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brief

THE

SANDMAN™

lives



written by

NEIL GAIMAN



illustrated by

JILL THOMPSON



and

OBII

VINCE LOCKE

THINGS UNLOOKED-FOR - ANSWERED PRAYERS - THE FLOWERS OF ROMANCE - JOURNEY'S END - THE GATES OF HORN



BRIEF LIVES

HE HAS HARDLY SLEPT THIS NIGHT.



COLD TEARS ON HIS FACE WOKE HIM; THE POSITION OF THE STARS TOLD HIM THAT ONLY MINUTES HAD PASSED.



AT ONE POINT HE DRIFTED OFF INTO A DREAM, IN WHICH HE WAS TEACHING HIS GRANDCHILDREN TO SING A SONG HIS CHILDREN HAD LOVED. HIS WIFE STOOD BEHIND THEM, AND SMILED INDULGENTLY.

HE WATCHED THE LIGHTS IN THE HOUSE ACROSS THE BAY FOR SEVERAL HOURS.

LATER THERE WERE TINY FIGURES MOVING IN THE GARDEN. AND LATER STILL, A SHOOTING STAR.

THEN HE WAITED.



NOW HE HEARS VOICES OUTSIDE HIS TEMPLE.

I WANT TO COME INSIDE. I WANT TO SAY HELLO. OR GOODBYE. OR SOMETHING.

I COULD SHOW HIM MY DOGGIE.



I am sorry, my sister, but no.

PLEASE? I WENT TO HIS WEDDING.

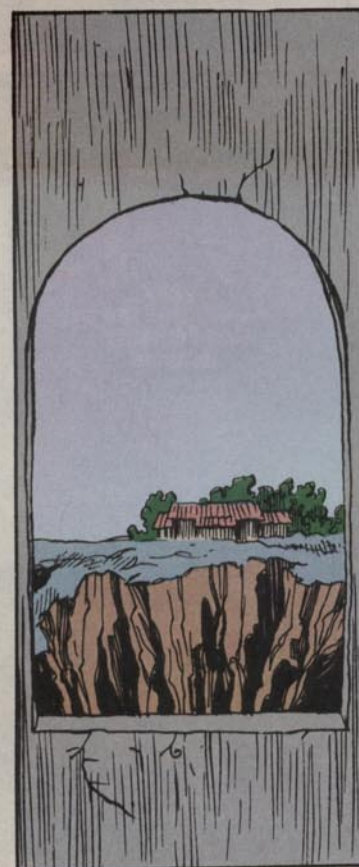
... Very well. But the dog remains outside.



THE

SANOMAN™

Written by Neil Gaiman, drawn by Jill Thompson, inked by Vince Locke, lettered by Todd Klein, colored by Danny Vozzo, edited by Karen Berger, assisted by Shelly Roeborg, featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg





THANK YOU FOR COMING BACK.

Did you doubt that I would? I gave my word.

I KNOW.



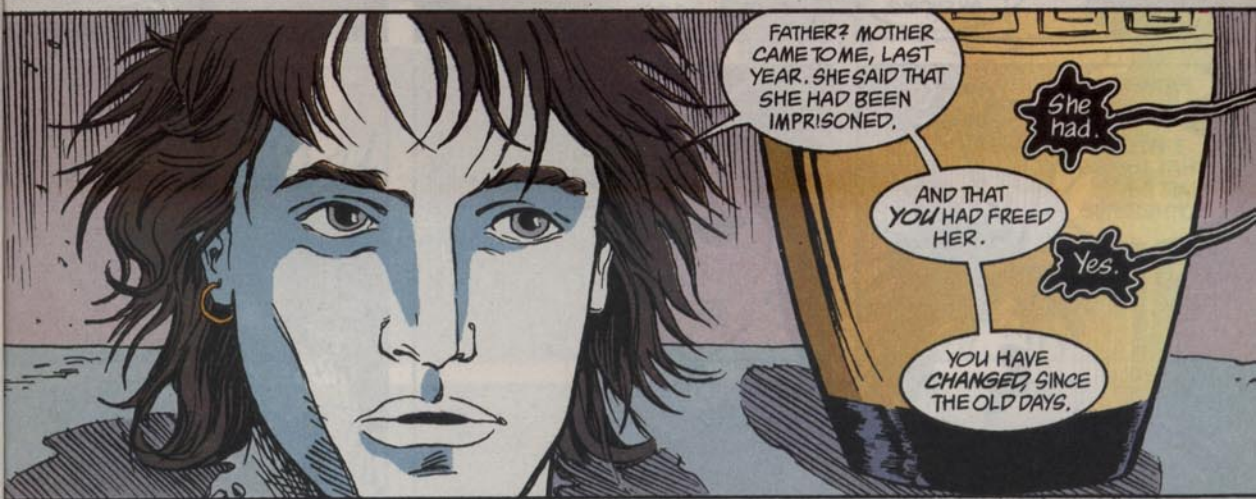
HOW WAS MY UNCLE?

He was... I do not know, my son. He has gone from that place, and from this world.

He was much the same, I suppose.

We do not always accomplish what we set out to do.

NO.



FATHER? MOTHER CAME TO ME, LAST YEAR. SHE SAID THAT SHE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED.

She had.

AND THAT YOU HAD FREED HER.

Yes.

YOU HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE OLD DAYS.



I doubt it.

FATHER? I AM VERY SCARED.

You asked for a boon, Orpheus. I can grant it.



I AM SO SCARED.

IT'S STRANGE. FOR MANY THOUSAND YEARS I HAVE PRAYED FOR DEATH. I HAVE PRAYED TO ALL THE GODS FOR PEACE AND RELIEF AND...

I HAVE PRAYED FOR AN ENDING.



I DID NOT THINK THAT YOU WOULD BE THE ONE TO GRANT IT. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAID TO ME THEN, FATHER?

