoom in on the man's face, and his one, golden eye.*

**Nur:** You

**Nur:** you're \*pant\* you're an omisha.

**Nur:** The hell are you doing here?

*Correstas eyes her carefully.*

**Correstas:** *Trying to be condescending, but it's a bit hard when you can barely breathe.* So \*pant\* she's a smart one.

**Nur:** Maybe you're just \*pant\* a dumb one.

**Correstas:** Oh, okay, so we're just gonna be five year olds about this.

**Nur:** What's an immortal doing snooping through a dead woman's apartment?

**Correstas:** Pretty sure \*pant\* I don't have to tell you diddly squat.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** No, wait...I know you. I *know* you.

**Correstas:** No you don't. I'm nobody.

*A conjoined panel then follows, one half is Nur's gaze, the other a close up of Correstas's one eye. Inside his eye are strange flickers of light, and there's almost a pattern to the glow: a sign like a heart.*

**Nur:** I know you...



**Nur:** From the holy orders. From the divinities. You're a phantom.

*Correstas stares, then throws his head back in defeat and exhaustion.*

**Correstas:** Fuck.

### Next Page

*Pan out. This page is a full shot of the apartment, and Nur and Correstas on the ground, somewhat in the background. Nur is resting her arms on her knees, and looks alert. Correstas is sprawled back, propping himself up with his arms. He's a bit of a mess.*

**Correstas:** How'd you know?

**Nur:** It's in the eyes.

**Nur:** If you know where to look.

**Correstas:** Hell.

**Correstas:** How—right, so, you one of the PM's agents, then?

**Nur:** What, the Prime Minister? I've never met her.

**Correstas:** Cool, great, not one of Duermo's agents. Great.

**Correstas:** Then, with all due respect, and I mean that, really—who the fuck are you?

**Nur:** Oh.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I'm an angel.

### Next Page

**Panel 1:**

*Correstas watches her.*

**Panel 2:**

**Correstas:** Shit, no joke, huh?

**Panel 3:**

*Flip to Nur, who's watching Correstas.*

**Panel 4:**

*She smiles, just a little.*

**Nur:** No joke. You can tell?

**Next Panel:**

*A close up of his eyepatch. It has a cold golden eye stylized on it.*

**Correstas:** I can tell if someone's lying. I can always tell.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Been a while since I met one of you. That's a funny disguise you're wearing.

**Correstas:** You sent here to meddle, angel girl?

**Nur:** Just a coincidence, if you'll believe it.

**Correstas:** If you're not gonna rat me out, I guess it doesn't matter either way.

*Nur, who has stood up, helps Correstas to his feet.*

**Nur:** You got a problem with the PM?

**Correstas:** Hey, I don't have any problem with the good lady. Guy like me doesn't have problems with pretty faces.

**Correstas:** But she isn't a big fan of us sticking our noses in Nightmare business.

**Correstas:** Also, she doesn't like me.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** So why's an envoy from the City on the Mountain mucking around in Serafine?

**Correstas:** Classified.

**Correstas:** But I guess that's kind of moot with you, isn't it?

**Next Panel:**

*We see a throne room, with five thrones. Nur is standing there, resting her hand on one of the thrones on the far left. Correstas is on the right, sitting uncomfortably on one of the thrones as he looks away from Nur.*

**Nur:** Humor me.

**Correstas:** Look, we're not breaking any rules. Really. I know what you're thinking, I know, but really, ma'am, you have to be here on the ground to see it.

**Correstas:** We're just doing our job. We're the good guys. We know not to be too interfering, but, really, it's been nine years of this shitshow...

**Nur:** You're dodging the question.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Well. I'm here for Sunshine Mechanical, of course.

**Correstas:** I'm sure this is out of an angel's range of worries, but, ah, there's been a bit of a problem with the, um, with the economy.

**Next Panel:**

*Change of scene again. Vienna is looking out the window of her office. It's late evening, maybe dusk, and the sky is dusty blue. Nur is standing behind her, watching her.*

**Nur:** And the Phantom Council wants to solve economics now?

**Correstas:** Please, ma'am, nothing so crude. We're checking powers left unchecked, like the good folks we are. No more than that.

**Correstas:** Out of your pay range, I'm sure, something like a little old corporation, but here on the ground...

**Correstas:** SM was so damn *big*. Of course I can't say the whole recession is their fault, but when the world was falling apart they just...kept eating. Like they'd never eaten before in their lives. Nine years of this.

**Correstas:** And then she comes along.

**Next Panel:**

*The sun has, maybe, sank a little lower.*

**Nur:** Vienna Heller?

**Correstas:** Oh, so you are familiar.

**Nur:** A bit.

**Next Page:**

*Correstas has walked behind Vienna's seat, his hands on the headrest, his face up close, examining her.*

**Correstas:** She goes and murders the old executive board, seizes majority shares, names herself CEO, and then the girl starts acting like she's going to turn the whole world around. And she wants us to believe her.

**Nur:** Do you?

**Correstas:** Sure. If I was a halfwit.

**Correstas:** No offense.

**Nur:** I'm sure.

**Correstas:** Hey, don't blame us for being realists. I'm not going to clap when a murderer murders some other murderers and proclaims herself the good murder queen.

*Correstas walks away, a scoffing smirk on his face.*

**Correstas:** I'm a realist. I know to squint when someone says you can trust them with power. She thinks she's saving the world? By the end, we'll be saving the world from her.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of a factory bearing the Sunshine Mechanica logo. The logo should be recognizable—it's been seen on various packaged products and signs throughout the story.*

**Correstas:** About a quarter of all Sunshine Mechanica factories are here in the land of Nightmare, plus a treasure trove of natural resources. Right now their legal status is in limbo.

**Nur:** And that's why you're here, in a dead woman's apartment, rifling through her stuff.

**Next Page**

*Now it's back to Nur and Correstas.*

**Correstas:** Lynn was a popular celebrity. She also happened to support the movement to nationalize the old SM assets. We put two and two together, and reached out to offer the full support of the Phantom Council.

**Correstas:** Technically legal, since Ms. Villanueva and I are both private citizens, but it'd be nice to stay under the PM's radar, if we can.

**Correstas:** We got in touch. Don't hear a peep from Lady Duermo. Lynn was a big hit at the rallies, on the radio. Things were going well.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Then she goes and dies.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** So I'm here to clean up, make sure any trace of me and my pals is wiped from the record.

*Nur is putting her sunglasses back on.*

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of Nur.*

**Correstas:** Well? What's with that look? What do you think, angel girl?

**Nur:** I think you like the sound of your own voice.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Hey, I just wish people would appreciate us a bit more. All this skulking and secrecy—we're the good guys here, but never a thank you, never a slice of the limelight...Drives a guy mad, honestly.

*Nur looks annoyed.*

**Nur:** The servants of the Lord aren't fame-chasers, phantom.

**Nur:** You should remember that. It's bad enough you're getting this involved already.

**Next Panel:**

*Like the flip of a switch, Correstas holds up his hands in total deferment.*

**Correstas:** Right, right, right right right, forget I said anything. Apologies.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** It's—it's okay. Don't worry. The holy council can do what it wants, far as I care. I'm not a politics person.

**Correstas:** That so? So what's an angel doing here, slumming it up with mortals?

**Correstas:** If you don't mind me asking, ma'am.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot from behind the two of them. Correstas is in front of Nur, politely expectant; for Nur, we see only her back.*

**Nur:** Nothing special.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of Lynn's bookcase, and some of the photographs on it.*

**Nur:** I wanted to pay a friend a visit.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Hey, isn't that lucky—it sounds like I can do my thing, and you can do yours, and no one's going to step on anyone else's toes.

**Nur:** I guess.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** And speaking of friends.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of his hand; he's holding out a business card, with his name on it.*

**Correstas:** If you ever feel like saying hello, drop by! Say hi! I'm sure we could be the best of pals.

**Nur:** That so.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** I mean, I don't know anyone in this city. And it's dreadfully boring work. If you wanted to honor me with an occasional visit I'd be happy to say hello.

**Nur:** No offense. But I get the feeling you want something from me.

**Correstas:** Ah, just like—because I said 'no offense' earlier—and you're—very funny, miss angel.

**Correstas:** If only I were so clever.

**Correstas:** Well, say we're being honest here, one immortal to another...it's been a few decades since the Phantom Council's been in contact with angels. It'd be a big favor if we could play buddy-buddy for a bit...I mean, politically speaking, and I know politics isn't a big deal to you, of course...but it sure would be nice if I could at least make some connections while I'm here, and if the folks back at the office knew I was rubbing shoulders with someone like you...

**Correstas:** Angels, phantoms, we're basically coworkers already, right?

**Nur:** Maybe. Technically.

**Nur:** And, technically, it's not illegal for you to be here, right?

**Correstas:** Haha, and there you are again, with the—well, who knows. I think I like you already, so maybe we *will* end up bosom buddies by the end of all this.

**Next Panel:**

*Correstas has gathered up his various folders and papers, as well as a cardboard box.*

**Correstas:** Well, the address is on the card. Pay a visit, if you like.

**Correstas:** Oh, and don't get any funny ideas. That card is blank to everyone but the person it's given to. And the information has a taboo on it, so no tattling.

**Next Panel:**

*He opens the window, as though about to jump out.*

**Correstas:** Not that, of course, I'd think you'd get funny ideas, ma'am...

**Next Panel:**

*Back to Nur, unsmiling.*

**Nur:** I've been told I'm very funny.

**Next Panel:**

*Same angle as the last panel: Nur, cool-faced, while Correstas's speech bubble intrudes from somewhere off-camera.*

**Correstas:** Swing by then, tell me a joke.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is left alone in the apartment.*

**Next Page**

**Panel 1:**

*A shot of rooftops.*

**Panel 2:**

*The camera descends; shots of windows.*

**Panel 3:**

*A shot of Nur's apartment building, and through the window we see her apartment.*

**Next Page**

**Panel 1:**

*The radio is in the foreground, Nur in the background, sitting at her desk. Staticky speech bubbles emanate from the radio.*

**Vienna:** —There's a lot to clean up. No one's looking away from the past, trying to pretend it didn't happen.

**Panel 2:**

*A shot of Vienna, as seen from the mouth down, standing on a podium somewhere. It's after sunset, though the sky is still light and blue, and there are stars.*

**Vienna:** Sunshine Mechanical created a system infected with cronyism, corruption, and blind overconsumption.



**Vienna:** As CEO and majority shareholder, that system is now my responsibility.

**Panel 3:**

*On Nur's desk is Correstas's business card. It lists his name, his title of First Seat, carries a seal of authority inked into the center of the card, and puts his address at 443B Nadia Blvd., Grand Balcony. The words VISA TO NIGHTMARE HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGED AND APPROVED BY FULL COUNCIL VOTE.*

**Vienna:** In the last week, anticorruption probes have been launched into the production division, where much of the abuse is taking place, and into Sunshine Mechanica's off-planet banking.

**Vienna:** Reforms are also being drafted with regards to the private security the company used to subvert Daydream's justice system—

**Panel 4:**

*The camera pans out, showing Nur's desk in its entirety, and Nur. The book In Vain is open in front of her. In her hands, a photograph—a photo from Lynn's apartment, Lynn and the little girl.*

**Vienna:** —notices of termination will be drafted by the end of the month, with sweeping changes to middle management both on Daydream and abroad—

**Panel 5:**

*A shot of Nur, looking down on us, as though from the POV of the photo.*

**Vienna:** —can anticipate a total overhaul of worker pay policy, which will also address entrapment practices towards migrant employees—

**Panel 6::**

*Same shot as before, but now Nur speaks.*

**Nur:** Hey, Vienna. What the hell are you talking about?

**Next Panel:**

*Vienna sits on the right side of the desk, looking down at her boots. Camera angle is from the side, looking past Vienna's head to Nur's face.*

**Vienna:** This's the human world. It's a place for mortals, like me.

**Vienna:** Mortals are messy. Their world is messy.

**Vienna:** I can't make all my speeches punky and fun, can I?

**Next Page**

*A reverse shot that now looks from behind Nur's head, at the empty space Vienna had been occupying just previously.*

**Next Page**

*Nur's hands set down the photograph. The book is shut. Nur is alone in her apartment.*

**Nur:** Guess not.

*Stinger: Correstas is sifting through paperwork inside a homey-looking study.*

## **Chapter 8**

*The first panel is a shot of the door to Logan's. CLOSED, says the sign. The next panel is a shot of the floor. It's dirty with a funny brown stain. A mop comes down with a wet squelch.*

*Nur is mopping up. She checks the clock behind her. It's a little after two.*

*Three more panels running across the page: the mop in action. Shh. Wshh. Splch.*

*Nur is putting the mop back in the closet. She's outside Logan's, locking the door. She's walking away, the storefront grate pulled down.*

*At home, she's lying in bed, reading a book. This isn't In Vain, but a heavy looking thing called Translating the Holy: A Beginner's Guide to the Sacred Script. On the cover and/or inside, you might see symbols similar to the ones Nur has tattooed around her arms.*

*There's a knock at the door.*

*Nur puts down the book and goes to get it.*

*A man enters. He speaks with an empty bubble, Nur speaks with an empty bubble, then she points him to the phone set up on the wall.*

*The man gets to work.*

*When the phone is fixed, Nur pays him, and he leaves.*

### **Next Page**

*Broken mechanical debris litters the background of the page, behind the panels: wires, plastic, meal, etc.*

*She sits down on the bed. She opens the book, then, seen through a set of three subsequent panels, she turns a page, turns a page, then flips back a bunch of pages. You don't think she's taking anything in.*

*Nur gets to her feet, physically tears the phone off the wall, bashes it on the desk, then tosses it across the room.*

*Nur stands there for a moment, breathing heavily, then she falls to a seat on the floor.*

*The final panel of this page is a shot of the broken phone, its innards—wires and bits of metal and brightly colored plastic. Some bits of debris have escaped the panel, scattered into the black background of the page.*

### **Next Page**

*The next panel is a shot of the floor at Logan's. The brown stain from earlier is still there.*

*The next panel is Nur's face, an ant's-eye view from the ground as she looks down at us.*

*Nur exhales, then disappears from view. In the next panel, she's back, mop in hand.*

*There's a large black space that stretches below the first six panels, down into nothing.*

### **Next Page**

*Three tiers of small square panels, a large black gulf separating each row. Nur walks past a telephone booth. In the second, Nur is waiting at the register of Logan's, yawns. In the last, Nur is reading her book, *Translating the Holy*, while the radio plays in the background.*

### **Next Page**

*Nur sitting in a run-down room. Other, tired-looking people in other, tired-looking plastic chairs. Her sunglasses are off.*

**Woman:** Number 46?

*Nur gets to her feet and makes her way to the desk.*

**Nur:** Right, um, right here, that's—that's me.

**Woman:** Hmm. Okay, found your file.

**Nur:** Yeah. I was wondering when I could expect a letter, or if I'd need to prepare for an interview—

**Woman:** You worked with us at the SM packing plant on Carina Street, right?

**Nur:** Oh. Um, yeah, I—

**Woman:** Okay.

*She's looking over a paper carefully.*

**Nur:** Not with you though. I, um, that was when I was with Sunshine  
Mechanica, so—

**Woman:** Yes, we're an SM subsidiary, actually.

**Woman:** Your number's on file. We'll call you if we need anything—

**Nur:** —it's just, this's the third time—

**Woman:** Yes. We'll call. Number 47?

### **Next Page**

*Same format as the previous page. Nur reads through her bills. Nur is stacking boxes in the backroom of Logan's. Nur sits in bed, staring at the ceiling. Black gulfs divide these snapshots of her life.*

### **Next Page**

*A splash page, all black, no panel divisions. In the dark, there are three 'shots.'*

*Nur's shadowy silhouette looking down at the desk.*

*Her hands, sliding it open.*

*A bird's-eye shot as Nur looks down into the open desk, at the pale glow of her halo.*

### **Next Page**

*The darkened top of the page shows rooftops and sky, and the city is filling in the normally blank background of the page. The black shadow of the Dome of the Stars looms high in the distance. Panels begin roughly a third of the way down the page.*

*Six panels on this page, equal sized.*

#### **Panel 1:**

*A shot of the top of the door to Logan's. The bell hanging over it dings as it announces a customer entering.*

**Voice:** Morning.

#### **Panel 2:**

*Nur, seen front on, as she watches whoever just entered the store.*

**Nur:** Hey.

**Panel 3:**

*A shot from behind Nur, as Hugo rifles through a candy bin. The mandolin is slung on his back.*

**Hugo:** How's tricks?

**Panel 4:**

*Same angle as the previous panel.*

**Nur:** Nothing special. The usual.

**Nur:** You?

**Hugo:** Oh, same old story.

**Nur:** So...you come all the way out here for a candy bar? Or did you just want to check in on your prophecy?

**Panel 5:**

**Hugo:** I'm—well, no. It's been a while. I wanted to say hi.

**Hugo:** I heard you moved.

**Panel 6:**

**Nur:** Yeah. Last week. Finished the paperwork on Tuesday.

**Hugo:** I heard you moved to the Plague District.

**Nur:** It's cheap. Rent's a lot easier. Not too far from work.

**Next Page**

**Hugo:** You can still crash at my place, y'know. You're always welcome to.

**Next Panel:**

*Focus shifts from Hugo to Nur. Her face is covered up with those sunglasses, as per usual; unreadable, maybe a little harder than usual.*

**Nur:** Thanks, but I'm doing fine where I am.

**Hugo:** You sure?

**Nur:** I'm sure. I'm okay.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** It's just, y'know, I guess I was a bit worried—

**Nur:** Why?

**Hugo:** Well

**Hugo:** it's been, uh, been a while, hadn't see you around, and the Plague District isn't really, y'know...as far as neighborhoods go, there're safer ones—

**Nur:** I'm billions of years old. I was there before there was space or time. I've killed Titans with my bare hands and cast them into the Void. I survived the first break, and I was there to watch the planets congeal out of lava and dust.

**Nur:** I don't need a boy to babysit me. And if you're wondering about that whole prophecy thing, nothing new's happened. Maybe those night classes didn't help as much as you think—

**Hugo:** God, Nur, what are you—? I didn't come to check in on my, on my prophecy, or whatever you—!

*His speech bubble froths at the edges with those foamy soap suds.*

**Next Panel:**

*Hugo cuts himself off. He doesn't like getting worked up. He doesn't like being seen worked up.*

**Hugo:** I wanted to say hi, Nur.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Well. Hi.

**Next Panel:**

*A silent panel. They both look a bit embarrassed.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur gestures at the candy bar.*

**Nur:** Are you going to buy that?

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Yeah.

**Hugo:** These things are really bad for you, y'know.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Yeah, uh, that's—yeah.

**Nur:** That's what I hear.

**Next Two Panels:**

*Hugo quietly pays for the candy.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** thanks.

**Nur:** For, uh, the offer, I mean.

**Nur:** Staying with you again.

**Next Page**

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** I know, I should stop pestering you about it. I'd just been thinking.

**Hugo:** It was fun being roomies.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Yeah. It was.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** I mean, y'know, ignoring some of the—

**Nur:** Right, yeah, with the—



**Hugo:** I was kinda relieved when they took your license.

**Nur:** Saints in the sky, that was—yeah.

*The air defrosts a bit as the two reminisce.*

**Hugo:** But, see, everything you went through that week? That's, like, 24/7 for me. I'm telling you, some of the clients I get—

**Nur:** And you've been a human for more than six months. Me, I've got an excuse for doing dumb shit.

**Hugo:** Yeah, I don't have an excuse.

**Hugo:** I'm just dumb.

**Next Panel:**

*The two are still smiling somewhat. This is a silent panel.*

**Next Panel:**

*This one too. They seem to be searching for something to say.*

**Next Panel:**

*Hugo takes a seat on the cooler with his candy bar.*

**Hugo:** Never did get rid of that music box, by the way.

**Hugo:** Client gave me this whole new thing where I can't ditch it until the next full moon.

**Nur:** How the hell is anyone supposed to know that?

**Hugo:** Ah, yes, Nightmare, the land under darkened heavens. Quite a nuisance.

**Hugo:** You could try calling up the Meteorology Institute. Dunno how helpful those bozos would be though.

**Hugo:** I bought one of those high-power radios, got in contact with some guy camped out on the lunar surface. From what he said, the next full moon over Serafine is in two weeks.

**Nur:** Assuming he's really a man on the moon, and assuming he's telling the truth.

**Hugo:** Well I'm not holding onto these things one day more than I have to. I've been living in motels all week, y'know that? That stupid music box, can't stop running unless I want all sorts of jerks to come and try getting their grubby hands on it—and the mandolin!

**Hugo:** I can't take my eyes off it for a second, otherwise the damn thing just wanders off.

**Nur:** And that client still hasn't told you why you have to hold onto them?

**Hugo:** She hasn't, but...I think I'm starting to get it.

### **Next Page**

*No panels, just one tall illustration. The page depicts Hugo on one side, Nur on the other, a strange ghost of a horizon behind them. Hugo holds the mandolin, strumming it gently, while Nur holds the open music box with the tenderness one might show a baby bird.*

**Hugo:** See, the box isn't just a box. The mandolin isn't just a mandolin. Same way music isn't just vibrating air, and words aren't just scratches on a page.

**Hugo:** When they meet, other things meet too. Things that don't always get the chance. Coincidences that were always too unlikely, but the thing, see, the thing with coincidences? They snowball.

**Hugo:** Throw a rock in a pond and watch the ripples cross over to the other bank. Bump your glass off the table and watch it shatter on the floor. Get smiled at by a stranger, someone you'll never see again, and watch yourself fall in love for no real reason at all.

**Hugo:** Something like that. It's hard to say. I hope I'm making a bit of sense.

**Nur:** Are you watching for something, then?

**Hugo:** I think so.

**Nur:** What're you watching for?

**Hugo:** Dunno.

**Hugo:** Maybe my client doesn't either.

### **Next Page**

*Nur is at the counter of Logan's again. She's watching the music box. It's open and singing for her, and the notes appear soft and pale as the drift across the page.*

**Nur:** Not really my kind of music.

*She flips it shut.*

**Hugo:** I'd like it more if it wasn't forcing me to live like some kinda runaway teenager.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Alright. I still don't think that's as bad as when I lost my PI license.

**Hugo:** *He's almost laughing.* Alright, sure, don't worry about me, I've got it easy, huh?

**Nur:** It's just proportions. You've been working for, what, six years? Professionally? Six years, yeah. Just, compare whatever you've done to the absolute shitshow we stuffed into the three months I was at your place—

**Hugo:** Okay, okay, *maybe...*

**Next Panel:**

*Smiling together.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** We had fun.

**Nur:** Yeah. I guess it was kinda fun.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Y'know, I think I still owe you some shitty overpriced coffee.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Oh. Right.

**Nur:** Well, I get off in thirty minutes.

**Next Panel:**

*Hugo tosses his crumpled up wrapper into the wastebasket.*

**Hugo:** Cool.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of the wastebasket.*

**Hugo:** On the other hand...okay, so, we could get shitty overpriced coffee from Millarose Plaza, or there's this new hole-in-the-wall by 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just heard of it, but I hear they make a killer brew for only 180.

**Nur:** Hmm. Let's go with the shitty overpriced coffee.

**Nur:** *She cracks a smile.* I think I want to see you suffer a bit.

*Hugo laughs.*

**Nur:** Anyways, 4<sup>th</sup> is just next door.

**Nur:** We'd be in and gone in a few minutes.

**Hugo:** I'm not getting rid of you that easy, right?

**Next Panel:**

*The next three panels are, once again, shots of the Anciliar Circle, with Logan's in the background. A black woman is chasing her child around the clock pole, laughing. Some men wander into the scene and give her and her child dark looks. The men are wearing round colorful pins on their chests. The woman grabs her child and tries to pull her away.*

**Hugo:** Hey, can I tell you a secret?

**Nur:** Sure.

**Hugo:** When you ran into me a few months back? For the first time, when we first met? I must've seemed pretty cool and mysterious, right?

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Hugo:** Ouch, haha.

**Hugo:** But that's good. Maybe it's better if I seemed like a bit of a jerkoff. I was only really out that night cause I didn't have anything better to do. And mostly I just read your fortune cause I like to show off.

**Hugo:** But I do hope it helps you, Nur. The prophecy.

**Hugo:** I hope things work out.

**Hugo:** I, um, I like being friends. Y'know?

**Nur:** Yeah. I do.

### **Next Page**

*Three tall panels, side to side, taking up about the top third of the page. The clock is in view, thirty minutes later, and in these three panels Nur and Hugo are emerging from the store. Nur locks up. They head off.*

**Nur:** Hey, I never told you, but I ran into an omisha guy a few weeks back.

**Hugo:** No shit?

**Nur:** Not just anyone either, some Phantom Council stoogie.

**Hugo:** Phantom Council?

**Nur:** Right, yeah, you wouldn't know. They're in charge of...let me think, their letter of commission came after the Host of Angels, so...

**Nur:** ...the Doors of Death, the Cosmic Core, the Paradisio, a couple other Holy Truths...

*A shot of a bus rumbling down the street.*

**Nur:** They're kind of like my coworkers. Angels, phantoms, all in the same sort of neighborhood.

**Hugo:** Huh. I always thought I was pretty in-the-know, y'know, divinity-wise, but...

**Nur:** Yeah, they try to keep a lid on the big cosmic secrets, if they can.

**Hugo:** And you're okay with just spilling the beans?

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Hugo:** Cool.

*Another shot of the bus as it trundles along.*

**Hugo:** Did you know the guy? The omisha?

**Hugo:** From when you were an angel, I mean.

**Nur:** No.

**Nur:** God. I don't know what I would've done if I did.

**Hugo:** So, in this sorta cosmic office hierarchy, are you guys on the same level, are angels above phantoms, or...?

**Nur:** Hah!

**Nur:** Above. We're definitely above.

*Nur is looking at her hands, smiling faintly. We're back inside the bus now.*

**Nur:** He didn't know. He thought I was just wearing a human guise for kicks.

**Hugo:** Ah.

**Nur:** I didn't tell him either.

**Nur:** Guy was walking on eggshells the entire time. I guess he thought I might throw him into the sun or something. If he said the wrong thing.

**Hugo:** I'm sure you would do something much more creative than that.

**Nur:** If I had my wings? If everything was back to how it should be?

**Nur:** I guess I could just make him buy me some Millarose Plaza coffee.

*Hugo cracks up laughing, and the camera moves outside the bus. Then, in the next panel, the bus is pulling up at the Plaza stop.*

*The next time we see them, Nur and Hugo are sitting at that same café. We see them from a bit of a distance, close enough to see their faces, close enough to see them laugh. It's a few panels of this, three maybe, four maybe. Their conversation is kept from us.*

*Eventually, it's time to go. Three panels, side to side, as they get up, slide in their seats, and Hugo puts on his jacket. They leave.*

*The bus is trundling back down the street now. We don't go inside, but we see their running dialogue as these next few panels wind through the streets of Serafine, down 7<sup>th</sup>, down the Giralda, past the Terminal, up into Goldgyre.*

**Nur:** Hey, I was wondering...do you know much about all that stuff going on with SM, and Heller? With the old Sunshine Mechanica factories?

**Hugo:** Sure, I've heard some gossip. A few angry rants. A few conspiracy theories.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Serafine leans pro-nationalization, from what I've seen, but there're plenty of pro-Heller folks too.

**Hugo:** I thought you weren't into politics?

**Nur:** Oh, I was just...I know someone. She was into that sort of thing..

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Your friend one the crazies?

**Nur:** I don't think so.

**Hugo:** Serafine isn't too bad, but we've got our bad shit too, don't let anyone tell you different.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** See, all those ultra-nationalist groups, y'know, the Redemption Institute, the NFA, the Pride and History League, they've jumped headfirst into the pro-nationalization side—

**Nur:** —Sorry, no idea who those are—

**Hugo:** —You know the type. They think there's an immigrant conspiracy out to get them, make the news every few weeks for jumping a kid in an alley 'cause he looked too foreign.

**Nur:** Ah.

**Next Panel:**

**Intercom:** Giralda Prima and Lores Place.

**Nur:** So, um, are—is that what the pro-nationalization people are like?

**Hugo:** Maybe not. Not all of them. But they certainly aren't making a big fuss about getting in bed with slimeballs like the NFA. And now NFAers are getting a bit of limelight they used to only dream of.

**Hugo:** Hey, plus side about the Plague District, you won't run into many of those bozos over there.

**Nur:** I haven't talked to my neighbors much.

**Nur:** I don't really talk with my neighbors.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** What if they invited me over for dinner?

**Nur:** I don't know if I could handle that.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** The friends I have are pretty stressful already.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Hey hey hey, don't deflect, I'm not the sole stress-causer here, when we ran in with the police that was all you—

**Nur:** Yeah, I, uh, I don't think private investigator was my true calling.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** You wanna know something funny?

**Hugo:** What?

**Nur:** There's a PI office next door to me in the District.

**Hugo:** Holy shit.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Really?

**Nur:** Really.

**Nur:** I might stop by. Not that there's anything I need PI'd, but it might be fun to—I dunno—say hi.

*Hugo's laughs trail down the page.*

**Next Panel:**

**Intercom:** Fifth and Giralda Prima

**Nur:** It's kind of a pain sometimes. My new place. None of the main roads go directly into the District, so getting around can be pretty damn hard.



