

JORDI LAFEBRE

Always Never



euRoPe
COMICS

Always Never

Writer and artist
Jordi Lafebre

Colorists
Clémence Sapin
and
Jordi Lafebre

Love, that exempts no one beloved from loving.

DANTE

The Divine Comedy

Inferno, Canto V, verse 103

We are human after all.

DAFT PUNK

CHAPTER
20









DO YOU REMEMBER THOSE ENDLESS HOURS OF PASSENGERS WAITING TO BOARD THE SHIPS PREPARING TO LEAVE THE PORT?



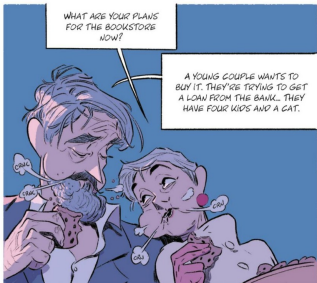
OO I EVER! AS A KID, I USED TO WALK UNDER THE ARCADES THAT HOUSED THE SHOPKEEPERS' STANDS. I'M SO GLAD THEY WEREN'T TORN DOWN.



WE DECIDED TO KEEP THEM SO THAT RETIREES COULD REMINISCE ABOUT THE GOOD OLD DAYS WHILE SITTING ON A BENCH.



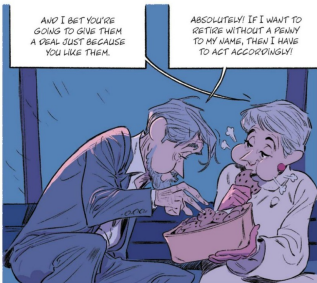
WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE BOOKSTORE NOW?



A YOUNG COUPLE WANTS TO BUY IT. THEY'RE TRYING TO GET A LOAN FROM THE BANK. THEY HAVE FOUR KIDS AND A CAT.

AND I BET YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE THEM A DEAL JUST BECAUSE YOU LIKE THEM.

ABSOLUTELY! IF I WANT TO RETIRE WITHOUT A PENNY TO MY NAME, THEN I HAVE TO ACT ACCORDINGLY!



I'M NOT BUYING IT, YOU'RE ONLY GIVING THEM A DEAL SO THEY'LL PUT YOUR DISSERTATION IN THE WINDOW DISPLAY!

NO, THEY'D BE BETTER OFF DISPLAYING ROMANCE NOVELS. YOU KNOW, TWO PEOPLE WHO GO THROUGH THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF LIFE BEFORE FINALLY GETTING TOGETHER IN THE END...



WHAT ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU REALLY READY TO RETIRE AND SPEND YOUR DAYS BAKING COOKIES?



MARTA CALLS ME EVERY WEEK. SHE WORKS FOR THE NEW MAYOR NOW AND SHE CAN'T STAND HIM. I THINK SHE JUST WORKED WITH ME FOR TOO LONG.



SHE STILL GETS MAIL THAT'S ADDRESSED TO ME, INCLUDING JOB OFFERS. SHE KEEPS INSINUATING THAT WE COULD WORK TOGETHER FOR A FEW MORE YEARS. I'VE EVEN BEEN OFFERED A POSITION AS CONSUL, HA!

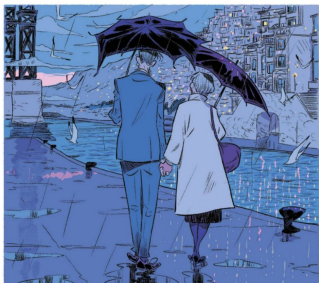


ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE IT?



YOU KNOW I'M NOT.





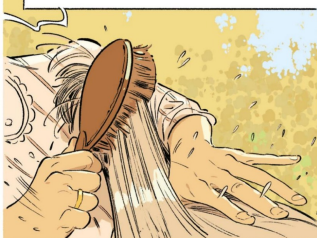
CHAPTER
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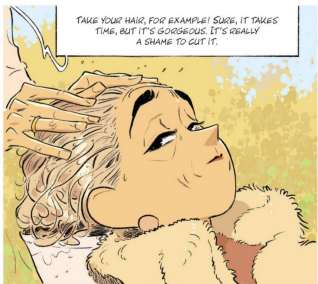
YOU HAVE TO REALLY KNEAD THE DOUGH TO GET RID OF THE LUMPS, AND LET IT SET SO THE SPICES CAN RELEASE THEIR FLAVORS.



BAKING REQUIRES PATIENCE, WHICH WE BOTH KNOW ISN'T ALWAYS YOUR STRONG SUIT...

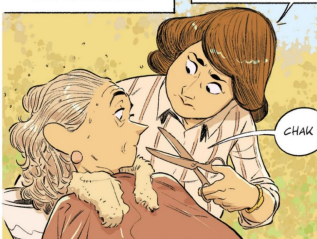


TAKE YOUR HAIR, FOR EXAMPLE! SURE, IT TAKES TIME, BUT IT'S GORGEOUS. IT'S REALLY A SHAME TO CUT IT.

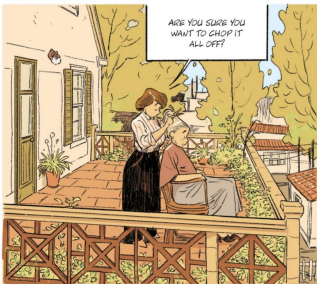


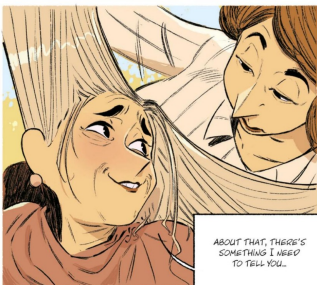
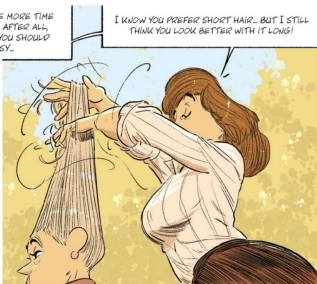
BUT SO BE IT. THEN YOU ROLL THE DOUGH INTO SMALL BALLS AND STICK THEM IN THE OVEN.

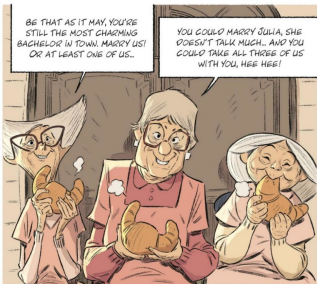
NOT TOO HOT, MIND YOU! COOKIES DON'T LIKE IT ROUGH!



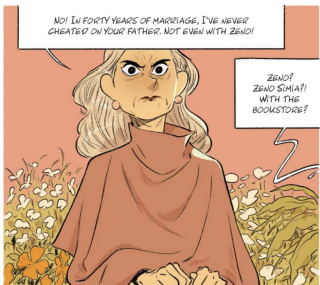
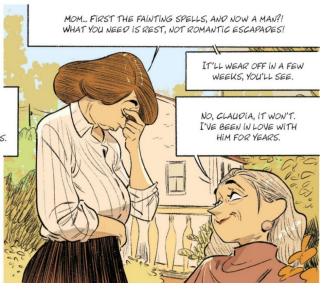
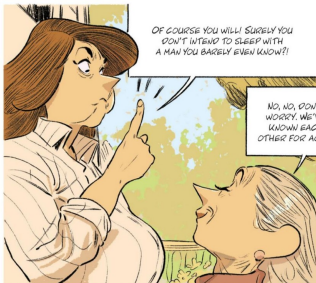
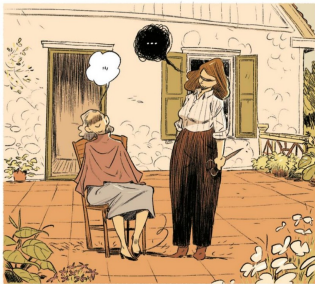
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO CHOP IT ALL OFF?

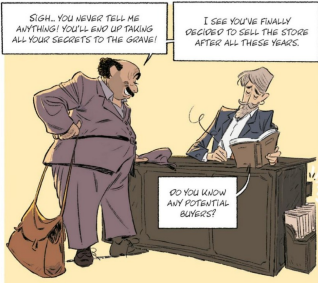
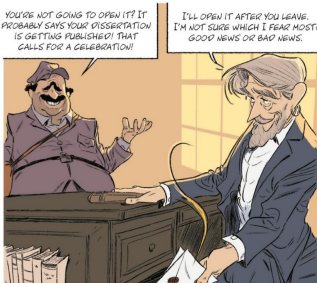






* THE OPENING WORDS OF JANE AUSTEN'S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.







NANA'S BEING SELFISH AND ONLY THINKING OF HERSELF. JUST LIKE YOU SOMETIMES. AND PLEASE TIE YOUR SHOELACES!



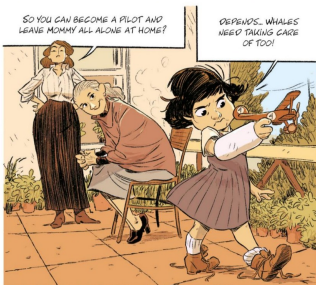
I LIKE YOUR AIRPLANE, SWEETHEART.

I'M PRACTICING LONG-DISTANCE FLIGHTS.



SO YOU CAN BECOME A PILOT AND LEAVE MOMMY ALL ALONE AT HOME?

DEPENDS... WHALES NEED TAKING CARE OF TOO!



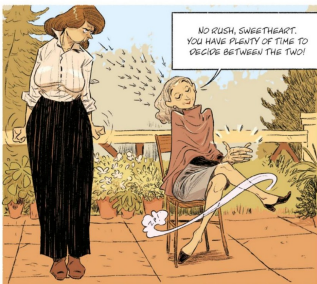
SORRY?