"YOUR LIFE IS YOUR OWN. YOUR DEATH, LIKEWISE. ALWAYS, AND FOREVER, YOUR OWN. FARE WELL."

"WE SHALL NOT MEET AGAIN."



I believe I said something like that, yes.

THOSE WERE YOUR EXACT WORDS. I HAVE HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO THINK ON THEM.

I SHOULD HAVE DIED LONG AGO.

Perhaps.



FATHER?

Yes.

I WISH THAT THINGS HAD BEEN OTHERWISE.

FATHER, I AM READY.

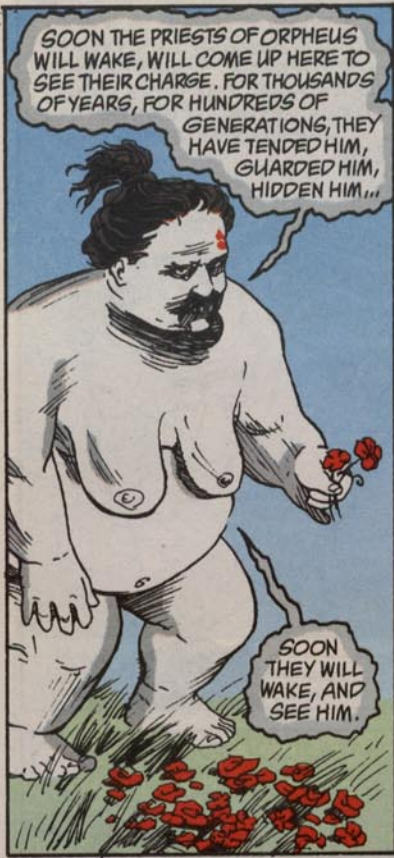












SOON THE PRIESTS OF ORPHEUS
WILL WAKE, WILL COME UP HERE TO
SEE THEIR CHARGE. FOR THOUSANDS
OF YEARS, FOR HUNDREDS OF
GENERATIONS, THEY
HAVE TENDED HIM,
GUARDED HIM,
HIDDEN HIM...

SOON
THEY WILL
WAKE, AND
SEE HIM.



GOODBYE,
DELIRIUM.



I THOUGHT
YOU'D STILL BE
HERE.

I PICKED
YOU A
FLOWER.

HERE,
TAKE IT.



SO. THE CHILD IS DEAD?

YES.

AND DESTRUCTION HAS GONE FOR GOOD?

...YES.

AND DREAM?

I DON'T KNOW.



IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE. THEY COULD HAVE DRAGGED OUR SISTER AND DESTINY INTO THE MESS.

IT'S STRANGE, MY TWIN. I THOUGHT I'D BE DELIGHTED TO SEE THIS DAY.



HE'S HUMILIATED ME. HE'S BEEN RUDE AND BOORISH. HE'S STUFFY AND STUPID AND THINKS HE KNOWS EVERYTHING. AND THERE'S JUST SOMETHING ABOUT HIM THAT GETS ON MY NERVES.

BUT I CAN'T HELP FEELING SORRY FOR HIM.



HE WAS LIKE A DISASTER, WAITING TO HAPPEN.

YOU CANNOT SEEK DESTRUCTION AND RETURN UNSCATHED.

DELIRIUM HAS.

DELIRIUM HAS BEEN SCATHED ENOUGH IN HER TIME.



HM. THE FIRST ENTIRELY NEW FLOWER IN QUITE SOME TIME. IT SMELLS WONDERFUL.

YOU KNOW, I SWORE AN OATH ONCE. I SWORE I WOULD MAKE HIM SPILL FAMILY BLOOD. AND NOW HE HAS. I SHOULD BE TRIUMPHANT.



IT WAS NOT OF YOUR DOING.

TRUE. BUT IT WAS WHAT I WANTED.

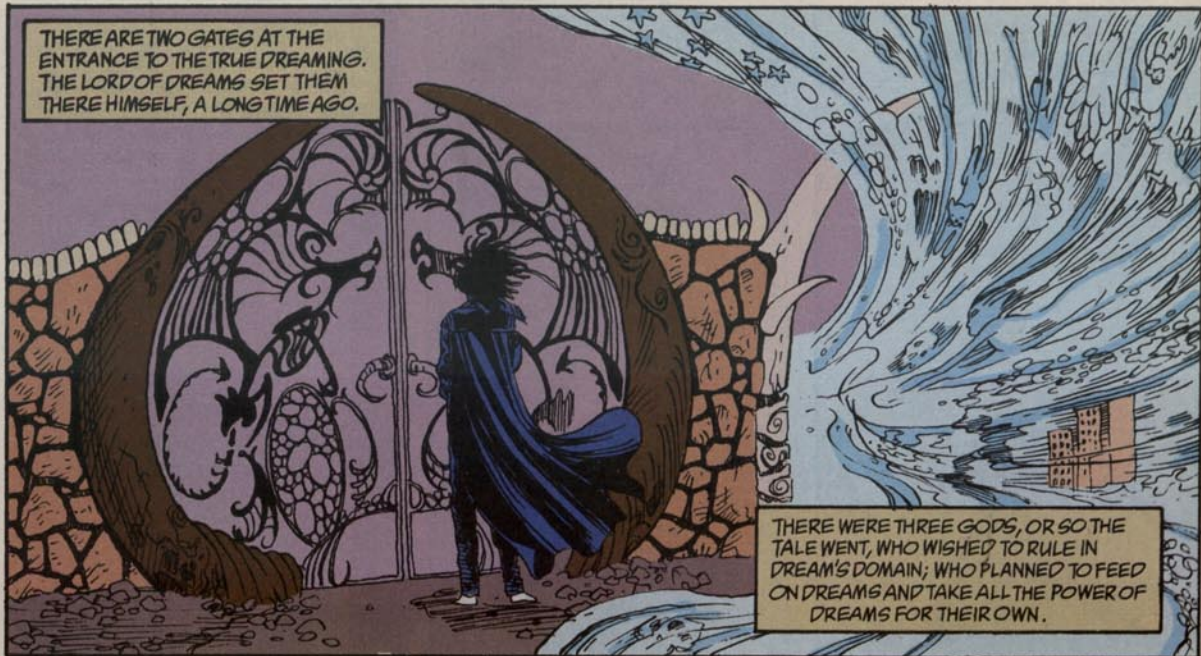
SO YOU'RE HAPPY?