**Hugo:** Hah. Heard that one before. *He says this with an odd bit of coldness on his face.*

**Hugo:** When the city's public transit got redone, they pretty much went out of their way to not connect the District to anywhere. They built neighborhoods like Goldgyre all through the '20s too, blocked off the Thoroughfares that used to go all the way to the Dome.

**Hugo:** 'Redevelopment,' that's what they called it. Basically the city council telling the whole inner city to get fucked.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** But there's no plague anymore, right?

**Hugo:** Oh yeah, never. Not like plague is why it all went to shit though.

**Next Page**

*We've moved to the Plague District, and this time we descend into the park that surrounds the Dome. In the distance, the lights of the slums. Ahead, the Dome of the Stars, all its lights quenched, a big black splotch on the sky.*

**Nur:** When did the Dome thing happen, '08? or was it the '10s?

**Hugo:** '09.

**Nur:** Hmm. I guess a bit of germaphobia doesn't wreck a district for 60 years on its own.

**Hugo:** I mean sure, yeah, that's what it said the coroner's report. Plague did it. And no one wants to live near a plague outbreak, right?

**Hugo:** Doctors go over the area, say it's all clean, not a lick of plague outside the Dome, random coincidence, we're safe kids.

**Hugo:** But c'mon, plague? In this day and age? In the Dome of the Stars, and nowhere else, kills off every last Las Vives senator before poofing off to who-the-fuck-knows? People aren't gonna be reading the coroner's report, they're not listening to the doctors, they're reading the tabloids and listening to shitty talk shows.

**Hugo:** And, well, you know how that song and dance went.

**Hugo:** They may not be religious on Nightmare, but they're sure as hell superstitious.

**Nur:** At least the rent's okay.

**Hugo:** Watch yourself, Nur. For real.

**Nur:** I've been around for a pretty long time. I've seen worse.

**Next Panel:**

*Move to a streetside view, back in the bright of the lights. The bus is moving along.*

**Next Panel:**

*Inside the bus.*

**Hugo:** Hey, Nur...when you, y'know, these last few weeks...

**Nur:** I, um...?

**Hugo:** Sorry, I mean—

**Next Panel:**

*He seems to be searching for something to say.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Stay in touch, yeah?

**Nur:** Oh. Yeah.

**Next Panel:**

**Intercom:** Fifth and Avuelta.

**Nur:** 'Course.

**Next Panels:**

*Nur is moving to the exit. She's looking over her shoulder and waving goodbye to Hugo, who waves back. In the next panel we're outside, the doors slide shut, and then Nur is alone. She watches the bus go off. Then, she's on her way.*

*In the next panel, we're in Anciliar Circle. We zoom in. Mr. Min, Nur's boss, slides open the grate over Logan's.*

**Min:** Hey Nur. The hell're you doin here? *He says it conversationally, apparently unsurprised to see Nur at the store outside her shift.*

**Nur:** Beer run.

**Min:** Partying it up with your big circle of, uh, friends and loved ones, huh?

**Nur:** Something like that.

*They go inside. Nur hits the lights.*

**Min:** And here I thought you sat in your room and watched paint dry for fun.

**Nur:** I do that too.

*Nur goes over to the cooler and picks out a twelve pack, which she tucks under her arm.*

**Min:** Big plans?

**Nur:** A friend of mine likes to drink.

**Nur:** I could use a drink too.

*Nur pays for the twelve-pack.*

**Min:** Don't forget, I put you on night shift for the rest of the week.

**Nur:** Gotcha.

*A bit of space between this and the last row of panels on the page. Nur is walking down the street, the beer in a paper bag slung over her shoulder. She approaches a building.*

### **Next Page**

*The first tier of panels show the top of the entrance to the building, and the roof, and the words Goldgyre House of Archives.*

*The next tier of panels show the steps leading up to the building below, as Nur walks up.*

*The background of this page, rather than black, is a full page shot of the inside of the Archive building, a large and warmly lit place, with rows and rows of books kept safe in their cabinets.*

*Small square panels meander down the page; Nur is pictured, walking down the aisles, between desks.*

*In the last two are Sofia Camillagrantz. She's poring over a book and taking notes. First panel is silent. In the second, she looks up.*

*Outside these square panels, in the full-page shot of the Archive House, the figures of Nur and Sofia are seen in a nook between the winding shelves at the bottom of the page.*

**Nur:** Hi, Sofia.

*Her speech bubble intrudes into the final square panel, where Sofia is seen looking up.*

### **Next Page**

**Sofia:** Oh, Nur. Hello.

**Nur:** Still busy?

**Sofia:** Mmh...almost there, but, uh, yes, still stuck in hell.

**Nur:** I figured. I was on my way home and I thought—I remembered you said you spent a lot of time here, sometimes, um

**Nur:** so I thought I'd come by and, well, say hi.

### **Next Panel:**

*Nur jostles her bag, the top of her beer pack poking out its head.*

**Nur:** Beer run before I went home. Want one?

**Sofia:** Wow. Shit, thanks.

*Nur cracks open the top of the carton.*

**Nur:** I figured if you were still here, you might, uh, you could use one. And that I could use one. Been a weird day.

**Sofia:** No drinks in the archives. We'll have to be sneaky.

*Nur sinks to the ground, a beer in hand.*

**Nur:** I hope you don't mind me gatecrashing.

**Sofia:** It's fine. And you brought a bribe, can't say no to that.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Wish I could say it's been a rough day. But really it's just been boring.

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Nur:** I dunno. It wasn't boring, for me. And it wasn't bad. But...I guess it was something I'd been avoiding. And I still kinda wish I'd avoided it. I guess there's no putting the bullet back in the gun, so

**Nur:** Thought I may as well check in with you, while I'm at it.

**Next Panel:**

*They take a drink in tandem.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** What is it you're working on?

**Sofia:** I've got a bit of a date with Lady Duermo pretty soon, if you'll believe it. Been reading up on some old legal cases before the meeting. Hector and I are going to talk to her about the Sunshine Mechanica factories—I don't know if you've been following all that...

**Nur:** Oh.

**Nur:** Lynn was going to go with you, right?

**Sofia:** Yeah, um, she was. It was hers, originally, all her idea.

**Sofia:** You and her talked about that?

**Nur:** Um, well, that stuff I only—I met someone else, a coworker, he was helping Lynn with her campaigning. Gave her funding, resources. Only met him after she died. Didn't know much about it when I knew her.

**Sofia:** Someone helping Lynn? Not Hector?

**Nur:** Nah. Guy named Correstas.

*Sofia jerks up a bit.*

**Sofia:** Wait, coworker? You're not—

**Voice (Librarian):** Um, uh, hi. Hey.

*They look up. A weedy and sad looking girl is looking down at them, a stack of folders clutched to her chest.*

**Librarian:** You guys, uh, no drinks allowed, y'know? Gotta ask you take em outside. Um. Sorry.

**Sofia:** Damn. Red-handed.

*They get up.*

**Sofia:** Finish this at your place?

**Nur:** Oh, um, sure.

*As they walk down the aisles, moving for the exit, Nur says:* But, uh, I moved pretty recently. Not in Goldgyre anymore.

**Sofia:** Oh?

**Nur:** Still close by, but it's a place over in Baquino, so, uh, Plague District.

**Sofia:** Mmh. Fun neighborhood.

**Nur:** If you still want to...?

**Sofia:** Oh, it's fine by me. I grew up there.

**Next Panel:**

*A larger shot of Nur and Sofia exiting the library, with the full street in view. A waste bin is to their left, and Sofia has chucked away her bottle.*

**Sofia:** It's fun hearing what they say about us on the outside.

**Sofia:** Had to do a press thing at a party in Grand Balcony, heard some dumbass telling me how, in the District, apparently—and she said this with more conviction than I've ever said anything in my entire godamn life—you have a one in four chance getting killed walking home at night.

**Next Panel:**

*A thin panel running across the page. No recognizable characters here, just an ant's-eye view of the street, a view of the busy moving feet of who-knows-who.*

**Nur:** Well, I've been there, uh, hmm, two weeks?

**Nur:** Haven't been killed yet, but maybe I'm doing something wrong.

**Sofia:** Hah.

**Next Panel:**

*Sofia and Nur walking down a Plague District street. They smiles as they talk.*

**Sofia:** No murders yet, but we've still got another block to Baquino.

**Nur:** I'm keeping my eyes peeled.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur lives in a tiny cul-de-sac, an empty fountain patiently crumbling away in the center, saggy stone buildings on all sides. We see Nur and Sofia from behind as they approach a building.*

**Sofia:** —so I never came here much when I was little. Baquino was the rich neighborhood.

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Sofia:** Not the real kind of rich.

**Sofia:** But sometimes people get this bug. They get some extra space, hot water, a new bed, then suddenly they're coasting on dreams of moving out, dreams of being millionaires.

**Sofia:** they grow a hundred feet and their heads're so far up in the clouds they can't see they're stuck here in the District with the rest of us.

**Next Panel:**

*We see them from the front as they walk under an alcove and approach the door to Nur's new building.*

**Sofia:** Or maybe I'm just bitter. They may not've been that much better off than us, but the Baquino folks sure acted like snooty rich assholes.

**Nur:** I, uh, I hope I'm not coming off like an asshole?

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of the inside the Nur's new flat, Nur and Sofia unseen behind the door. It seems larger than Nur's apartment, but the walls are more worn, more tired. On the ground is a handful of letters.*

**Sofia:** Hah. No, you're good.

**Sofia:** But no, if there was any money in Baquino, it was the short-lived kind.

**Sofia:** Big ideas don't go far without blind luck to keep them healthy. Luck's pretty expensive here.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Ugh.

*She steps over the letters.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I hate mail. I thought maybe I'd be getting less after moving.

**Sofia:** Are you?

**Nur:** Yeah, but at least at my old place I could just leave it unopened in the mailbox. Here they just slide it under the door. Fucking awful.

**Next Panel:**

*Sofia picks up the mail and rifles through it.*

**Sofia:** Bill. Ad. Ad. Coupon—oh, this is a great brand ...

**Next Panel:**

*In the background, Nur has set the beer case down on the ground by the couch. In the foreground, Sofia is speaking over her shoulder, a little bit apologetically (but only a little bit).*

**Sofia:** Oh, uh, sorry about that. I have itchy fingers, it's a bad habit. Lynn would always get annoyed when I would rifle through her stuff. It's compulsive.

**Nur:** It's fine. I guess someone should read them.

**Sofia:** You're a real low-maintenance-houseplant kind of lady, huh? Water once a week, keep in the shade?



**Nur:** Hmm. Partial shade, maybe. It's hard to see in these things, I bump into stuff when it's too dark.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is on the couch with a beer, passing one to Sofia.*

**Sofia:** What's your deal with mail, anyways?

**Nur:** I just don't know why any of these jerkoffs are messaging me. I'm not their friend, I don't know them, I don't want to know them, I don't know how they know to send me anything—I'm not even from around here. I'm leaving when I get the chance.

**Nur:** I'm not a Serafine girl, or whatever—wish they'd just fuck off.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of Sofia, close up.*

**Sofia:** Fair enough.

**Next Panel:**

*Sofia speaks over the top of her bottle, eying Nur diplomatically.*

**Sofia:** And...your, uh, coworker. Correstas? What's your, ah, deal? with him?

**Nur:** I don't really know him. It's more of a friend-of-a-friend thing. But, yeah, more-or-less coworkers.

**Sofia:** I'd been helping Lynn prepare her talk with Duermo, helped get her radio interviews, public talks...and I knew a guy, Correstas, he was helping her too. And I don't think he wanted anyone to know he was helping.

**Sofia:** We're thinking of the same guy, right? Omisha, eyepatch, has a kind of silver fox thing going on?

**Nur:** Silver fox?

**Sofia:** Really wish I hadn't said that.

**Nur:** He had an eyepatch when I saw him. And I haven't met any other omisha in this city.

**Sofia:** Hmm. He tries to stay off the streets, if he can.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Yeah, his kind don't get along with gods like Duermo.

**Nur:** You know the type. They act like they're the coolest kids on the block, and they don't like how, sorry, when push comes to shove, divines like the Lady are on a whole other level.

**Sofia:** You're not...?

**Nur:** I'm not Phantom Council, thank god.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of Sofia, waving her drink idly.*

**Sofia:** And here I thought it was some big secret. Correstas would lose his head if you so much as thought the word 'phantom' around him.

**Nur:** Oh, it's secret. Big time. How does it go...?

**Nur:** Gods are dreams, phantoms are secrets, angels are mysteries—that's in the letters of commission, I think—but trust me, it's only the Council who get big heads about it.

**Sofia:** So what are you? A god?

**Nur:** Angel.

**Nur:** I'm

**Nur:** on break.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Huh.

**Nur:** Did you say there was a coupon in the mail?

**Sofia:** For body wash. I think there's a small skincare, salon-type place nearby, they must want to poach you as a customer.

**Nur:** Oh. I thought maybe it was for the grocery, I, uh, I need to restock...don't really eat out much anymore...

**Sofia:** Hey, can I keep that coupon? If you're not going to use it, I mean.

**Nur:** Yeah, sure.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** So you know Correstas too?

**Sofia:** Yeah, a bit. He was helping us with funding.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Kind of a slimeball, to be honest. But then every once in a while he'd bring in a bottle of nice wine—I mean, *really* nice, this is some good fucking wine—so I guess it's all okay.

**Nur:** He never offered me wine.

**Sofia:** Jerk.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I don't really like drinking, to be honest. When my body gets all woozy and weird and suddenly it's like—fuck, these things are so fragile, aren't they?

**Sofia:** Only if you're a wuss.

**Nur:** No, really.

**Nur:** How the hell you do you manage? A little bit of plant juice and bam, that's it, suddenly you're body's like, fuck you. Don't you feel trapped? How do you not feel trapped, all the time? In these stupid gawky things?

**Sofia:** It helps if you can down drinks like a champ. That's me.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Okay, so you hate alcohol, and that's why you bought a big twelve pack, right?

**Nur:** I don't know. That's what you're supposed to do, right? Drink beer? Buy beer for sharing?

**Nur:** When you're, uh, with someone, and it's not, like, work, or a café, or whatever.

**Nur:** This isn't my forte, throw me a lifeline, c'mon.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Well, good to know angels know their manners.

**Nur:** It was—it took a while. Lived with someone for a few months—when I first arrived, I mean. Over by the Downside. It was, um, it was a trip.

**Sofia:** Really?

**Nur:** *Getting a bit worked up.* I mean, it wasn't my fault, not really, right? I think I did pretty well for someone who's only been wearing a human body for, what, a few months?

**Sofia:** I'm thinking there's a story here.

**Next Panel:**

*Rather than panels, the lower half of this page is the background, a scene spilling all the way out to the edges of the page. Nur is sitting on the couch. Sofia is on the coffee table. They each have a drink in hand. They talk.*

**Nur:** It's—

**Nur:** Alright, so my, uh, my friend, Hugo, I've been at his place for a while. And he tells me I should get a job, see the city, get my own place maybe.

**Nur:** And I'd been thinking it over, and I think, hey, one of Hugo's weird friends, I met him once or twice, he's like a detective or something, a private detective, maybe that'd be interesting. Private detective.

**Nur:** Well the first job I get is okay, but the second—

**Nur:** I didn't know it's illegal to pretend you're police. Did you know that?

*Sofia is smiling.*

**Sofia:** Maybe start from the beginning.

**Nur:** Right, okay. So, after I got my license...

*Stinger: Nur's coffee table, stacked with empty beer bottles.*

## Chapter 9

*The first panel takes up the top third of the page. Nur stands in front of the door to Logan's.*

*A row of square panels showing her feet as she through the store.*

*She rounds the checkout table, her fingers trailing gently on the countertop. Her hand on the doorknob to the back room. Her eyes. She's not wearing her sunglasses.*

### Next Page

*Nur opens the door. In the back room, Lynn's body lies dead on the floor.*

*From behind Nur, Mr. Min hovers by some of the shelves, a large cardboard box of merchandise hefted in his arms.*

**Min:** Nur, the hell're you doing?

**Nur:** I—sorry, Mr. Min.

### Next Page

**Min:** This isn't a clubhouse. Don't have your friends hanging around while you're on shift.

**Nur:** I'm sorry, I just—

**Min:** If I can suffer through my turns on the register without any pals, then you can too.

**Min:** Now clean up this mess, god, there's blood everywhere.

**Nur:** I can't, I, we're supposed to go to the bar.

**Min:** You've still got twenty years left on your shift.

*He hands her a mop and tells her to get this shitshow cleaned up.*

*Nur bends over and shakes Lynn's shoulder.*

**Nur:** Hey, c'mon, Lynn, we gotta go.

**Lynn:** *An empty speech bubble rises up from her mouth as she stirs.*

*Lynn raises herself up. Her body is slashed with knife-wounds, and her throat is open and bleeding. But, otherwise, she seems fine, she even smiles. She lets Nur help her to her feet.*

*Min's speech bubble intrudes from off-panel.*

**Min:** Your friend gone yet?

**Nur:** Just a sec. We'll be out of your hair soon.

*Lynn says something with a blank and empty speech bubble.*

**Nur:** I still have another 20 years, but after that we can go

**Nur:** soon

**Next Panels:**

*They're in the same pose, we're seeing them from the same angle, but now Nur and Lynn are at the Fury, like the background was torn out from under them and quickly replaced. They move to the bar.*

**Nur:** Thanks for coming.

**Nur:** I appreciate it.

**Nur:** No it's fine.

**Nur:** Yeah.

*Lynn converses with Nur, but her speech bubbles continue to appear empty. We see them at the bar now, Nur talking, Lynn responding. They laugh. Nur's eyes are still sunglasses-free.*

**Next Panel:**

*A close up of Nur's face, as her laughter dies away and leaves behind a lingering smile.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur notices something.*

**Nur:** Lynn, you—

**Next Panel:**

*View is now on Lynn, whose head is crowned by a magnificent halo. It glows furiously, and the light obscures most of her face. Lynn says something.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Oh. Yeah.

*This shot is from slightly above, as Nur looks around, and sees everyone in the bar is crowned by a halo as well.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur's face, her eyes scrunched into a squint.*

**Nur:** Hey, I—could you tone it down, maybe...? It's too bright, I...

**Next Panel:**

*Nur winces in pain.*

**Nur:** I—

**Next Panel:**

*We see Nur from behind Lynn, and we see Lynn's back, and her Halo, and everyone else's halo. They're blinding. The page has gone blurry.*

**Nur:** It's too bright.

**Next Panel:**

*Pure white.*

**Next Page**

*This page is completely black. There are only speech bubbles. Lynn and Nur.*

**Nur:** Lynn? Are you there? I can't see. I, I can't—

*A blank speech bubble appears in reply.*

**Nur:** Okay.

*Another one.*

**Nur:** Yeah, of course.

**Nur:** Help me up, please?

*A little ways down the page, Nur's last two bubbles.*

**Nur:** Thanks.

**Nur:** Hey, don't let go, yeah? We still have a lot to—

### **Next Page**

*Nur's face is buried halfway into her sheets, which rise around her like a miniature alpine mountain range. Faint city-light—it cuts in from an open window—falls down in a line over her cracked-open eye.*

*Next panel, same angle as the last. Her eye is slightly more open, and her fingers tighten on her sheets.*

*She puts a knuckle against her eye and rubs, then brings it to her mouth and bites her hand.*

*Pan out. Nur is curled up in bed. It's time to wake up.*

*The panels end early on this page. At the bottom, blackness.*

### **Next Page**

*There are five horizontal panels on this page, each on top of the other. Each one has Nur at the counter, dealing with one or another customer.*

#### **Panel 1:**

**Nur:** No. Try next door.

#### **Panel 2:**

**Nur:** 1200.

#### **Panel 3:**

**Nur:** No.

#### **Panel 4:**

*The talkative Customer from the first chapter is here. In comparison, Nur looks a bit less annoyed with him than with the others.*

**Customer:** —And I did fine for myself, didn't I? But then the cousins are always pestering me, I get phone calls every other week, and enough is enough, isn't it?

**Nur:** Hmm.



**Panel 5:**

*This customer seems annoyed about something. So does Nur.*

**Nur:** The 25 is sales tax. 600, plus 25. 625.

**Next Page**

*Nur is walking home. A row of thin successive panels, as Nur turns a corner, turns another corner, and makes her way into a more poorly lit street—the District.*

*At home, she locks the door and goes to her bed. She takes out a book, Translating the Holy.*

*Three quiet panels where she turns the page. Then, a knock at the door.*

*Outside, we see Sofia.*

**Sofia:** Hey, Nur, you in?

*Back inside, Nur closes the book and bites on her thumb.*

*Next panel, she's looking at her feet as Sofia knocks again.*

*We move back outside. Sofia hovers by the door, then leaves.*

**Next Page**

*Nur glances out the window, then goes back to her book.*

*A dark gulf divides those first panels, looking out the window, from the next. In the next, Nur's clothes are on the ground, and we go in to the shower, where we see Nur from behind as she washes her hair. There isn't a constant stream from a shower head—instead, there's a metal pot to the side, and whenever Nur needs to rinse, she cracks on the bath tap, fills the pot, and douses herself with it when it's half-full.*

*She rinses for the last time, sets down the pot, then stands there for a moment. We see her tattoos—holy script, as you might've seen in the book that Nur may or may not have stolen from the Serafine Public Library.*

*Nur's hands rub gently against her biceps, as she hugs herself and prods at the tattoos on her arms. We linger here for a few panels.*

*We see her from the front now. Vienna is handing her a towel.*

**“Vienna”:** The book was a good find.

**“Vienna”:** Why would humans need it, anyway?

*Nur dries herself off.*

**“Vienna”:** They’d never be able to read it. At least you’re making progress—they probably wouldn’t get past page one.

**Next Panel:**

**“Vienna”:** They can hardly do anything, can they?

*Nur goes back to her bed, where Translating the Holy sits. She looks at it for a panel, then picks it back up again.*

**Next Page**

*City streets. In the distance, behind the buildings, there are trees, and bright white lights.*

*Next panels: into the greenery. We are at the Optica, a thick forested park where the trees occasionally make room for great white floodlights. Nur and Hugo are sitting on a bench. Around them, in the distance, great pillars of light point up into the sky.*

**Hugo:** So what do you think? Does the Optica make a good first impression?

**Nur:** It’s pretty cool. It’s peaceful.

**Hugo:** And boy does Serafine waste no time telling that to the tourists. All the hotels around here charge out the whazoo, and of course that’s where the government encourages dummies on their honeymoon to stay. Makes the city a cool few million every year.

**Hugo:** Or it used to, at least. Hard to bring over tourists these days.

**Nur:** Mmh.

**Hugo:** Before I got my degree, see, you could make decent money as a Seer, all cause of tourists.

**Hugo:** A planet covered in eternal night, and their prime minister is an actual god—you can see it, right? Tourists come over thinking they’re going to have some big spiritual religious experience or whatever-you-like, and then they look around and see most folks on Nightmare don’t put much stock in magic, and have time for exactly one god, and only one—

**Hugo:** and that's because they can't vote her out of office, haha.

**Hugo:** So if you're one of those weirdos who goes against the grain and likes telling fortunes, you can always find a quick buck from a foreigner looking for a mystical experience.

**Nur:** Is it really that mystical if they're paying for it?

**Hugo:** If they believe it is, sure.

**Hugo:** And they should! I'm pretty damn good at this, y'know!

**Next Panels:**

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Nur:** Hey, remember that time I broke your teapot?

**Hugo:** My favorite teapot? The one my sister gave me?

**Nur:** It was kind of ugly.

**Nur:** You also only had the one pot so I don't know if favorite is really—

**Nur:** But yeah. You remember?

**Hugo:** Sure, I remember. I'll hold it against you till my dying day.

**Nur:** Right.

**Nur:** And you remember how you told me not to make tea, cause you saw me breaking the pot if I did?

**Hugo:** And you did anyway? And then you broke the pot, just like I saw?

**Nur:** Yeah but see I think that's just cause you telling me I was going break it made me all nervous, and that's what made me knock it off the table.

**Nur:** I think sometimes you're not actually seeing anything, you're just making guesswork and self-fulfilling prophecies—and that's prophecy with a lower case 'p,' by the way—and then you just smile like an asshole and everyone thinks you're right.

**Hugo:** *Smiling like an asshole,* But I was right.

**Nur:** I think you could've just said nothing.

**Hugo:** Yeah, but,

**Hugo:** I like showing off. It's fun.

**Nur:** Right.

**Hugo:** I didn't bust my ass on night classes to *not* show off, y'know?

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Hey

**Hugo:** have you thought about school, Nur?

**Nur:** School? You're kidding.

**Hugo:** No, really! I guess since, uh, your legal records go back less than a year, general university might be hard, but they've got some great vocational schools all over Las Vives.

**Hugo:** I mean, hey, you're pretty smart.

**Hugo:** There's two here, um, and I think there's a writing and communications school in Aritas City, if you don't mind the drive.

**Nur:** Why would I go to vocational school?

**Hugo:** I mean, aren't you kinda tired of working at Logan's?

**Nur:** Not really. It's been okay. Not awful, I guess.

**Nur:** It'll work out.

**Hugo:** I—well, hit me up if you want the names of those schools.

**Nur:** Mmh.

### **Next Page**

*We look at them from behind the bench. They look out over a large pond, litter bobbing against the near shore, and behind the distant treeline brilliant floodlights stand in orderly procession. It's silent, and very still.*

*The next panel is the same. No movement. Maybe some birds have taken off behind the trees.*

**Nur:** So, uh

*Next panel. Still the same view.*

**Nur:** What, um, what've you been up to? this week?

**Nur:** or whatever

*Next panel.*

**Hugo:** Haha what?

**Nur:** Like

**Nur:** What's new with you?

**Hugo:** No I mean, it's just kinda funny, hearing you starting small talk like that.

**Nur:** Hey, don't be a little shit, I'm trying to be nice.

**Hugo:** No, no, it's cool, it's cool, I—nothing much with me, nothing new.

**Hugo:** Still another week till I get rid of that stupid music box.

**Hugo:** So that's

**Hugo:** fun.

**Nur:** Is it really worth it?

**Hugo:** Am I being paid a lot, you mean?

**Nur:** Um, yeah, I guess. Are you?

**Hugo:** Well. I guess.

**Hugo:** But it's also about doing the job, doing it right. Cause you know there aren't many other people who could do this. It had to be me.

**Hugo:** And that's, y'know—that's nice. It's nice to feel like that.

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Hugo:** I mean, it's...it's more than I get usually? I like doing what I do. I do. It's not...I guess I worry sometimes. It's not a lot, but...

*They fidget together.*

**Nur:** What, um, what sort of books do you have to read? To study—this. That. Being a Seer.

**Hugo:** Uh, fucking expensive ones. That you could also just rent from the library, not that anyone tells you that.

**Nur:** Are they, uh, about...?

**Hugo:** Oh, competing theories—just as an example: should it, the study of being a Seer, should it be considered a study of warnings, or a study of advice?

**Hugo:** You'd think they're the same thing, but, lordy, would some *very* angry scholars disagree with you. Then there're historical Seers, had to read up on those

**Hugo:** music theory

**Hugo:** um

**Hugo:** hmm

**Hugo:** and there's math. Lot more math than you'd think. Awful lot of math.

*Still the same view, same as each other panel. Hugo is looking at Nur, and from what little you can see of the side of his face, he seems to be grinning.*

**Hugo:** You're not thinking of following in my footsteps, are you?

**Nur:** Well, um...

**Hugo:** I could tutor you, of course, but it'll be 10,000 a session, y'know, hot stuff like me doesn't come cheap.

**Hugo:** Hey, you have a library card, right? Maybe you could find some books at the SPL.

**Nur:** Library card, well, uh, I don't have one, no. Well, I do. I did. Sort of.

**Hugo:** Like, what, you've got half a card and someone else has the other half, and by your powers combined you've got one full card?

**Nur:** No, I—well, I checked out a book. And I didn't want to give it back, so I kept it. And since I'm keeping it I can't go back, I mean, it's been a few weeks now

**Nur:** they've probably got hitmen patrolling the shelves with shoot-to-kill orders on me.

**Hugo:** Hmm. Probably.

**Hugo:** What book?

**Nur:** Translation textbook. For the Holy Script.

**Nur:** I was actually wondering, well, because that was kind of why I called you—to meet, I mean, today. I never knew if...do you understand it? The Script? Is that something you learned?

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Hm.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** I know maybe a few words—just a little, and when I say ‘little’ I mean, like, three maybe, that’s it—nothing to brag about.

**Next Page**

*Nur and Hugo sitting together, now seen from the front, from the knees up to the mouth. Their eyes are out of panel. Nur’s arms are bare, as usual, and there are her tattoos, plain as day.*

**Hugo:** Definitely nothing compared to you.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur’s hand goes, perhaps unconsciously, to rub her left bicep.*

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** I’ve always wondered—what exactly do those tats say?

**Nur:** I never told you?

**Hugo:** Uh, well, I asked you once, the day you came back from the tattoo parlor, and you just told me they were Holy Script.