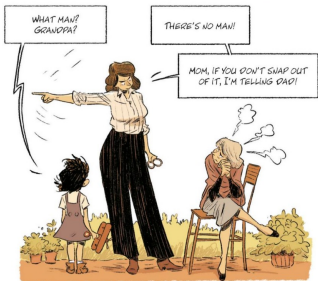
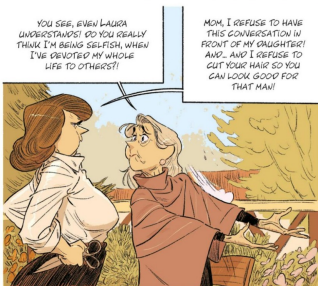


WELL YEAH, I ALSO WANT TO TAKE CARE OF WHALES. I'LL LIVE ON A BOAT AND I'LL WEAR A RED KNIT HAT!



NO RUSH, SWEETHEART. YOU HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO DECIDE BETWEEN THE TWO!





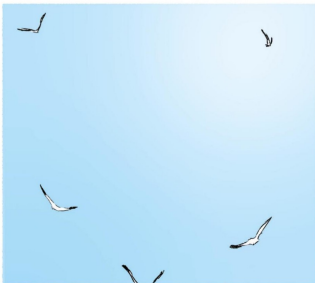


I'M JUST GOING TO RELEASE THESE MOTHS OFF THE BRIDGE. I WON'T BE NEEDING THEM ANYMORE.

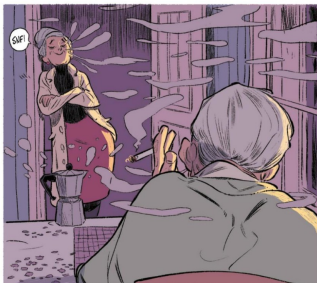


CHAPTER
18









HOW DO YOU ALWAYS GET THE COFFEE TO SMELL SO GOOD? I'LL JUST TAKE HALF A CUP, OTHERWISE I WON'T SLEEP A WINK TONIGHT.



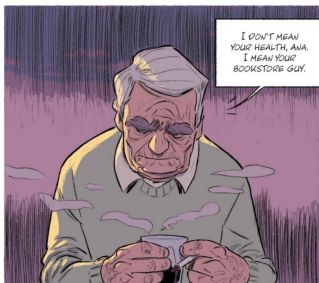
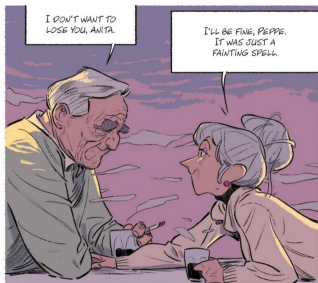
EVEN THOUGH I WAS NEVER A BIG SLEEPER...

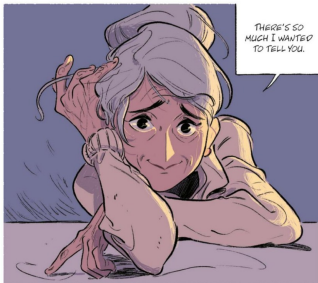


YOU SMOKE TWO CIGARETTES AND I HAVE A HALF-CUP OF COFFEE.

TO EACH THEIR OWN LITTLE SECRET...







CHAPTER
17



WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?
THIS TICKET ISN'T VALID!
EITHER GO BUY A NEW ONE,
OR GET OFF THE TRAIN.

OF COURSE IT'S VALID!
AND I HAVE CLASS FIRST
THING TOMORROW MORNING!
I CAN'T BE LATE.



EXCUSE ME, SIR, AS
STUDENTS, WE'RE ENTITLED
TO A REDUCED FARE,
WHICH MAY EXPLAIN THE
MISUNDERSTANDING.

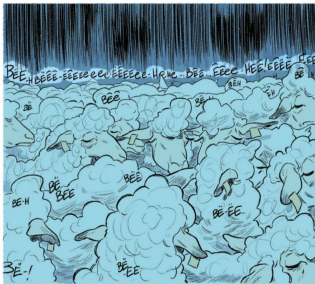
THE KID IS JUST TRYING TO
FREELOAD, AND LAST I CHECKED,
THIS IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!



COME ON, OLD MAN,
SHOW ME YOUR TICKET.

I FORGOT IT AT HOME,
ACTUALLY...



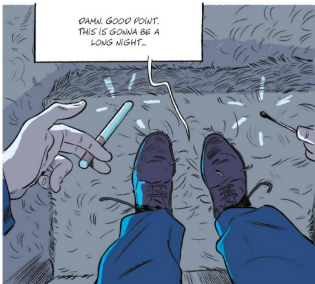


I WOULDN'T, IF I WERE YOU.

IF WE'RE GOING TO BE RIDING TOGETHER,
I MIGHT AS WELL TELL YOU UP FRONT.
I DON'T TAKE ORDERS FROM ANYONE.



YOU REALLY INTEND TO
SMOKE IN A CAR FULL
OF HAY BALES?



DAMN. GOOD POINT.
THIS IS GONNA BE A
LONG NIGHT...



TIME IS A
RELATIVE NOTION.

YOU KNOW, SOMETIMES
THE SHEPHERDS SMUGGLE
BOTTLES INSIDE THE HAY.

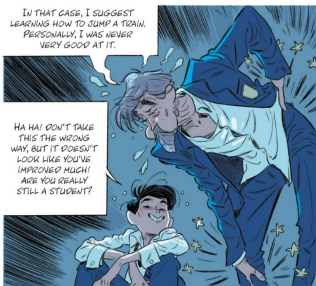


...AND AS SOON AS I GRADUATE, I'M TAKING THE FIRST BOAT OUT OF HERE AND NEVER COMING BACK.



THERE'S ALWAYS A REASON TO COME BACK, TRUST ME. EVEN IF IT'S ONLY ONCE IN A WHILE.

I'LL TRAVEL ALL AROUND THE WORLD. I'LL LIVE OFF ODD JOBS AND MEET A TON OF GIRLS.



IN THAT CASE, I SUGGEST LEARNING HOW TO JUMP A TRAIN. PERSONALLY, I WAS NEVER VERY GOOD AT IT.

HA HA! DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY, BUT IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE YOU'VE IMPROVED MUCH! ARE YOU REALLY STILL A STUDENT?



I'M GETTING MY DOCTORATE. IT'S TAKEN ME FORTY YEARS TO FINISH MY DISSERTATION.

WELL YOU CERTAINLY TOOK YOUR TIME! WHAT'S YOUR DISSERTATION ABOUT?



I'M TRYING TO PROVE THAT TIME CAN GO BACKWARDS.

SO YOU DEVOTED FORTY YEARS OF YOUR LIFE TO PROVING THE IMPOSSIBLE?



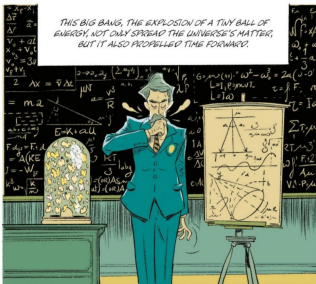
IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE, WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT MY DISSERTATION ARGUES.

ALL RIGHT, GRANDPA, LET'S HEAR IT.

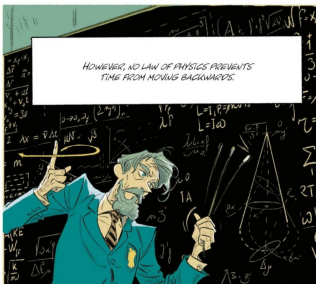
THE UNIVERSE AS WE KNOW IT WAS THE CONSEQUENCE OF AN ENORMOUS EXPLOSION CALLED THE BIG BANG.



THIS BIG BANG, THE EXPLOSION OF A TINY BALL OF ENERGY, NOT ONLY SPREAD THE UNIVERSE'S MATTER, BUT IT ALSO PROPULSED TIME FORWARD.



HOWEVER, NO LAW OF PHYSICS PREVENTS TIME FROM MOVING BACKWARDS.

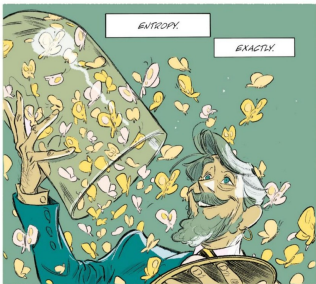


IT IS NEVERTHELESS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY SUCH PHENOMENON TO EVER OCCUR. YOU SEE, EVERYTHING TENDS TO EXPAND AND BECOME INCREASINGLY DISORGANIZED AND DISORDERLY.



ENTROPY.

EXACTLY.



AS SOON AS IT IS SUBJECTED TO DISORDER, MATTER NEVER REORGANIZES ITSELF SPONTANEOUSLY, AND TIME, WHEN PROPULSED FORWARD, DOESN'T STOP.



JUST LIKE A SWARM OF MOTHS FLYING EVERY WHICH WAY WHEN THEY'RE RELEASED.



WHEN THEY DISPERSE, THEY CONTINUE TO FLY IN A PATTERN OF ENDLESS CHAOS.



TIME, MATTER, MOTHS. EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE OBEYS THE SAME PATTERN FROM PERFECT ORDER TO ABSOLUTE DISORDER.



ONLY AN OUTSIDE FORCE CAN REINTRODUCE ORDER.

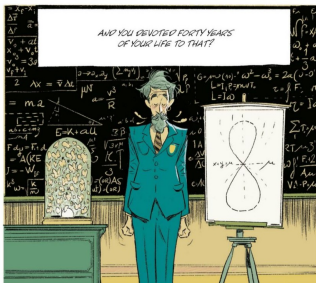
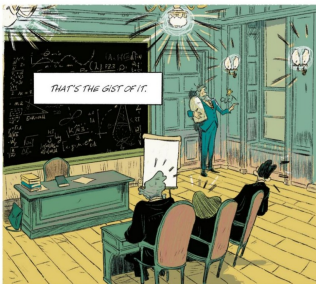


WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THERE WAS A FORCE CAPABLE OF RESTORING ORDER, JUST FOR AN INSTANT?