NO. I'M SCARED.



SO AM I.

THERE ARE TWO GATES AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE TRUE DREAMING. THE LORD OF DREAMS SET THEM THERE HIMSELF, A LONG TIME AGO.



THERE WERE THREE GODS, OR SO THE TALE WENT, WHO WISHED TO RULE IN DREAM'S DOMAIN; WHO PLANNED TO FEED ON DREAMS AND TAKE ALL THE POWER OF DREAMS FOR THEIR OWN.

FROM THE SKULL AND FROM THE SPINE OF THE OLDEST, DREAM CREATED HIS HELM.



AND FROM THE HORNS OF THE YOUNGEST, HE CARVED A GATE THAT HE RESERVED FOR TRUE DREAMS.

THIS BECAUSE HE HAD SOME LITTLE REGARD FOR HER, AND HAD, PERHAPS, IN SOME SMALL MEASURE, REGRETTED THE COURSE OF ACTION HE HAD FOUND NECESSARY.



BUT ALL THIS WAS LONG AGO; AND THE TRUTH OF IT ALL HAS NOT EVER BEEN TOLD ON THIS WORLD.

Andros?



FROM THE TUSKS OF THE MIDDLE GOD, HE CARVED A GATE THROUGH WHICH THE COMMONALTY OF DREAMS COULD TRAVEL; ALL THE FALSEHOODS AND HOPES AND FEARS.



Andros? Listen to me, then you may all wake



Some time ago, I created your priesthood to tend my son. To guard him from all harm

Now your responsibilities are at an end.



I have only one thing more to ask of you

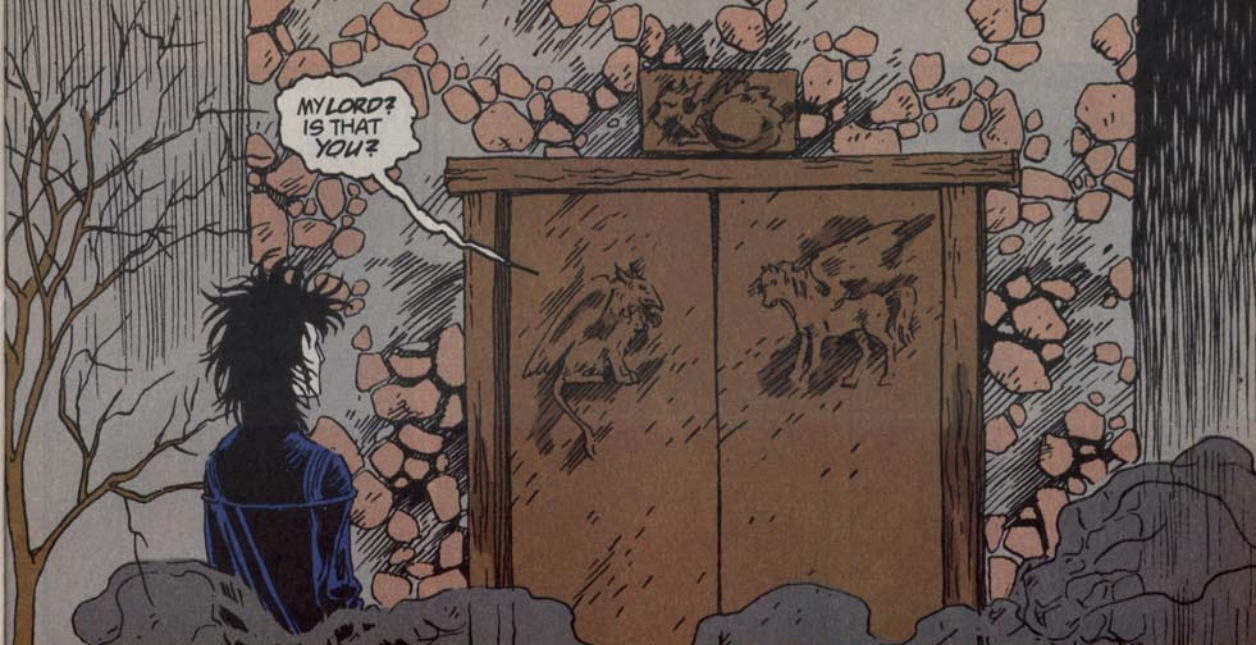
Bury his head, Andros. Bury it safely. But erect no marker.



When that is done your task will be over, your duties will be at an end.

If you wish, you may stay at the temple. Or do...do whatever you may wish.





MY LORD?
IS THAT
YOU?



A strange question
to ask, my servant Am I
not your
creator?



I AM SORRY, LORD.
IT WAS JUST THAT...
FOR A MOMENT...

Do not
trouble yourself,
Gryphon.



You three have served
me well in the past: as you
shall serve me well in
the future.



Have I ever
told you how
much I
appreciate
your service?
That I value
you all most
highly?

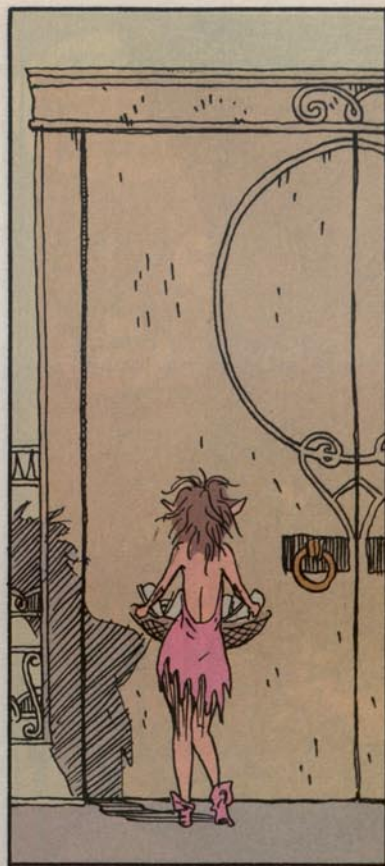
SIRE...?