**Hugo:** And I said yeah, I can see that, and I asked ‘So what do they say?’

**Hugo:** And then you said ‘The word of the Lord’ and spent the rest of the afternoon staring out the window.

**Hugo:** You were kinda a zombie that first month. Hard to get in much small talk.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I really never told you? You don't know anything about what they might say?

**Hugo:** Nope.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur squeezes her bicep.*

**Nur:** Ah.

**Next Panel:**

*Zoom in on her arm, and her index finger probing at one of the symbols.*

**Nur:** I know this one.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** 'Dalia.' It's a bit like fire. Tall fire. Not angry fire, or out-of-control fire, but tall and hungry and hot. Something that eats other things, something proud.

**Next Panel:**

*Her fingers explore her arm.*

**Nur:** And one of them gets translated as 'nur.' Or 'aor.' It sounds sort of like that, when you say it out loud. I don't remember which one though.

**Nur:** Holy Script wasn't meant for—for mortal mouths, and no Holy word has an equivalent in mortal language.

**Nur:** It's kind of funny, that they—they have books. To translate it. Because

**Nur:** you can't ever really translate it. You definitely can't say it.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur's hand falls away from her arm.*

**Nur:** I



**Nur:** had a dream last night.

**Hugo:** Bout what?

**Nur:** Nothing important. I don't remember.

**Hugo:** Oh, was it embarrassing? You gotta tell—I could always just scry and see—

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** No! I told you, it's not—it wasn't important! God.

*We can see Nur's face, now, not her arm or her back or her-but-from-a-far-away-distance: we see her face. Behind those sunglasses, made transparent by the angle and the lighting, Nur's eyes are twisted up with anger.*

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** *A blank bubble.*

**Hugo:** Sorry.

**Nur:** It's okay.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I don't think I've ever had a dream before.

**Nur:** As a human.

**Nur:** Or maybe I have, and I don't remember.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur half-lifts a hand.*

**Next Panel:**

*She touches Hugo's arm, very gently.*

**Nur:** I've got night shift, so, um, better head out. And

**Nur:** I'll

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I'll catch you later.

**Hugo:** Sure.

**Nur:** Wanna walk back to the bus?

**Hugo:** Yeah, that sounds nice.

### **Next Page**

*All is quiet. There are four horizontal panels, one on top of the other, as Nur and Hugo walk through the Optica. They are tiny on the skin of the park, like ants on a green leafy fruit. Sometimes we see them as dark silhouettes, when they pass in front of the dominating illumination of the floodlights. Sometimes a wind comes through, and goes shh shh in the trees.*

### **Next Page**

*Four more panels. They cross a bridge. They pass by a pond. They cut through the woods, and duck between dark grasping branches. In the last panel, Nur asks, So, what are they? The, um, the words you know? In Holy Script.*

### **Next Page**

*Four more panels.*

#### **Panel 1:**

**Hugo:** Uh, lemme think...pretty simple ones, nothing special.

#### **Panel 2:**

**Hugo:** 'Mahsh,' that's one. Kinda looks like a paperclip, with a square in the corner? Means 'bridges,' sorta. And 'crossing.' And it's in the same neighborhood as 'healing,' but not exactly.

**Hugo:** The metaphor I heard for it was, like—mahsh is how stitches bridge skin, and make it so wounded flesh can heal better. Mahsh is when sutures cross one shelf of skin all the way to the other. Mahsh is when you pinch your skin together to make it heal, even though you know you'll be cut open again one day, and have to do it all over.

#### **Panel 3:**

**Nur:** Can you remember any others?

**Hugo:** Hmm. I don't know what it's called, but it looks like a long 'O,' means something like 'light,' I think. Something sort of like 'light.' You've got it on your arm, actually.

**Panel 4:**

**Hugo:** Grammatically, it's kinda like 'and,' or 'then,' or 'to.' Links other words together. So you see it everywhere in the old holy writings. I was curious, so I looked it up at school—only reason I know that one.

**Hugo:** I think the idea is—is that it clarifies the word that follows it. Illuminates it, I guess, makes it make sense.

**Nur:** Any—any others?

**Hugo:** No, sorry. Nothing off the top of my head.

**Next Page**

*They're out of the park now. The pages are more cramped with panels again.*

**Hugo:** Oh, damn, I almost forgot, I meant to tell you

**Nur:** ?

**Hugo:** there's another tresnochado coming up.

**Nur:** Wow, really? I didn't think you could predict that stuff.

*Up ahead, there's a tall and grand cluster of buildings, much brighter than any of the others around it. The Highlights, ever-popular, a cluster of art houses and concert halls.*

**Hugo:** Can't, usually, but sometimes if the wind is right, if you're looking in the right places... next one should start sometime Friday.

**Hugo:** The boys over at the Nightmare Meteorology Institute are always tearing their hair out trying to study them.

*Hugo seems to find no little amusement in the woes of the Nightmare Meteorological Institute, if his face is anything to go by.*

**Hugo:** All sorts of weird shit happens whenever they do their studies. Like—two years ago, I think it was two years, they tried using an atomic clock to measure exactly how long a tresnochado was, down to the nanosecond—

**Hugo:** —by the end of the night, they realized the clock had gone missing, even though there were four people in the room with it—

**Hugo:** —and then, and then! when they checked the Institute’s expenditure report? zero record of purchasing the clock. Most people thought it was a publicity stunt, and there was never a clock in the first place.

**Hugo:** Then, this year, same night you came down, they tried to do their studies analog style, no machines—just researchers writing down their observations. Well, at the end of the night, they go back over their notes and realize it’s all in some weird mystery language, and no one can translate it.

**Hugo:** A few days pass, they notice one of their employees hasn’t come to work since the tresnochado ended. They send someone to his house, but he isn’t there. The house is almost dead empty—no furniture, no decorations

**Hugo:** but you know what is there?

**Hugo:** The fucking atomic clock.

**Nur:** Not a fan of the Meteorology Institute?

**Hugo:** Well, traditionally the Office of Prophecy and the NMI have always had a bit of a rivalry.

**Hugo:** Also they suck and I hate them.

**Hugo:** When I was interning at the Office, right after I got my degree, they shipped us a box full of lost memories as some kind of bullshit practical joke. The stupid things escaped, of course, scattered all over the building, it took *weeks* to track them all down, it was awful—

*Nur and Hugo are walking side by side. Nur is smiling gently as Hugo talks. A dark figure has appeared in front of them, walking in the opposite direction, but they don’t notice.*

**Hugo:** —Like, say you have to use the bathroom. You go, you pop a squat, and then one comes at you from under the stall door and you spend the rest of the day crying on the fucking toilet because you never got to know your Aunt Rita before she died, and your shift is nearly over when you remember you don’t have an Aunt Rita—

**Next Panel:**

*Nur bumps into the figure.*

**Nur:** oof

**Next Panel:**

*She touches the dark figure's side in a conciliatory sort of way, the way you might, on instinct, try to steady a vase you've accidentally disturbed.*

**Nur:** Sorry, my bad.

**Next Panel:**

*A larger panel this time, the camera pans out and we see the figure in full: a tall creature, body horned with treebranches, it looks at Nur with its single eye. Black as night, the city around it blurs with a harsh reddish tint, as though the being's silhouette is puncturing the world behind and forcing orange light to ooze out like sap.*

**Forest God:** NOT AT ALL.

*It seems nice enough.*

**Next Panel:**

*The god cocks its head.*

**Forest God:** IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG?

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** What?

**Forest God:** YOU WERE GIVING ME THE STRANGEST LOOK.

**Nur:** Oh. Sorry.

**Forest God:** IT'S QUITE ALRIGHT, HUMAN.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I—Okay. Have a good one.

**Forest God:** YES. THANK YOU.

**Next Panel:**

*The god moves off down the street behind them. Nur watches it over her shoulder.*

**Nur:** Hm.

**Nur:** Anyways—

**Next Panel:**

*Camera angle shifts so Hugo is in-frame now. He is frozen in place, his eyes uncharacteristically wide. He looks like he just swallowed hot petroleum.*

**Nur:** —Um. Are you alright?

**Next Page**

**Panel 1:**

*Hugo screws up his eyes.*

**Hugo:** Yeah. Yep. I'm great. Never better.

**Panel 2:**

*A big shiver runs up his body.*

**Nur:** ...You sure?

**Hugo:** I'm good. Just. Wow, that was a strong one.

**Panel 3:**

**Nur:** The god?

**Hugo:** Serafine doesn't get the powerful ones too often.

**Hugo:** Gimme a moment.

**Panel 4:**

**Nur:** It was just a forest god.

**Hugo:** An old one.

**Hugo:** Okay, I'm good. I'm cool.

**Nur:** Alright. Well, better hurry, bus should be here soon.

**Panel 5/Background:**

*Pan out. The streets around the Optica and the Highlights. This panel isn't a panel at all, but a part of the background, unclosed by border lines, exposed by a gap between the top and the bottom panels.*

**Panel 6:**

*Panels again. The bus, rumbling down the street, as seen from the outside. It's a small, thin panel.*

**Panel 7:**

*Another small and thin one. Nur waves to Hugo as she disembarks.*

**Panel 8:**

*Nur is unlocking Logan's.*

**Next Page**

*Several panels, all from the same point-of-view at the front of the store, like snapshots of a video. Nur shuffles around preparing the store. She's over here. Now she's over there. Lights. Restocking. Checking the register. Yawning. Continues checking the register.*

*The panels on this page are divided by a large dark mass rather than traditional straight borders, and it is in the tall, treebranching shape of the forest god. The panels of Nur preparing Logan's for the night shift radiate around the shape, each separated from the other by irregular tree branches.*

*The central panel isn't from the point-of-view of the others, and looks at Nur head-on. Elbows on the checkout counter. She's clasped her hand on her mouth and is looking off to the side. Behind the lenses, you can see her furrowed eyes.*

*Stinger: Translating the Holy, lying open and face down on the coffee table.*

## Chapter 10

*A small café and corner store on a sharply sloping street. Not Logan's.*

*We go inside, where Nur is waiting in line. The man in front of her gets his order and goes. Nur is humming quietly under her breath. Her turn, she goes up and orders.*

### **Next Panels:**

*The clerk keeps talking as he prepares her a pair of sandwiches and a soda.*

**Clerk:** Man, sucks about Lynn, right?

**Nur:** I—what?

*The light catches her sunglasses so you can see raised eyebrows and surprised eyes behind them.*

**Clerk:** Sorry, I just thought—thought I heard you humming Glassheart. The song.

**Nur:** Oh. Yeah.

**Clerk:** Some real shit.

**Clerk:** Fucking loved her music. Some really cool stuff..

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Clerk:** Too bad, y'know.

*Nur takes her order and pays.*

### **Next Panel:**

*Nur is outside the café.*

### **Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Too bad.

### **Next Panel:**

*Inside Logan's, Min is by the register, checking something off on a clipboard.*

### **Next Panel:**



*Nur comes in through the front door.*

**Nur:** Dinner.

**Next Page**

**Min:** Where'd you go, off-planet? There're sandwich places just next door.

**Nur:** Place on Orozine, near the District. Way cheaper.

**Next Panel:**

*She empties her bag on the counter: two sandwiches, a soda.*

**Min:** What, cheaper than Soledad? We're literally right next to a grocery store.

**Nur:** This place is better.

**Next Panel:**

*The soda hisses like a snake when Nur pops it open. The Sunshine Mechanica logo grins on the side.*

**Min:** I used to have the best prices in the area.

**Min:** Dirt cheap.

*They eat their lunch.*

**Min:** You couldn't find a better deal anywhere in the city. Everyone would stop at Logan's.

**Nur:** Hmm.

**Min:** Wasn't making any money, of course—you can't make money with prices like that. I just liked it when people came in and bought my shit. Makes a guy feel important.

**Min:** But after a while it got thinner. Whole city got thinner. Not so many people anymore, no matter the prices.

**Min:** So I figure, shit, may as well make some money then.

**Nur:** Yeah, that, uh, sounds like a good idea. For a store. Making money.

**Next Panel:**

*Min picks up his sandwich.*

**Min:** I've got some paperwork to finish in the backroom. Man the register. Y'know, in case that flood of customers comes rushing in.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur watches him go.*

**Next Panel:**

*She swigs from her soda.*

**Next Panel:**

*Commotion from outside.*

*Nur looks over her shoulder. There are shapes outside, some ways away from the store, arguing maybe, indistinct shapes of people. Tiny speech bubbles can be seen around the door, and Nur hesitantly puts her hand on the checkout counter, as though to move past it.*

“—told you—“

“—so get your ass—“

“—come on, I don't—“

**Next Panel:**

*One of the shapes slugs the other across the face.*

**Next Panel:**

*The figure falls, and the group goes to town with their kicks. Nur is rushing to the door.*

**Next Page**

**Panel 1:**

*Outside now. A horizontal panel stretching from one side of the page to the next. You can see the torsos of three men as two of them kick at their victim, off-panel. On one of them, you can see a brightly colored pin, like what you might wear to support a politician running for office. You might make out the letters NFA. While two men kick, the third hangs back.*

**Man:** —we gave you a warning fucker, we played fair, and then you went and came the fuck back—

**Man:** —Yeah? Want more?—

**Man:** —this isn't your country, shit-eater, This. Isn't. Your—

**Man:** —c'mon, he's not worth it, just—

**Panel 2:**

*This panel is just below the first, and shows the view right below their bodies. We see the Customer, the chatterbox who always comes in to pester Nur, he's on the ground and we see him and we see kicking feet. One pair of feet seem not to be kicking.*

**Man:** —fucking asking for it—

**Customer:** —get the hell—!

**Customer:** —Help! Help, Saints, someone—

**Customer:** —fuck—

**Man:** —got some nerve, huh? Got some fucking nerve?—

**Man:** —Yeah, very funny. C'mon guys, he got the message, let's—

**Panel 3:**

*This and all the subsequent panels are simple and small, each the same size. Nur has burst through the door. She has a man by the collar.*

**Man:** What—?

**Panel 4:**

*His jacket tears as she punches him in the mouth.*

**Man:** Fuck!

**Man:** What—

**Panel 5:**

*One of the others tries to tackle her, the man who'd tried talking down his friends. Nur's sunglasses are knocked off.*

**Panel 6:**

*She shoves herself into the man who's grabbed her, biting down into his arm animal-style, and her long flailing leg catches another man in the chest.*

**Panel 7:**

*The Customer has gotten up and delivers a hard elbow to the man holding Nur, right in the head. He's flinched, and she's broken free, and she's already swinging and punching at one of the others.*

**Panel 8:**

*Nur largely disappears from view as she falls to the ground with one of the men, but you can see her arm pulled back, ready to plant itself.*

*The Customer wrestles with one of the others, but he seems to be losing.*

**Panel 9:**

*Nur has reemerged, bloody, and she tackles another one of the men like a wildcat.*

**Panel 10:**

*On the ground, we see a torn scrap of jacket and a pin, which now clearly reads NFA: A Better Future for You and Your Children.*

*The sounds of the brawl float around the bottom of the page, grunting and shouting and swearing and hitting, though Nur, the Customer, and the NFA men are all out of sight.*

**Next Page**

*Inside the store, Min has emerged from the backroom.*

**Min:** Hey, Nur, we fully stocked on—

**Next Panel:**

*He's noticed the fight outside.*

**Min:** What the hell—?

*But by the time Min has hurried to the front of the store, the fight ends, the three men run off. Before Min can get out the door, Nur pushes it open, supporting the*

*Customer with his arm around her shoulders. He's bruised, and sports some cuts. Nur looks like shit.*

**Nur:** First aid kit.

**Min:** Yeah, gotcha—

*Min hurries off. Nur and the Customer are gasping for breath as they deposit themselves against the checkout counter, leaning on it for support.*

**Nur:** I'll \*pant\* call an ambulance—

**Customer:** No, it's fine—

**Nur:** But—

**Customer:** I don't \*pant\* I don't need an ambulance

**Nur:** C'mon, you—

**Customer:** Just, \*pant\* just maybe some bandages, I'm okay, I told you—

**Nur:** Look, the phone's right there, I'll call one up—

**Customer:** I don't—

**Nur:** It'll just be—

*The Customer loses his temper.*

**Customer:** No! God, I told you—I—

**Customer:** Sorry, it's—I'm fine, really, I don't—I don't need an ambulance, don't...

*Min comes back with a first aid kit.*

**Customer:** I'm okay.

*Nur looks at the Customer carefully. Her sunglasses have been abandoned outside, and her eyes are there for anyone to see.*

**Min:** So, who wants to fill me on what the hell that was?

**Customer:** Dumbass NFA wannabees.

**Nur:** We kicked their asses.

**Customer:** We got our asses kicked too. Just made enough noise that people were starting to notice.

**Customer:** Ran like a bunch of spooked deer, but I bet it won't be a week before they start hanging around the Circle again.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** You said NFA? That's one of those...those nationalist groups, right?

**Customer:** Psychos. Fucking maniacs.

*Min is dressing the Customer's injuries.*

**Nur:** Couldn't we, I dunno, call the police? or something?

**Customer:** You think if they gave a shit those guys would be hanging around here every day?

**Customer:** I've tried to get them to scare em off, if they won't arrest them at least tell them to go somewhere else, anywhere else.

**Customer:** "Well they're not doing anything right now. We can't shoo off someone for doing nothing."

**Customer:** Hah.

**Min:** They hang around here most nights. Sometimes come in to buy a few bottles. You must've seen em, Nur.

**Nur:** I never noticed.

**Next Panel:**

*Min is finished with the Customer, he goes to put some antiseptic on one of Nur's cuts. Nur draws back.*

**Nur:** What're you doing?

**Min:** Uh, making sure you don't get an infection?

**Nur:** What? I'm fine.

**Min:** You look like shit.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur takes the bottle from Min, and a roll of bandages.*

**Nur:** Let me do it then.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur looks back to the Customer as she cleans her injuries.*

**Nur:** What was that, anyways? I don't actually—I didn't really hear what happened, or why those guys were losing their shit on you.

**Customer:** Just the usual. Didn't like how I was existing right there where they could see me.

**Nur:** ?

**Customer:** 'Go home, get out, steal someone else's job.' When I didn't jump on a ship off-planet at the snap of their fingers, well, I guess they took issue with that.

**Nur:** Off-planet? I thought you grew up in Serafine.

**Next Panel:**

*Surprise breaks through his scowl.*

**Next Panel:**

*He laughs.*

**Customer:** Ha ha! You actually were listening to me. Wow.

**Next Panel:**

**Customer:** You're damn right. I grew up in this dim nightlight country, and so did my papa, and so did his papa.

**Customer:** Haven't moved since the day I was born.

**Next Panel:**

**Customer:** Yeah, I grew up here. Not in whatever dreamworld reality those boys have in their heads where they're right and the whole world's wrong and out to get em.

*Nur tries to get up, but her feet wobble and give out and she falls back on her butt.*

**Min:** So, the ambulance—

**Nur:** I don't need one // **Customer:** I'm fine, no ambulance.

**Min:** Wow, here I thought I made bad choices, but then you guys go and shoot for dumbass of the year award, first fucking place.

**Nur:** I—

**Min:** What? Too good for an ambulance? You're bleeding out on my fucking floor, you look exactly like three buff guys beat the shit out of you, go to the god damn hospital.

**Min:** Anyways, I already called while I was in the backroom. They'll be here soon.

*Nur and the Customer look, to varying degrees, uncomfortable and unhappy.*

*Camera moves outside the store, far down the street, where an ambulance whee-oohs through Corazón Avenue. In the distance, you might make out the shape of the building where Logan's sits.*

**Nur:** ...So, I get the night off?

### **Next Page**

*Nur and the Customer are in the back of the ambulance, lying on their backs.*

*When Nur speaks, it's clear she's breaking an extended silence.*

**Nur:** They didn't kick our asses.

**Customer:** What?

**Nur:** We had them on the ropes.

**Nur:** I got in some good hits.

**Nur:** If anything it was—it was a mutual ass kicking. At worst.

**Nur:** Right?

*The Customer snorts a little, but not meanly. He almost smiles.*

**Customer:** Guess so.



*The Customer wipes some blood from his eyebrow.*

*He looks at Nur.*

**Customer:** Hey, when we get there, just...tell em we were mugged. Didn't know how many people there were. Didn't see who did it. Didn't know who did it.

**Nur:** What? Why?

**Customer:** I don't—look, I don't want it to, to be this thing. With police, or lawyers. Because they track those guys down, and you know what they'll say: that I started it, that I'm the dangerous one, that we're all dangerous. And whatever some idiots'll tell you about how those NFA guys are just a, a vocal minority, just a few rotten apples...there're so, so many people who'd take their word over mine. Quick as a heartbeat.

**Nur:** I could back you up. I was there. I mean, fuck, look at me.

*The Customer doesn't reply at first.*

**Customer:** You're not from Serafine, right? Or Nightmare?

**Nur:** No.

**Customer:** It's hard to tell, with the sunglasses.

**Nur:** Oh shit. Damn it, I forgot—I left them—

*She lurches, as though to get up, but her body protests at the movement, and she winces.*

**Nur:** Shit.

**Customer:** But even without the glasses—I think it's the eyes. You could be from here. Or you could be from somewhere else.

**Customer:** My papa was like that. Didn't look much like grampa at all. Took after granma. You got that kind of, that face that could almost belong anywhere, y'know?

*Nur seems to be avoiding eye contact with the Customer.*

**Nur:** No. I don't belong here.

**Customer:** That's what they'd say too.

**Next Page**

**Next Panel:**

*Nur's head is on its side, looking hard at the blank ambulance wall.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Seven months ago

**Nur:** a little over seven months, maybe

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is climbing up a blue dream-staircase. Everything looks is filtered through sapphire and glass. She talks quietly and expressionlessly as she ascends. No panels, all the images blur together.*

**Nur:** I was in a fight. It...I was hit. I think I won, but it was too late, it was too much, and—

**Nur:** I remember falling. I remember some things.

*There are stars below, and a planet covered in dark clouds, and its lone white moon. Nur has emerged from the sleek ghost-colored alleys and stairs and is upside-down, looking down into the sky.*

*Below, something huge and winged raises an enormous, world-spanning spear.*

**Nur:** I came to the city like that. I was hurt.

**Nur:** I was bleeding. There wasn't any blood, but I knew I was bleeding to death, where no one could see.

**Next Page**

*A view of Nur, naked, hunched over on the ground. It's tresnochado night, seven months ago. The speech bubbles of Nur in the present hover over the panels.*

**Nur:** It feels like it's been years.

**Nur:** I remember what happened after I arrived. But everything before—it's all—it's all so messed up—

**Next Panel:**

*Nur stands in front of Hugo.*

**Nur:** I met someone. He tried to help.

**Next Panel:**

*Hugo, from the nose down.*

**Nur:** He told me my fortune.

**Next Panels:**

*There are three faces on this part of the page, illustrated without panel-borders, blooming across the background. The Customer, Nur, and Hugo.*

**Customer:** Your fortune?

*Her speech bubbles are cuffed with swirls, arcane patterns.*

**Nur:** You fell from the sky.

**Nur:** You had nowhere to hide.

**Nur:** A city will catch you.

*Transition to looping puzzlebox-shapes that frame in the rest of the prophecy. Nur's words become Hugo's words.*

Death will enter your house unexpected  
Guests will knock on your door uninvited  
A corpse will haunt you.

You will break something nice  
You will ask for advice  
Someone will kiss you

When the time comes, you can hold him for a while  
When you're bleeding, she must see you smile  
What you've forgotten, a god will help you remember

**Nur:** That's what he told me.

**Next Page**

*We're back in the alley.*

**Nur:** When I came to Serafine, I brought something with me.

*Nur looks to the side suddenly. Then, she rushes back into the alley.*

*Hugo gets up to follow. Inside the alley, Nur is looking for something. She trips, falls hard to her knees, but she keeps looking.*

**Nur:** I didn't have anything. I didn't have clothes. I had that one thing I brought, just that one thing.

*There. Something glowing, behind one of the trash bins. Nur shoves it out of the way, and it crashes open to the side with a sound like tin drums. On the ground is her halo.*

*Nur tries to grab it, but draws her hand back instantly with a tiny dark gasp. Her fingers are cut open, singed-looking. She's bleeding.*

**Nur:** But it wasn't the same.

*Hugo appears behind her. He wraps the halo in a thick towel. Nur picks it up.*

**Nur:** I—I had it, right there in my hands...

*The flashback panels cut off in a swirl, and a single speech bubble trail connects the flashback-images to Nur's mouth. She's biting her knuckles.*

**Nur:** It isn't the same.

**Nur:** I came here from far away. And I didn't mean to, I just—I needed somewhere to land. And Serafine was there. It caught me.

### **Next Page**

*She puts nearly all her fingers into her mouth, biting them, almost like an child. An empty speech bubbles trails from her.*

**Next Panel:**

*She's withdrawn her hand, just enough to speak.*

**Nur:** Fuck them. Fuck those guys, if they want another fight, if they come anywhere near Logan's I'll fucking kill them.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** And fuck you. I'm not your friend. I don't care about you, your papa, or your grampa. Just

**Nur:** shut up.

*The Customer is looking away from her.*

**Next Panel:**

*We move outside. The ambulance is pulling up in front of the hospital.*

*A dark gulf between these panels and the next.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is lying in bed, while a doctor speaks to her. It's not clear how much she's paying attention.*

*Pale teal curtains are drawn around the bed, blocking off view from the rest of the hospital.*

**Doctor:** —nothing broken, no internal bleeding, but you've lost a good bit of blood—

**Doctor:** —possibility of infection, but you should be—

**Doctor:** —and your friend is alright, a bit worse than you, but otherwise—

**Next Page**

**Doctor:** —could go home in a few hours, but we'd recommend staying the night—

*Nur snaps to attention.*

**Nur:** No. I'm heading home tonight.

**Doctor:** Oh. If you're sure—

**Nur:** Nothing broken, right? Nothing serious?

**Doctor:** We'd like to check a few more things, but it's possible you could be discharged by the end of the day—

**Nur:** Yeah, do that.

**Doctor:** Well, we'll see.

*He checks some things off on his clipboard.*

*In the next panel, we move outside Nur's curtained bed. The doctor has just exited, leaving her to her privacy.*

*Three panels of Nur lying in bed, back inside, staring at the ceiling. Then, she tries to get out of bed.*

*She's on her feet, walking delicately through the curtain, like she's walking on ice.*

*Outside the curtains, she keeps on walking. She's nearly to the elevator when her legs give out. She collapses, and on the ground her eyes flutter, then fall shut.*

*A gulf of darkness between these panels and the next.*

*When Nur comes to, she's in bed again.*

*The lights are out in the hospital, the only real illumination coming from the gentle orange city-light filtering in through the window behind her. The clock on the desk says 2:51 AM.*

*Here is what Nur looks like: she has a black eye, a cut lip, and above the eye that isn't a swollen purple plum there's a large bandage.*

*She has an ugly bruise on her arm, where she was grabbed. Her knuckles, which you will see soon, are a blotchy red-purple mess. Bandage on her other arm, tattoo hidden.*

*Nur rubs at her face, then tries to fall back asleep.*

## **Next Page**

*A shot of Nur's little place in Baquino. Desk in the foreground, rest of the apartment spread out around it, and the front door in the background.*

*Click, rattle, the doorknob shakes a little. Nur opens the door and limps inside. Without closing it, she goes for her desk and pulls the drawer open.*

*The light of the halo throws itself across the walls and across Nur's face, but she's not here for her halo. Nur takes out the copy of In Vain sitting next to it and rifles through the pages. Towards the end, she finds where both the laminated flower and Correstas's business card sit waiting.*

*She takes them.*

*We go to a shot of an unfamiliar apartment. The window looks out onto Anciliar Circle. Somewhere off-panel, a phone goes ding-ding-ding-ding, until it stops, and someone goes: "Hello?"*

*We see Min by the phone, in an undershirt and boxers.*

**Voice (Nur):** Hi, Mr. Min?

**Min:** Nur? Hey, yeah. You okay? Back from the hospital yet?

**Nur:** Not yet. It'll be a few more days before I can go back to work.

**Min:** Yeah, uh, sure thing. Let me know when you're ready.

**Nur:** Yeah. Thanks.

**Min:** You and the other guy, you all—?

*Click. Nur hangs up first.*

*Stinger: A young black man is by the Customer's bedside, and they seem quietly happy as they talk together.*

## Chapter 11

*The radio sits on the floor, its cord snaking out from a power outlet beneath Nur's bed. Nur is nowhere to be seen, though the lights are on, so she must be somewhere just out-of-panel.*

**Radio:** Don't forget, we got a tresnochado coming up tomorrow, and the Office of Prophecy says this one could be a doozy. Get your shopping in now, stock up on food and water, cause you might be holed up for a good few days!

**Radio:** Take that opportunity to cozy up with someone special, maybe? Haha.

**Radio:** Anyways, friendly reminder that the Serafine Transit Authority doesn't operate during tresnochado conditions. So don't count on buses or metro if you're one of those weirdos in a hurry on tresnochado night.

**Radio:** If you have an emergency, contact the Office of Prophecy at 1-800-133-2429, or dial 151 for the Divine Reserve Temple.