A BRIEF MOMENT DURING WHICH ALL WOULD BE UNITED AGAIN.

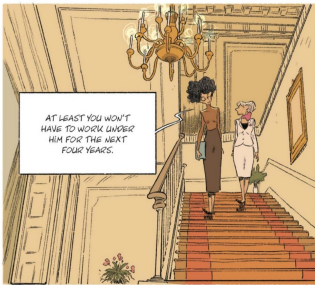
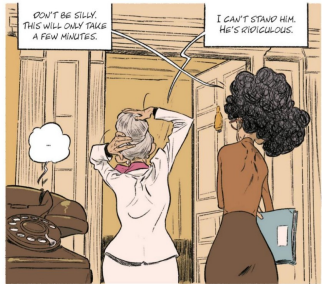




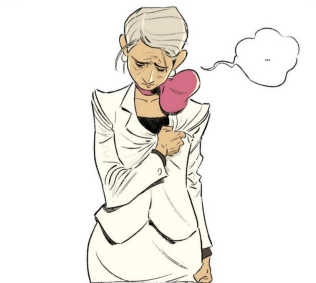
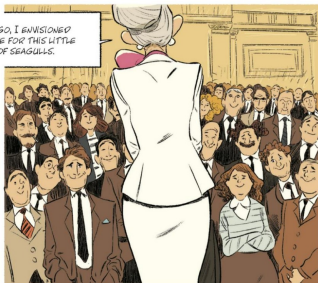
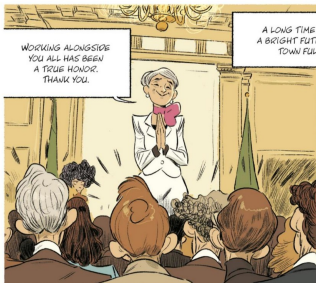
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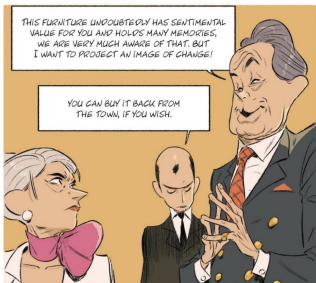








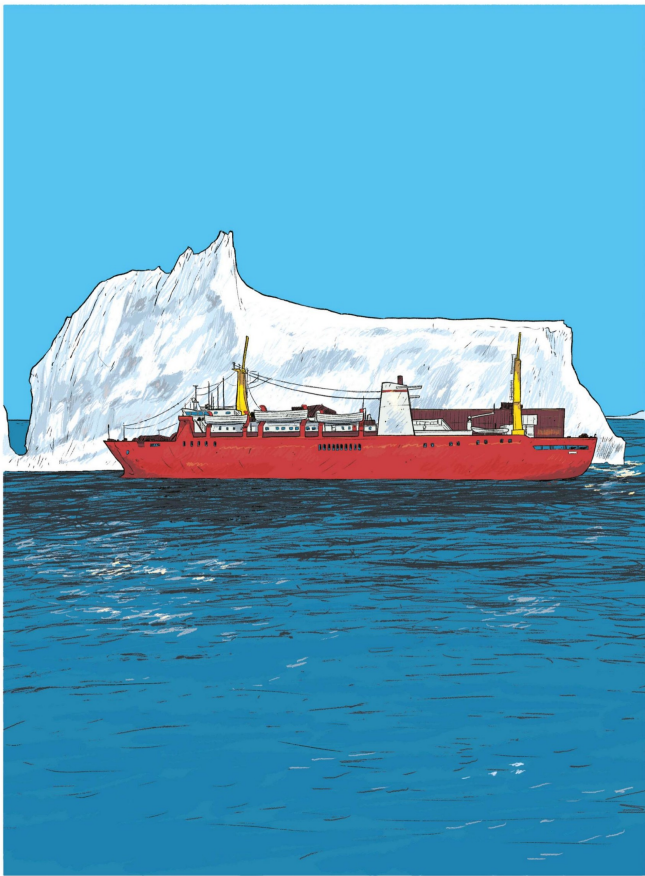


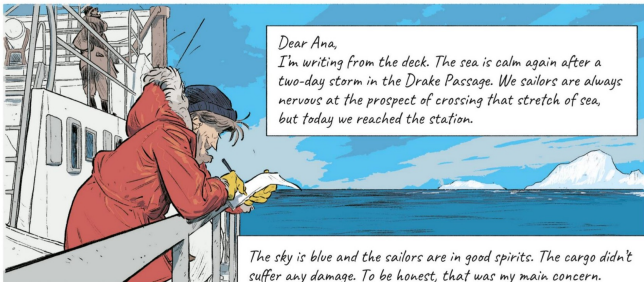




CHAPTER
15







Dear Ana,
I'm writing from the deck. The sea is calm again after a two-day storm in the Drake Passage. We sailors are always nervous at the prospect of crossing that stretch of sea, but today we reached the station.

The sky is blue and the sailors are in good spirits. The cargo didn't suffer any damage. To be honest, that was my main concern. I was afraid of bringing bad luck to the crew on my last voyage... (You're probably smiling... The idea that a scientist such as myself could be so superstitious always made you laugh.)



Yes, you read that right: my last voyage.
I told the captain I wouldn't be setting sail anymore. We'll tell the crew when we get to port.



They're more superstitious than I am and nearly as melancholy. I did, however, tell Margaux, who didn't take it very well. All told, I will have spent nine years aboard the Venecia. I already miss this big red whale of a ship that shivers in the cold.

Captain Huskin wanted to work on the hull, so we dropped anchor off the King George Islands. We all disembarked onto terra firma to stretch our legs, which did us a world of good.




After a few weeks of giving me the cold shoulder, Margaux finally started talking to me again. She told me that penguins are gregarious creatures and form huge noisy colonies. They usually mate for life. Penguins are probably the least solitary of all animals.



She also added that when a penguin is spotted away from the group, it usually means he's lost, because they don't like to go off on their own. She made sure to emphasize every word so I would get the message. She says I'm a 60-year-old man-child who can't commit.


She's probably right, even though she always knew I could leave at anytime. I've never been able to do things differently.





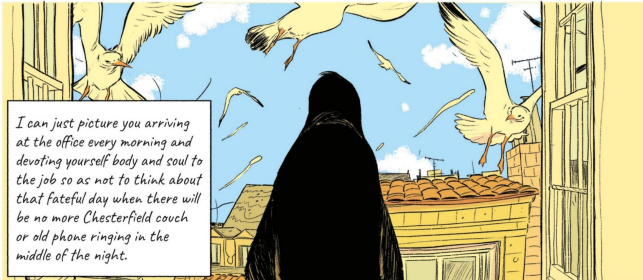
*I'm coming home, Ana.
I'll reopen the bookstore and
move into the old apartment
in the Steps neighborhood.
I'm almost done with my
dissertation. I figure I only
have two years left on it. But
I need to finish it on solid
ground, even if it means turning
my living room into a lab.*

*I'll find comfort in
the smell of the sea
coming in through
the open window—
on really windy days,
at any rate.*



*There's not much left
of that kid who ran off
to travel the world.
The time may have come
for me to put down my
suitcase and, after all
these years, become a
penguin like everybody
else.*

*What about you? Do you
know what you'll do after
you serve your last term?
I doubt you'll answer my
question. Even if you wanted
to, you wouldn't, because
you don't like thinking
about "afterwards."*



*I can just picture you arriving
at the office every morning and
devoting yourself body and soul to
the job so as not to think about
that fateful day when there will
be no more Chesterfield couch
or old phone ringing in the
middle of the night.*

I'll try to call you as soon as we make a stopover in a civilized port. As always, I'll call during your last hour at the office. Don't worry about the time difference. I don't sleep much anymore anyway.



And I rise at dawn, my head full of quantum algorithms, memories, and trivial thoughts.



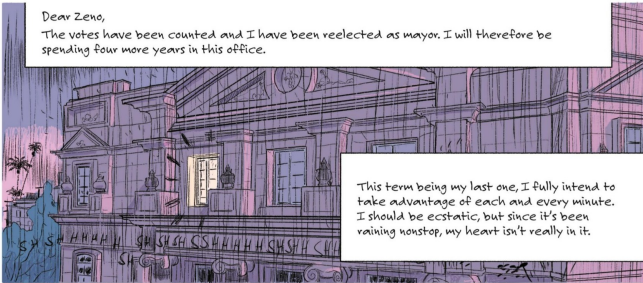
I can see big billowing storm clouds gathering; time to get back to work.

Z.




Dear Zeno,

The votes have been counted and I have been reelected as mayor, I will therefore be spending four more years in this office.




This term being my last one, I fully intend to take advantage of each and every minute. I should be ecstatic, but since it's been raining nonstop, my heart isn't really in it.



It's a good thing there's no chimney in my office. Otherwise, I might be tempted to bring a blanket and a few cats.

When I was campaigning, I avoided announcing that, if I were to win, it would be my last term. Marta said it would have made me look like a frail old woman.

But I think she was talking more about herself than about me. With every passing day, I have more strands of silver hair. I'm not fooling anyone.



But in all honesty, I love the gray hairs! I look like a friendly witch. (Don't make that face! It goes without saying that I would be a friendly witch!)

The other candidate is a tall, pale man who crinkles his nose like a wary rodent when he believes he's right. He has the obnoxious habit of punctuating his speeches with maritime metaphors, always talking about helms, captains, and sinking ships...



Metaphors that reminded me of you and made it hard to concentrate. I would picture your boat capsizing and I would see you being swept away by a gigantic wave.

The torrential rain beating down on the city is making it apathetic. Giuseppe walks out into the courtyard, looks up at the clouds with pinched lips, and predicts more days of rain.



"Be patient, little squirrel," he says. "Spring is almost here."

On the last day of my campaign, we inaugurated the bridge. We walked across it with the engineers and a few of the oldest residents of the Steps neighborhood, to whom we wanted to pay tribute. The rain had made the bridge slippery. Clutching their umbrellas, the poor little seniors walked tentatively, holding onto their family members' arms for dear life. It was an utter disaster.