No matter.
Carry
on.



IS HE ALL
RIGHT?







Lucien? The lady Ishtar is presently in the dreaming, on her way Beyond.

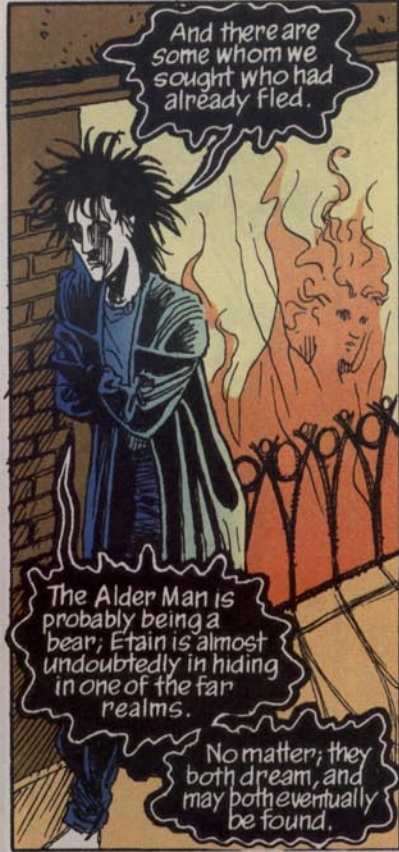
Find her for me. I have a message for her, from my brother.



There are some who have aided me on my journey: Faramond, The Lady Bast, a dead human named Ruby, and others...

They must be suitably rewarded.

OF COURSE, MY LORD.



And there are some whom we sought who had already fled.

The Alder Man is probably being a bear; Etain is almost undoubtedly in hiding in one of the far realms.

No matter; they both dream, and may potheventually be found.



We should send messengers to inform them that they may, if they wish, return.

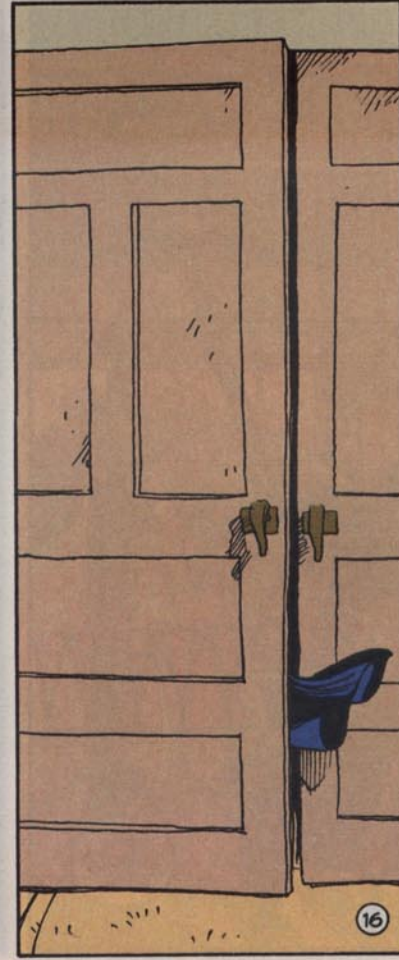
That it is now safe.

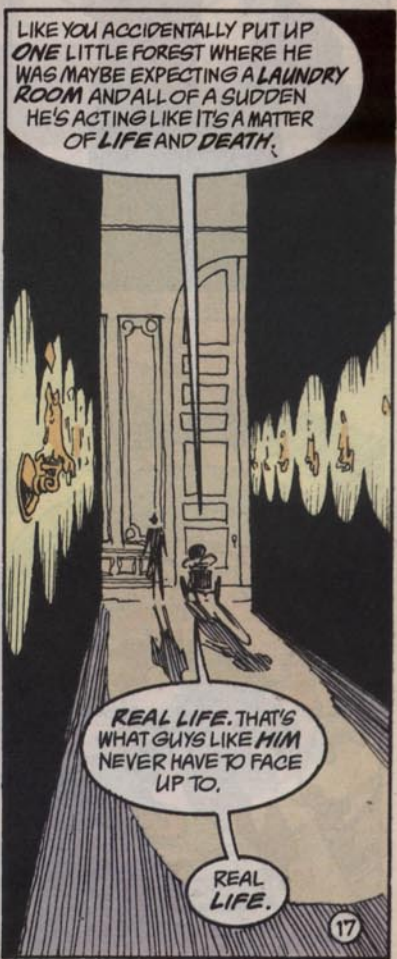
And I am certain that there is much else that needs my attention.