*Nur's hands can be seen, scribbling something onto a piece of paper.*

**Radio:** Here's another friendly reminder! You know that kick ass poem you're going to write in the middle of the night, or that best-selling novel you're gonna start when you're suddenly seized by mysterious inspiration?

**Radio:** Yeah, trust me, it's gonna be real disappointing to look at when tresnochado's over. Sorry guys. Nine times out of ten, a writer you are not. I'm not saying don't try it! Just, y'know, temper those expectations, buddy.

*She continues to write. Translating the Holy is open on the desk, just next to her. Holy Script is visible on the paper.*

### Next Page

**Radio:** The Divine Reserve Temple advises all citizens to lock your doors and windows, and to keep them shut if you hear someone knocking during the night.

**Radio:** Hear a call for help? Don't play hero! Call the appropriate emergency personnel.

*She pauses. Finished?*

**Radio:** Wolf howls, unintelligible whispers, and disembodied train noises are all relatively common. If you hear any during the night, don't worry—there aren't any wolves, the whispers are just in your head, and, no, sorry, the Serafine Transit Authority couldn't make those trains run on time if it killed them.



*She's finished. Nur's hands fold up the paper, neat and orderly, like a letter.*

**Radio:** So stay safe, listeners! Don't do anything dumb, and if you have any fun tresnochado stories afterwards, feel free to call them in in a few days to 202.5, Street-talk with Arnold Pao! Will you get your chance in the limelight? Who knows! That's 1-800-Pao-Talk, don't forget it!

*Stinger: Outer space, where the moon hangs over a planet covered in coal-dark clouds.*

## **Chapter 12**

*Rectangles move down the page. Each one uses two square panels to depict its own scene somewhere in the city:*

*A long meandering street lined with bright yellow lamps.*

*In the next panel, the lights dim.*

*We look down a row of buildings, and see windows shuttered, the rooms inside all dark.*

*An RIT pharmacy, one of the same kind you've seen throughout the streets of Serafine. The normally lit-up logo of the store is snuffed, and there is no flat white fluorescence inside—just dark.*

*A clock sits motionless, both hands pointed straight up.*

*A bus is parked on the curb. Inside, something moves. A shape appears by the window, it peeks out at you with round glowing eyes.*

### **Next Page**

*We go to Baquino. There are a few panels around the top of the page, meandering and loose. Nur emerges from her building, a large duffel bag slung over her shoulder. She sets off.*

*The rest of this page is pitch black.*

### **Next Page**

*She walks down an empty darkened street.*

*She passes under faint yellow streetlights.*

*She makes her way up an alley that's almost completely black. Nur and the alley walls are visible only by the slightest suggestion.*

*She walks alongside a long pool. This street is somewhere high up, and it overlooks the sprawl of Serafine below. Nur is a thin grey ghost, and the fountains are dead, and the pool is like black glass.*

### **Next Page**

*Nur is standing in front of a stately but unobtrusive building. She checks something in her hand.*

*Correstas's business card, name, title, seal of authority, visa authorization, and the address 443B Nadia Blvd., Grand Balcony.*

*She takes a crowbar from her bag and bashes the doorknob from the door.*

*Inside, Nur has passed a door on the first floor, labeled A. At the top of the stairs, we see a door labeled B.*

*Nur uses a pair of pliers to break open the doorknob with a quiet crack, then sticks in some metal picks. After a moment, the door comes open.*

*She's quiet as she enters. Over there: Correstas, asleep, a cozy-looking sleeping mask pulled over his eyes.*

*Nur stands over the bed, and the sleeping man. Reaching down, her spider-delicate fingers pry the sleeping mask from Correstas's face. Her fingers almost brush his eye, the one not covered by the patch he wears even while asleep.*

*Feeling at something unseen, Nur seems to clamp down on thin air right in front of the immortal man's face. She pulls.*

*Something white and pale and stirring is in her grasp. She cups her hands together, as though a newborn animal is trying to escape between her fingers.*

### **Next Page**

*The door slams shut. We're back at the flat in Baquino, Nur stumbling through the door, out of breath, her hands still clasped together. Her eyes are wide with exhilaration. At her desk, she delicately opens her fingers. A thing like the outline of a child's drawing drops to the tabletop, its outer lines flapping feebly.*

*She stares at it. This is supposed to be her triumphant moment. But, mostly, from what you can see on her face, she seems a little scared.*

*There's a knocking. Nur doesn't jump, or start, but instead calmly places a book on top of the symbol, as though to keep it from flying off, and walks towards the door.*

*Outside now. Hugo is standing in front of the door, waiting. In the next panel, the door is open, and Nur is there.*

**Nur:** Hey.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Hi.

**Next Panel:**

*Nur steps aside.*

**Nur:** Wanna come in?

**Next Panel:**

*Inside, Hugo lays his jacket on the couch, and follows Nur as she goes to the desk.*

**Nur:** I was wondering if you were gonna come.

**Nur:** I guess

**Nur:** I was kind of hoping you would.

*Hugo smiles a little.*

**Hugo:** That was one of my classes, actually. ‘How to know when someone’s thinking of you.’

**Nur:** Really?

**Hugo:** Nah, I’m fucking with you. Just a gut feeling I should pop in. And my gut feelings are pretty reliable.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I wanted the chance to say goodbye, but, I dunno. Going to your place, actually going to find you, talk to you, it seemed—it was a lot.

**Hugo:** You going somewhere?

**Nur:** I’m leaving.

**Nur:** For good.

**Hugo:** You are?

*Nur is cradling the symbol on her hands.*

**Hugo:** What is that?

*The symbol stirs, its floppy wing-like margins attempting to give the body lift.*

*Some kind of comprehension comes over his face, and Hugo’s next speech bubble is small, as though his voice has shriveled up in mummification.*

**Hugo:** Nur, where did you get that

**Nur:** It was the phantom's. I took it while he was asleep.

*Nur sets down the symbol with one hand and with the other takes out the folded-up letter. She isn't looking at Hugo; busy, apparently, with the paper and the symbol.*

**Nur:** Do you know what it is?

*He looks like he's breathing ice cold air, and trying not to suffocate.*

**Hugo:** When I try to See into it, the Bells of Life and Death deafen me with their ringing, and instead of a past or a future it shows me a city on a mountain, and a golden river, and a Book with every name ever given, I—

**Hugo:** I can guess.

**Hugo:** Nur, I don't think this is the kinda thing you should—

**Nur:** The sign of hearts. That's what they call it.

**Nur:** The immortal authority given to each seated member of the Phantom Council. Here, forced into physical form.

**Hugo:** Geez. That's, uh, that's quite the thing to have lying on your desk. Nur, can we talk about this, just...just talk, before you do what you're gonna do?

*Nur has opened the desk and, wincing, retrieves the halo with her bare hands.*

**Nur:** I don't know why I waited. I don't know why I let this city swallow me up. I guess I thought if I didn't take any choices, if I let the current just carry me...then I wasn't really living here, you know? I wasn't really human, I wasn't really stuck, I hadn't surrendered, I hadn't—

*She holds out her arms, as though keeping something invisible at bay.*

**Nur:** I was stupid. You can't hold life at arms-length. You can only stand around inside it looking like an asshole with your arms raised up at nothing.

**Nur:** I'm done waiting.

**Hugo:** And, hey, yeah, proactivity, always a good thing, but maybe with this you should, I dunno, sit on it for a little? This's some pretty intense stuff—

*Nur opens the letter she wrote.*

**Nur:** I mocked up a letter of commission, see? It should be enough for this.

**Nur:** I have my halo.

*She touches the symbol gently, as though caressing a child.*

**Nur:** And I have my lifeline. It's like a door, its open just a crack. There's a draft coming through, and behind it—I'm going back. I'm going home. I'm going to be an angel again.

**Hugo:** Nur, I'm trying to warn you, I can't see much with that thing in the way, blinding me, but at the edges, at the margins, I'm seeing bad shit, the alarms are all going off and I really think—

*The halo begins to smoke, as though burning the wood of the desk.*

**Nur:** I can't wait anymore, Hugo—

**Hugo:** Please, trust me on this, I'm begging you, I don't want to see you hurt, Nur, if you just rush in I don't know what will—

**Nur:** Bye, Hugo. And thanks.

**Hugo:** Nur—

*She puts her hands over the sign of hearts.*

**Nur:** I'm going home.

*The world catches light.*

*Panels break down at the edges. The black background is cut up by white. Nur is in the heart of the outpour of gold, white, silver, rose, ice-blue, like she's grabbed onto the sparking tail of a shooting star, like she's struck rainbow-colored oil, and Hugo puts an arm over his eyes because it's blinding, it's hot white, brighter and truer than anything in sunless lamp-lit Serafine.*

*Nur's face is screwed up with concentration. She grips the sign of hearts. There are no panels anymore, and the room groans like a forest in the wind, like a earthquake through a tunnel.*

**Nur:** almost

*It's like holding on to a slick wet ledge, with water rushing between the fingers. Her grip on the sign slips.*

*It's like staring down a tunnel.*

**Nur:** —no, almost—

*Her right hand slips off entirely. Comets of color and light go zipping from between her left hand fingers, zwing-zwing-zwing, and somewhere behind her Hugo cries out in pain.*

**Nur:** Hugo!

*There's an explosion. Everything stops.*

*The next page is empty, just white.*

*The page after:*

*A white background. The first few panels depict sketchy outlines rather than full detailed color.*

**Nur:** where

**Nur:** home?

**Nur:** am i

**Nur:** back

*The sketches become more detailed, clearer and cleaner inking. Nur has been knocked to the ground, and, dizzy, she slops lopsided to her feet.*

**Nur:** i

*Black and white and grey, but no longer sketchy. She's looking around.*

**Nur:** no, i...

*Color is seeping in. Muted, but gaining strength. The burgundy of the wooden floor. The yellow in her skin. The orange of Hugo's jacket, blown to the opposite wall.*

**Nur:** h—hu

*She stumble-walks over to where Hugo has fallen.*

*Next shot: the desk in the foreground, the cindery smoking outline of the sign of hearts burned into the wood. Burnt scraps remain of Nur's homemade letter of commission. Her halo lies on the floor. In the background, you can see her crouched over Hugo's body.*

**Hugo:** nur?

**Nur:** hugo

*A close up, Nur and Hugo in the foreground again.*

**Hugo:** I can't—it's—can't see—

**Nur:** hugo, i'm

**Hugo:** It's going out.

*Hugo's face. His hands are clasped to his mouth. The bubbles that normally surround his speech bubbles like foam or soap are boiling, floating away, dissipating.*

**Hugo:** It's

**Hugo:** what did you do

*They keep floating off. A dandelion surrendering its seeds to the wind.*

**Nur:** Hugo, I didn't—are you alright?

*Hugo sits upright.*

*He doesn't move.*

**Hugo:** It's nearly out.

**Nur:** What do you—Hugo, you're not...?

**Hugo:** They're closing off. The strings of prophecy. They're pulling away. I—

*Only a few small bubbles linger around his speech.*

**Nur:** What...?

*Hugo turns and shoves her away. Nur falls on her butt with a tiny thud.*

**Hugo:** I told you! I told you not to screw with that thing!

**Hugo:** I warned you, I tried to get you to—why couldn't you just listen? Why couldn't you—

*He keels over and throws up.*



**Hugo:** nur, help me, please

**Nur:** Hugo, I'll—I'll call an ambulance, we'll get you to a hospital, it'll be alright, it'll all be alright—

**Hugo:** It's gone.

*His speech bubbles are normal and unremarkable.*

**Hugo:** I can't see.

*There is some panic and desperation there, but they are shoved to the margins by the enormity of his shock. He seems unable to get to his feet.*

**Nur:** You—what...?

**Hugo:** It's all gone.

*Nur stares, but he says nothing more. She hurries to the phone and dials.*

*We move outside the building to listen to her talk.*

**151:** Divine Reserve Temple, what's your emergency?

**Nur:** My—my friend is hurt. Please. We need help.

**151:** Stay on the line. We'll have someone there soon.

*A dark gulf without panels ends this page.*

### **Next Page**

*Nur is sitting on the curb, outside, staring down the street. The phone is in her hand, the cord leading back inside the flat. Something appears in the distance, and she gets to her feet.*

*A horse-drawn carriage without any horses pulls up in front of the building.*

*A tall figure in a bellhop cap emerges from the carriage.*

**Nur:** He's inside. I don't know what—please—

*In the next panel the being is loading Hugo into the back of the carriage.*

**Nur:** —divine light, I think, or something, he couldn't move, he threw up earlier, back inside, and he—he said something about seeing, he couldn't see, I—

*Nur moves to join him inside the carriage, her hand going to his shoulder.*

**Hugo:** Don't

*She withdraws.*

**Nur:** Hugo, I—

**Hugo:** Don't. Please, just—just don't.

*Nur watches as the carriage pulls away.*

*It's gone.*

*Stinger: The fallen halo, on the ground.*

## **Chapter 13**

*Shots of the city. The lights are dim, the doors are shut, the windows are shuttered. It's still tresnochado.*

*The last panels of this page comes to look at Baquino's dry fountain, the creaky old buildings, the shadow of the Dome of the Stars looming high above.*

*Next page.*

*Inside the flat, Nur is seated on the askew bed. Her skin is paper-white. She looks sick.*

*Her eyes are open, then they fall nearly shut. Next panel—they've flickered open again. The back of her hand goes up over her eyes, pressing against her face as an eraser presses to unwanted drawings.*

*Stinger: Hugo is in a hospital somewhere, unconscious in bed. Several tubes are hooked up to his arm, and a pair of doctors are speaking quickly just behind him.*

## **Chapter 14**

*A waiting area, somewhere. A hospital, maybe. Nur, sunglasses apparently lost for good, is seated here, her fingers wound together. She stares at her lap. A sign near the front desk reads 'Department of Athanasiology.' Nur doesn't look very well.*

**Nurse:** Miss Nur?

*Nur looks up. A nurse has just emerged from the hallway to the side.*

**Nurse:** I'm sorry, but I can't confirm or deny whether the patient you asked for is here. As a rule, visitation rights following emergency treatment are for family only.

**Nur:** What? No, I—tell him it's Nur. He'll—he'll understand.

**Nurse:** Ma'am, I really can't, it's against federal policy—

*Nur is on her feet.*

**Nurse:** Look, I know he's here, this is the closest hospital to my flat, he must be—

**Nurse:** Ma'am, I can't. You'll have to get in contact with your friend after he's released. I'm sorry, I don't make the rules.

**Nur:** But—

**Nur:** Sorry, you're right. I understand.

**Nur:** I'll get out of your hair. Thanks.

*The nurse walks off, and Nur busies herself with her backpack. She glances over her shoulder. While the nurse is turned around, Nur scoots past the front desk and hurries down the nearby corridor.*

*She glances through the windows as she goes, room by room. No one she recognizes. She checks a floor plan on the wall, the section of the hospital delineated 'Athanasiology,' the subsection labeled 'Mortal Ward.' Another shot of her passing closed doors, empty rooms, strangers. Then, at the end of the hall, she stops, she takes another look through the window, and she slips inside.*

*It's a shared room, two beds and two patients. On one side is an old man. On the other is Hugo.*

**Old Man (Emmanuel):** So the lights blow out! All of them! And then—

**Old Man (Emmanuel):** Oh, um, hello. Are you...?

*She doesn't acknowledge him.*

**Nur:** Hugo, are—are you alright?

*Hugo is fiddling with his sheets, coiling them with his finger, but otherwise seems serene, perhaps even comfortable. He does not meet Nur's gaze.*

**Hugo:** Hey, y'know, Emmanuel was just in the middle of a story, you, um, kind of interrupted him.

**Emmanuel:** Is, uh, is this a friend of yours, Hugo?

**Hugo:** Don't worry about it. So what happened next?

**Nur:** Hugo—

**Hugo:** Look, he was just getting to the good part. C'mon, you were just at the good part. What next?

*Hugo remains pleasant and cordial, his usual self, and continues to avoid Nur's gaze.*

**Emmanuel:** Well, uh

*He doesn't seem too perturbed. If anything, the presence of another audience member seems to please him, and he occasionally looks to her as he talks.*

**Emmanuel:** So it was pitch black, and, of course, no flashlight.

**Emmanuel:** Way, way out we could see some lights, but, see, we didn't know if it was the farmhouse or the neighbors or who-knows-what-else

**Emmanuel:** and honestly? the only thing really on my mind was that this would be the perfect time to get back at my brother! Well, I—

**Nur:** Hugo I—sorry, Emmanuel—I wanted to check in, to, um, to see how you were, if you—

**Hugo:** I think I told the nurse I wasn't really down for visitors right now. And you're being kind of rude to my friend here, and me too, I'm kinda busy...

**Nur:** I'm not trying to—I just—

**Hugo:** See, Emmanuel and his brother were out in the fields, I dunno if you've gone too far outside the city, it's pretty eerie out there, 'specially in the farmlands, but they got stuck outside in the dark, and it was all his brother's fault—

**Emmanuel:** The dummy didn't even bring flashlights!

**Hugo:** And the dummy didn't even bring flashlights.

**Emmanuel:** And he forgot to check the breakers before we left, of course, so what happens? The farm lights blow out when we're in the middle of the cornfield!

**Hugo:** So, and you gotta picture the scene, Nur, it's near pitch black—this is what Nightmare's really like, y'know, without the citylight to mime daytime—pitch black, and ten-year-old Emmanuel's thinking...

**Emmanuel:** Isn't this the perfect opportunity for a prank? For swift and uncompromising justice?

**Nur:** I'm sorry Emmanuel, I'm sure it was a great prank, but I really, really don't—

**Hugo:** See? Very rude.

**Emmanuel:** Oh, no, I don't mind, not really. It, uh, it sounds like you two ought to talk, maybe—

**Hugo:** We don't.

**Emmanuel:** Sorry, I guess that's—that's just what it sounded like. To me, I mean. What, uh, who is this, again?

*Hugo is looking at her now. Still calm, but no more smile.*

**Hugo:** Well. Doesn't really matter. She was about to leave.

**Hugo:** What happened next, Emmanuel?

**Nur:** Hugo, please—

**Hugo:** I don't leave the city that often, not every day I get to hear fun townie stories, y'know?

**Nur:** I just want to know how—

**Hugo:** You wanna know what you did?

**Hugo:** Is that it?

*He's picked up the clipboard hanging on the side of his bed.*

**Hugo:** You wanna know what happened?

*A shot of Nur.*

**Nur:** It was—I'm sorry, it, it was an accident, you know I never meant to—

*A clipboard is tossed from off-panel into her hands.*

**Hugo:** Well. It's all there.

*On the clipboard, in neat, cramped writing, Nur sees the doctor's notes: Patient admitted May 12<sup>th</sup> (tresnochado conditions), suffering from: nausea, blurry vision, loss of balance, emotional distress. Preliminary report: Exposure to strong holy(?) radiation, immortal essence in unstable condition (non-critical), extrasensory points show cataracts, signs of burn damage, possibly severe.*

Administered saline drip and 200ccs of Nephelimine.

May 13<sup>th</sup>. (Since admission, tresnochado conditions persisted for approximately 70 hours before subsiding). Patient has stabilized. Continues to suffer from dehydration, bouts of nausea, dizziness. Astral roots remain severely burnt, damage could be

*The rest is out of panel.*

**Nur:** I don't—so, are, are you hurt...?

**Hugo:** What, didn't you read the clipboard?

**Hugo:** Let's see. Severe burn damage to the astral roots. Sixth sense permanently blinded. Lasting bioathanasial symptoms could persist for the rest of the patient's life; weakness, dizziness, possible compromised immune system...

**Nur:** Is—is that...?

**Hugo:** Oh, I didn't get it either, not at first. All medical mumbo-jumbo, until the doctor translated it.

**Hugo:** So. I'll have to get regular checkups. Make sure the body's holding up. Y'know, possible organ failure, weakened immune system, gotta keep all that fun stuff in check. None of it's *too* likely, so I might not have anything to worry about.

**Hugo:** Though, I better find a new job, seeing as you basically gouged out my third eye with a hot poker. Bit of a prerequisite to being a Seer, y'know. Actually, well, Seeing.

**Nur:** Oh.

**Nur:** Hugo, I never—I didn't mean to—

**Hugo:** You didn't, huh?

**Hugo:** You know what your problem is?

**Hugo:** You use people like security blankets. You only reach out when you want something. You can't think of anyone other than yourself for more than five god damn seconds.

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** Your letter of commission was incinerated when you fell! You can't touch your own halo without it turning your hands into hamburger grind! You *knew* that shit with the sign of hearts wouldn't work, I begged you to—

**Next Panel:**

**Hugo:** You're a selfish asshole.

**Nur:** It was—it was an accident.

**Nur:** Hugo, I just—I just wanted to go home. Please. I never—I never, ever meant to h—to hurt you—

**Nur:** I—

**Hugo:** I know.

*Hugo isn't meeting her eyes anymore.*

**Nur:** I never wanted this.

**Hugo:** I know.

*Hugo cups his mouth and nose in his hands, like he has nowhere else to put them.*

**Nur:** I care about you. I didn't want you hurt.

**Hugo:** I know.

**Hugo:** I know I shouldn't blame you.

*They stand there. Nur is watching Hugo, and Hugo is watching nothing. What else is there to say?*



**Hugo:** Nur, just—

**Hugo:** I can't do this. Please.

*In the next panel, Nur is closing the door to room 314 behind her.*

*Inside the room, we see her silhouette outside the door. Then, it's gone.*

*Outside again, Nur is walking down the hallway. She stumbles, nearly trips. She really doesn't look well.*

*She falls on her butt, out of breath. She leans against the wall.*

*Just a moment. She needs a break, a small one. She'll close her eyes for just a moment...*

*The rest of the page is black.*

*The next page has dialogue trailing down a black background.*

**Voice:** Is she sedated?

**Voice:** You found her in the hall? Why—?

**Voice:** 150ccs of Nephilimine.

**Voice:** Will we have to operate?

**Voice:** Hand me the astral scissors, I'm going to cut the second root cluster.

**Voice:** There's internal bleeding, we have to open her up.

**Voice:** Surgical is prepped. Exploratory laparotomy—

**Voice:** There.

**Voice:** Hand me—

**Voice:** And there.

**Voice:** Right.

### **Next Page**

*Nur is in bed somewhere. She stirs, faintly, and something beside her begins to beep. Next panel, same angle, in the background a nurse enters through the curtain surrounding Nur's bed.*

**Nurse:** Hey. How you feeling?

**Nur:** I...what...?

*The small movements of sitting up and talking seem to be deeply uncomfortable.*

**Nurse:** They found you blacked out in the Mortal Ward.

**Nurse:** Breathing was shallow, pulse arrhythmic—we ran some tests, found heavy scarring on most of you extrasensory points, internal injuries, astral and physical, all sorts of stuff...

**Nurse:** Nothing we couldn't patch up, but, damn, it looked like you'd been pushing around with all that for at least a full day. They were worried, could've been a lot more serious.

**Nur:** Oh.

**Nurse:** Well, maybe go see a doctor next time you're irradiated in holy light.

**Nurse:** We're assuming it was something like that, based on the injuries.

**Nur:** Yeah. Something like that.

**Nur:** You, um, you said you patched it all...?

**Nurse:** They had to open you up to deal with some internal bleeding, and most of your astral roots needed some heavy balms—next few weeks'll be rough, but it shouldn't be anything permanent. Hopefully.

**Nurse:** You've been out for a few days, actually. Today's the 16<sup>th</sup>. We'll want to keep you here for another night, but, after that, you should be good to go home.

**Nur:** But, I thought...a friend of mine was there, when it happened. They said his injuries were bad. Permanent. He's here too, in the Mortal Ward, room, um, room 300-something.

**Nurse:** Oh, that guy? I know who you're talking about. Yeah, I think his paperwork said he's a Seer, those guys gotta keep their extrasensory points way open. Leaves your system a lot more vulnerable. Normal folks like you though, way less risk.

**Nurse:** He's in it bad, but at least we got to him in time. His life's not in danger, at least.

**Nur:** Yeah. That's...that's good.

**Nurse:** Hey, if you're feeling up to it, I'll need you to fill out some paperwork, now you're awake...

*She hands Nur a clipboard, and they talk, though we see no speech bubbles to fill us in further.*

*The two talk a bit longer, then the nurse gets up and leaves Nur to herself.*

*She sits up just a little, winces in pain. She lifts up her hospital gown. Underneath, a long white bandage runs down her abdomen.*

*She lowers her gown.*

*Nur hugs herself, hands around her biceps, gently rubbing circles into her arms. Behind her, outside a window, the city lights glow strong.*

*Stinger: A doctor is discussing something with Hugo, alone. The curtains are drawn up around his bed.*

## **Chapter 15**

*A great starry sky. In the distance, something that might be a planet. Beyond that, something that might be the sun.*

*Nur is walking through tangled hallways. Smoke is billowing across the darkness. She can't see very well.*

*A cloud of what looks like burning fuel belches across the night. A single paper-white hand (larger than a planet, surely) brushes it aside.*

*Nur keeps going higher and higher.*

*Below, among the stars, is a monster. Like a mermaid, or a serpent, or a dragon, long and coiled and beautiful. Many heads, and many eyes, and many mouths. Fire streams from her lips.*

*Above, two great hands heft a spear as long as life.*

*The next two pages are a full spread. On one side, something huge and winged plunges her spear into the other page, where the monster arches her back in agony, or maybe anger. Nur is a speck beneath them.*

*Next page. Cluttered panels surround the top of the page: a hand, a fanged mouth, Holy Script glowing gold and white. Stars. They are interrupted by a knock-knock knocking.*

*The rest of the page, in the background behind the panels, is a full-page shot of Nur's flat. She's lying in bed, and someone is at the door. In a lone panel at the bottom of the page is her face, half buried in the crook of her arm, her eyes flicker open.*

### **Next Page**

**Voice (Sofia):** Hey, um, Nur? You home?

*Nur lies with her eyes closed for a panel. In the next, she slides her legs out of bed. She scoops up a cane from where it leans on the bedpost.*

**Nur:** Coming. One second.

*She swings herself to the door, slowly, and opens.*

**Sofia:** Oh. Hey.

**Sofia:** You okay? You look like shit.

**Nur:** It's not so bad.

**Sofia:** What happened?

**Nur:** It's, uh, hard to explain. But I'm not dead, and I'm not dying, so...

**Sofia:** Hmm. If you say so.

*Nur has wheeled herself around and is caning her way over to the kitchen counter.*

**Nur:** I'll put the kettle on. Shut the door behind you.

**Sofia:** Oh, uh—yeah, sure thing.

*She follows Nur inside.*

**Nur:** No beer, but I have some tea, if you want.

**Sofia:** That sounds good.

*The sharp fsh-fsh-fsh-fsh of the stove igniting. Nur puts on a kettle.*

**Sofia:** You sure you're okay?

**Nur:** Yeah, it's—it's fine. Just kind of tired.

**Sofia:** I can tell.

**Nur:** Thanks.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** So what's up?

**Sofia:** I wanted to ask a favor.

*We see Nur's back as she rifles through a drawer. She does not seem bothered by Sofia's frankness.*

**Sofia:** You told me you were an angel. And I guess I believed you. I believe you.

**Nur:** Why's that?

**Sofia:** Why? I didn't have any real reason to think you were lying. I wanted to believe you. I didn't know how to prove you wrong. I was a few beers in, and thought you were pretty hot.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** \*

*Unclear if she meant to say that last part out loud.*

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** Why does anyone believe anything?

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is running a hand through her hair, as though she doesn't know where else to put it.*

**Nur:** Okay. So I'm an angel. And the favor...?

**Sofia:** My meeting with Lady Duermo is in a week. But this was Lynn's meeting, really.

**Sofia:** She was the one who campaigned for it, she was the one who went to the interviews and spoke at press meetings and played nice for the radio. She could make people care. And now she's gone.

**Sofia:** I can cite my graphs, the historical precedents, the economic models, but...

**Sofia:** This meeting was supposed to raise the issue to the spotlight. Lynn isn't there to light the fuse, to make it something more than numbers and economics, but if you came with us in her place, as a sponsor, if you volunteered divine approval for the Villanueva Plan—that's what we're calling it now—maybe, well...

*Move from Sofia and the shot of Nur's back to Nur's face, Sofia in the background. Nur sighs, and her face makes it clear this isn't a sound of surrender or resignation, but the short and knowing sigh of the tide shhing over a beach, before it prepares to withdraw, as it must.*

**Nur:** The favor of an angel comes for love, for hope, for despair—real things, physical things. Things you can't question.

**Nur:** Facts, graphs, evidence—that's human business.

**Nur:** No angel would agree to this.

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of Sofia, on the couch.*

**Sofia:** Look, you knew Lynn, didn't you? Why she cared about this?

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of Nur.*

**Nur:** ...

**Next Panel:**

*Sofia, again. She's smiling, slightly, and looking aside.*

**Sofia:** ...No, it's alright.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** I know you didn't really know her. I just wondered if guiltng you might work.