I had no choice but to grab Giuseppe's arm, while he walked with the same confident gait he's always had.

That night, I stayed late at the office to go over paperwork. Then I put on a raincoat and I walked across the bridge alone. It's a nice bridge. Simple and discreet.



I can't wait for you to see it the next time you're in town, even though I know you'll criticize it. You can't help it.


I walked across it very slowly, concentrating on each step and on the sound of the raindrops falling on my umbrella.



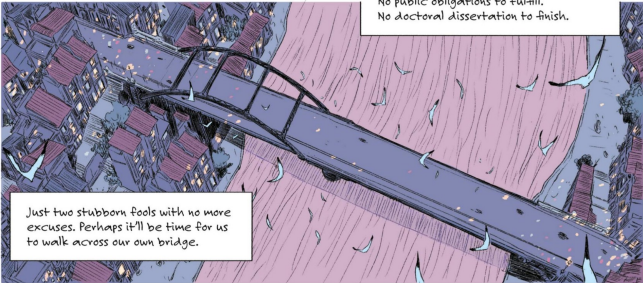
When I got to the other side, I started crying like an idiot.

Four years!






What will become of us in four years, my love?
We'll be running out of excuses soon.



No job for me; no travels for you.
No public obligations to fulfill.
No doctoral dissertation to finish.

Just two stubborn fools with no more
excuses. Perhaps it'll be time for us
to walk across our own bridge.



I'll stick around at the office in case
you call. I'll put on Bach's Suites.
They're perfect for this rainy weather.

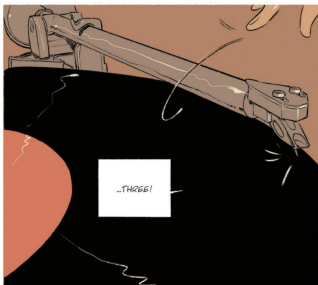
How long has it been since we listened
to Bach together?

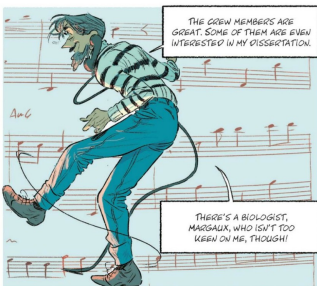
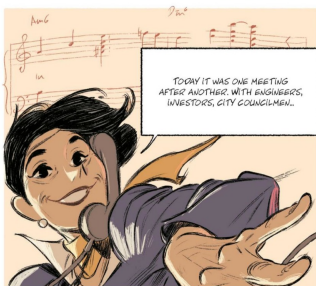
Will you call me?

A.

CHAPTER
14





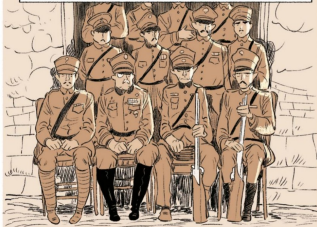




HER HUSBAND WAS A BRILLIANT VIOLINIST. JULIA HAD A BEAUTIFUL VOICE AND WOULD SING ALONG AS HE PLAYED. THEY WERE CRAZY ABOUT EACH OTHER.



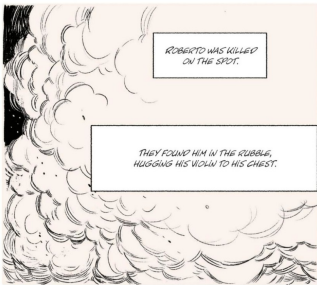
WHEN THE WAR BROKE OUT, ROBERTO, WHO NEVER WOULD HAVE HURT SO MUCH AS A FLY, WAS DRAFTED... HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO HOLD A GUN.



TO AVOID GOING TO THE FRONT, HE JOINED THE ARMY ORCHESTRA. ONE DAY, THERE WAS AN AIR RAID DURING A CONCERT...

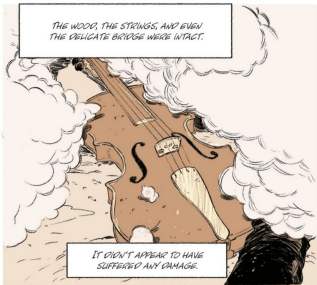


ROBERTO WAS KILLED ON THE SPOT.



THEY FOUND HIM IN THE RUBBLE, HUGGING HIS VIOLIN TO HIS CHEST.

THE WOOD, THE STRINGS, AND EVEN THE DELICATE BRIDGE WERE INTACT.



IT DIDN'T APPEAR TO HAVE SUFFERED ANY DAMAGE.

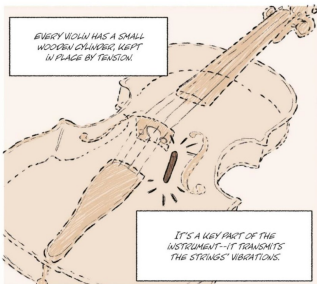
THEY BROUGHT IT TO JULIA IN A CARDBOARD BOX, WITH AN ARMY DECORATION.



WHEN SHE TRIED TO PLAY IT IN MEMORY OF ROBERTO,
THE VIOLIN HAD GONE MUTE. IT DIDN'T LET OUT A SOUND.



EVERY VIOLIN HAS A SMALL
WOODEN CHINBEAK, KEPT
IN PLACE BY TRINION.



IT'S A KEY PART OF THE
INSTRUMENT--IT TRANSMITS
THE STRINGS' VIBRATIONS.

IT'S CALLED THE "SOUL OF THE VIOLIN."
IT MUST'VE COME APART IN THE BLOW.



AFTER ROBERTO DIED, JULIA'S
SOUL ALSO CAME APART.



SHE HASN'T SPOKEN A
WORD SINCE THAT DAY.

A REAL TRAGEDY.



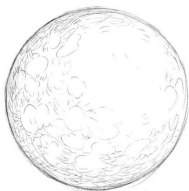
I'VE BROUGHT YOU
DOWN, I'M SORRY.

NO, DON'T BE. THE STORY
OF JULIA AND ROBERTO
DESERVES TO BE TOLD. I'M
GLAD YOU SHARED IT WITH ME.

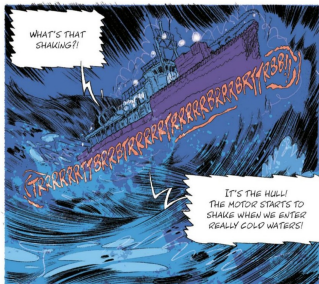




CHAPTER
13







WHAT'S THAT SHAKING?!

IT'S THE HULL!
THE MOTOR STARTS TO
SHAKE WHEN WE ENTER
REALLY COLD WATERS!



IT'LL ONLY LAST A FEW MINUTES,
UNTIL THE METAL PLATES RETRACT!



YOU DON'T LIKE THE
COLD, DO YOU, YOU
OLD WHALE?

SRRR...
BRRR...
BRRR...
HRRR...



HELP ME MOVE THE CARGO TO THE STERN
AND LET'S LOOSEN THE MOORING!



I HEAR THAT YOU COULD
BECOME CAPTAIN IF YOU
WANTED TO...

...AND THAT YOU SPEND YOUR
TIME GAZING AT THE STARS
ON CLEAR NIGHTS.

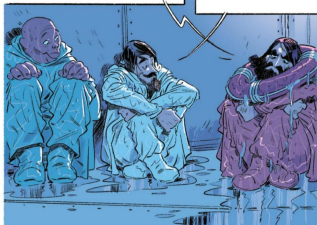


I HOPE IT'S NOT
A BAD OMEN!



PLEASE DON'T TELL THE CAPTAIN.
HE FORBADE ME FROM PISSING
IN THE WATER.

I NEVER GIVE
AWAY A SECRET.
IT'S BAD LUCK.



BOBO, THE MOON CHANGES BECAUSE
IT'S ATTRACTED TO EARTH.
IT'S CALLED ORBITING.



MOON AND EARTH WANT TO BE
TOGETHER? SO WHY THEY NOT MEET?



A LONG TIME AGO, THE MOON AND
EARTH EACH FOLLOWED THEIR
OWN TRAJECTORIES.



ONE DAY THEY CROSSED PATHS AND
WERE MUTUALLY ATTRACTED TO EACH
OTHER, BUT NEITHER MANAGED TO STOP.



THEY FOLLOWED THEIR
OWN COURSE, EACH WITH
A POWER OF ATTRACTION
OVER THE OTHER...

...AND THE FORCES COMBINED,
AND THE MOON STARTED
ORBITING AROUND THE EARTH,
OVER AND OVER AGAIN.



THEY NEVER
MANAGED TO
LATCH ONTO
EACH OTHER...

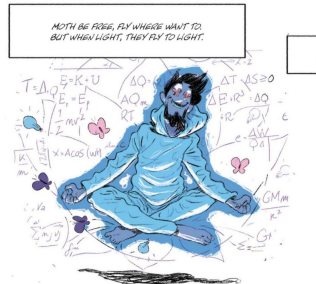
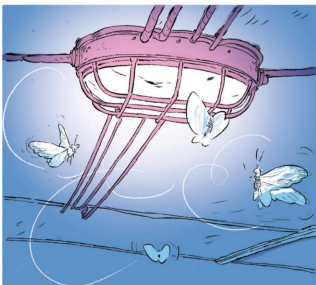


...BUT THEIR PATHS
ARE FOREVER
LINKED.

SO MOON AND
EARTH ALWAYS
LIVE APART?

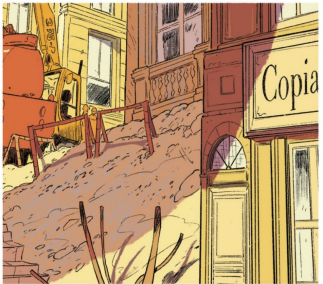
IT'S ACTUALLY THEIR WAY OF
BEING TOGETHER. IF THEY EVER
COLLIDED, THEY WOULD CAUSE
A LOT OF DAMAGE.