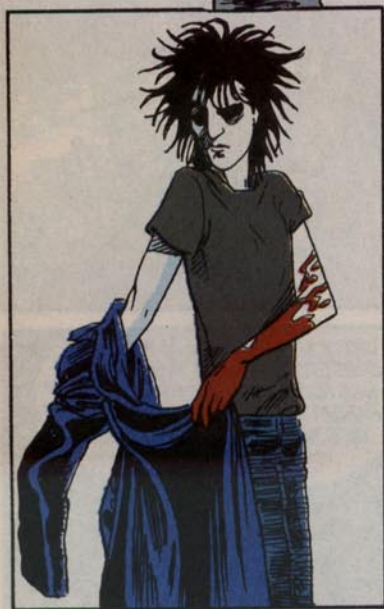
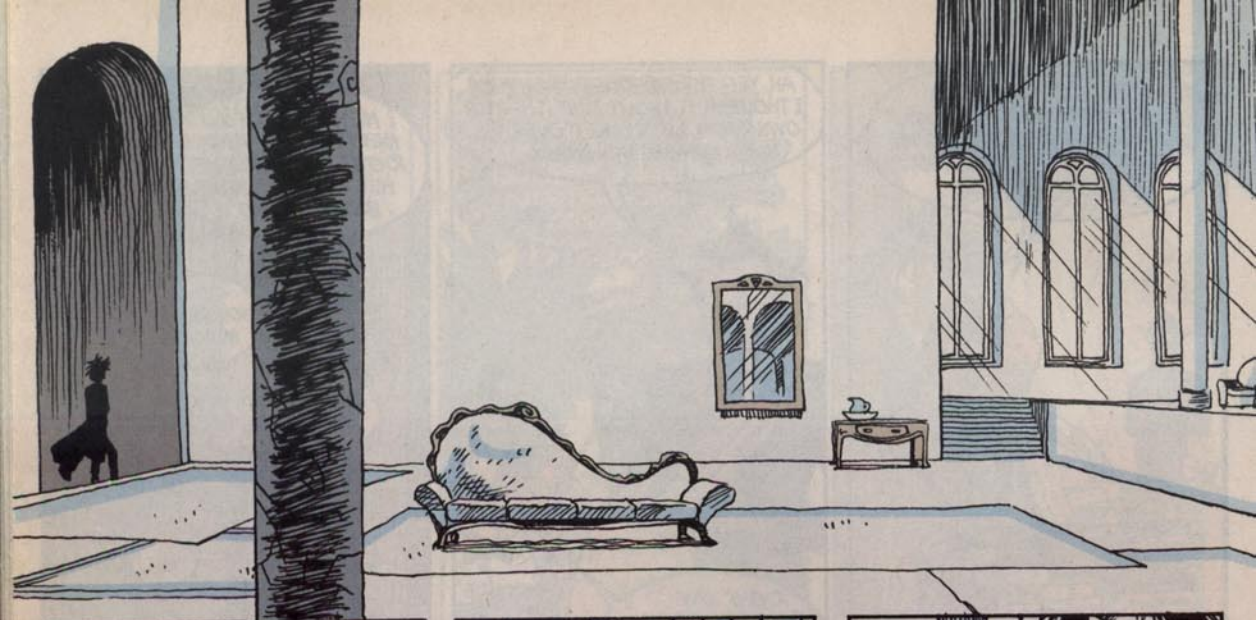


But not today. These things can wait.

Tomorrow, I shall work. But not today...










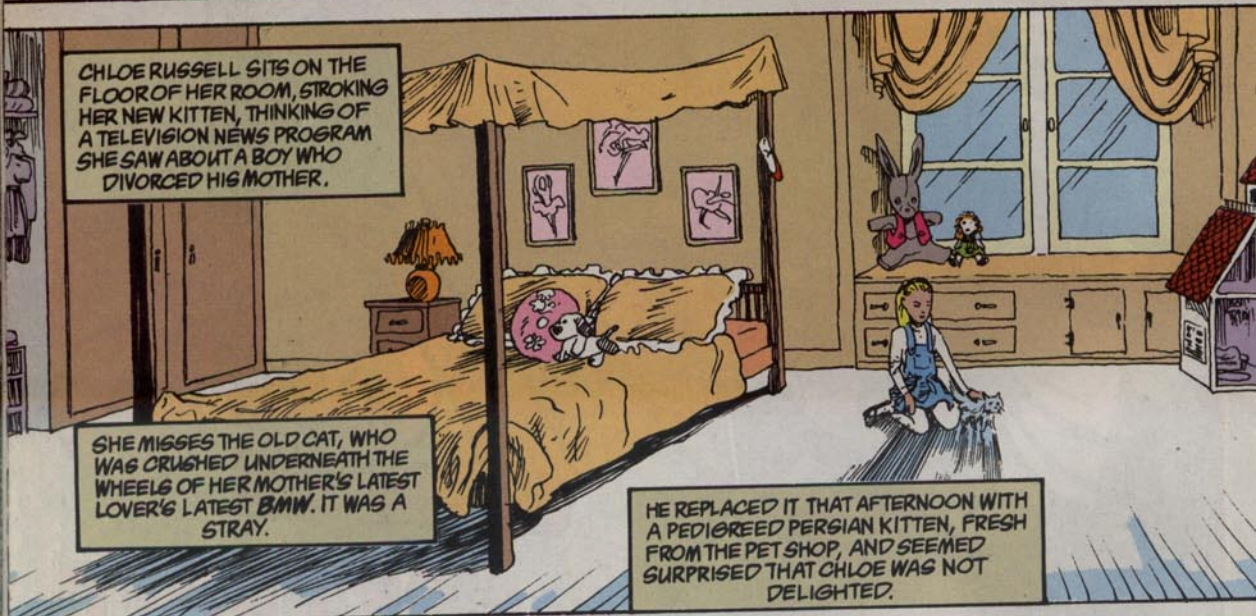




MARY CANBY IS SITTING IN THE GRAVEYARD BEHIND THE OLD CHURCH, HER BACK AGAINST THE COLD STONE OF THE TOMB. IT IS NOT THE CHURCHYARD THAT STEVEN, HER SON, WAS BURIED IN; THAT'S SOMEWHERE UP NORTH ... BUGGERED IF SHE CAN REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE TOWN...

SHE FOUND A TWENTY POUND NOTE IN A RUBBISH BIN THIS AFTERNOON, AND HAS SPENT THE EVENING DRINKING HER WAY THROUGH IT, AS SHE FINISHES EACH BOTTLE SHE THROWS IT AT A GRAVESTONE AND LISTENS TO IT SMASH.