**Next Panel:**

*The same angle from earlier, from behind Sofia as she looks over at Nur in the background by the kitchen counter.*

**Nur:** How long've you known?

*She doesn't meet Sofia's gaze.*

**Sofia:** A while.

**Sofia:** I'm not some living lie detector, but I'm still pretty good. The job got me very familiar with liars.

**Nur:** I don't think I was being that subtle, so

**Nur:** don't get all proud you solved the mystery, or whatever.

*Her face is mocking, but it's a kind of mocking that self-depreciates more than it mocks, a knife without a handle that can only be grasped by the razor.*

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** No? I know the rest of it, too. I know you're not some fan trying to get her kicks cozyng up to Lynn's dead body. I know you cared.

**Sofia:** I don't know why you were chasing her ghost.

*Nur is dead calm, almost casual.*

**Nur:** No reason why. And I didn't.

**Nur:** Lynn was a nobody. She was no one. She spoke to me a few times and that was it. She may as well've survived and kept on living, and gone on with that meeting, and saved the world I guess, if that's what you think you're doing, and I wouldn't have noticed the difference.

**Sofia:** That sounds like bullshit.

**Nur:** I could count the number of times I spoke to her on two hands.

**Sofia:** You've got a pretty good poker face.

**Nur:** Maybe one hand.

**Sofia:** What's the point? Why lie?

*Not so casual anymore, maybe a little angry. The next line is more forceful:*

**Nur:** I'm not lying. I never knew her.

**Nur:** You've said more to me in the last ten minutes than Lynn ever did her entire life.

*The kettle begins to whistle. Nur turns and kills the stove.*

**Sofia:** Well, if I get knifed on the way home, I hope you won't skip the funeral.

**Nur:** That's not funny.

**Sofia:** Why did you care?

**Nur:** *Her back still to Sofia.* I'm making tea. Give me a second.

**Sofia:** *A bit testier now.* I think I have a right to know why a stranger inserted herself into my best friend's death. Why an angel wants to buy me beer and—and be buds.

**Nur:** I'm not your bud.

**Nur:** I mean—

**Nur:** I don't know.



*Nur hold a tea bag over a cup. It hangs like a pendulum..*

**Nur:** ‘See you around, Nur.’ That was the last thing she said to me. She was going to see me around. It’s so stupid, I don’t—people say that all the time, it’s just empty small talk, it’s *nothing*, it’s literally *nothing*, I don’t know why I even remember it—

*Nur’s forehead is in her hand, as though under attack from a headache.*

*She sighs again, the sure and certain sigh of the tide, inanimate and emotionless.*

*In the next panel, she moves over to Sofia, a pair of hot cups held together in the long fingers of a single hand as the other props her up on the cane.*

**Nur:** Tea.

**Sofia:** Thanks.

*Sofia takes a sip.*

*A silent panel. Then, the next:*

**Nur:** I’m sorry. About Lynn. I don’t know if I ever told you that.

**Nur:** She seemed nice. I’m sorry you lost her.

**Sofia:** Thanks.

*They drink, quietly.*

**Nur:** Sorry. The tea bags are a bit old. It’s kind of musty.

**Sofia:** It’s okay.

*A shot of Nur’s hands around the teacup.*

**Nur:** I don’t know why I cared. I really don’t.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** You know Vienna Heller, right?

**Nur:** I mean, I know you know her, I just...

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I always liked Vienna. She was tough and she didn't take anyone's shit, and if she needed to do something, she did it. I like to imagine talking with her. I like to imagine she'd sympathize with me. I like to imagine she'd like me. But I never thought that way about Lynn.

**Nur:** Because she did kind of like me, didn't she? Not just in my head. She'd smile, she'd say hello. She did kind of know me.

**Nur:** Maybe she was just pretending. Just small talk.

**Nur:** I don't know.

**Nur:** I liked to think of Lynn, after she died. I held her so close. I made room for her in my head, and it made me happy.

*Nur is holding herself, arms wrapped around her torso.*

**Nur:** But there aren't any long talks to go back to, to relive, to wrap myself in, and imagining one from scratch just feels...

**Nur:** I know Vienna won't ever know me, and I don't think I want her to. She's a myth. She's a story. Everything she is is filtered through other people's passions—their love for her, their fear, their hate. She's real, where everyone else is mortal and made-up. She's more of an angel than anyone I know face-to-face could be. More than me, I guess.

**Nur:** But Lynn's not a myth. Lynn knew me. Just a little.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I'm glad she was kind to me. I think we could've been friends.

**Nur:** We could've been friends, and I could've forgotten I was ever what I really am, and gotten lost and happy with her.

**Nur:** So maybe it's good that she died.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I can't help you, you know. I'm sorry. Even in this doomed body, I still have my pride. I'm still an angel.

**Sofia:** But it's right. Lynn was right. I know that this is right.

**Sofia:** I know my history, I know my evidence, I've been going back and forth with the Daydream Embassy and the Nightmare Poverty Institute and I *know* what I'm talking about—

**Nur:** Then convince them. The government, the people, whatever. That's what humans do, right? You take your bits of truth and put something together out of it, and show it off?

*She says this gently, and not unkindly.*

**Sofia:** And what if it's not enough?

**Sofia:** If you were the edge we need, that final push, I would do anything to catch you and take you with us.

**Nur:** And what if I don't believe in you? What if I think nationalizing the old Sunshine Mechanica assets is horseshit? What if I trust Vienna?

*Sofia, always cool, always sure, seems a bit uncomfortable now.*

**Sofia:** I don't know why you would.

**Nur:** *She says it all so calmly, still not a bit of unkindness in her voice.* What if I think the people supporting you are crazies who don't know what they're talking about? What if I'm still a bit bitter that a bunch of NFA thugs beat the shit out of me once, because I didn't like that they were beating the shit out of someone else in front of my store?

**Sofia:** The NFA is just a small group, and so are the others, the Pride and Whatever League—if you just don't give them attention...

**Nur:** If you look the other way. If you don't care about what they do, as long as they're on your side.

**Sofia:** That's not—

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** I know, they're shitty. And I know that this is the kind of stage they live for. But it's not just what nationalizing the old factories could do for the economy, it's that voting for nationalization is one of the only things in the last nine years that's brought conservatives across the aisle for a social policy shift

**Next Panel:**

*Sofia is worked up now.*

**Sofia:** they've been pushing austerity measures ever since the recession started, and of course that's only made things worse—I have four detailed reports on each other time austerity policies were put in place

**Sofia:** if we can get Congress invested in public funding again, education, poverty relief—and I have over twenty historical examples, plus reports from the NPI, this is what we *know* will have a real, tangible effect—plus, if we drag the core conservative base in that direction, it could counter the nationalists from NFA type groups, cause we’re empowering their biggest anti-nationalist opponents—

**Nur:** And that’s great, but I told you, this is human business. You’re looking at history, probability, reason, things that only exist if you defend them, things people can pick apart if they’re confused, or stupid, or know more than you.

**Sofia:** You said an angel’s favor belongs to lovers, to passion—isn’t that what Lynn gave them? If we get support for this, it’ll be because people love this country, and because they act out of love.

**Nur:** And fear. Afraid their country is doing the wrong thing, afraid of missed chances, afraid of lies and bogeymen and made-up horseshit. And they’re angry, because you might get yours before they get theirs, and for some people that’s worse than death. They’re human, they see the world in bits and pieces and think they have angel eyes that look at all of creation.

### **Next Page**

**Nur:** And when they fear or hate or shout or love, or when they go and beat the shit out of strangers on the street, or make excuses for the people who do, they just—they lie. Those people aren’t you, with your facts, and they aren’t an angel’s people, running around on blind passion—they put on a skin of evidence scavenged I guess from talk shows and radio, and they play pretend. I won’t give your plan my blessing. And I won’t give it to them, either.

**Nur:** Whatever grace I have left won’t go to pretenders.

**Nur:** Tell me you’re dumb and simple and just want to save the world, and I would give you everything. I would grow wings again.

**Nur:** Tell me you don’t know what you’re doing, and my mercy is yours.

*Pan out. Sofia and Nur, sitting together on the couch. Nur is turned to look at Sofia, head-on. Sofia doesn’t meet her gaze, though maybe not on purpose. Maybe she’s just thinking.*

**Sofia:** I can’t lose this, Nur.

**Sofia:** It’s all I have left. It’s Lynn. It’s every time she spoke, every time she laughed, every time she told me to stop touching her stuff, every time I drank too much on her tab and had to cough up 800-something dollars for her the next day.

**Sofia:** I don't know if how much of that is in the logic, the facts, the reports I'll regurgitate for Lady Duermo. Maybe none of it. I'm pretty good at compartmentalizing.

*She looks at Nur now.*

**Sofia:** If you won't bless the plan, then what about me?

**Sofia:** Bless my despair, bless my anger, bless my love, and just look the other way when I take your blessing and use it.

**Nur:** I don't look the other way. My eyes are angel eyes. I see the world, whole and true.

**Sofia:** How long have you been living in a human's body? You must've picked up some tricks, right?

*Nur scowls. The scowl becomes annoyed confusion. Then she's laughing.*

**Nur:** That's funny. Picking up tricks. I don't think I ever thought of it that way.

*She rests her head in her hand.*

**Nur:** I was asleep when you knocked. I didn't mean to be.

**Nur:** I had a dream.

**Sofia:** About what?

*Nur's eyebrows knit a little, in concentration.*

**Nur:** I can't remember. I was in it, I think. Something was familiar. There're so many things I can't remember anymore. I can't remember the words of the Chorus, or the streets that wind through the City on the Mountain. I can't even remember what my tattoos say.

**Nur:** Angels don't dream. Dreams are for mortals. Mortals who that can't see the world whole and true and without any gaps, mortals who lie and imagine and create.

**Nur:** No angel anywhere ever created anything. Why would we, when the Chorus sings in our ears and casts out all illusion, and the voice of the Lord is our muscle and sinew?

**Nur:** Ow!

*Sofia has leaned over and pinched her arm.*

**Sofia:** Not feeling very lordy to me.

*Nur pushes her over.*

**Sofia:** oh shit *she says, spilling tea over her shoulder.*

**Nur:** Don't do that!

**Nur:** God.

*Nur sets the teacup on the table.*

**Sofia:** Isn't that bad, saying 'God' like that—you know, taking the Lord's name in vain?

**Nur:** I'm asking Him to give me patience.

**Sofia:** Hah.

*Nur flops back, a tiny smile on her lips, running both hands through her hair, while Sofia smiles Hugo-ishly.*

**Nur:** I think, sometimes, I wish you hadn't come.

*Sofia's smile dims a little, like the surface of a street lamp fogging with condensation.*

**Nur:** I wish the whole world would leave me alone. I wish I could tell the city to go away, and leave me, forever. I wish I could go home.

### Next Page

**Nur:** I'm really glad you came, Sofia.

**Nur:** I wish I wasn't such a big sadsack. I wish I hadn't messed things up so badly. I wish I'd been Lynn's friend.

**Nur:** I don't like being alone.

*She scoops up her cane and gets to her feet, hobbles over to her desk. She looks over her shoulder, gesturing for Sofia to follow.*

*They're by the desk now, Nur's hand pulls it open. Inside—light.*

**Sofia:** What is that?

*A shot that looks directly inside the desk, at the brilliant white-gold circle that sits in its drawer the way a king sits on a throne.*

**Nur:** My halo.

**Nur:** When I go with you to meet with Lady Duermo, I'll put it on, and shine with the light this world surrendered when it first cooled into matter.

*Sofia stares into the halo, her face serene and unreadable as an underground lake.*

**Next Panel:**

*A shot of the two from behind, light pouring out from the open desk.*

**Nur:** We're traveling to the Drossarina, right? You'll have to pay for my ticket.

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** I can do that.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** Thanks.

**Next Panel:**

*It's all the same angle. Nur and Sofia, side by side, their backs to us, their fronts and faces private.*

**Sofia:** Hey, Nur?

**Nur:** Yeah?

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** I'm sorry.

**Nur:** For what?

**Sofia:** Well. I don't know. For whatever it is that happened to you, I guess.

**Nur:** A lot's happened to me.

**Sofia:** I know.

**Sofia:** And I'm sorry for hurting you, because I know I must've, somehow. I wish I knew how not to hurt you. I wish I could see with angel eyes.

*She toys with her glasses.*

**Sofia:** My human ones aren't all that great.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** It's okay.

**Nur:** My human eyes aren't all that great either.

*Stinger: Lady Duermo sits in her throneroom, consulting, apparently, with several tiny humans.*



## Chapter 16

*Four slot-like panels on the top of the page, each with Nur on the phone in her flat.*

### **Panel 1**

**Nur:** No, not dead. Not dying.

### **Panel 2**

**Nur:** I know. Have things been alright on your end?

### **Panel 3**

*Smiling a little, half-laughing a little.*

**Nur:** It's not weird. I do that sometimes.

**Nur:** Yeah, because I'm nice, you jerk.

### **Panel 4**

**Nur:** Alright Mr. Min. See you tonight.

*She hangs up.*

### **Panel 5**

*The smile fades a little, not into a frown but into a chilly calm.*

*In the next panels, Nur lugs a suitcase out from under her bed. Inside, curled up like a living thing, is the sign of hearts.*

**Nur:** Hi.

*She scoops it gently into her arms, and it stirs the way a starving child might stir.*

**Nur:** Let's get you home.

*A dark gulf between this panel and the next.*

*At the bottom of the page, Nur is in Grand Balcony again, using her cane to precariously mount the steps up to Correstas's building. She buzzes the intercom for apartment B, then a silent panel, waiting. Her left hand is closed up in a gentle fist.*

## Next Page

*Nur presses the buzzer again, maybe a bit annoyed. A third time, she presses it, and says, Correstas, it's Nur—*

**Intercom (Correstas):** Hey *hey* not so flippant with the name, I'm a big deal, you can't just throw me around like I'm yesterday's newspaper, c'mon, who knows who's listening...

*There's a metally-sounding buzz.*

**Intercom (Correstas):** Door's open. Don't dawdle, yeah?

*Inside Correstas's apartment, Correstas in the foreground. The door swings open behind him, and Nur walks in.*

**Nur:** Hey.

*Correstas turns to face her, Nur in the foreground now, the phantom in the background.*

**Correstas:** Welcome, welcome, well, welcome. Glad you made the trip. Can I get you anything, ma'am? A beer? Wine? Some bottled starlight? Only the best, of c—

**Nur:** You're missing something.

**Correstas:** Hmm?

*She marches over and opens her fist. The sign of hearts uncurls in her palm.*

**Correstas:** Oh shit. Where—

*His hand goes to his forehead.*

**Correstas:** Shit. I thought I was—oh man, oh, my ass is saved, saints in the sky—

**Correstas:** When the days went by and I didn't see head or hair of you, I was worried my guardian angel didn't care, but here you are, at the last minute, come to save my—

**Nur:** I broke in and stole it a few days ago. For angel business.

**Nur:** Sorry.

*Next panel, a shot of her hands, holding out the sign.*

**Nur:** Here's it back.

*It's just Correstas's hands.*

*Then: his whole body, hands, torso, head. He watches the sign with a strange look. Sharp annoyance, then, in the next panel, pride, a bit of a sneer, a bit of a smirk, a bit of calm.*

*He looks at Nur, all cool diplomatic smiles again.*

**Correstas:** Well, I hope it was some kind of help—

**Nur:** You don't have to kiss my ass. I lost my wings six months ago. My letter of commission burned up when I fell from the sky. If you wanted to pull any kind of awful phantom shit on me, you could do it, same like you could do to anyone else.

**Correstas:** Hm.

*He turns away from Nur and throws his head back with the sign cupped to his face, as though splashing himself with water.*

**Correstas:** Well, that's a relief.

*He's returned, quite casually, to his desk, and is putting away some manila folders scattered around the workplace.*

**Correstas:** I don't know if you know this, but it's the sign of hearts that lets the Council open dimensional doors to wherever.

**Next Panel:**

*Somewhere with a distant alien sun, red and cool, a lone white gate stands unattached to any building or wall. It's the middle of a rocky desert, a land with the look of something important and cherished once, but long since abandoned.*

**Correstas:** Which is nifty, but Duermo has all sorts of safeguards set up just for us. I could cut through them, of course, but not if I want to stay incognito.

**Next Panel:**

*Back to Correstas, glancing over his shoulder.*

**Correstas:** I had to take a space shuttle here, if you'll believe it. Fucking humiliating.

**Next Panel:**

*He's looking at the paperwork again.*

**Correstas:** I think, just to vent a little, I'm gonna take a train to the Drossarina. When everything's taken care of, when I'm ready to head home. And I'm gonna open the Ivory Gate right in her lap, and walk off planet before she has a chance to so much as compliment my cheekbones.

**Correstas:** Oh, I can just see the look on her face.

*He's silent for a panel.*

**Correstas:** Wonderful.

*Go to Nur, watching him.*

**Nur:** So

**Nur:** no curse?

**Nur:** I'm not looking at a century in the Soul Lantern? You're not gonna call me some mean names?

**Correstas:** Ah well

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** here's the thing, angel girl—

*His face takes on a venomous quirk.*

**Correstas:** —my wingless pal—

**Correstas:** —I lied to get to where I am. I stabbed a few backs. I worked for it. I didn't have my letter of commission handed to me at the beginning of time, I earned it. Maybe I don't like some bitch who never had to work for anything walking over me like I'm nobody. Because I'm not. I'm not.

*The mockery in his face burns up like mist in the morning sun.*

**Correstas:** But, you know how it goes. Bygones, water under the bridge--you know.

**Nur:** Water under the bridge.

**Correstas:** Yeah.

**Nur:** Figured you were more of a dam-up-the-water-till-it-flashfloods kind of guy.

**Correstas:** Okay, well, sure, kicking folks when they're down, a bit of a cut-throat style, it's fun, it gets the job done, and who doesn't like that bad boy attitude, you know?

**Correstas:** But sometimes you can be—oh, I dunno, a bit *too* much of a dick?

**Correstas:** I meditate in the mornings. I bought a cycling machine. Took a seminar on anger management. I figure immortality is wasted if you don't try new things every now and then, right? These days, I try to be positive.

**Nur:** Well. That all sounds pretty damn positive.

**Correstas:** I mean, if I just turned around and kicked you out the door right after acting all nice and buddy-buddy, well,

**Correstas:** that'd just make me feel like a real dick.

**Nur:** I guess no one wants to feel like a dick.

**Correstas:** Exactly. And then you get to feel nice for being such a damn good person.

**Nur:** I'm sure.

*She comes over to the table and looks politely at Correstas's paperwork*

**Nur:** Work going well?

**Correstas:** Nearly done, nearly done. There's no real time limit here, so I'm taking the opportunity to see the sights, play tourist, have a bit of fun—incognito, of course.

**Nur:** What, you don't get to do that already?

*She says this casually, conversationally.*

**Correstas:** Hm?

**Nur:** You're—

*Her face crumples into tight introspection.*

**Nur:** I... because you're the...the First Seat, right? And, the First Seat, in the letters of commission for the Council, you have to—

**Correstas:** Oh, yes, duties of the First Seat. Ambassador, secret keeper, all the other fun stuff. I guess I do travel quite a bit, don't I? Definitely better than the office nonsense Two and Four put up with.

*Nur takes a seat at the desk, rubbing her forehead.*

**Nur:** I knew that. I know that. I—

*She laughs a little, and rests her cheek on her knuckles as she watches Correstas genially.*

**Nur:** I was kind of expecting it, you know. Get my heart torn from my body, get thrown into the Soul Lantern for a few ages. It might be fun, that's what I was thinking, it might be fun to have someone to blame.

**Nur:** I could spend the first century cursing you by every star in the sky, maybe spend the next one pleading for mercy.

**Correstas:** I hope you're not expecting me be your cheerleader, drop some hot pithy little saying about life or meaning or whatever.

**Correstas:** If a couple decades in the Lantern is what you're asking for, I'll do it.

**Nur:** No. Sorry, I'm just being dramatic.

**Nur:** I have no idea how mortals do it. Every day, choose left, choose right, choose whatever-the-hell, make a choice every single goddamn step of the way—it's no wonder they can't live forever—

**Nur:** Sorry. I know, you don't care.

**Correstas:** Oh, yes, of course not, but go on if you want, I can work and ignore you at the same time.

**Nur:** Nah. It's okay.

**Nur:** I'm getting kind of tired of feeling sorry for myself. Maybe I'll give it a break.

**Next Panel:**

*She scratches at the back of her head, maybe a little embarrassed.*

**Nur:** Anyways, I, uh, I've got plans. Told someone I'd help her out. I promised, actually. Be kind of a dick move to flake out for a pity party in spirit jail.

**Next Panel:**

**Correstas:** Maybe now's the time to buy yourself a cycling machine.

*Nur snorts, still smiling.*

**Nur:** Dumber things have happened, I guess.

**Nur:** If you're still in a positive mood, I wouldn't mind that drink now.

*A black gulf, the scene comes to a close.*

*In the bottom part of the page, separated from the previous scene, are a row of panels featuring a phone booth. We go inside and see Nur, calling someone.*

*It rings, it rings, it rings.*

**Next Page**

*A closeup of Nur's face and the phone, as the voice message plays:*

**Phone:** Hey, you've reached Hugo, leave a message and I'll get back to you!

*\*Beep\**

*Nur's mouth is open just enough to slip in a piece of paper. Then, she hangs up.*

*Puts in a coin and dials another number. Zoom out now, outside the phone booth. Ringgg. Ringgg. Ri—*

**Nur:** Hey, Sofia?

**Nur:** Not much. No.

**Nur:** Because I'm nice, that's why.

**Next Page**

**Nur:** I was thinking, my shift gets out early tonight, and, um, was wondering if you want to hit up the Fury, later.

**Nur:** Maybe this is the night I stop hating alcohol.

*She laughs a little.*

**Nur:** Yeah, no. This bill's on you, I already got us buzzed with that 12 pack.

**Nur:** Okay. Maybe.

**Nur:** See you.

*She hangs up.*

*Another black gulf, and the next panels are Nur caning her way around Logan's, as though pacing.*

*She watches the slushie machines swirl their medicine-colored slush. She's leaned up on the counter, the cane on the side, rubbing her leg and wincing. She's far in the background, staring at the trash can across the room. A sad little party of crumpled up receipts/wrappers lies around the can. Nur tosses a crumpled up Bluejoy wrapper like a champion basketball player; it hits the rim and bounces cheerily away, and Nur's face falls into a glum found-my-goldfish-belly-up-dead kind of annoyance.*

*Next panel, the wrapper hits the floor in front of a pair of feet.*

*Next shot is of Mr. Min, who's bent over picking up the wrapper.*

**Min:** Nice shot.

*Even without sunglasses, Nur's face is the cool and shameless face of a poker star.*

**Nur:** I had a few good ones before you came in.

*Next panel, Min tossing the wrapper into the trash as he goes to join Nur by the counter.*

**Min:** Productive afternoon?

**Nur:** My record's 3 out of 12.

**Nur:** Maybe another day to practice before I really start sinking them.

**Min:** I can cut the break between morning and night shift, if you want the full 9 to 12 to practice.

*At this, Nur is perturbed.*

**Nur:** I'd, uh—I'd rather not, if that's okay.

**Min:** Yeah?

*Min seems almost as surprised as her.*



**Nur:** What? You're looking at me funny.

**Min:** I guess cause it's kind of funny.

**Min:** You always ghost through work like it's nothing. I didn't think you really cared whether you were here or home or anywhere else.

**Nur:** Oh.

**Min:** Like in my mind, I say, Logan's is open all day from now on, full 15 hour shifts, and you say, bring it bitch, and then I'm left looking like a dummy cause my bluff got called.

**Nur:** Yeah, I guess so. I dunno.

**Nur:** All day it was like—and it'd never bothered me before, just, out of the blue, I was pacing and getting antsy and—

**Nur:** It just felt like I was wasting my time.

**Nur:** Not trying to sound ungrateful, I just—

**Nur:** How do you stand it?

**Min:** What, sitting at the counter all day?

**Min:** I guess some people bring books. Some people have pet projects, I dunno, novels, or radio shows, and they write em and imagine it making them rich and famous one day.

**Min:** I just learned to like it. Sometimes you learn to like the feeling of throwing it away, bit by bit, just

**Min:** Ride it out. That's what I do. Learn to expect it, and then like it.

**Min:** Anyways, you can head out. Cover the morning tomorrow, full shift, if you're still not dead or dying.

**Nur:** Right. Hopefully.

*Nur goes for the exit. She looks over her shoulder a bit as the door to the backroom falls shut behind Min.*

*The panels end, and at the bottom half of the page, in the background, we see the city, and we see a strange silhouette rising over it. This isn't the silhouette of the Dome, which has often loomed over Nur's life in Serafine, but the distance neighborhood of Weatherview. Weatherview is raised up above the floor of Serafine*

*on great towering pillars, and none of the buildings at the top have windows looking out to the rest of the city. Like a chef who has raised his dish up to the sky, but refuses to remove the dome that will finally reveal the food inside.*

### **Next Page**

*We move below. From a view on the ground, we see the pillars of Weatherview rise up around us. We see Nur, towering the way the pillars tower, warped by our ant's-eye perspective.*

*We see her going down a narrow cobbly street.*

*She is at a tall, comfortable building, tall and comfortable like she is tall and uncomfortable. She presses the buzzer for apartment 6C.*

**Nur:** Hey. It's me. It's Nur.

*She stands there.*

*She presses again.*

**Nur:** Are you there?

*No response.*

*The panels end. Below, in the background of the page, uncontained by panels, there is a view of the glowing windows of the Fury.*

### **Next Page**

*Sofia sits at the bar. She is sitting a little sideways on her stool, with a near-empty martini glass in front of her. She taps her toothpick, the impaled olive swinging like a pendulum.*

*Pan out.*

*The bar is alive, and dark silhouettes scatter themselves at all the tables, and around Sofia at the bar.*

*Nur's head comes into view, and she gives a small wave, catches Sofia's attention.*

*Sofia says something smirking and pleasant as Nur moves to join her at the bar in the background. No speech bubbles, but it's not hard to see they're talking about small unimportant things with great meaning.*

*The last shot of the chapter is Sofia calling to the bartender, as Nur says something whose privacy no speech bubble illuminates.*

*Stinger: Correstas on a park bench. He's looking up and into the distance, where the Dome of the Stars rises like a peeking giant.*

## Chapter 17

### Page 1

*Three panels run along the top of the page. The door to Nur's flat. In the first, it is closed, and Baquino is dark and still. In the second, she emerges, in the third she locks the door.*

*These are the only panels. The rest of the page is a single shot: Nur, walking with her cane down the winding Plague District streets. We haven't seen much of the District before, besides the little cul-de-sac of Baquino. It's very dark here, and the lights are much fewer between.*

### Page 2

*A full page shot of the Plague District, as seen from above. It's very still. At the center of the page is the perfect black geometry of the Dome of the Stars.*

### Next Pages

*Nur is by the window of the private investigator office near her flat. She peers in, but it's dark inside, the only light coming from the rosey peach neon on the PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR sign.*

*There are trees here, Nur notices, more trees than in the outer city. Intrusions from the old Legislative Park that once surrounded the Dome. It has grown wild in the last few decades, and no one has bothered to return and teach it manners.*

*Two children run by, laughing.*

*She passes the salon down the street, the one that once sent her a coupon in the mail.*

*She sits on a bench, munching on a popsicle.*

*The sounds of karaoke and idle talk slip along the streets, like passersby.*

*Nur passes an alley and peers down its insides, but it holds its secrets in the page's black, featureless ink.*

*Shots of Nur's feet and the end of her cane. Walking, walking, walking. We see the ground underneath her slope up. She's ascending.*

*We see the road that leads all the way up to the top of the hill. The four towers and the Dome seem larger than entirety of the Plague District, as their silhouette stretches across the page from one side to the other.*

*It's night.*

*There are no clocks, no matter what Hugo might've said months and lifetimes ago. There is no AM, or PM, or city lights. Nur can barely see in front of her face as she climbs to the top.*

*She is underneath the shadow of the Dome, and she is rendered as mere suggestions of exposed skin.*

*Nur walks inside. Down a hall. It always seemed so austere from a distance, but now, up close, you can see the building is a strange zombified thing—the walls peel, the ceiling sags, and you could imagine that plague still incubates here, just waiting for company.*

*Next panel: In the heart of the Dome, Nur finds what could only be the Senate Chamber. A great circular thing, with rings of chairs peering at her from behind benches like an audience of ghosts.*

*Next two panels: She goes to the tallest chair in the room, raised up above the others. She plops down in the seat, hanging her cane on the arm of the chair. She seems quite comfortable.*

*Beyond the Senate Room, down hallways and through holes in the wall and between the trees that surround the Dome outside, Nur can see tiny orange lights. The city, a universe away.*

*HELLO*

*Nur does not seem surprised to hear a voice. It is not the voice of the Forest God she met, weeks ago—this text is cooler and softer—but it is the voice of something immortal.*

**Nur:** Hi.

**Nur:** I hope you don't mind. Me, I mean. Taking a seat.

*I DON'T MIND.*

*I DON'T GET VISITORS VERY OFTEN.*

**Nur:** Me neither.

**Nur:** It's my fault. I don't think I tried very hard to get people to want to visit.

*She pauses, thinking.*

**Nur:** I went out for drinks with a friend the other night. It was fun.

*IN MY CHURCH, THEY WOULD POUR BARLEY WINE, AND DRINK IT IN MY HONOR. THEY READ FROM MY BOOKS IN SONG-VOICE. I LIFTED THE SOUND OF THEIR LOVE INTO THE RAFTERS, AND WHEN IT BECAME HOLY, IT WAS BECAUSE I WAS IN IT.*

**Nur:** That sounds nice.

*THE CHURCH HAD GAME NIGHTS ON FRIDAYS. CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS, BUT OTHERS TOO, THEY WOULD COME IN FROM TOWN, THEY'D PLAY BINGO, AND SETTLER'S BARGAIN, AND OTHER SILLY BOARD GAMES.*

**Nur:** Hugo says I'm no fun with board games. Too many rules. I'd get impatient. I once threw a Snakes and Ladders board out the window and...I think it hit something? Below? There was a sound. Like, a hitting sound. I didn't check and Hugo didn't check and he said I shouldn't play board games anymore, so...yeah.