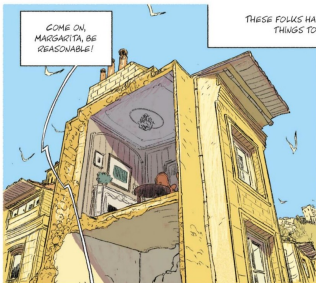




CHAPTER
12





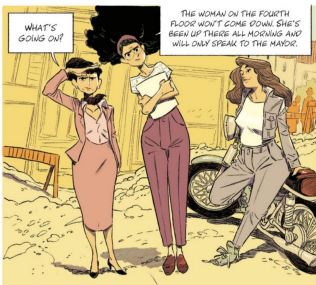


COME ON, MARGARITA, BE REASONABLE!

THESE FOLKS HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO.



AND IT'S ALMOST LUNCHTIME! PLEASE...



WHAT'S GOING ON?

THE WOMAN ON THE FOURTH FLOOR WON'T COME DOWN. SHE'S BEEN UP THERE ALL MORNING AND WILL ONLY SPEAK TO THE MAYOR.



HAVE THEY BEEN COMPENSATED?

OF COURSE, AS HAVE ALL THE BUILDING'S OCCUPANTS. I WENT TO THE OFFICE TO GET THE FILE WE HAVE ON IT. OH, AND YOU GOT ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE LETTERS WITHOUT A RETURN ADDRESS...



THANKS MARTA, YOU CAN GO HOME. IT'S SATURDAY, AND BESIDES, IT'S YOUR ANNIVERSARY.

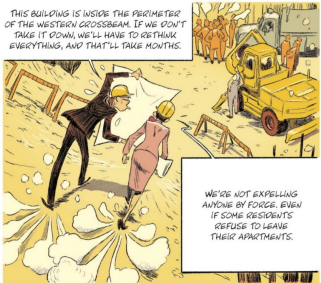
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T NEED ME ANYMORE?



YES, I'M FINE, DON'T WORRY. HAVE A GREAT WEEKEND!



THIS BUILDING IS INSIDE THE PERIMETER OF THE WESTERN CROSSBEAM. IF WE DON'T TAKE IT DOWN, WE'LL HAVE TO RE-THINK EVERYTHING, AND THAT'LL TAKE MONTHS.



WE'RE NOT EXPELLING ANYONE BY FORCE, EVEN IF SOME RESIDENTS REFUSE TO LEAVE THEIR APARTMENTS.



BUT--

YOU KNOW THE RULES.



I'M TRULY SORRY, MA'AM.

DON'T WORRY, MR. FELIX.



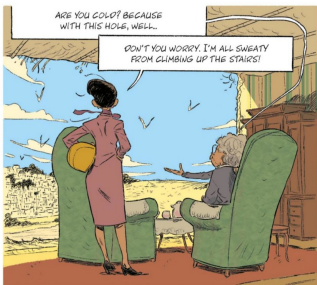
BE CAREFUL! SHE HAD NO PROBLEM KICKING US OUT!

A REAL SPITFIRE!



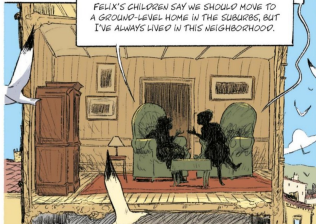
THE BUILDING STRUCTURE ISN'T SAFE, MA'AM. IT'S DANGEROUS UP THERE.

THESE OLD BUILDINGS ARE SOLID.



MRS. MARGARITA, WHEN CONSTRUCTION IS FINISHED, THE NEIGHBORHOOD WON'T BE THE SAME ANYMORE. MOST OF YOUR NEIGHBORS TOOK THE MONEY AND LEFT.

FELIX'S CHILDREN SAY WE SHOULD MOVE TO A GROUND-LEVEL HOME IN THE SUBURBS, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LIVED IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.



THEY'RE NOT MY KIDS, SEE. I WAS FELIX'S SECOND'S WIFE. I NEVER HAD CHILDREN MYSELF. WHAT ABOUT YOU?

YES, A TEENAGER. BUT SHE'S NOT ALWAYS MY BIGGEST FAN.

COME NOW, I BET SHE ADMIRES YOU VERY MUCH!

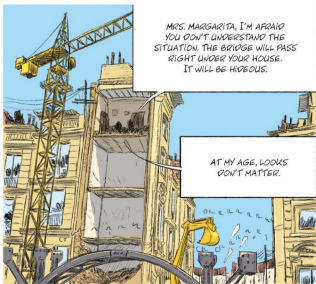


BUT YOU ACCEPTED OUR OFFER.

BECAUSE FELIX INSISTED. BUT THEN I REMEMBERED THE BOTANICAL GARDEN THAT WAS DEMOLISHED LAST YEAR, AND IT MADE ME SAD. I DON'T WANT MY APARTMENT TO SUFFER THE SAME FATE.

MRS. MARGARITA, I'M AFRAID YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION. THE BRIDGE WILL PASS RIGHT UNDER YOUR HOUSE. IT WILL BE HORRIBLE.

AT MY AGE, LOOKS DON'T MATTER.



IT MADE ME SAD AS WELL. BUT THE GREENHOUSE WAS IN SUCH A TERRIBLE STATE THAT IT HAD TO BE DESTROYED EITHER WAY.

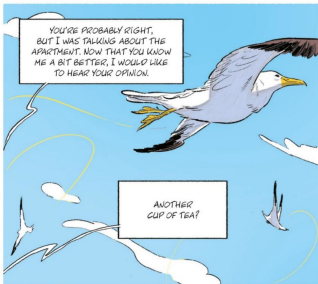
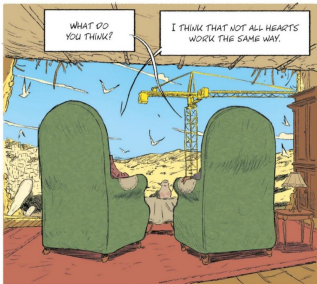
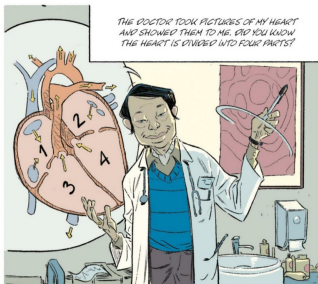
I SUPPOSE WE ALL GET OLD EVENTUALLY.



THIS IS THE MONEY YOU GAVE US TO LEAVE OUR APARTMENT.

FELIX TOOK A BIT TO GO BUY HIMSELF SOME SHOES, BUT I PUT IT BACK IN THE ENVELOPE ON TUESDAY.







CHAPTER
11





Dear Ana,
I'll be in town on Tuesday the 24th. The ship is docking for one night, which gives me the opportunity to take care of a few things relating to the apartment and the bookstore. Can I see you?

Z.



BRG...
RGBRG...

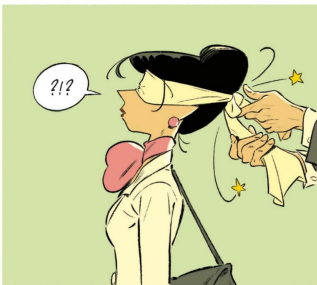
QUIET,
FOR HEAVEN'S
SAKE!

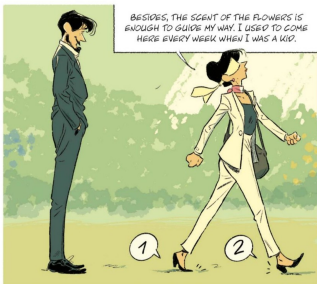
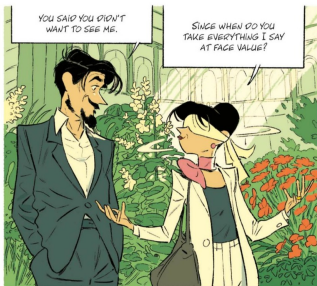
Good lord, I haven't seen you in eight years. I'm afraid to graze your arm or even breathe in your scent, for fear of fainting. I'll settle for your voice...

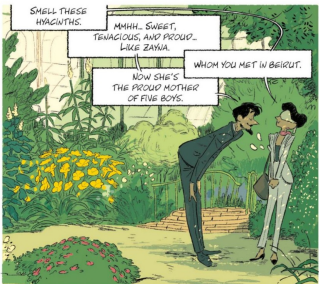
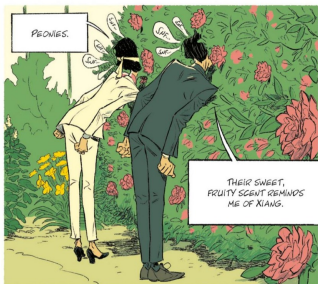


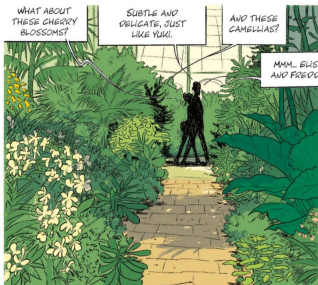
I'll meet you at the old botanical garden at 5 PM. It's closed to the public because it's being demolished. We'll be able to relax there. Well, maybe you can. Me, doubtful.

A.

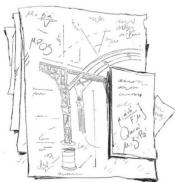


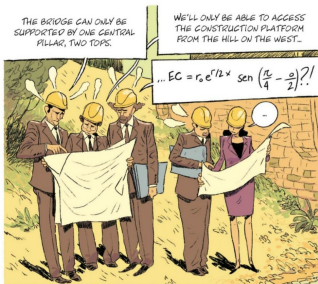
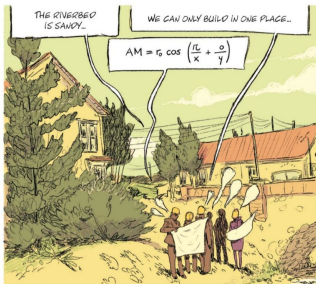






CHAPTER 10







"DEAR ZENO, I'M SO EXCITED! I'VE ONLY JUST BEEN REFLECTED, AND WE'VE ALREADY STARTED CONSTRUCTION ON THE BRIDGE..."