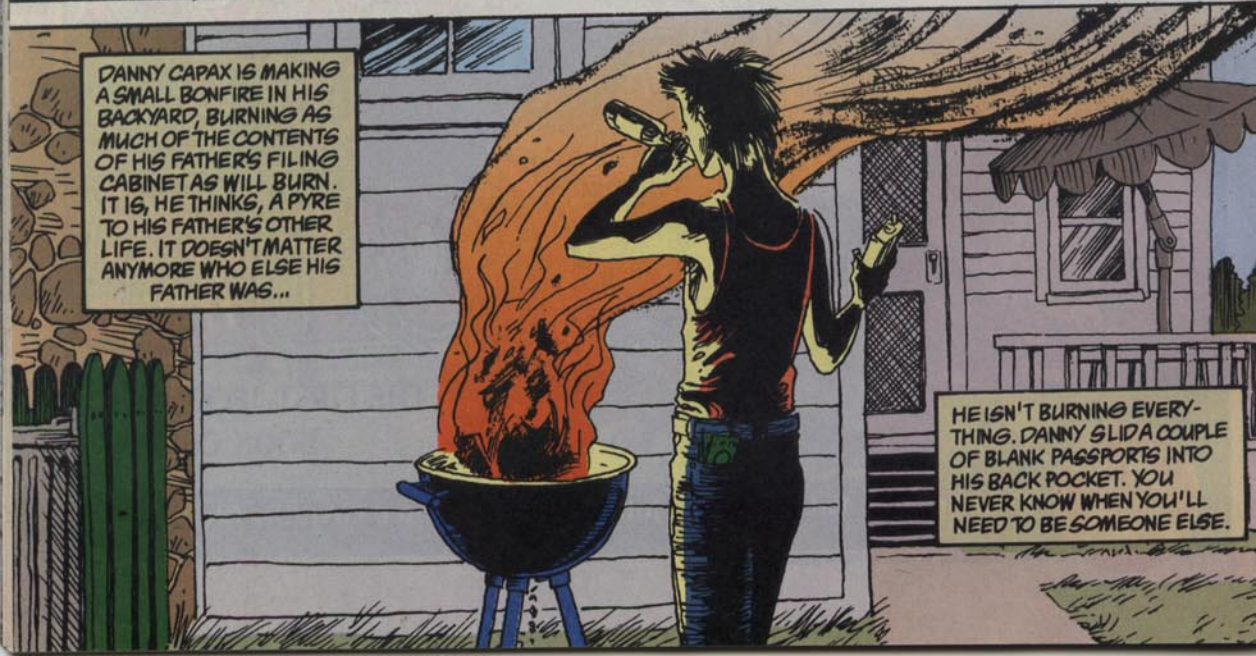
AFTER A WHILE SHE BEGINS TO CRY.



CHLOE RUSSELL SITS ON THE FLOOR OF HER ROOM, STROKING HER NEW KITTEN, THINKING OF A TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAM SHE SAW ABOUT A BOY WHO DIVORCED HIS MOTHER.

SHE MISSES THE OLD CAT, WHO WAS CRUSHED UNDERNEATH THE WHEELS OF HER MOTHER'S LATEST LOVER'S LATEST BMW. IT WAS A STRAY.

HE REPLACED IT THAT AFTERNOON WITH A PEDIGREEED PERSIAN KITTEN, FRESH FROM THE PET SHOP, AND SEEMED SURPRISED THAT CHLOE WAS NOT DELIGHTED.



DANNY CAPAX IS MAKING A SMALL BONFIRE IN HIS BACKYARD, BURNING AS MUCH OF THE CONTENTS OF HIS FATHER'S FILING CABINET AS WILL BURN. IT IS, HE THINKS, A PYRE TO HIS FATHER'S OTHER LIFE. IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE WHO ELSE HIS FATHER WAS...

HE ISN'T BURNING EVERYTHING. DANNY SLID A COUPLE OF BLANK PASSPORTS INTO HIS BACK POCKET. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU'LL NEED TO BE SOMEONE ELSE.

IN THE DARKNESS, TOM FLAHERTY FEELS A SPIDER STEPPING TENTATIVELY OVER HIS EYEBALL. A MAGGOT SQUIRMS BETWEEN HIS TOES. AN ARMY OF ANTS MARCHES UP ONE ARM.

HE WOULD SCRATCH AT THEM, BUT HIS ARMS ARE BOUND TO THE BED BY LEATHER STRAPS. HE DOES NOT DARE TO OPEN HIS MOUTH TO SCREAM: THERE ARE FLIES AND THINGS LIKE FLIES SWARMING OVER HIS LIPS, PROBING AND BUZZING AND KISSING...