*YOU ARE A FUNNY ONE, HUMAN.*

**Nur:** You think? A friend told me once I should get a new job. I don't think stand-up comedy was what he was thinking of.

*HMM. NO, NOT THAT KIND OF FUNNY.*

*NO DISRESPECT. I'M SURE YOU COULD TELL A GOOD JOKE, IF YOU SO WISHED.*

**Nur:** Thanks.

*I DON'T GET VISITORS VERY OFTEN. HUMANS DON'T COME TO THE DOME OF THE STARS.*

**Nur:** I think it's very practical of them. The Dome is out of the way. It's old, and full of bad memories.

*AND ME.*

*THEY FIND IT BETTER THIS WAY, TO PRESERVE THE DOME AS A SILENT PLACE. A CLOSET IN THEIR BEDROOM, WHERE LONELINESS AND FEAR AND BLAME CAN BE STORED, AND ORGANIZED. THEY CAN LOOK UP AT THE DOME AT THE END OF A LONG DAY, AND SORT OUT THE THINGS THAT ITCH AT THE BACK OF THEIR HEAD IN ITS SHADOW.*

**Nur:** Sounds like a nice place for a god.

*HUMANS WITH NOWHERE TO SLEEP AT NIGHT MIGHT SQUAT IN THE WAREHOUSES AROUND OLD THIRD, OR RESERVOIR STREET. BUT NO ONE*

*COMES HERE FOR SHELTER OR REST, FOR THE SAME REASON A HOMELESS MAN WOULD NOT BREAK INTO A HOME HE KNOWS IS OCCUPIED TO SLEEP IN A BED WHERE A STRANGER IS ALREADY SLEEPING.*

**Nur:** Is that why you're here?

*A GOD DRINKS DEEP FROM FAITH. BUT WE ALSO DRINK DEEP FROM SILENCE, AND AN ABSENCE OF FAITH.*

**Nur:** Sounds lonely.

*YES.*

*WE DO NOT DIE. NOR ARE WE FORGOTTEN. NOR DO WE STARVE WHEN THE PRAYERS RUN THIN. WE ARE IMMORTAL, AND WHEN WE AND OUR MORTALS BECOME SEPERATED, WE WANDER DOWN OUR OWN BRANCHING PATHS, WINDING AND SOLITARY, UNTIL THE DAY COMES FOR THOSE PATHS TO INTERSECT, AND WE FIND EACH OTHER AGAIN.*

*AND IN THE MEANTIME, IT IS LONELY.*

**Nur:** Yeah. I can imagine.

**Nur:** So that's why you came here? To the Dome?

*I CAME HERE BECAUSE WHERE MORTALS SEE AN OCCUPIED BED, I SEE A PLACE WHERE I AM STRONG, WHERE I CAN DRINK FROM THE SILENCE AND GROW WILD AND STRANGE UNTIL IT IS TIME FOR MORTALS TO DREAM OF ME ONCE MORE. AS THEY ALWAYS DO.*

*I CAME HERE BECAUSE I HAD NO HOME, AND I HAD NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.*

**Nur:** Yeah. I—

**Nur:** Same story here, I guess. It, uh, kind of sucks.

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** I saw some people camped out in the park outside. Just a few. Friends of yours?

*THEY DO NOT ENTER THE DOME, BUT THEY ARE WILLING TO SLEEP ON ITS DOORSTEP. THEY ARE THE DESPARATE ONES.*

*AND YES.*

*THERE IS A BOY IN A TENT OUT THERE, LIVING WITH HIS FATHER, AND HE SOMETIMES VISITS, AND SPEAKS WITH ME. HE IS NOT A WORSHIPPER, AND I DID NOT COME HERE FOR WORSHIPPERS, SO I PRESUME HE MUST BE A FRIEND. YES.*

**Nur:** That sounds nice.

*YES.*

**Nur:** I had a falling out with my best friend. I don't think he wants to see me anymore.

**Nur:** But Sofia does. I think she likes being friends.

*I HAVE SEEN HUMANS POISONED BY LONELINESS, AND WATCHED THEM WASTE AWAY BECAUSE THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND LONELINESS IS REAL AND PHYSICAL AND CAN RUN THROUGH THE VEINS LIKE BLOOD OR BACTERIA.*

**Nur:** Hey, um, by the way

**Nur:** I'm like you

**Nur:** An angel. That's what I am. You don't have to call me 'human.'

*BUT YOU DO NOT HAVE WINGS.*

**Nur:** I lost them.

*YOU DO NOT HAVE A HALO.*

**Nur:** It's at home.

*YOUR BODY IS A HUMAN'S BODY.*

**Nur:** It is.

*I DO NOT THINK YOU ARE AN ANGEL. BUT IF YOU ARE, I PITY YOU, LITTLE ONE.*

**Nur:** Yeah? I guess I pity you too.

**Nur:** We have it rough. Humans don't think about how much it hurts, when they draw us from out of the dark so they can love us and believe in us. They're kinda thoughtless like that.

**Nur:** I knew that. Even when I had my wings.



*I THINK YOU ARE LOST, HUMAN. BUT I APPRECIATE THE COMPANY.*

**Nur:** Me too. Maybe I should've had more friends. Maybe it's weird to get your kicks talking with strangers in a cursed building.

**Nur:** Ever since...ever since the hospital—looking ahead gives me the same feeling of looking over my shoulder, y'know? Waiting to see flashing lights, an ambulance, police.

**Nur:** Like the mouth of a monster is open around me, breathing on me with gross monster breath, one jaw coming up from behind and one jaw coming down up ahead, waiting to—to chew me to bits. Cause that can happen now, humans get chewed to bits, and when they do they stay dead.

**Nur:** I can feel my body dying, I can feel old age teething at me. It doesn't rest, not for a second. It doesn't take breaks, I can't impale it on a sacred spear. And—and I'm happy.

**Nur:** Is that allowed?

*Her smile, so calm and casual and pleasant, has twisted up. It's still a smile, but it seems to buckle under an awful weight pulling at all corners of her face.*

**Nur:** I don't want to be lonely. I like being happy. I like having drinks at a bar with a girl I met barely a month ago.

**Nur:** And I feel sick. I want to go home. I want to throw the whole city away like a candy wrapper, and I just want to go home. I guess I'm waiting for the world to punish me for that, before I can go home or before I can get too happy, just strike me dead for being a fucking hypocrite.

*I WOULD LIKE TO GO HOME AS WELL. I DO MISS GAME NIGHTS.*

**Nur:** Maybe I'll give gaming another shot. I could buy a board game, I guess. I could buy a chessboard. Or checkers. Checkers seems easier. I don't think I'm smart enough for chess.

*IT SEEMED LIKE THEY HAD FUN. BUT MY TOWN IS GONE NOW, MY PEOPLE LOST THEIR JOBS, OR THEY HELD TOO TIGHT TO THEIR JOBS AND IT GROUND THEM UP INTO GRAVEL, AND THEIR DESCENDANTS NOW LIVE IN STRANGE CITIES FAR, FAR AWAY. AND THEY FORGOT.*

**Nur:** That sucks. I'm sorry.

*THANK YOU.*

**Nur:** Are there any in Serafine? People from the town, people who might've believed in you?

*I DO NOT KNOW.*

**Nur:** Could be. You never know who you'll run into these days.

**Nur:** The weirdest thing happened, a few weeks back. I ran into—a coworker, I guess, you could call him a coworker. A phantom, from the City on the Mountain, right here in Serafine. An immortal, like me. What're the odds?

*IS THAT RHETORICAL? I CAN TELL YOU THE EXACT ODDS, IF YOU LIKE. SUCH IS WITHIN MY POWER.*

**Nur:** Haha, no, it's, um, it's rhetorical.

**Nur:** I don't know. When I was an angel, the Chorus sang to me the plan of the universe. My hosannas joined the thousand other hosannas of the host. The math of creation was solved. Our eyes could see it all so clear, free from illusion.

*Nur sticks her legs out, casually rocking her feet side to side on their heels.*

**Nur:** The other day I put my shoes on the wrong foot and I'd walked halfway to work before I noticed. Getting your shoes on with the cane and the bad legs and everything is, uh, it's a real project.

*I CAN'T SAY I HAVE EVER HAD THAT PROBLEM.*

**Nur:** Hey, is it true people who come to the Dome of the Stars disappear? Poof, into thin air, that kind of thing?

**Nur:** They tell all sorts of stories.

*I HAVE WATCHED HUMANS OVERDOSE ALONE IN THE PORTRAIT HALL BATHROOM. I KNOW THAT SEVERAL DECADES AGO, OVER 80 HUMANS DIED OF PLAGUE IN THIS ROOM, THOUGH THEIR BODIES WERE FOUND, AS NORMAL. I ONCE WATCHED A PAIR OF VERY DESPERATE MEN FIGHT OVER SCAVENGED VALUABLES THEY TOOK FROM THE CRYPT, AND I WATCHED ONE HIT THE OTHER, AND THE OTHER DID NOT GET UP FROM WHERE HE FELL ON THE GROUND.*

*BUT NO, IF ANY HUMAN EVER DISAPPEARED IN THIS PLACE, UP INTO THIN AIR, I HAVE NOT SEEN IT HAPPEN.*

*I SUPPOSE IT IS POSSIBLE, OF COURSE. THERE ARE MANY STRANGE NOOKS AND CRANNIES HERE, DREAMT INTO BEING BY HUMANS WHO LOOK UP*

*AT THE DOME FROM FAR AWAY AND WONDER WHAT'S INSIDE. I CANNOT SEE THEM ALL.*

**Nur:** I guess I should watch my step when I head out.

*THE BUILDING IS ALSO VERY OLD. I THINK YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO TRIP OVER A LOOSE FLOORBOARD. WHICH CAN BE JUST AS DANGEROUS AS ENCHANTED DARKNESS.*

*Nur sits up languidly.*

**Nur:** Man, you know what I remember? My spear. It was the longest thing you've ever seen. Longer than planets. I had a name for it. Angels don't usually name their weapons, but I remember I named my spear. It felt kind of silly at the time. But also kind of fun.

**Nur:** I could throw it, and nothing, not darkness, not loose floorboards—nothing could match it. My spear pierced the universe, righteous, just, fucking unstoppable

*She makes a motion with her hand, puffing out her cheeks and making a pshoo sound, as her mimed spear impales something out of sight.*

**Nur:** Damn.

**Nur:** It's a good thing humans don't live too long. There's not enough room in their heads for anything important.

**Nur:** I'll watch my step on the way out.

*YES.*

**Nur:** Hey, god, do you have a name?

*NO. ONE DAY I WILL TAKE A NEW ONE. BUT NOW, RIGHT NOW, I AM A VOICE IN THE DUST, COMPOSED OUT OF POWER AND WIND, NAMELESS.*

**Nur:** Ah. Gotcha.

**Next Panel:**

*WHAT IS YOUR NAME?*

**Nur:** It's really long. I don't remember it all. It was in Holy Script.

**Nur:** I told the first person I met to call me Nur. It's a letter, shaped like a skinny 'O.' Holy Script. It was in my name somewhere, I think. My real one.

**Nur:** Guess no one could tell me different if I insisted it was.

*She rubs her biceps.*

*For a panel, it's quiet, and Nur is small and alone in the room of the dead. There's a noise from somewhere off panel.*

**Nur:** It's kind of creepy in here. I thought it wouldn't bother me, or if it did, I thought it'd wear off. But it hasn't, really.

YES.

**Nur:** Is it really that dangerous here?

*IT IS DANGEROUS IN ANY OLD PLACE WHERE THE STRUCTURE IS UNMAINTAINED AND THE CEILING COULD FALL DOWN UNEXPECTEDLY.*

*AND OF COURSE BAD MEMORIES LIVE HERE, AND NO ONE HAS MAINTAINED THOSE EITHER.*

**Nur:** I think I'm going to head home.

*Nur rises from her seat.*

*IT WAS NICE TALKING WITH YOU.*

*Nur is at the door to the Senate Chamber, looking over her shoulder.*

**Nur:** Yeah, you too.

**Nur:** I hope you find your name soon.

*MANY THANKS, ANGEL GIRL.*

### **Next Page**

*The page is almost entirely black, except for a shot of a long unlit hallway, as seen from the side. It is portrayed vertically, running from the bottom of the page to its top, grey and scabbed, the hall's old sense of luxury still present in a strange and exsanguinated way. Nur, flipped 90 degrees along with the hallway, walks up its throat.*

### **Next Page**

*The panels are not neat outlines, but images that bloom out of the blackness of the page background. Nur emerges into the open air. Serafine lies ahead. In the center*

*of the page is a large panoramic shot: Nur, as seen from behind, and the world around her.*

*She looks out over the city.*

*It's like lava, if lava were made of fireflies, and if fireflies were powered by a million-fold machinery. It's beautiful.*

*The next shots of the page are Nur, walking down through the District. On the last tier of the page are three panels.*

*In the first, she stands in front of the door to her flat.*

*In the second:*

**Nur:** Welcome home.

*In the third, her fist tightens against the door, and she is caught in nonmotion. She does not open her fist, she does not unlock her flat, and she does not enter.*

*Stinger: On top of Nur's desk are several things—the laminated flower bookmark, Correstas's business card, and her halo, placed openly and casually on the wooden surface.*

## Chapter 18

### Page One

#### **Panel 1:**

*The first page opens with a shot of a door inside an unfamiliar apartment. Someone is knocking. These four panels are all the same size and same angle.*

#### **Panel 2:**

**Voice:** Yeah! One second!

#### **Panel 3:**

*Sofia walks over to the door.*

#### **Panel 4:**

*It's open, and Nur is limping inside.*

**Sofia:** Hey there.

**Nur:** Hi.

**Nur:** I'm not too late...?

**Sofia:** Kind of late, but Hector was too, you're good.

#### **Panel 5:**

*Reverse shot, now we're looking in at Sofia's place, her and Nur facing away from us as they walk over to the table in the background. A tall dark man from the Fury, weeks ago, is sitting there. He protests, mildly:*

**Hector:** Hey now, don't put the sins of Serafine's bus system on my good shoulders.

### Next Page

*They pull up chairs at Sofia's neat circular table with its flowery tablecloth.*

**Sofia:** Oh, if only we knew some government official who could do his job and teach those buses a lesson.

**Hector:** I know you're joking, but we really did have a meeting with the Transportation Committee just last week. The Serafine Transit rep was there and he

threw the biggest hissy fit you've ever seen, of course—what a mess. So, hey, don't say I'm not trying.

**Nur:** The Transportation Committee?

**Sofia:** The good Senator Namayan is one of Las Vives's representatives to Congress. He's been giving us a hand for the meeting with Duermo.

**Nur:** Oh. Okay.

**Sofia:** And this is the friend I told you about, our new sponsor.

**Hector:** Nice to meet you again, uh, Nur, right?

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Hector:** Alright. So, I just wanted to go over some of the details with you, make sure you're not in the dark when we meet with the PM this weekend.

**Nur:** Keep it simple, I'm kind of dumb.

*Sofia snorts.*

**Hector:** I'll do my best.

*It's quite cozy at Sofia's kitchen table. We look down on them from somewhere near the ceiling.*

**Hector:** What we really want to emphasize is that this isn't a declaration of war on Heller, and we don't want full nationalization.

**Nur:** No? Isn't that what Correstas wanted?

**Hector:** Oh, you know about Eyepatch? Yeah, I think that's what he was hoping for. But then, he's not a citizen of Nightmare, is he? And I don't have to care much for what a foreign national is hoping for, do I?

*Nur is amused.*

**Nur:** Guess not.

**Hector:** See, if we have partial nationalization, leave a few factories with SM, we can rope Heller in as a business partner,

**Hector:** keep a closer eye on her than if the Drossarina cut ties altogether,

**Hector:** and it's easier to advertise to constituents if we're not taking the hardline stance, get a bigger swathe of voters nodding their heads. Cause remember, our end goal here isn't just nationalizing the factories, it's shifting the cultural weathervane in Congress, social spending = good, see? not rocket science. The reports from the

*No more speech bubbles are shown to us, the conversation kept private, though we can still see them talking. Hector gets up, still talking as he puts a kettle on the stove. At one point, Sofia breaks out the beer, and she and Nur open a bottle each, though Hector sticks to tea. You see Sofia say something, her narrow eyes alive with mockery, and you see Hector and Nur crack open with snorts and laughs. Nur says something back, a similar kind of sharpish mocking in her face, and Sofia rolls her eyes, smiling.*

*It's cozy.*

*Eventually, Hector gets up, says something to Nur, to Sofia, and he heads out. Sofia and Nur seem a little tipsy as they call for him in protest, presumably telling him to stay. He waves them off.*

*We move outside as he walks into the artificial city-night. Sofia's house is near the Scram, and we see a great bridge crossing the river somewhere in the distance.*

*Hector moves off panel. A quiet shot of Serafine.*

*Inside, Nur is leaning out the window. She's looking out at the Scram, as lazy-looking herself as the sluggish black river below.*

**Nur:** Y'know, I've lived here for half a year. A little over. I don't think I've ever seen the river before.

**Sofia:** No shit?

*She appears by Nur's side, holding a pair of glasses with chunky red liquid.*

**Nur:** Leaving Goldgyre was always an ordeal.

*Nur adjusts where her head lies in her arms. Trying to find that comfortable sweet spot for head-resting.*

**Nur:** Or, uh, I guess it didn't have to be. I'm just a bit of a slug.

*A shot of the river, dark and unrevealing as the Dome's insides, and scabbed with detritus that occasionally catches some rogue light from the street.*

**Nur:** It's kind of dirty.



*Back to the apartment, where Sofia hands Nur one of the drinks.*

**Sofia:** Well, here's to clean rivers. Maybe someday.

**Sofia:** Strawberry daiquiris. I thought it was time to graduate from beer university for the night.

**Nur:** What's a daiquiri?

**Sofia:** Fruity alcohol thing. It tastes better.

*Nur takes a drink from her glass.*

**Sofia:** Strawberry flavoring though, you can't find real strawberries in Serafine.

**Nur:** Hey, wouldn't know the difference.

*Sofia takes a sip.*

**Sofia:** This is pretty bad, all things considered.

*Nur makes a face after her second drink from the daiquiri.*

**Nur:** Wish you hadn't said that. Tell me it's the best daiquiri in the world and that's what I'd have tasted.

*Nur downs most of the glass, then stands, ready to make the long limp to the kitchen.*

**Nur:** Well. Thought that counts. Let's make another, add more shitty flavoring this time.

*In the next panels, they loiter by the kitchen counter, and we get snapshots of conversation spoken mostly through tipsy smiles. Nur has drawn up a chair so she doesn't have to stand. The bottles of alcohol and strawberry flavoring at the counter get progressively lower with each panel.*

**Nur:** I don't get it. I sometimes look up at Weatherview, and, like, what the fuck? How could anyone live in houses that big? I don't think anyone lives there at all, and I've never been all the way up to see for myself so you can't tell me I'm wrong—

*Next Panel.*

**Sofia:** Yeah, so then they find her dead in the guy's closet, right? Overdose—

**Nur:** —fuck—

**Sofia:** —I'm telling you, I'm telling you, they're all so fucked up, they're just like those jerks from Baquino when I was a kid only now they're all actually really rich, for real—

*Next Panel.*

**Nur:** —so then he tells me, hey, don't use the good teapot, you'll break it—

**Sofia:** —What? No—

**Nur:** —no but see he's Foreseeing it, with his weird bullshit Seer powers. It's definitely going to break—

**Nur:** so I took that thing and used it anyways—

**Sofia:** Ha!

**Nur:** —and it breaks, of course, but that's his fault—

*Next Panel. Sofia seems quite drunk now, and Nur not far behind.*

**Sofia:** I'm telling you, I could make music, better music, way better than most of those pricks. Here watch—

### **Next Page**

*On this page, Sofia is banging her spoon against the glasses they used for daiquiris, and an empty beer bottle, to a little chorus of disorderly dinging.*

**Sofia:** See? Music—

*She dings harder. This panel is a close up of the spoon and the glasses.*

*Next panel, same angle: one of the daiquiri glasses shatters.*

**Sofia:** oh shit

**Next Panel:**

*Sofia's hand, soaking it up with a towel, while Nur's laughs ramble over the panel.*

**Sofia:** Okay no more dee quiris.

**Next Panel:**

*Same angle as before, a shot of the broken glass, the stained towel, the scooped up shards, but Nur and Sofia are gone.*

**Next Panel:**

*Nur and Sofia are sitting together on Sofia's couch.*

**Sofia:** ...

**Sofia:** But, you know something?

**Next Panel:**

**Sofia:** She wasn't hot air. Her songs.

**Sofia:** She was good. She was really good.

**Next Page**

*Nur stares down at her fingers, knitting in and out of each other.*

**Sofia:** We were roommates, in college, and she was in med school, undergrad, I was studying business management. She was in all these singing clubs, and she was so, so good. Even then.

**Sofia:** I told her, you—you gotta. Get the fuck out there, Lynn, sing somewhere. Take gigs at the bar, whatever, you don't have to skimp on med studies, just don't forget that none of that matters at all and you know it, it doesn't matter when you stand it next to that voice

**Sofia:** that's what I told her.

**Nur:** So she took your advice?

**Sofia:** Hah. No, Lynn was a good girl, she studied hard for med school and got into the graduate program and I guess got her masters, because we didn't see each other again for like five years.

**Sofia:** Then I get a call from her, out of the blue, and she tells me she's looking for an agent, and she hears I'm pretty good.

**Sofia:** Isn't that crazy?

**Nur:** Pretty crazy.

**Sofia:** insane

**Sofia:** And then I'm her agent. And we're going out for drinks on the weekends, we're talking, and all the stuff we had in common at college is gone

**Sofia:** but it's weird cause the fact we're different people now, totally different human beings, it's like it didn't matter. We just started over, and then we were friends again.

**Sofia:** And the crazy thing, the one that's really crazy—she got famous, and, y'know what happened after? It was—I guess five years of med school can change you but fame didn't, not with her, she just swallowed that poison like a champ and didn't even flinch.

**Sofia:** Everyone changes when they're famous, and she didn't.

**Sofia:** She was too nice, honestly. Maybe she should've changed a bit more.

**Sofia:** Like after the divorce, see, she let Benicio walk away with an even split, money, furniture, fucking crazy, I told her to string him up but—

**Nur:** Lynn was divorced?

**Sofia:** Yeah, some jerk-off she did a collab with once. Guess he had a really nice butt or something.

**Nur:** No shit? She was married?

**Sofia:** That's what I said. Yeah, he's all smiles and kisses, of course, at first. And then we find out he was all smiles and kisses with another family too. Right here in Serafine.

**Nur:** Damn.

**Sofia:** Yeah.

*A silent panel. Sofia holds up the back of her hand to her mouth.*

**Sofia:** They had it worse though, the other family. I don't blame her, or her kid. Lynn didn't either. But the fans, the ones who had swallowed Lynn like she was life-saving medicine, they were animals. The hate mail and threats, and she—her daughter was, what, three maybe? Three and a half?

**Sofia:** Can you imagine, some stranger going to all the work of tracking you down and sending a letter just to let you know you and your three-and-a-half-year-old should go die and a fire?

**Nur:** They didn't say that, did they?

**Sofia:** Hah. They were chased out of the city. Moved down south. Benicio went with them. We hear about a year later that he died in some accident, and, honestly, I wonder if he faked it, if he's off somewhere with family number three, but

**Sofia:** It was shitty. For everyone.

**Nur:** I didn't know.

*Sofia chuckles into her hand.*

**Sofia:** Lynn's fans knew, and her family knew, and I knew, and the magazines knew too, which means so did everyone else. So I guess you're pretty much the only person in the world who didn't know.

**Nur:** What happened with the other family?

**Sofia:** They lived down south for a while, but Lynn got in touch just this year. It's pretty rough in the Riviera right now, she convinced them to move up north, get out while they can. Well, they did, and Lynn gave a hand setting things up in Serafine. I think they're doing well. I never spoke with them much.

**Sofia:** I wonder if the kid's okay. Lynn said she had a hard time with moving.

**Nur:** Oh.

**Sofia:** You know. Kids.

**Nur:** I, um, yeah. I guess.

**Nur:** Were they at the funeral?

**Sofia:** Yeah.

**Sofia:** The girl took it hard. She got angry, yelled.

**Sofia:** I guess someone had to.

**Sofia:** I should call them, sometime. I really should, I just

**Nur:** The meeting?

**Sofia:** It's very convenient. I could call them, I could bus over, or I could sit in the Archive House with my pet meeting, my pet politics, and then, well, you can't blame me, right?

*A shot of the refrigerator. There's an address on it.*

**Sofia:** That's the closest I ever got. Last week, I wrote down their address.

**Nur:** I could, I dunno, I could go...

**Sofia:** What, go with me?

*She looks at Nur with a barbed kind of smile.*

**Sofia:** I don't need you to rub it in

**Nur:** I didn't mean to—

**Sofia:** No, it's alright, I

**Sofia:** yeah

**Sofia:** I didn't mean that either, I

**Sofia:** Anyways. I was never good with kids.

**Sofia:** Lynn was good with kids.

**Sofia:** The little girl, Evita, she doesn't like it in Serafine. Homesick. So here's what Lynn does, she—first chance she got, first chance she could tour down south, she took the kid with her. They went all over the Riviera, had a blast, apparently.

**Sofia:** I told you, right? She was too nice. I always told her, you're too nice, and that's not like a jokey compliment, you're really too nice, it's not a good thing, I—

**Sofia:** I wonder if that's why—

**Sofia:** God. You know what terrifies me? That guy who—when it happened, what if that was why? What if he got her attention, asked her something, what if she stopped when no one else would've stopped? What if she was too nice?

**Nur:** I don't know. Hey, Sofia—

**Sofia:** Sounds like a story they'd make up about the District. Don't make eye contact, that's when the District kids knife you!

**Sofia:** Hey, let me tell you a story.

**Sofia:** It's called, how the big famous rich boy wanted to save the world. As a hobby.

**Sofia:** And it's not one boy, but a hundred, everyone who gets a bit of money and gets their face on a magazine, and then one afternoon they decide they want to give

charity a try. We need to save those kids, you know? The kids. Those poor kids, somewhere. Like they're the only person in the world who knows that some people are rich while some people are poor and, man, isn't that just a bummer?

**Sofia:** The way they talk about the Plague District. Them and everyone else. Like they think all the crime and murder in the world is holding a senate meeting in the Dome, and it was us who elected it there.

**Sofia:** And any time they get a bit of crime in the city, its cause we let it out. Irresponsible, silly, poor little District. Fuck.

**Sofia:** I wonder what they thought when Lynn died, just down the street from the Dome. I can guess.

**Sofia:** Do you want to know who killed her? How he did it?

**Nur:** I didn't—

**Sofia:** I was kind of hoping no one would figure it out. Maybe the killer puffed up in a cloud of steam, and the wind whisked him away, like it does in the stories, and we never solve the mystery of Who Killed Lynn Villanueve—sorry, there's no one to arrest, the wind did it.

**Nur:** I

**Sofia:** I read the police report, most of it, and the coroner's report. See, they think it was an accident. He didn't mean to kill her, just stab her a little. Just a little bit. But, wouldn't you know, nicked an artery—

**Nur:** Sofia, god fucking damnit will you just—!

**Nur:** I

**Nur:** don't

**Nur:** can we talk about something else

*Sofia looks down at her feet.*

**Sofia:** What else is there to talk about?

*Nur flops her head back to rest comfortably on the top of the couch.*

**Nur:** Okay. Well

**Nur:** since I listened to you being a sadsack

**Nur:** how about you listen to me being a sadsack

*Sofia takes off her glasses and folds them up. She regrets what she said—at least, that's what the twisting knifetips of her frown say.*

*Her frown lightens.*

**Sofia:** That's fair.

**Nur:** Okay. Great.

**Nur:** Okay. Here's one.

**Nur:** Okay.

**Nur:** There was this guy, Hugo. He was a friend of mine, until I did something dumb. And now whenever I say 'Hugo, he's a friend of mine,' I have to mentally correct myself, like, 'ex-friend.'

**Nur:** So. That's a downer.

**Sofia:** Yeah, I know that feeling.

**Nur:** I go to his apartment sometimes, just to—to talk, but he's never there. I've been there three times. I was thinking of going again, after we were done tonight.