"...WHICH WILL UNITE BOTH SIDES OF THE TOWN FROM THE HILLS. I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT HOW THIS BRIDGE IS ALSO A SYMBOL OF OUR RELATIONSHIP..."



"...YOU AND I, WEIGHTLESS, UNITED IN SUCH AN UNLIKELY WAY."

WHO IS THIS BIMBO?!!



"UNITED IN SUCH AN UNLIKELY WAY"?!

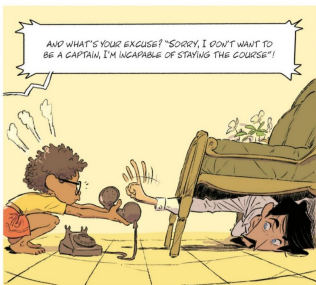
WE'RE THE ONES WHO SHOULD BE UNITED! YOU AND ME! AND IN A VERY LIKELY WAY!



HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY EXPECT ME TO TRUST YOU?



YOU HAVE WAY TOO MANY SECRETS!







WHAT'S GOING ON?

SOME GUY WANTS TO STOP CONSTRUCTION ON THE BRIDGE!

AWA, WITHOUT A SOLID FOUNDATION, THE BRIDGE WILL NEVER HOLD.

$$X \cdot Y = 0.4M!$$



YOU KNOW WHAT?! GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE! TAKE YOUR THINGS, AND DON'T FORGET ALL YOUR STUPID FORMULAS THAT NOBODY UNDERSTANDS!



ZENO, WE WON'T CHANGE OUR MIND.



HOLD ON A SEC, PUT THE ENGINEERS ON.



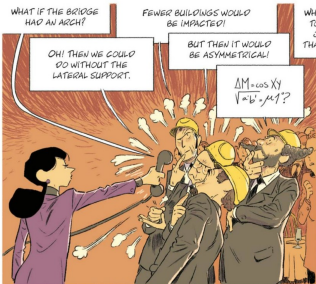
WHAT IF THE BRIDGE HAD AN ARCH?

FEWER BUILDINGS WOULD BE IMPACTED!

OH! THEN WE COULD DO WITHOUT THE LATERAL SUPPORT.

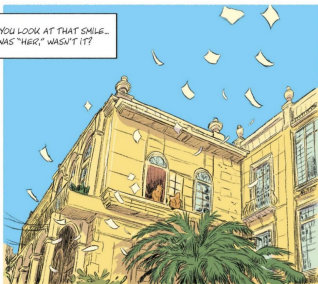
BUT THEN IT WOULD BE ASYMMETRICAL!

$$\Delta M = \cos X Y \\ \sqrt{a^2 - M^2}?$$



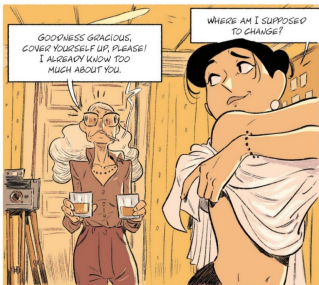
WHO EVER SAID BOTH SIDES HAD TO BE IDENTICAL? THE BRIDGE JUST HAS TO STAY STANDING. THAT'S ALL! DO THE MATH AGAIN!





CHAPTER
9

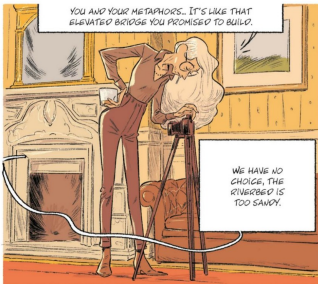




A POLITICAL FIGURE HIDING BEHIND A FLAG.
HA HA WHAT A METAPHOR!



YOU AND YOUR METAPHORS.. IT'S LIKE THAT
ELEVATED BRIDGE YOU PROMISED TO BUILD.



WE HAVE NO
CHOICE, THE
RIVERBED IS
TOO SANDY.

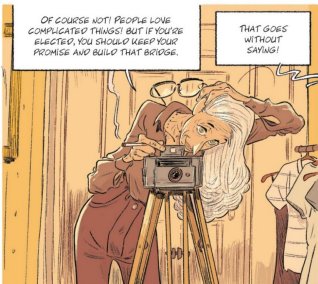
SIMPLE THINGS STAND
THE TEST OF TIME BETTER..
BUT YOU'VE NEVER
LIKED SIMPLE.



AND YOU THINK
THIS COULD COST
ME VOTES?

OF COURSE NOT! PEOPLE LOVE
COMPLICATED THINGS! BUT IF YOU'RE
ELECTED, YOU SHOULD KEEP YOUR
PROMISE AND BUILD THAT BRIDGE.

THAT GOES
WITHOUT
SAYING!



AND YOU SHOULD
WORK WITH A TEAM
OF ENGINEERS FOR
WHOM ONE PLUS ONE
ALWAYS EQUALS TWO.

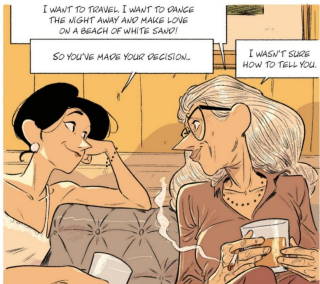
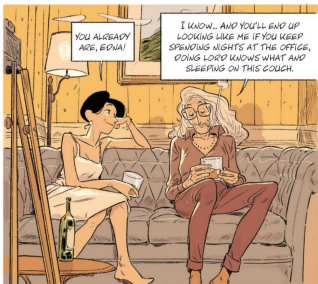
ARE THERE
TIMES WHEN IT
DOESN'T?

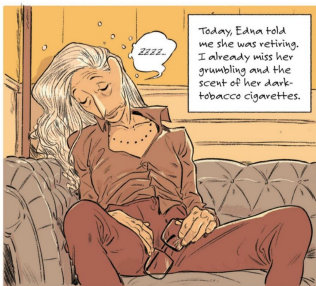
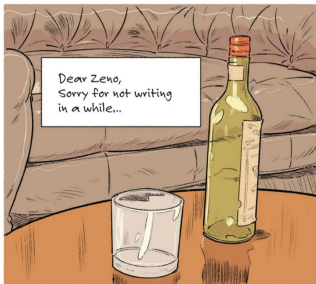


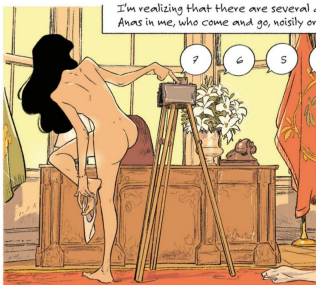
DON'T MAKE ME
ANSWER THAT.

FLASH!!









I'm realizing that there are several different Anas in me, who come and go, noisily or quietly...



There's Ana, public figure. Ana the Mayor. Ana, Giuseppe's wife. Ana, Claudia's mom...



CLICK!

They cross paths, wave knowingly to each other, and sometimes argue. Truth be told, I still don't know which one of them I really am.



I'm sure I'll find out some day. In the meantime, I try to make all of them get along.



One of the bold Anas grabbed the camera out of my hand. She put on the timer and took this pose. I'm sending you the photo along with a kiss. I hope you like it.



Fair winds, sailor.

A.

CHAPTER
8



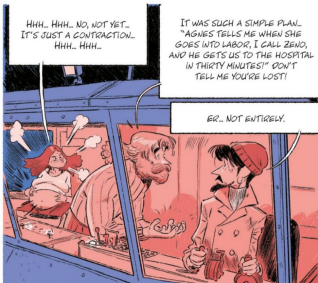


OH BOY... I'M REALLY NOT GOOD AT THIS...

ZENO, DON'T TELL ME YOU GOT LOST AGAIN!

HHH... HHH... HHH...

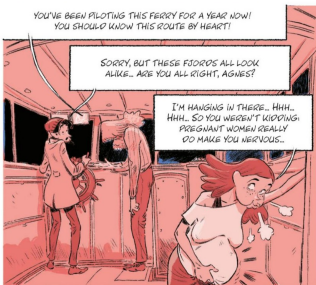
IS THE BABY COMING?!



HHH... HHH... NO, NOT YET... IT'S JUST A CONTRACTION... HHH... HHH...

IT WAS SUCH A SIMPLE PLAN... "AGNES TELLS ME WHEN SHE GOES INTO LABOR, I CALL ZENO, AND HE GETS US TO THE HOSPITAL IN THIRTY MINUTES!" DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE LOST!

ER... NOT ENTIRELY.



YOU'VE BEEN PLOTTING THIS FERRY FOR A YEAR NOW! YOU SHOULD KNOW THIS ROUTE BY HEART!

SORRY, BUT THESE FJORDS ALL LOOK ALIKE... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, AGNES?

I'M HANGING IN THERE... HHH... HHH... SO YOU WEREN'T KIDDING! PREGNANT WOMEN REALLY DO MAKE YOU NERVOUS...



REALLY? WHY IS THAT?

I'VE HAD A FEW BAD EXPERIENCES. I BRING BAD LUCK TO PARENTS-TO-BE.

HHH... HHH... CUT IT OUT, ZENO. JUST GET US TO THE HOSPITAL AND EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE.



IF YOU CAN'T READ A MAP, THEN LOOK AT THE STARS. YOU KNOW EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT STARS!

IN THE OLD DAYS, SAILORS USED THE STARS TO NAVIGATE, DIDN'T THEY?

LET'S GO UP ON DECK.

??