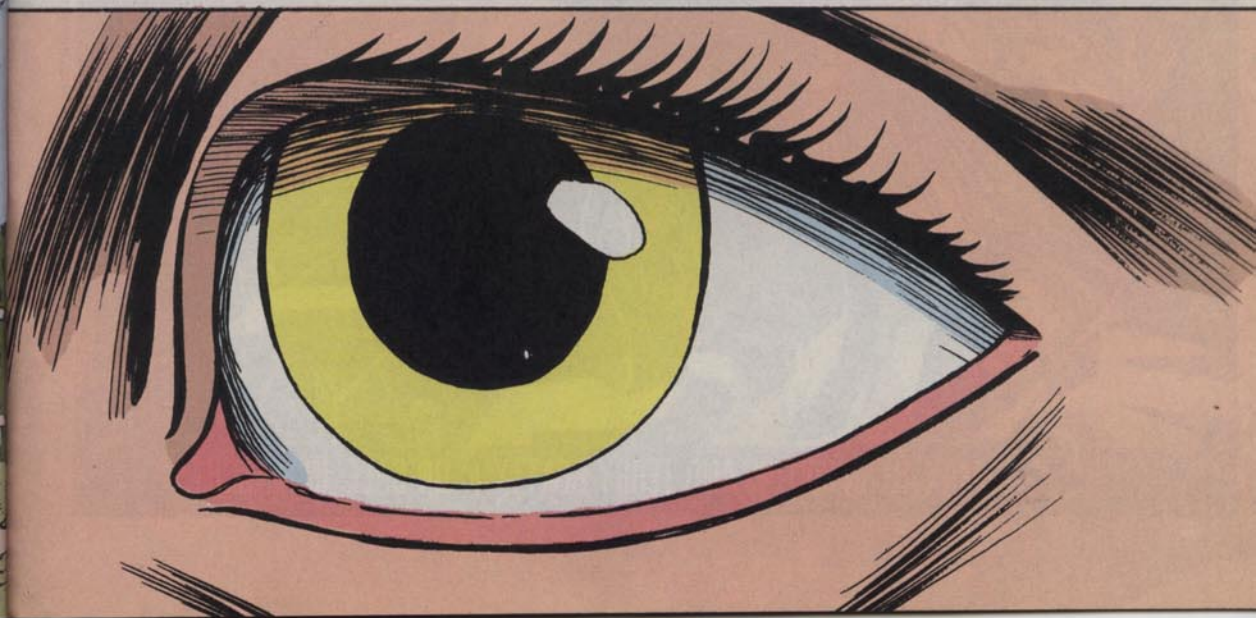


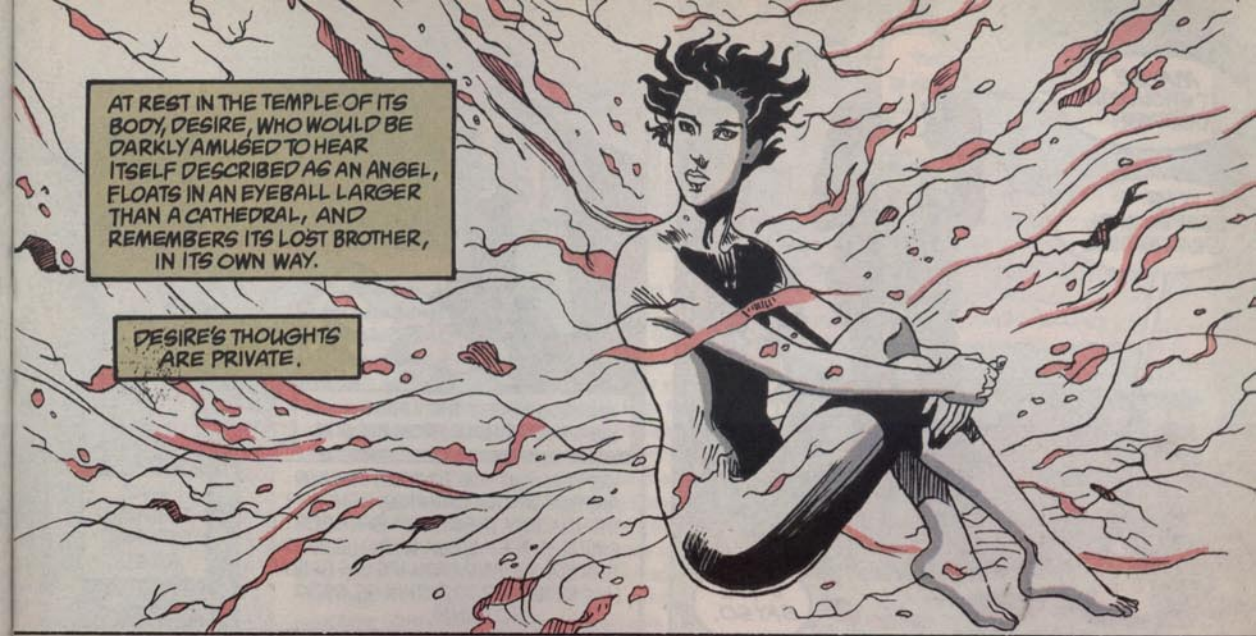
TIFFANY SITS IN THE LEATHER CHAIR AND TELLS THE STUDIO AUDIENCE HOW SHE FOUND HER NEW LIFE; HOW THE PALACE OF SIN WAS DESTROYED (KINDA LIKE SODOM AND GOMORRAH, INTERJECTS THE SHOW'S HOST) AND OF THE ANGEL WHO APPEARED TO HER, AND GAVE HER AN ARMANI JACKET TO COVER HER NAKEDNESS, AND TOLD HER THAT SHE WAS SAVED.



EVERYBODY CLAPS.


TIFFANY GLOWS.