**Sofia:** So, what, are you just gonna keep paying visits to stare down a locked door for the rest of your life?

**Nur:** I could. For as long as I'm here.

**Nur:** Not like I have a busy schedule.

**Sofia:** That's the kind of band aid you want to rip off, just, take it and rip it off, Nur. Trust me, you don't want that hanging off you forever.

**Nur:** People aren't band aids.

**Sofia:** Yeah. Okay. Sometimes they are, though.

**Sofia:** But anyways. What else.

*She's lazed out on the couch in the same slack, stretched out way as Nur. She's smiling again, just a little.*

**Sofia:** Come on, let it out. One bad friendship can't be the only thing getting you all mopey.



**Sofia:** Pity party, you and me.

**Nur:** Haha, yeah, right. Sure, I got more.

*A full page shot of the two lounging on the couch. Sofia is curled up catlike, while Nur is sprawled out, her gangly legs stretching out under the coffee table.*

**Nur:** My wings are gone. I'm stuck in a human's body. I can't go home.

**Nur:** So. That still sucks.

*She and Sofia don't seem hurt or bothered by the things they talk about.*

**Nur:** Money's running out. I had a bit squared away from when I was working two jobs, but I got fired almost three months back, and Logan's is barely enough to cover Baquino.

**Nur:** I don't know what I'm doing. I'm afraid.

**Nur:** Flying was pretty cool. I miss flying.

**Nur:** Is that dumb to say? It feels a bit dumb.

**Sofia:** No way. Flying sounds fucking awesome.

**Nur:** And I had a spear.

**Sofia:** No shit?

**Nur:** Yeah, it was pretty awesome.

**Nur:** No idea where it fell when I got knocked down here.

**Nur:** I haven't seen the sun in, what, seven months? It's kind of gloomy.

**Sofia:** I like it, kind of peaceful with the lamps and the night and all, but, hey, different strokes for different folks.

**Nur:** My legs still act up. I don't know if that's something I'll live with forever, or however long forever is for a mortal's big dumb meat body.

**Nur:** I'm drunk. I know when I stop being drunk I'm gonna get all sad and mopey again.

**Sofia:** Oh, hey, me too.

**Nur:** What're the odds?

*This is all one page, one shot, their meandering chain of talk floating down around them like helicopter seeds.*

**Next Page**

**Sofia:** You're not gonna ditch me to go visit your weird ex-friend's apartment, are you?

**Nur:** I might.

**Sofia:** You're pretty drunk.

**Nur:** I'm a little drunk.

**Sofia:** Doing sad silly things like staring at a locked door is definitely something you should do sober.

**Nur:** You sure?

*Nur stands, hoisting herself up on her cane.*

**Nur:** I'm really feeling that sad silly bullshit right now. This feels like—like the perfect time for—

*She wobbles, falls back over on the couch.*

**Nur:** Sad silly bullshit.

**Nur:** Fuck, what time is it?

**Sofia:** Uh

*A tiny panel, a shot of the clock. It's a traditional clock, and the arrows point to 1:20.*

**Sofia:** It's, uh, after midnight? I think.

**Nur:** I have, I've got morning shift tomorrow.

**Sofia:** Oh, damn.

**Nur:** I could skip.

**Sofia:** If you want, but then you might spend the rest of the day in bed feeling like a big useless slug.

**Nur:** That sounds possible.

*She totters to her feet again.*

**Nur:** I think I'd—I should head back. Maybe catch a bus—

**Sofia:** There are definitely no buses right now.

**Nur:** Metro runs late, I can find a station.

**Sofia:** Hey, stay the night.

**Nur:** What?

*Sofia's stood up.*

**Sofia:** Crash on the couch. I'll grab a blanket and pillow.

**Nur:** I—no, I can get back fine, it's okay.

*Sofia disappears into the next room.*

**Sofia:** Come on, I'm not gonna let you run to the other side of the city at one in the morning, drunk off your ass and hobbling around on a cane.

**Nur:** Yeah, I, uh, I guess. Okay. You sure?

*She's back with a pillow and a thin crumpled up blanket.*

**Sofia:** Not exactly Grand Balcony but, hey

*Nur pops the pillow under her head, and gets the blanket arranged over her legs.*

**Nur:** No, it's good, I, um, thanks

*Sofia tosses a bundle of clothes on the table.*

**Sofia:** If you don't feel like going to work in nasty alcohol clothes tomorrow.

**Nur:** Oh. Thanks.

**Sofia:** Shower's over there.

**Nur:** Thanks.

*Sofia goes to the kitchen and hits the lights. All dark now, with a bit of stray orange coming in from the window.*

**Sofia:** So that's it for our pity party?

**Nur:** I think so. I'm, uh, wow.

**Nur:** Kind of exhausted.

**Nur:** I don't do this, this whole talky thing, y'know, all that often?

**Sofia:** It's good.

**Sofia:** Thanks for talking. And listening.

**Nur:** Yeah, you—you too.

**Sofia:** Hey. I know it's—it's all weird for you. I know this isn't your kind of thing, all this politics stuff.

**Sofia:** I know you might want to change your mind, if you think you can't be an angel and also be whatever the hell it is we're asking you to be for this meeting thing.

**Sofia:** If you want to back out, that's—that's okay. I know I'm drunk, but I'll still mean it in the morning when I'm sober, and the morning after that, and after that too. I know that.

*Nur does not move from where she lies on the couch. Her eyes are closed—you could mistake her for sleeping.*

**Nur:** Nah. It's okay.

**Nur:** I don't think I'm changing my mind. I don't wanna be a dick, y'know?

*Sofia lingers by the couch on her way to her bedroom.*

**Sofia:** Hey, up to you, no judging. And if you do change your mind, don't fly off to who-knows-where, or vanish on us, y'know, poof. You can still visit. You should visit, Nur.

**Nur:** Oh, shit, I guess alcohol's on me next time, isn't it?

**Sofia:** We can split.

*She bends down and kisses Nur on the forehead.*

**Sofia:** Night.

**Nur:** G'night.

*Nur is asleep, her eyes shut, her face untroubled.*

*Stinger: Hector is packing a suitcase—clothes and toiletries, and folders of paperwork.*

## Chapter 19

*Sofia's couch. On one end is the pillow, sunken-in from a night's use. The blanket is bunched up carelessly at the other end, half-drooping onto the floor. The lights are off, and the room is dark, and in Nightmare it's always night time, but the clock says 6:30 AM.*

*Shower sounds.*

*In the bathroom off to the side, Nur is getting ready for the day. The shower hisses to a stop. We leave the bathroom, and in the next panel she emerges, wearing distinctly less-than-Nur-ish clothes—loaners from Sofia.*

*She folds the blanket and sets it on top of the pillow.*

*She pauses, and glances to the refrigerator. We zoom in on the address, written on sticky-note by Sofia.*

*7 Marquita Street, Goldgyre*

*She goes over to the kitchen table, she finds a notepad, and she skritch-skirtches something with a spare blue pen. As she leaves, she sets the note down on the coffee table.*

*Nur closes the door gently, careful not to make a sound.*

*We zoom in on the note.*

*Hey,*

*Leaving for work. I'll be back sometime to give back the clothes. Come get me if you need anything.*

*Thanks*

### Next Page

*Nur is unloading several boxes of candy bars inside Logan's. Red ones, silver ones, chocolate, licorice—glittery and colorful wrappers that stand to attention on the shelves like toy soldiers.*

*These panels surround the page like a frame for a photograph, some irregularly sized, other clean simple squares. In the center of the page are close up shots as Nur reaches a package of Bluejoys. Her fingers linger on the cheery wrinkled plastic. Bluejoy! it says, with a little cartoon bird.*

*In these central panels, she sets aside a pair of them and continues to unpack.*

### **Next Page**

*A row of panels cross the top of the page—Nur hitting the lights, Nur closing up, the Anciliar Circle clock with the time, 3:30 PM, Nur’s silhouette walking down the dark-and-light Serafine street.*

*Below the panels is a shot of neat little houses on a sloping hillside road. Marquita Street, says a sign. The next shot is in a panel, and now, Nur is there, walking up to door number 7. She doesn’t hesitate as she walks up and gives the door a knock.*

*A panel of pause.*

*Nur knocks again. Another panel of pause.*

*A woman appears (“Hello?”) at the door, opening it just a crack. The chain lock is still in place. The woman is short, and her eyes are coolly armored so Nur cannot tell whether she is feeling welcoming or unhappy or anything else.*

**Nur:** Hi. Um. I’m Nur. I was—I knew Lynn.

*She raises a hand, and a pair of Bluejoy’s.*

**Nur:** I know Lynn would get these for your daughter—um—Evita, right? I know they’re kind of hard to find in the city, so

**Nur:** I don’t know if anyone’s checked in, since the funeral, and I was wondering—

**Nur:** can I come in?

**Woman (Lani):** Yeah. Sure.

*She shuts the door, then opens it again, the chain lock removed.*

**Woman (Lani):** I’m Lani.

*She shuts the door behind her.*

**Lani:** Evita!

**Lani:** She’s here somewhere.

**Lani:** Evita! You have a visitor!

**Lani:** You weren't at the funeral service.

**Nur:** I was almost there. I chickened out at the last minute.

**Lani:** That was nearly me. There wasn't anywhere on any planet I wanted to be less. Hard to believe the crowd we got, at the cemetery—who comes all this way to look at a body in a box?

**Lani:** I know some people must've bused in from out-of-province, Amanacerine, Magbalang, maybe even some northerners. There were shirts with her face on it.

**Nur:** I don't think I could've handled that.

**Lani:** I'm glad Evita made us leave early.

**Lani:** Evita!

*A bundle of scribbles and the word coming! emanate from somewhere the floor above.*

**Nur:** How old is she again?

**Lani:** Five. Almost six.

**Lani:** She's gotten so big and smart. Overnight, almost.

*Unclear if she's proud or perhaps finds this an inconvenience.*

**Lani:** You want a drink? Coffee, water, tea?

**Nur:** No, um, thanks, I'm good.

**Lani:** So you're a friend of Lynn?

**Nur:** Sort of.

**Nur:** She used to come by the place where I work. We made small talk. She'd buy things, tell me she'd see me around, then after a few days she'd be back, to, uh, see me around. That's sort of like friends, right?

*There's a friendly bit of laughter around Lani's face, not quite audible laugh sounds, but maybe the next closest thing.*

**Lani:** Sure, sure.

**Lani:** I mean, hey, some fans would've killed for that.



*Stomping noises, then a little girl with very serious eyes appears at the foot of the stairs. She watches Nur, a kind of flinty ruptured iron in her gaze, more capricious than her mothers immovable armor.*

**Evita:** Who're you?

**Nur:** Hi, Evita. I'm Nur. I knew Lynn.

*Evita gives no response, watching her warily. Nur does not seem perturbed by this*

**Nur:** Well, there isn't much I have to say. I know Lynn used to get you these—southern candy

*She holds up the Bluejoys.*

**Nur:** They're kind of hard to find, so, I thought you might want to know where she got them. It's a corner store just over on Anciliar. Logan's, big red sign right over the door. Can't miss it.

*Nur marches over and hands Evita the Bluejoys. Evita takes them. It's all rather business-like, and Evita, no longer precociously careful, now looks confused.*

**Nur:** So. Yeah. It was nice meeting you, Evita.

**Evita:** y

**Evita:** yeah

**Nur:** I, uh

*She looks at Lani.*

**Nur:** Sorry, I'll get out of your hair. Have some stuff I gotta take care of at home.

**Lani:** What? Oh. Are you—you're heading out?

*Her armor lifts a little, she seems surprised.*

**Nur:** Yeah. Gotta pack, I'm heading north in a few days. Don't want to leave it to the last minute.

**Lani:** Oh. Yeah, I understand. Well, thanks, sorry you couldn't st—

**Evita:** Hey!

*They turn to Evita. She is holding up one of the candy bars like a sword.*

**Evita:** I want you to share it with me.

**Nur:** Oh. Um. Sure.

*She looks at Lani, who has a twitching smile on her face, then walks over and takes the Bluejoy. She pops a seat on the foot of the stairs, next to Evita.*

**Evita:** Food should be shared. That's what Auntie Lynn said.

**Nur:** That's a good policy.

*They munch on the bars. In the background, Lani has gone off to the kitchen counter, busy with some kind of letter.*

**Nur:** So, um. I heard you and your mom only just moved here—moved to Serafine, I mean.

**Evita:** We've been here eleven months. I counted.

**Nur:** Do you like Serafine?

**Evita:** No!

*Nur glances across the room to where Lani has caught her eye. She makes a well-you-brought-this-on-yourself face, but doesn't move from her work.*

**Evita:** It's too big. There aren't any flowers. My swing is all the way back home, cause we had to leave it behind, cause mommy says there's nowhere to put it here. It's too crowded. It's smelly. We don't have a backyard. And now Auntie Lynn won't visit me anymore.

**Nur:** It's not—well, maybe if you, um, give it time...?

**Evita:** It's been eleven months, I counted.

**Nur:** Yeah, uh, I guess that is time.

**Evita:** Serafine is dumb.

**Nur:** uh

*Nur shrugs, gives up.*

**Nur:** Yeah, it is pretty dunb.

*Evita nods.*

**Nur:** Hey, you know, you've actually been here way longer than me.

**Evita:** No I haven't. Have I?

**Nur:** Yeah. I only arrived, like, seven, six-and-a-half months ago?

**Nur:** Maybe more like seven.

**Nur:** I'm pretty much a big useless baby, and I got used to the city, eventually. If I can, I'm sure you can, too.

**Evita:** I wanna go home.

**Nur:** Me too.

**Nur:** But my home is pretty far away. I don't think I'm going back.

*Evita looks at Nur. They've finished their candy bars.*

**Evita:** You're Nur. That's what you said.

**Nur:** Um, yeah, I'm—I'm Nur.

**Evita:** I'm Evita.

*She turns and hurries up the stairs.*

*Nur watches her go, then looks over to Lani.*

**Nur:** So, um...?

**Lani:** She approves.

**Lani:** That was good, not bringing up Lynn. I think she's tired of people telling her how sorry they are.

**Nur:** They were close?

**Lani:** Oh yeah. Lynn really looked out for that girl.

**Nur:** Were you close?

*Lani pauses her writing.*

**Lani:** We had a lot of things tying us together. We could've cut the strings and gone our own ways, said goodbye forever—but we didn't.

**Lani:** I don't know. I don't think I liked her much. I always got the impression she liked it easy. If she was nice, it was because nice was easy, and nice made people like her, and she didn't want to deal with anyone ever not liking her.

**Lani:** She was so nice to us. I'm grateful, every day, and I'm so, so sorry I never just told her, to her face, how much it meant—how much she meant to me, to Evita.

**Lani:** But I don't think I liked her. Is that shitty of me? Is that a shitty thing to say? God.

**Nur:** I don't know. I didn't know her very well.

**Nur:** You don't seem like a shitty person, but I guess I don't really know you either. No more than I knew her.

*Nur pauses, as though remembering something suddenly and all at once.*

**Nur:** Um

**Nur:** Sorry for just, I mean, just kind of waltzing in, I'll head out—

**Lani:** No it's

**Lani:** It's fine. Thanks for that, with Evita. I'm glad you came.

*Nur's gotten up. Though she marched to Lani and Evita's home, Bluejoys in hand, as certain and unhalting as a machine, she seems to have crumpled up like a candy wrapped, a creature of bony awkward angles and arm rubbing and not-quite-meeting-your-gaze.*

**Nur:** Sorry for bothering you, I'll just—

**Lani:** Really, it's—

**Nur:** It's okay, I've got, I know—

*Lani cuts in more forcefully.*

**Lani:** No, look, Nur

*She smiles, a tired smile but a true one.*

**Lani:** I appreciate it.

*Nur shoots back a wobbly thumbs up of a smile. She walks to the door, pauses, doesn't quite leave yet;*

**Nur:** See you around, Lani.

*She leaves.*

*The panels parcel out into thinner and thinner ones, then fade. The next time we see Nur, she's leaning up against a wall, her head tilted up, she's breathing deeply.*

**Nur:** Stupid.

*She's in a side alley, not an alley-where-you-get-mugged-and-killed alley, not an alley-where-you-hear-strange-footsteps-from-just-behind-you alley, but more like an alley-that-children-run-through-on-their-way-to-their-friend's-house kind of alley, with backdoors that look well used and a small row of potted flowers hanging against one of the windows.*

*Nur runs a hand over her face.*

*Behind her is a woman in an overcoat and a dress. We can't see her face. Nur's elbow is blocking it in this panel, and some part of her is blocking it in every subsequent panel.*

**Nur:** I don't know you. I never knew you. I think

*She lowers her hands, just a bit, but they stay somewhere above her shoulders, as though she's trying to hold in invisible water pouring from her temples. The hands block out the face of the woman who, from her clothes, her hair, you recognize as Lynn.*

**Nur:** I think it'd be great if you just left.

**Nur:** Okay?

**Nur:** I'm sorry.

*We see her from the side. If Lynn is still there, she is off panel.*

**Nur:** I'm leaving now.

*Nur lingers for a panel. Then another.*

*Finally, she walks off.*

## **Next Page**

*Nur is going for a walk. Down side streets. Down the main road. The shape of Weatherview, raised up above the muck and the mess of Serafine, stands higher and higher on the horizon.*

*And then Nur is at Hugo's house.*

*She looks up to where his apartment must be, somewhere on the second or third or fourth floor.*

*She stands there in the street, in the company of lamps and strangers, as though expecting something very sudden and explosive to happen to her, or to the building, or to the entire city.*

*She turns and continues on her way.*

### **Next Page**

*Three panels, grouped together in the upper left corner of the page: a bed, an open suitcase, badly folded clothes.*

*Next: Same angle, same panel, same suitcase, but a shirt's been tossed in from off-panel.*

*Nur's hands appear, dumping a plastic baggie with toothbrush, toothpaste, into the suitcase.*

*Another cluster of three, this one below the first, and grouped together on the far right: Nur at work, Nur talking with Mr. Min, Nur successfully sinking a crumpled up wad into the waste basket. She raises her hands in cool victory.*

*One last cluster at the bottom of page, in the middle: Nur, pressing the buzzer to Hugo's building. Her reward is silence.*

### **Next Page**

*Nur is at Sofia's apartment.*

**Nur:** How you feeling?

**Sofia:** Pretty shitty, but I think we've got this.

*Nur's dropped off a plastic bag full of clothes on the couch.*

**Nur:** Thanks again for the loaners.

**Sofia:** They weren't too small?

**Nur:** Everything's a bit small on me.

*Nur stretches her long arms towards the ceiling.*

**Nur:** Such is my curse.

**Sofia:** Mmh.

**Sofia:** Well, tickets are all taken care of. Hector and I'll meet you at Logan's on Saturday, around 7, then we'll take the 7:30 train to the Drossarina. Everything goes well, we should be in the capital before 1. Meeting's at 2:30.

**Nur:** Wouldn't want to lose our good daylight hours.

**Sofia:** Right.

**Sofia:** Hey, by the way, speaking of your long, lanky skeleton bod—

*Sofia picks up an elegant dress wrapped up in a wrinkled plastic laundry cover.*

**Sofia:** I picked this up from Lynn's place. It's one of her old performance gowns, but it's pretty loose, so it should fit.

*Nur looks rather like Sofia just picked up a large live lobster and asked her to swallow it.*

**Nur:** Why would I wear that?

**Sofia:** Because you probably don't want to meet the Minister Eternal in a tank top and skinny jeans?

**Nur:** That's not, no, I can just—

**Nur:** do I have to?

**Sofia:** C'mon, just try it on.

**Sofia:** Just

*The next few panels show her undressing to Sofia's haranguing as she helps her pull on the dress gown.*

**Nur:** No

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** No

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** No

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** No

**Next Panel:**

*Nur is fully dressed in a rippling silver gown, twisting around her like a whirlpool and trailing around her feet.*

**Nur:** I really can't just, I dunno, wear, um, normal human clothes?

**Sofia:** Oh, come on, you look great.

*Nur looks at herself in the mirror.*

**Sofia:** You look great.

**Sofia:** Come on. You're fucking killing it.

*Nur scratches at the back of her head. She looks away from her reflection. She's making an it's-no-big-deal kind of face.*

**Nur:** I guess.

**Sofia:** Trust me.

**Next Page**

*Back in the living room, Nur pulling her shirt back on, while Sofia has the dress bunched up in her arms.*

**Sofia:** I'll take this to a friend, he'll touch it up a bit so it fits better.

**Nur:** Okay.

**Nur:** So, um, see you Saturday?

**Sofia:** It's a date.

**Sofia:** Hey, worst case scenario, at least we get to have fun playing dress-up.

*Nur can't hold back a bit of a smile.*

**Nur:** Yeah. Should be fun.



*She leaves.*

*The next time we see her, she's on a bus. She looks up. The bus comes to a stop, and the driver announces Fifth and Avuelta. Nur makes to get up, then hesitates, then sits back down. The bus continues on its way.*

*We see a dark narrow street. The bus comes to a stop, and Nur gets off. The angle shifts, and now we see Weatherview looming over her like a gavel. Nur arrives at Hugo's apartment.*

*She presses the buzzer.*

**Nur:** Hugo. You there?

*No response. Next panel. Again:*

**Nur:** Hugo. Please.

*No response. Next panel. Again:*

**Nur:** I don't know if I'll get another chance. I'm leaving soon.

**Nur:** I don't think I'm coming back.

**Nur:** Are you there? Are you listening?

*No response.*

*Nur kicks aside a bit of litter. She waits. She squats to a seat on the curb. She waits. She waits. Without pressing the buzzer, she says, "I'm still here."*

*She settles. She waits.*

*All these panels come one after the other, not especially neat, rough at the edges and angles. She is either pressing the buzzer, or she waits.*

*She gets to her feet and hits the buzzer.*

**Nur:** I'm not going away. You can't stay in there forever—

**Voice (Hugo):** Oh. Nur.

*Nur turns. We see the back of her head, the street, and then, somewhere ahead, Hugo is limping along towards us. He looks like shit.*

**Next Page**

*Three panels, each the same size.*

**Hugo:** Hi.

*Next: He stumbles a bit, balancing himself on the wall. Nur starts forward. We've zoomed out a little, the two are smaller, the street is bigger.*

*Next: Further zoomed out. Hugo, who has slid to a seat on the ground, and Nur, who's rushed to his side. They are doll-like, several sizes too small to be more than lumps in the darkness.*

### **Next Page**

*Six panels, each the same size, same angle, same view. Each shows the door to Hugo's apartment, as seen from the inside. Three panels above, three below. An additional three panels—small and rectangular—run in the space between them, in the middle, and in the small panels we see Nur's feet shuffling as she deals with the door from the other side.*

**Voice (Nur):** Hey

*First two panels: the door, blank and unmoving. Third: there is a click.*

**Voice (Nur):** Still with me?

*Fourth: open, Nur is carrying Hugo on her back, and they make a lopsided silhouette against the light from the outside hallway. Fifth: inside the apartment, she hooks her heel against the door to push it shut behind her. Sixth: the door is shut, the apartment is dark.*

### **Next Page**

*The piggy-back-ride shape of Hugo and Nur move for the couch. Nur does not hit the lights. The floor-to-ceiling windows on the wall to her right admit sneaky glimmers of the orange-glowing city.*

**Nur:** You haven't redecorated.

*There are dishes in the sink, unwashed. The coats are hung up awkwardly on a rack by the door, with one fallen rainjacket coiled up on the ground. The wallpaper is the same blue antique wallpaper that Nur grew familiar with when she lived here, with Hugo, months and months ago, and neither the coffee table nor the couch nor the cabinets have moved an inch.*

**Nur:** You, um

*She's trying to think of something to say. Maybe something clever, or kind, or reassuring—she comes up with nothing, and from the look on her face that 'um' is agonizing.*

**Nur:** Yeah

*She sloughs him off her back, gently, onto the couch.*

**Nur:** I'll get you some ice.

**Hugo:** Ice would be nice.

*She goes for one of the kitchen drawers, then the fridge. She puts a handful of ice from the freezer into a plastic baggie.*

**Next panel:**

*Her hand resting the baggie on Hugo's face. He really looks like shit. A black eye, a split lip, a cut over his eyebrow which is sticky with half-dry blood. The ice bag covers up most of it, and flecks Hugo's skin with condensation.*

**Nur:** What happened?

*He reaches into his jacket.*

**Next panel:**

*He is showing her the music box.*

*The music box: delicate patterns of silver give life to the margins and edges, but otherwise the outside is relatively unobtrusive. Inside, wrapped in a labyrinth of curling patterned lines, there is a tiny silver face, its mouth open as though frozen mid-singing.*

*Hugo has popped it open, and the box begins to play.*

**Nur:** Oh Hugo. Why do you still have that thing?

**Hugo:** I like the tune. It's pretty, isn't it?

**Nur:** You've kept it all this time?

*Hugo is smiling vaguely as he looks down at his hands.*

**Hugo:** I lost the mandolin a few days ago. But the box hasn't beat me yet.

*Nur is sitting on the floor, her back against the couch.*

**Nur:** You dummy.

**Hugo:** Man, but when those things are together—it's like electricity.

**Hugo:** Cause you know every force in the universe is trying to pull them apart. Destiny is working against you, like the turning of the planet, but you can hold tight, and as long as you hold tight the universe can go eat a dick. Anything is possible.

**Hugo:** Which is cool. It's a cool feeling.

**Nur:** But the mandolin is gone.

**Hugo:** Yeah. That was a bummer.

**Hugo:** But not the box. Not yet.

**Nur:** You're hurt.

**Hugo:** It's harder to stay ahead. Harder to keep the box out of reach. I don't know when they're coming anymore, or what they look like, or what the next step or next next step should look like.

**Hugo:** But I'm a tough cookie. I can deal.

**Nur:** You can, huh?

*Her head's fallen back against the couch, her neck exposed, her uncovered eyes looking to Hugo behind her.*

**Hugo:** I guess it's a gut-reaction kinda thing. When the world is trying to throw you off, you can't help holding tight, right?

**Hugo:** I'm not ready to let go.

*Nur's fingers trace against Hugo's arm.*

**Nur:** They hurt you.

**Hugo:** Yeah. But I've still got the box.

**Nur:** Are you still living in motels?

**Hugo:** Sometimes. Sometimes I'm here. I shouldn't, but I didn't like staying away from home so much.

**Nur:** It's gotten messy. You were always up my ass about leaving my clothes on the ground, or leaving the dishes unwashed.

**Hugo:** Haha. Sorry. I promise I'll be more understanding to slobs from now on.

*Pan out. Look at the apartment. A gloomy blue thing, it's hard to imagine what it'd look like with the lights on.*

**Nur:** I've had a few different homes in Serafine. This place. The place right after, with the roommates—

**Hugo:** *Laughing* Oh shit, I almost forgot about that. God, those guys were dicks—how long did you last again?

**Nur:** Two weeks, I think. Fucked out of there pretty quickly. Then Goldgyre, then the District...

**Nur:** Gotta say though, your place takes the cake as the most depressing home I've ever had. You really can't—I dunno—change the wallpaper?

**Hugo:** Ah. Well...there's something nice about having a piece of life that stays the same. Always just...the same. Same wallpaper. Same bed. Same leak in the roof.

**Hugo:** You're right though, I've gotten a bit sloppy.

**Next panel:**

**Hugo:** The future, see, it's changing, always changing. Sometimes you tell a prophecy, and you think it's a good one, and maybe you're a little proud you know something that no one else does.

**Hugo:** But then you make another one. It doesn't make sense, this prophecy and that one—the futures are arguing, they don't fit, two melodies turning each other sour, and you start getting worried cause each new one turns your tunes into awful dins and the more you learn the more lost you are, and now you're afraid of telling new fortunes, you start second guessing yourself, you make excuses.

**Hugo:** But you still gotta pick through the strings, cause that's your job, that's why you got that shiny license on your wall from the Office of Prophecy, cause damn you didn't take all those night classes in Futurology for nothing, right?

**Nur:** That's not really what it's called, is it?

*Hugo smiles.*

**Hugo:** Well. It doesn't matter much now. The immaterial has become immaterial, right? Haha.

*One hand holding the ice pack to his face, he stretches out the other and gives it a vague wave towards the ceiling. He holds it for moment, then lets it fall to his side.*

**Hugo:** Nur. How was your day?

**Nur:** It was okay.

**Hugo:** Really?

**Nur:** Yeah. Not so bad. My best friend got the shit beat out of him. I had to drag him home. It was his fault though, for being a self-destructive pinhead.

**Hugo:** Haha. Ouch.

**Nur:** So then we hung out for a bit. I put on some tea. It was a long way back to my apartment, so he let me crash at his place for the night.