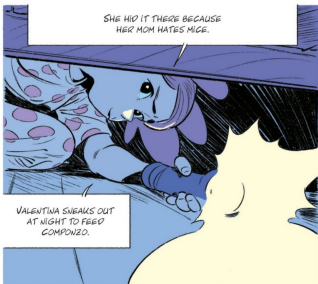
OH!

WOW! IT'S BEEN AGES SINCE I'VE SEEN ANYTHING THIS BEAUTIFUL!





IT'S JUST LIKE VALENTINA,
A GIRL IN MY CLASS. SHE HID A
MOUSE IN A SHOEBOX IN HER
DADDY'S WORKSHOP.



SHE HID IT THERE BECAUSE
HER MOM HATES MICE.

VALENTINA SNEAKS OUT
AT NIGHT TO FEED
COMPONZO.



AND WHAT DOES
SHE FEED HIM?

I THINK
COMPONZO LIKES
SPAGHETTI.

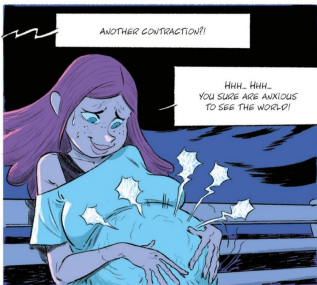
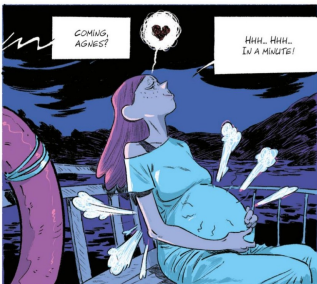


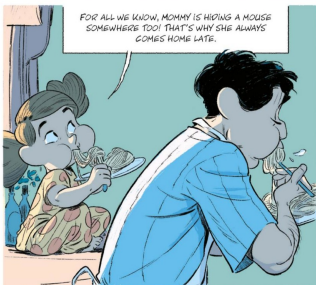
OF COURSE HE DOES!
WHO WOULD TURN DOWN
A BOWL OF SPAGHETTI
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE
NIGHT? COMPONZO
IS RIGHT!



WHAT ABOUT YOU?
YOU HUNGRY?





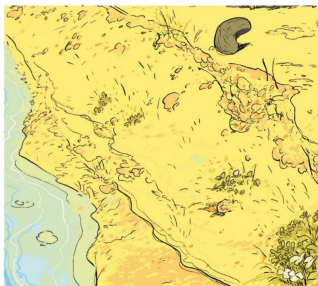
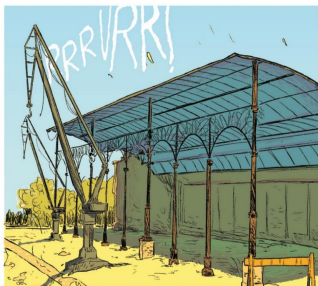
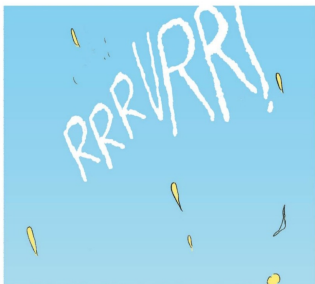




CHAPTER

7







STOP!!
DON'T TOUCH
THE ARCADES!

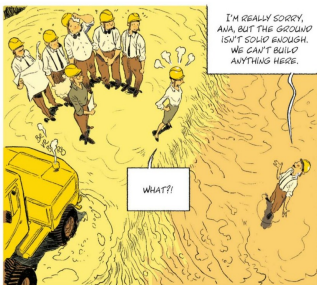
BUT I THOUGHT WE
WERE DEMOLISHING
THE OLD QUAY.

WE'RE RENOVATING THE PIER
AND THE SHIPYARD, BUT WE'RE
NOT TOUCHING THE ARCADES!

DO I REALLY HAVE TO DO
EVERYTHING MYSELF?

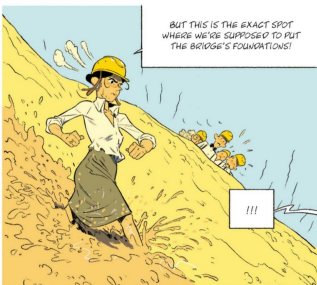
WHAT'S HER PROBLEM?

MUST BE THE HEAT...



I'M REALLY SORRY,
AUA, BUT THE GROUND
ISN'T SOLID ENOUGH.
WE CAN'T BUILD
ANYTHING HERE.

WHAT?!



BUT THIS IS THE EXACT SPOT
WHERE WE'RE SUPPOSED TO PUT
THE BRIDGE'S FOUNDATIONS!

!!!



WHAT IF WE REINFORCE THE
PILLARS WITH CONCRETE?

POINTLESS. THE WATER WOULD
EVENTUALLY SWEEP IT ALL AWAY.

IF THE ENTIRE BANK IS LIKE
THIS, THEN IT'S A LOST CAUSE.

NO WONDER NOBODY HAS
EVER BUILT A BRIDGE HERE.

I'M AFRAID WE'RE GOING
TO HAVE TO GIVE UP...



THIS TOWN NEEDS A BRIDGE
AND IT WILL GET ONE!
EVEN IF IT MEANS STARTING
FROM SCRATCH AND
REDRAWING THE BLUEPRINTS.

EITHER WAY,
WE ARE NOT
GIVING UP!



GO HOME, ANA. WE CAN PICK THIS UP AGAIN TOMORROW.

NO... I NEED TO FINISH.

I THINK YOU NEED SOMETHING ELSE.

HUH?

NOTHING.



ARE YOU SURE I CAN'T BRING YOU A DIFFERENT SKIRT?

THIS ONE WILL BE DRY BY THE TIME I HEAD HOME. THANKS, ANA. SEE YOU TOMORROW.



RiiiiiiiiiiiiiiNG!!!



HELLO?

EVENING, MA'AM. WILL YOU ACCEPT A CALL FROM THE ISLAND OF...? ACTUALLY, I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S CALLED...

HA HA HA!

I'M STARTING TO GET USED TO YOUR UNTIMELY PHONE CALLS.



GOOD, BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I CAN TELL MY LATEST MISADVENTURE TO. I'M LOST IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE WITH MARY A DROP OF FUEL LEFT...

YOU SHOULD BE CALLING FOR HELP, INSTEAD.

HMM... YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT.

BUT SINCE THEY WON'T GET HERE TILL MORNING, EITHER WAY I'M STUCK SPENDING THE NIGHT ON THIS BEACH.



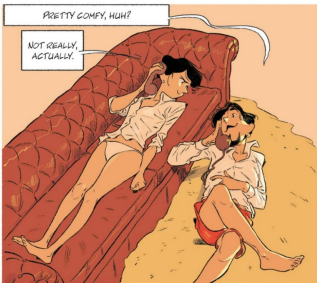
IN THAT CASE, MAKE ROOM FOR ME.

FLIP!



PRETTY COMFY, HUH?

NOT REALLY, ACTUALLY.



THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE INCAPABLE OF RELAXING. YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOO RIGID.

THAT'S NOT TRUE!

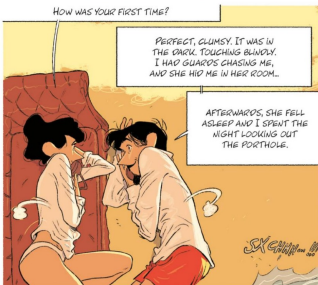
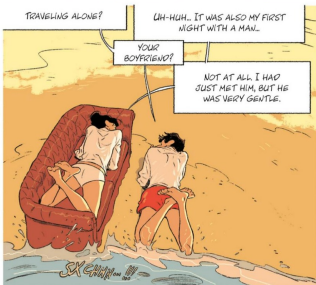


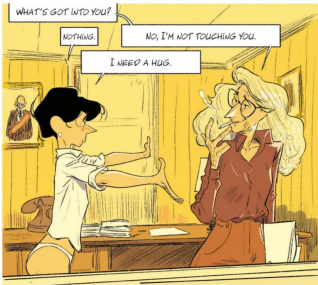
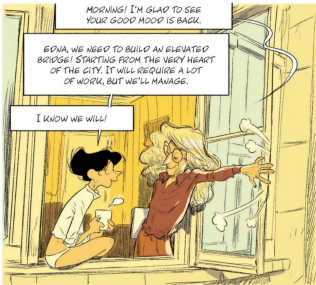
HA HA HA, OF COURSE IT IS! YOU SPEND ALL YOUR TIME ORDERING PEOPLE AROUND AND COVERING THE CITY IN CONCRETE.

TOTAL BALONEY! I ALSO HAVE SOME SOFT SIDES.



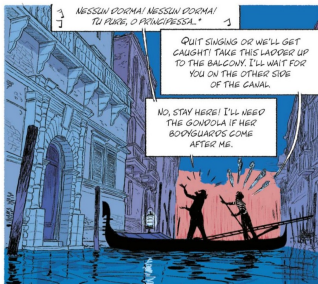






CHAPTER
6





3
1
NESSUN DOPIA! NESSUN DOPIA!
TU RAGE, O PRINCESSA.*

QUIT SINGING OR WE'LL GET
CAUGHT! TAKE THIS LADDER UP
TO THE BALCONY. I'LL WAIT FOR
YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE
OF THE CANAL.

NO, STAY HERE! I'LL NEED
THE GONDOLA IF HER
BODYGUARDS COME
AFTER ME.



BODYGUARDS? PFFF... ARE YOU
SURE THIS IS A GOOD IDEA?
FOR ALL WE KNOW, SHE WON'T
EVEN WANT TO SEE YOU.

IMPOSSIBLE! SHE'S
ALWAYS SENDING ME
BEAUTIFUL BLANK
LETTERS, WITHOUT
A WORD SO THAT
NOBODY CAN TRACE
THEM BACK TO HER...