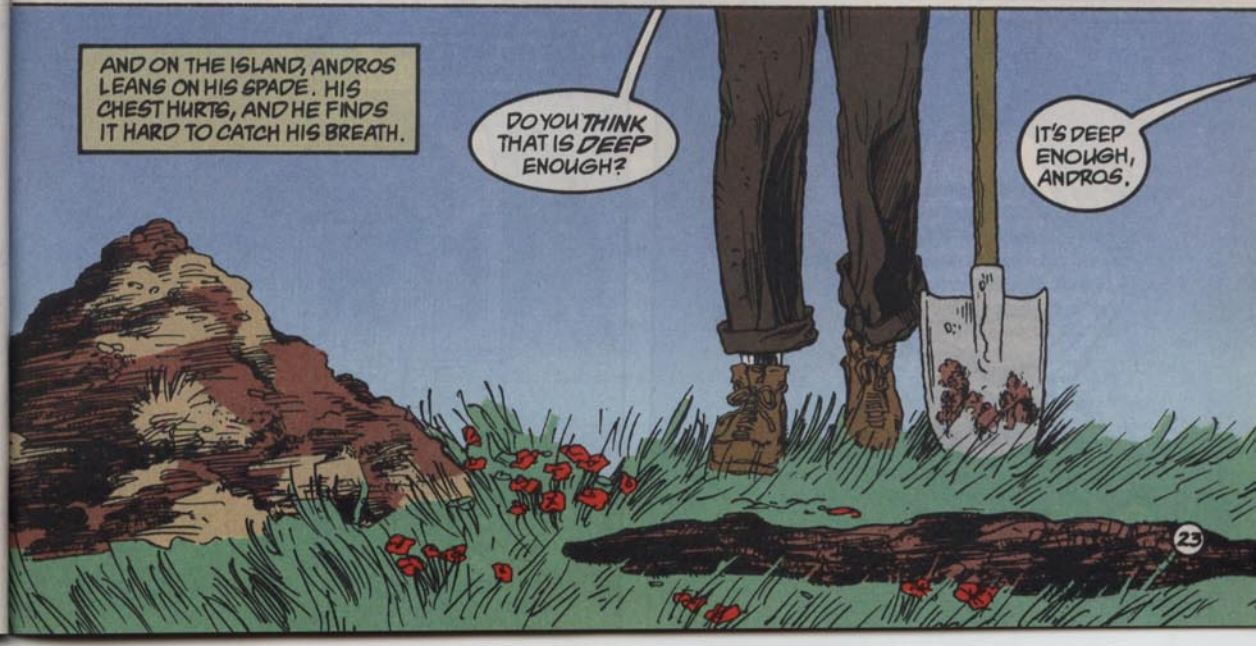


AT REST IN THE TEMPLE OF ITS BODY, DESIRE, WHO WOULD BE DARKLY AMUSED TO HEAR ITSELF DESCRIBED AS AN ANGEL, FLOATS IN AN EYEBALL LARGER THAN A CATHEDRAL, AND REMEMBERS ITS LOST BROTHER, IN ITS OWN WAY.

DESIRE'S THOUGHTS ARE PRIVATE.



IT HOLDS A SMALL RED FLOWER, VERY TIGHTLY.



AND ON THE ISLAND, ANDROS LEANS ON HIS SPADE. HIS CHEST HURTS, AND HE FINDS IT HARD TO CATCH HIS BREATH.

DO YOU THINK THAT IS DEEP ENOUGH?

IT'S DEEP ENOUGH, ANDROS.



MAYBE IT SHOULD BE DEEPER.

IT IS DEEP ENOUGH, GRANDFATHER.

IF YOU SAY SO.



ANDROS TAKES THE LINEN-WRAPPED BUNDLE FROM HIS SON.

WE WILL PUT HIM TO REST, THINKS ANDROS RHODOCANAKIS, BENEATH THE CHERRY TREE. AND PERHAPS HIS SPIRIT IS IN ELYSIUM, WITH HIS BELOVED EURYDICE. AND PERHAPS HIS SPIRIT HAS RETURNED TO DARKNESS, OR TO NOTHING...

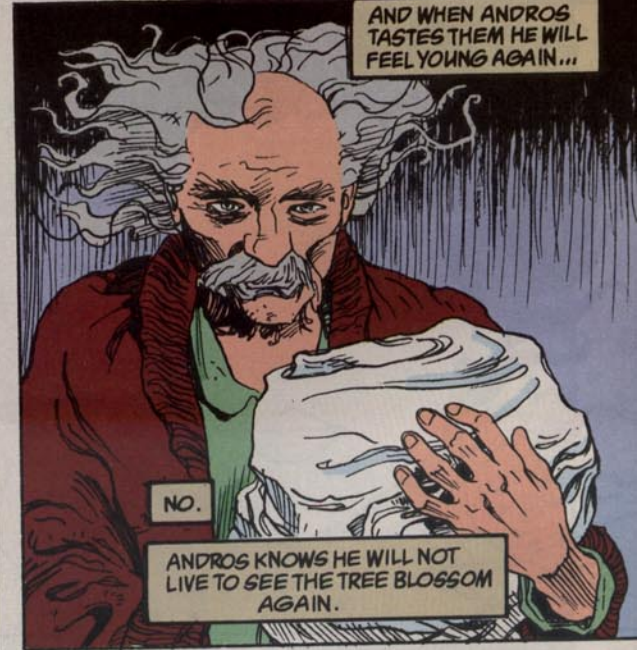
AND PERHAPS HE IS AT REST.



GRANDFATHER? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

I AM FINE, BOY. JUST OLD BONES.

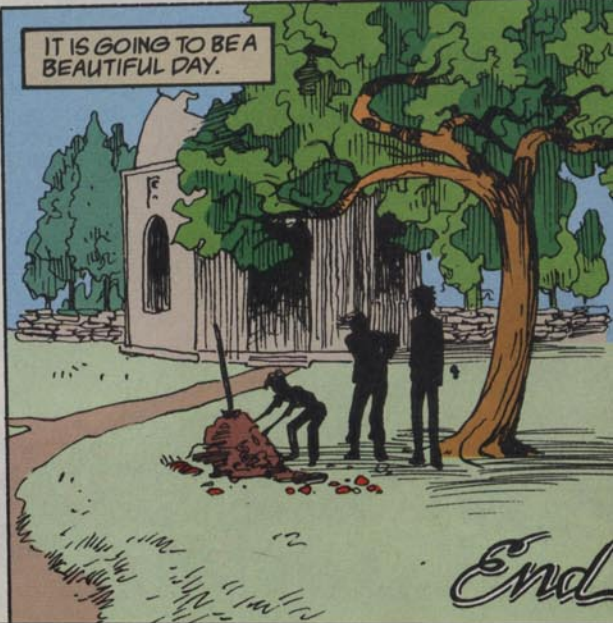
AND PERHAPS HIS SPIRIT WILL MOVE INTO THE CHERRY TREE, AND IN SPRING THE NEW BLOSSOMS WILL BE HIS, AND IN SUMMER THE CHERRIES WILL TASTE OF TRUE POETRY AND SONG...



AND WHEN ANDROS TASTES THEM HE WILL FEEL YOUNG AGAIN...

NO.

ANDROS KNOWS HE WILL NOT LIVE TO SEE THE TREE BLOSSOM AGAIN.



IT IS GOING TO BE A BEAUTIFUL DAY.

End