*We go to Hugo's face.*

**Hugo:** Yeah. That sounds right.

*Nur smiles, a bit of a goofy, tiny, accidental smile.*

**Nur:** Tea in the usual place?

**Hugo:** Yep.

*A gap in the panels—time passes, a few seconds, a few minutes maybe. We move over the the kitchen counter, where Nur has ignited the stove.*

**Nur:** I got into alcohol, just a bit.

**Hugo:** No shit?

**Nur:** No shit.

**Hugo:** I gotta know—what kinda drunk are you? Sad track? Angry drunk? Party drunk?

**Nur:** Hmm. Melodramatic drunk, I guess?

**Hugo:** Hahaha. Oh man. I can see it.

**Nur:** What kind of drunk are you?

**Hugo:** I take that secret to my grave

**Nur:** C'mon you jerk, I told you mine.

**Hugo:** No, it's—um, it's a bit—I don't get drunk, not really, just a little tipsy. I don't *drink* drink.

**Nur:** Hugo, you're being a little gremlin, don't blueball me—

*Another gap between one row of panels and the next.*

*When they resume, we've moved back to the couch, where Nur and Hugo are seated.*

**Nur:** ...So then she made me put on this dress, this crazy silver thing that drags on the ground and has all these moving parts, and I guess it was kind of dumb to think I could go meet the Prime Minister in my tank top but still—

**Hugo:** Wow. And this was after you popped in on the Dome?

**Nur:** Yeah. I don't think I'd go back, it's kind of creepy.

**Hugo:** Yeah, no joke! God, you always get mixed up in the weirdest shit.

**Nur:** Well. The god I met was nice. I know how lonely she must be up there. Maybe I'll go back. Maybe.

*They're both drinking tea from tiny flowery cups.*

**Nur:** Hey, Hugo. Um. I don't mean to—well, I know this is kind of—

**Hugo:** What?

**Nur:** When you—back then, before, did you ever See me dying? Did you ever See my death?

*He's not exactly smiling.*

**Hugo:** Before it all went—well, before.

*The cloud passes from his face, he has that usual almost-smile on his face again.*

**Hugo:** No, never. Anyways, that's not how prophecy works.

**Nur:** What?

**Hugo:** Lotta rules to this kind of thing, but here's the big one: prophecy can't tell you when you're gonna die. A good prophet could tell you when you might wish for

death, when you might see death right in front of you, but no one could tell you the day you're set to die.

**Nur:** You predicted Lynn's death. You Saw it.

**Hugo:** I Saw a death in your future. I Saw where it touched all the other strings that pulled tight around your life. But there was no way of knowing whose it was, who was dying.

**Hugo:** Y'know the little things, right? The small things I used to predict, the show-offy stuff. When we found the music box, how I knew the guy had it in his jacket, and not his pants or his backpack. How I knew where hidden things liked to hide. How I stayed a step ahead of people, when I wanted to. Before. Small stuff. The 101 stuff.

**Nur:** I—no, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have brought it up, Hugo, I—

**Hugo:** I'm not trying to guilt trip you. Or

**Hugo:** I'm trying not to, at least. I don't want to hurt you Nur.

**Hugo:** I'd like you to understand.

*We zoom in on the music box.*

**Hugo:** There're the small things. Not prophecies, not really. You follow patterns, you take your Sixth Sense and your Third Eye and you feel around for interesting knots and dangling threads. Then you keep feeling them, you see where they lead you.

*We zoom in on Nur's face.*

**Hugo:** Feel them.

*The background behind her is black—not a large departure from the background of the dusky apartment, but now she's holding a silvery thread between her fingers.*

**Nur:** I feel them.

**Hugo:** Bumps, whorls. Little things people left tangled in the string.

*Nur is feeling at a flower tangled into the thread, like the one in the bookmark from Lynn's book. Her face is the face of a sleepwalker.*

**Nur:** I feel them.



**Hugo:** It's the little things. At first. You keep following the strings, one, then two, then seven, then a hundred, hopelessly knotted, more than it feels like you can count.

**Hugo:** More than anyone could count.

*Strings. We are not in the apartment anymore—we are in a world of string, a spiderweb of white in a throat of blackness.*

**Hugo:** It's no use.

*Nur is looking down at the strings around her. The strings bind her up almost completely, and one, held gently in both her hands, is tight around her neck.*

**Hugo:** Follow the strings, and this is where they lead, always. A hopeless infinity.

**Hugo:** That's why we give prophecies.

**Hugo:** You take them all up, a handful of mysteries going who-knows-where, and you pinch them down at a single point, and a single person, one intersection.

**Hugo:** One person.

**Hugo:** One prophecy, one person.

*These pages show her in that dark place, the black empty throat, sitting alone. We see her hands, feeling at the threads, or holding them together in a bunch.*

### **Next Page**

*Pitch black. Nur is alone, and she holds the threads of prophecy.*

**Hugo:** The light of the prophecy pulls the strings taut and clear on a single point.

*The strings are pulled tight in one clear pinch between Nur's fingers.*

**Hugo:** Death can only be found at the end of a string, where a prophecy can never reach.

**Hugo:** A prophecy needs a before, and an after.

**Hugo:** There's always something else. That's the nature of the prophecy. It's a promise. The things that happened before were meaningful. There was a before, and if you fight through it, there will be an after.

### **Next Page**

*We go to Hugo, inside the apartment.*

**Hugo:** You get me?

*We go to Nur. We cannot see her face.*

**Nur:** I hope I didn't rip you off when you read my fortune for free.

*Hugo's face is as soft as the filament that wraps up an egg yolk. He isn't smiling.*

**Hugo:** Special discount.

*Nur gets up, taking the empty cup from Hugo. Their fingers graze as the cup goes from his hands to hers.*

**Nur:** I'll get us s'more.

*She returns to the kitchen. Hugo keeps talking.*

**Hugo:** I really liked being your friend, Nur.

*Nur's back is to him as she turns the stove back on.*

**Nur:** I liked being your friend too.

**Hugo:** I'm glad. I just wish— but it's all so messed up now. And—

**Hugo:** Hey, Nur?

**Nur:** Yeah?

**Hugo:** Can we pretend? Just for tonight? Can we act like nothing happened? Can we stop all this talk about death and prophecy and shit and—

**Hugo:** It won't be long. Just for the night.

*Nur appears next to him with a pair of steaming refills.*

**Nur:** That'd be nice.

*She takes a seat next to him. We see her say something, and we see him smile, though their speech bubbles are no longer available to us.*

*We see her pull her legs up beneath her and settle in more comfortably on the couch. We see Hugo talk, and we see Nur laugh the tiniest little laugh.*

*We are zooming out. We're zooming out more. We're looking out the tall clear windows, down at the city beneath.*

### **Next Page**

*The same view as before, out the window to Hugo's apartment, a repeated panorama of the living glowing streets of Serafine.*

*In the next panel, we see Nur's reflection in the glass.*

*Zoom out.*

*She's looking out the window, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders.*

*Zoom out. A cup of tea in her hand. By the couch, Hugo is asleep.*

*Nur turns and approaches the couch. She takes one last sip, a silent one, careful not to make any noise as she sets it down empty on the floor. With the slow and delicate inevitability of a volcano's mid-eruption collapse as seen from miles away, she climbs over Hugo's body and onto the couch. Her long spidery arm goes around Hugo's shoulders, which are rather thin and small and easy to hug without that poofy orange jacket. She doesn't let go.*

*There are dark shapes in Hugo's blue vampire apartment, and she falls asleep with her arms around him.*

### **Next Page**

*Hugo's eyes flicker open.*

*We go to a clock. It says 7:45 AM. The streets outside are brighter and yellower.*

*We go to Hugo on the couch. A blanket has been draped over his shoulders, and he's alone.*

*He wanders around his apartment. He hits the lights. He pokes his head into one of the rooms. He walks the walk of someone who has just survived a great explosion, and does not know yet whether his legs can be trusted.*

*On the kitchen counter, he finds a note.*

Hi Hugo

I was hoping I could spare you an awkward goodbye. If we had to do this in person, I'm not sure I'd be able to say these things out loud. There's something nice about how personal a bit of writing can get without making everything all weird, y'know?

The music box is with me. Try not to pull any more dumbass stunts. You're better than that. Even if this is it, kaput, we're never meeting again, we forget all this bad shit and each other and move on for good, I think, somehow, it would make me sad if you went and died.

I don't know how to end this letter, and I'm afraid if I keep writing I'll chicken out and not leave you anything at all, so I guess I'll just say

Goodbye and thank you and good luck.

—Nur

*We see him from behind, and we do not see his face. He holds on to the counter for support.*

*Stinger: A pair of empty teacups sit empty on the floor at the foot of Hugo's couch.*

## Chapter 20

*We are looking out over the city from behind a razor tall tower, one we have seen only occasionally on the Serafine skyline. It is not Millarose, and the Dome is a bump in the faraway distance—this building is segmented and skinny and protrudes great cranes and wires like some bizarre installation-art chandelier. Tiny red lights blip along the sides, like the lights on an airport runway.*

*In the city, Nur is waiting alone in the yellowy-gray light of Anciliar circle. Buildings are indistinct blobs. It's misty today, and overcast. Up above, dark tufty smoker's lung clouds hang low over the city.*

*Sofia and Hector appear out of the darkness. Sofia waves. Nur picks up her suitcase and hurries towards them. The mist parts at her movement.*

*We see them on a bus. Sofia and Nur are talking, quietly and carefully as one talks in an empty church. Hector is cool as a cucumber, looking off out the window as though this day is not different than any other. They are saying things too private for speech bubbles.*

*Now they are at the foot of a tower.*

*A sleek glass elevator brings them higher and higher, and the city shrinks and shrinks. They're at a desk now, a sign for Gate 3B printed neatly overhead. They speak with the attendant, and then they're in another elevator. Higher and higher and higher and higher.*

*They pass into the clouds.*

*Long crane-like extensions jut off into the blurry distance. Wires cut near-invisibly through the haze. Great round shapes, like the bellies of monsters, hang impossible in the clouds. Then they're on a wind-tossed platform, one with a long way to fall, and Nur is looking around with interest as Sofia and Hector lead her to one of the cranes. An enormous curved silhouette is lit up by infrequent blinking lights somewhere ahead. The clouds open up—we see that curved shape is just a part of a massive zeppelin, hovering half-doused in darkness. The crane—an escalator anchored to the central tower by safety wires—starts at the wind-struck platform and leads up to the zeppelin.*

*They ride the escalator suspended in the mouth of oblivion, black clouds all around. The lamps on the sides of the escalator pass them by like ghosts in a crowd. Nur, Sofia, and Hector arrive at the entrance to the zeppelin cabin.*

*Zoom out. We see the zeppelin, and the indistinct suggestions of several others scattered around the airport tower. One zeppelin stirs, and takes off into the black.*

*Nur looks out her window. The clouds muffle but don't quite hide the spiderwebbing orange streets of Serafine below.*

*Sofia leans in and says something to Nur, who smiles.*

*Hector is reviewing his notes.*

*The zeppelin gains altitude. The countryside of Nightmare is now largely invisible in the dark, but trails of lights meander across the belowground like crumbs fallen from a child's pocket. Occasionally, an oasis of orange or yellow blossoms in the miles-away soil.*

*A flight attendant comes by with snacks. Sofia gets a sandwich, and splits a candy bar with Nur.*

*The next page is solid black, save for the tiny form of the zeppelin in the clouds.*

*The next page, it's gone, just black featureless sky.*

### **Next Page**

*Nur is sleeping, her head resting gently on Sofia's shoulder. Sofia nudges her.*

**Sofia:** Hey, sleepyhead. We're here.

*Her eyes slit open.*

*The next time we see them, they are walking down an escalator to a tower very much like the one in Serafine, though this one is perhaps more embellished, with arcing buttresses and pretty lamps. The lights here are a hard cool white, very unlike the glowing yellow of Serafine.*

**Sofia:** You ever come here? As an angel?

**Nur:** Don't think so. Maybe.

*They emerge from the base of the tower.*

*This is Nur's first glimpse of the streets of the Drossarina. They are long and flat, and the buildings are square and stone and old. Lamps cast white light over the capital, and railways run above the square-tiled streets. There are, perhaps, more ghosts, more gods, more things of the night in the capital than there were in Serafine, visible in the sidelines. Where Serafine's buildings boasted skins of bright colored plaster, the Drossarina is stately church-stone, grey and beige, excepting for the occasional structure of tall black metal.*

*On the city skyline: the ferris wheel of the boardwalk district, the train station, the rooftops of the Drossarina's many churches, the spires of the Minister's Palace.*

*At their hotel, Nur and Sofia are getting dressed.*

**Sofia:** —and of course we'll have plenty of time for playing tourist, afterwards.

**Nur:** Hmm. I don't know if I'm the tourist type.

*Nur seems lost in thought.*

**Sofia:** The lakefront is nice, and of course we'll have to show you the Pearl—I'm going to force you to have fun, Nur, if it's the last thing I do.

**Nur:** Good luck with that.

*There's a knock at the door.*

**Voice (Hector):** Car's here. I'll meet you downstairs.

**Sofia:** Yeah, see you in a bit.

*She buttons the last button and pulls on her jacket.*

**Sofia:** I look good, right?

**Nur:** hm?

*Nur stirs from her thoughts, as though Sofia's words are coming to her from across an immeasurable distance. Then she meets Sofia's eyes and smiles, her cheeks maybe coloring a little.*

**Nur:** Yeah. It's, um—it looks nice.

**Sofia:** You and your flattery.

**Nur:** um

*Nur struggles a bit with the gown's zipper*

**Nur:** Hey, help zip me up?

*Nur gives Sofia her naked back, and Sofia helps with the dress.*

**Sofia:** Big day.

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Sofia:** *in a tiny under-her-breath speech bubble* damn, zipper's stuck, wait

**Sofia:** How're you feeling?

**Nur:** I'm okay.

**Sofia:** You sure? Just that you, ah, seem a bit—a bit far away.

**Nur:** Yeah? Well, you said it, it's a big day. And we're pretty far from Serafine. Far away.

*A long ziiiip as Sofia cinches up the dress.*

**Sofia:** It'll be over soon.

**Nur:** Yeah.

**Sofia:** And then, the rest of the day—paid vacation. Courtesy of Hector's office, of course.

**Nur:** That sounds nice.

*Sofia's fingers linger on the top of the dress and the base of Nur's neck.*

**Sofia:** There.

**Nur:** Thanks.

*They stand there for a second, quietly. Nur's eyes are closed, as she leans in a little into Sofia's arms.*

**Next Panel:**

**Nur:** So

**Nur:** um

**Nur:** we're getting a car?

**Sofia:** From the Lady herself. I'll see if we can get them to drive us around the boardwalk after.

**Sofia:** And if there's anything you want to talk about, afterwards...

**Nur:** Yeah. Afterwards.



*They slip from each others' touch. Nur glances at herself in the mirror, a smile flickers across her lips.*

**Nur:** How do I look?

**Sofia:** Pretty great.

**Nur:** Better than you?

*Sofia laughs. The panels break apart, and then at the bottom of the page we see a car bumping down the Drossarina's streets.*

### **Next Page**

*A tall open hallway. Gilded pillars bloom like flowers against a velvet red wall. Nur, Hector, and Sofia are sitting, waiting.*

*A girl in a clean-pressed suit opens the inhumanly vast door.*

**Aide:** They're ready.

*Hector goes first, followed by Sofia, and then Nur, limping along with her cane.*

*The throne room of Lady Duermo:*

*It is a long carpeted hallway, flanked by colorful pillars that are thin at the bottom and swell fatter and fatter as they rise to the ceiling. They are colorfully patterned, and a ring of lanterns surrounds each pillar near the bottom, at hip-level.*

*We cannot see beyond the light of the lanterns. Instead of walls, there is darkness, and occasionally inside that darkness we see the outer edges of great swathes of fabric, like drapes, or the world's most oversized dress. The three walk down the hall, slowly and deliberately, and the limping Nur a little awkwardly. They reach the end of the room.*

*There is a throne at the head of the throne room, plush and comfortable and padded with leather. Many hundred of times bigger than whoever that seat was originally meant for is the Prime Minister, Lady Duermo, large as a building, a shroud draped over her body that suggests shoulders, legs, a head, etc, underneath. There is a gap in the shroud, through which a single pale arm protrudes, and through which we can see a single one of her curved, appraising eyes—the eyes of a judge. She is lounging comfortably on her side, behind the vacant throne, head resting gently on her knuckles.*

*Below her are several official-looking men and women. Senators.*

*Duermo is tall and grand the way mortal kings delude themselves to be, and when she speaks, her text is rendered as one might render the soft and ringing growl of a wolf.*

Miss Camillagrantz. Senator Namayan. And friend. I hope your trip was pleasant.

*Sofia gives a bow just low and long enough to be polite, while Hector's greeting is deep and performatively respectful. Nur nods.*

**Hector:** Madam Prime Minister. It was fine, thank you.

**Hector:** Hey Jose. Jude, Encar.

**Senator (Encarnación):** Hey Hector.

*Some of the others nod to him, or smile. Duermo waves a single car-sized hand.*

Well, don't keep me waiting, my loves. I have a busy day ahead, and no doubt you're eager to start.

**Hector:** Right. So, business. We all know that sooner or later Heller's going to come knocking for the old Sunshine Mechanica facilities.

**Senator (Jude):** We've heard the usual populist prattle. That land is SM property. You really want to just tear up a private sector contract, lawfully signed? Government overreach, Hector, the coalition would never.

**Hector:** And I'm sure many of our coalition friends are being nicely compensated in SM dollars for their indignation.

**Hector:** But these aren't ordinary 'lawful' circumstances. 'Lawful' companies don't swell to eat up half the galaxy. 'Lawful' companies aren't steeped head to toe in organized crime. 'Lawful' companies certainly don't award their chief executive position via murder. Heller went and decapitated SM, and now she's propping up the headless body and acting like it can still walk and talk.

You want to seize the assets, of course.

**Sofia:** Not entirely, ma'am. We're proposing a bit of both, a diplomatic solution—

*We go to Nur. We go to her eyes, which are lost in something similar to thought. She is gazing down and just slightly to the left. When we pan out again, the speech bubbles of Hector, Sofia, and the senators are blank, and their conversation does not reach us, or Nur.*

## Next Page

*Nur is in a black and featureless background. She holds between her fingers a press of strings, pulling off in every direction, around her arms, around her neck.*

*In the next panel, we go to her face, and the words of Lady Duermo have intruded into this dark place.*

Is that so?

## Next Page

*Nur looks up, back in the throne room.*

Divine approval, in Serafine. Now that's intriguing. And what do you have to say, Miss Divine Approval?

*Hector glances at her, cool but maybe a little wary. Sofia does not take her eyes from Lady Duermo.*

**Senator (Jose):** Hector, you're not serious, this is the divine approval you—?

“Senator Arroyo. I asked the good lady a question. Please, let's not be rude.”

**Nur:** Well...

*All eyes are on Nur.*

**Nur:** I've spoken to them in private. I heard them out. I've thought long and hard about this, about what it is that made Sofia Camillagrantz and Lynn Villanueve feel so strongly, and believe what they do. I've thought long and hard about the two of them.

**Nur:** In my capacity as an angel of the Host, with my authority as a Beatific Mystery commissioned by the Lord at the dawn of time, I've given Miss Camillagrantz my divine blessing, as is my right.

Well, those are certainly the right words. But you'll forgive me if I point out you don't look particularly angelic.

**Nur:** It's alright. You're right.

**Nur:** Give me a second.

*Hector is expressionless. Sofia is watching the Minister.*

*Nur moves as though to pick something up, though, at first glance, there is nothing in her hands. Then, she raises her hands to her head, and crowns herself with the power and the glory of an angel's halo.*

*The room changes. From where the halo sits on Nur's head, the whole world seems to bend and contort, the way a paper napkin contorts when it is pierced by a stick. The halo radiates divinity—words of divinity, symbols of divinity, divine light.*

*When Nur speaks, her voice is tinted by the halo.*

**Nur:** I am an angel of the Host, a Beatific Mystery brought into being before there was time or space or gods, when the foundations of the universe were yet to be laid.

*Sofia is looking at her now. Nur meets her gaze, and gives Sofia a wide open smile. Look at her glow. She's fucking beautiful.*

**Nur:** I give no commands, I give no promises, I give no certainty of success. I give only my blessing, which I believe has been earned. Make of that what you want.

*A trickle of blood runs down Nur's temple.*

**Sofia:** nur

*The senators stand rigid like tenpins staring down a bowling ball.*

If you would remove your halo, dear angel. I fear my senators might piss themselves, or faint, and we really do have a lot to get done today after we're finished with you all.

**Nur:** Sure.

*She takes her halo. It knifes through her fingers as the divine radiance fades. When she lowers her hands, the halo is gone, and her finger tips are scarred and bleeding.*

*Hector retains his composure. His speech bubbles and his words are half transparent, barely visible, and he is a mere shape in the background.*

**Hector:** To summarize—nationalizing some of the factories, while leaving others under SM's wing, would open up new business sectors and revitalize the economy as the near identical Barragan Stimulus Plan did in 1232. The Drossarina keeping an eye on Heller, is wiser in the long run than cutting all ties, which is why we support only partial nationalization. Polling suggests majority support in the Fen Province, the Rivierra, Magbalang, and my own Las Vives.

*This panel focuses on Nur, her back to us, and Lady Duermo, watching Nur carefully from behind the throne.*

I think you've made your case, Senator Namayan, Miss Camillagrantz. We'll have to discuss this further, Hector, but I think, in the meantime, you can go.

*She gestures to the other senators.*

I would like to speak with our angel in private.

*They file out of the throne room. Sofia reaches out to touch Nur's arm.*

**Sofia:** I'll see you in a bit.

*Nur reaches out as well, and for just a moment slips her fingers between Sofia's.*

*And then she's gone.*

*Duermo and Nur are alone now.*

My love. Why did you do that?"

*We start to see just how badly the halo has affected her. Bloody, weak.*

**Nur:** Why bother with this? I know you like Hector's plan. I can tell. Why please the peanut gallery?

That's what you want to know? That's what's on your mind right now? The complications of running a coalition government?

**Nur:** Curious, I guess. I imagine Vienna wouldn't have gone through this whole talk show routine. If she knew what was right, and what was wrong.

No? And she would know right from wrong, would she? Would I?

Politics is a game of waiting, but perhaps, in her case, less so. She is a brassy little human, I must say. And I am no human.

I, who am one of the great immortal spirits, lord of evening and night."

I, Prime Minister Eternal, executive chief, who across this world of Nightmare is loved and feared and hated and admired.

For better or worse, I am their passion. But, you understand, my love, I am a god, not a ruler. A ruler could sweep aside her dissidents, yes. I could raise my right hand and turn them to ash. I could send government goons to their homes in the dead of night, and spirit them away to some nameless prison in the Yawning Sea, and they would never again know what it's like to breathe open air as free men.

But then I would stop being a god, wouldn't I? A proper god, of faith and passion, shouldn't need such crude methods. So for now, I pay the price of divinity.

**Nur:** I wondered. That sounds right. That's what a god should say. But it can be hit or miss, whenever a god gets all mixed up in the mortal world. Phantoms too.

*Nur looks like she could collapse at any second.*

**Nur:** The Council's got a guy here. You know that? The First Seat. He was pumping money into the nationalization camp. If that matters.

That little worm? A daring move. A stupid one.

**Nur:** I never got that. You guys get weird when you stick your fingers in human stuff. A god in government. A phantom trying to knock down a corporation. Angels, we like being mysteries. We keep our distance. We know our place.

Is that so? Is that why you wear a human's body?

Dear angel. You're bleeding.

**Nur:** Humans bleed. It's okay.

Dear angel. Let me tell you something.

If you really hate this mortal world, that mortal body, that mortal life, it's not impossible to go back. It won't be the same—a little faded, a little off, a little strange—but you could have wings again. Few things are lost forever, if you can accept them when they come back to you in a different color and a different shape.

Or you could live a mortal life. Which is a worthy thing too, as worthy as smiting demons.

But nothing can come from ending your story here.

**Nur:** i can't feel my legs

*Blood continues to drip from some unseen injury behind her hair. Her eyes are like glass.*

There's no shame in living.

*We see the scars on her fingers as her grip loosens, the cane falls, Nur collapses.*

*The next few pages are black, pitch black, with disembodied dialogue*

**Nur:** I can't remember—it's all gone on without me. It's gone somewhere I can't go.

**Nur:** I can't remember what it feels like to hold a planet in my hands, and feel its every last living thing against my skin. I can't remember what the galaxy looks like from the eyes of an angel. I can't remember the grip of my spear in my fingers, or the warmth of my halo...and my halo, all I can think of now is how sharp those edges are.

**Nur:** Lady Duermo...you've seen it, haven't you? You've seen the City on the Mountain, the long cosmos, the face of the Lord...

I have, dear angel.

**Nur:** tell me

### Next Page

*It is black. Nothing but their voices.*

Creation stretches out like a hand. It is in every color, and in it is every possibility. It branches as trees and veins branch, forever. You could spend decades, centuries, just...watching it. Watching what they build.

**Nur:** yes

When you stand there to watch, standing where only a divine could stand, you, an angel, you can hold all of it in just one eye. It is marvelous, isn't it?

**Nur:** it is

The City on the Mountain has had a few changes in recent decades. They have convenience stores now. Fast food joints. A few years ago the phantoms set up some good quality radio towers, so now there's radio. There's a charming little comedy broadcast I quite enjoy.

**Nur:** no shit?

But, mostly, it is the same. The curtains that hang over the City, stirring so faintly in the wind, the sound they make like you're surrounded by toothless snakes.

**Nur:** of course.

Every night the Immortal Procession walks from the foot of the mountain to the old crater. Their rolling shadows kiss over every building in the land.

And the face of the Lord...the face of someone who knows you down to the molecule, a face that understands your every atom and adores you for it, a face you can't

help but fall deeply and terribly in love with. Mortals know it only through leaps of faith. But we have seen it with our own eyes, haven't we?

Do you remember?

**Nur:** oh, my lady. it's

**Nur:** lovely

### **Next Page**

*As she lies on the ground, we see Vienna crouching behind her.*

**"Vienna":** Is that it? You're leaving already?

**Nur:** It doesn't matter, does it? That's just what humans do. We leave.

**"Vienna":** Dummy. Of course it matters.

*Nur's mouth opens and closes, a fish out of water, gulping unbreathable air. Her lips are red with blood, and her eyes are dripping wet.*

**Nur:** i don't want to die

That is wise of you.

That is brave to admit.

Let me help you, my love.

*The rustle of Duermo's shroud. Nur's trembling body disappears beneath the goddess's cloak.*

*Rather than a stinger: a page of black.*



## Epilogue

*Sofia is sitting alone in a chair. The hallway is empty. Pale lamps replicate the cool yellowy light of early morning, though the windows show only night outside, and white city lights.*

*Sofia is reading from a book.*

**Nurse:** Hey. Miss Camillagrantz?

**Sofia:** How is she?

**Nurse:** She's taken a beating, but it could be worse. Definitely could be worse.

*The nurse is casual in the way only veterans and rookies can be.*

**Nurse:** That girl's record is something else. Three hospitalizations in the last month alone—her body won't like it, that's for sure. We've got her patched up for now, but she isn't out of the woods just yet.

**Sofia:** Do you know when she'll wake up?

**Nurse:** No, I'm sorry.

*We do not zoom in particularly close. Sofia and the nurse are rough gesture figures in the tealish yellow hospital lighting.*

**Nurse:** She's stable, but honestly, we could see a relapse any day now. We're hopeful though. Tentatively hopeful.

**Nurse:** Would you like to see her?

**Sofia:** I would. Is that alright?

**Nurse:** Hey, you got clearance from the Prime Minister, I'm not stopping you.

**Nurse:** Just this way.

*They walk off panel.*

*We go inside a dark room, looking ahead at a door and a well-lit hallway beyond.*

*Then, the nurse and Sofia are there, pushing it open.*

**Nurse:** Buzz me if you need anything.

**Sofia:** Thanks.

*Sofia takes a seat next to Nur's bed. She is asleep, her head has been shaved, stitches running down awful cuts along her skull. A nasal cannula sits snugly beneath her nose, and an IV runs from the hollow of her arm to a bag of vague hospital fluids near the bed. Her eyes are shut.*

**Sofia:** Hi.

**Sofia:** You know, I think I liked your old haircut better. But you could make the short cut work. You've got a good face for it.

*She puts her hand over Nurs.*

**Sofia:** I'm thinking, when you wake up, we still have to check out the Capital Pearl. It's pretty fucking incredible, going up, and up, and up, and when you get to the top of the ferris wheel, the very top—

**Sofia:** It's something else.

**Sofia:** There's a lot to do around here. They have ferries that go out into the lake, that's always fun. I always see you in the same clothes, whenever we see each other. Maybe we should go shopping.

**Sofia:** When you wake up.

*We see Nur's face, we look down on her from above. She looks peaceful.*

**Sofia:** I can't wait forever. Busy schedule, you know, lots of clients. I've been taking calls all day. Next week one of my singers has to sign a new deal with some radio company. Aritas City. I'll have to catch a flight sometime Friday.

**Sofia:** So you'll have to wake up soon. Sooner, not later.

*We see their hands, Sofia's thumb rubbing the inside of Nur's palm.*

**Sofia:** I don't know if Northern style food is your thing, but they have some great restaurants here.

**Sofia:** We'll have time to try a few.

*The final panel: Nur's hand stirs, and she holds Sofia's hand just a bit tighter.*

**Sofia:** We'll have plenty of it.