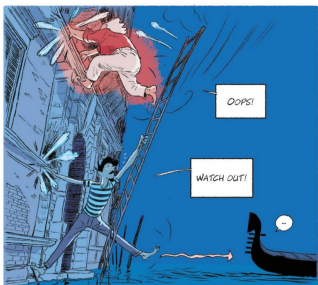
WHAT ABOUT YOU
AND THAT MAYOR
WOMAN YOU REFUSE
TO TALK ABOUT?

I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM
HER SINCE I LEFT
TOWN YEARS AGO.
I THINK SHE HAS
A DAUGHTER NOW.



YOU SHOULD CALL HER!
YOU MELANCHOLY TYPES,
YOU ALWAYS THINK
HAPPINESS ISN'T
FOR YOU.

YEAH, YEAH, YEAH...
COME ON, HURRY! AND
DON'T START SINGING!



DOPS!

WATCH OUT!



GREAT, SO MUCH FOR
OUR GETAWAY VEHICLE!

DON'T WORRY!
NOBODY WILL EVEN
NOTICE WE'RE HERE!
NO NEED TO RUN!

*EXCERPT FROM THE OPERA TOSCA BY PUCCINI.



LOOK AT THAT BRIDGE: IT HAS AN ARCH OVER IT, MAKING THE LATERAL SUPPORT PILLARS UNNECESSARY. GENIUS, RIGHT? YOU SHOULD TAKE NOTES...

I STUDY QUANTUM PHYSICS, NOT ENGINEERING.



WHO KNOWS, IT MIGHT PROVE USEFUL ONE DAY. WAIT FOR ME HERE, I WON'T BE LONG.

AND PLEASE DON'T...

...SING! I WON'T, DON'T WORRY!



JULIET!



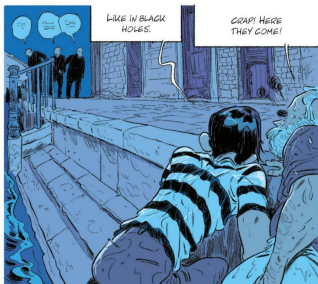
ROMEO!

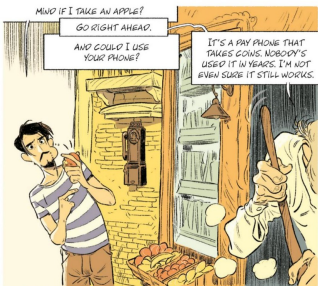


MA IL MIO MISTERO È CHIUSO IN ME
IL NOME MIO NESSUN SAPRÀ MA, MIO
SULLA TUA BOCCA, LO DIRÒ QUANDO
LA LUCE SPLENDERÀ
ED IL MIO BACIO SCIOGLHERÀ
IL SILENZIO CHE TI FA MIA!

??!!







MIND IF I TAKE AN APPLE?

GO RIGHT AHEAD.

AND COULD I USE YOUR PHONE?

IT'S A PAY PHONE THAT TAKES COWS. NOBODY'S USED IT IN YEARS. I'M NOT EVEN SURE IT STILL WORKS.

--
- HELLO?
- ANA?
- ZENO?

CHAPTER
5



Sunday,
Election Day.

Dear Zeno,

(I'm a little ashamed to be writing these words... I guess I really can't keep anything from you. One day, maybe I'll understand why your mere presence turns my life upside down.)

This morning, I was supposed to act like a good candidate. Eat a light meal, attend a few meetings, analyze the survey numbers, then go home and wait to hear the results.

But instead, I nibbled on a few chocolate cookies and stuffed some clothes in a suitcase. After going alone to the polling booth (I didn't vote for myself!), I went to the train station and bought a ticket for the first train out of there.

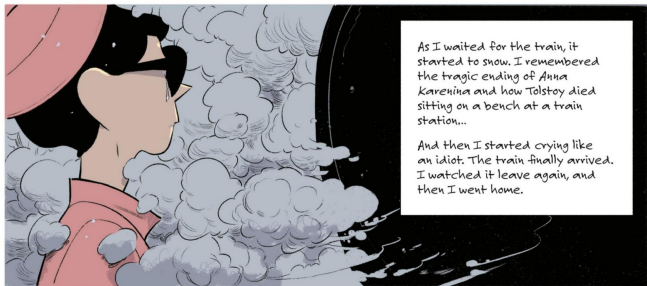


I figured that if I gave up being mayor and ran away, maybe you would go with me, and... well, I don't know what got into me! I was sitting on the platform, freezing to death...

But the train was late and little Claudia wouldn't stop squirming, as if she were protesting against the cookies and the cold... and the fact that I was about to deprive her of her father.



My poor dear Giuseppe... Had I done such a thing, he would have forgiven me, I know he would have. He always understands me, and is much more forgiving of me than I am of myself...



As I waited for the train, it started to snow. I remembered the tragic ending of Anna Karenina and how Tolstoy died sitting on a bench at a train station...

And then I started crying like an idiot. The train finally arrived. I watched it leave again, and then I went home.



What will become of us, Zeno?

Will we be able to become "friends"?

Now that I've found you again, I would so love to make a little bit of space for you in my life.

A place filled with seagulls, with a view of the sea.

Tell me, would you like that?

A.

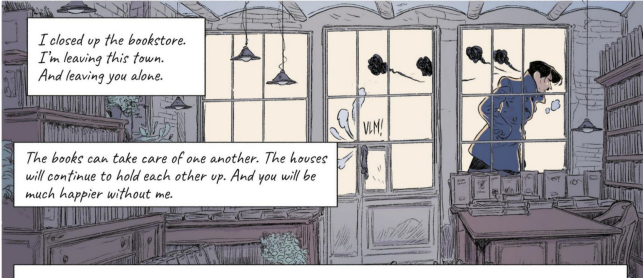


P.S. Your bookstore is closed, and there's no note on the door. I'll slip this letter in the mailbox and hope it reaches you.



Sunday night, Election Day.
Dear Ana,

(Damn it, I'll never be able to say goodbye to you.)

A man in a blue coat is looking out a window in a bookstore. The room is filled with bookshelves, a desk, and hanging lamps. The man is looking out at a snowy street.

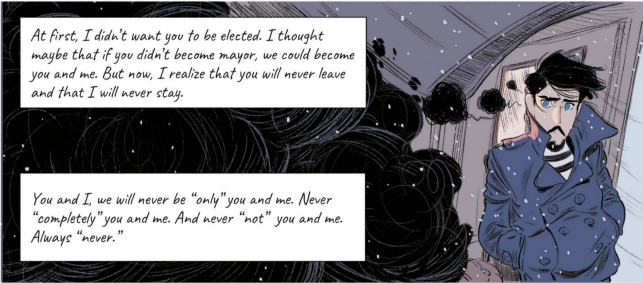
*I closed up the bookstore.
I'm leaving this town.
And leaving you alone.*

*The books can take care of one another. The houses
will continue to hold each other up. And you will be
much happier without me.*

*This morning, I wanted to be angry with you, but I wasn't able to. I wanted to vote against you,
but I couldn't. We were all there, standing in line, with your name on a ballot, the ballot inside
an envelope, the envelope inside our coat pockets, right next to our hearts.*




*After I voted, I had planned to go back to the bookstore, but I couldn't. I went
home, I packed a few things in a suitcase (mainly the notes for my dissertation),
and I took the first train out of there.*

A man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a blue double-breasted coat over a striped shirt, is shown in profile talking on a mobile phone. He is standing in a snowy, outdoor environment. The background is filled with dark, swirling patterns, possibly representing snow or a storm. The scene is set at night or in low light, with a few snowflakes visible in the air.

At first, I didn't want you to be elected. I thought maybe that if you didn't become mayor, we could become you and me. But now, I realize that you will never leave and that I will never stay.

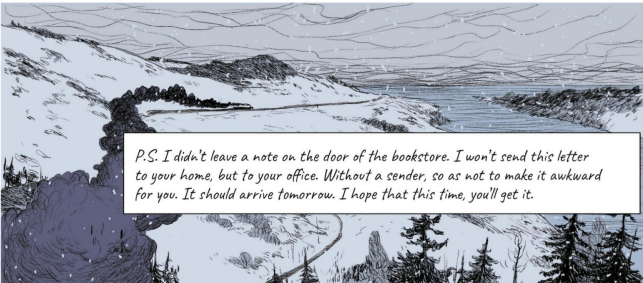
You and I, we will never be "only" you and me. Never "completely" you and me. And never "not" you and me. Always "never."

A man in a blue coat is standing on a train platform, talking on a mobile phone. He is looking towards the camera. The platform has a railing and a bench. In the background, there are buildings and a snowy landscape. The scene is set at night or in low light, with a few snowflakes visible in the air.

I hope with all my heart that you win the election (I know you will) and that you'll be a good mayor (the best this city of seagulls has ever had).

I sincerely wish you a wonderful family life. (Giuseppe is everything I will never be. You will be happy with him..)

Z.

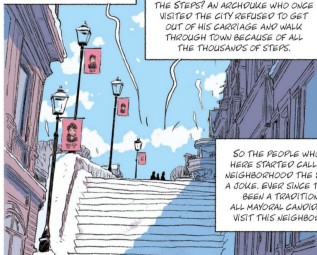
A wide, panoramic view of a snowy landscape. A path leads from the foreground towards a body of water in the distance. The sky is overcast, and there are some evergreen trees in the foreground. The scene is set at night or in low light, with a few snowflakes visible in the air.

P.S. I didn't leave a note on the door of the bookstore. I won't send this letter to your home, but to your office. Without a sender, so as not to make it awkward for you. It should arrive tomorrow. I hope that this time, you'll get it.

CHAPTER
4



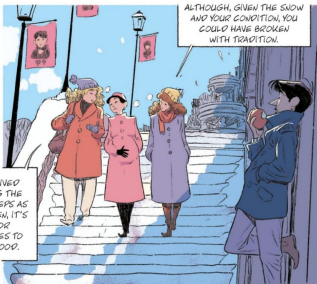
CAREFUL YOU DON'T SLIP ON ALL THESE STAIRS, ANA!

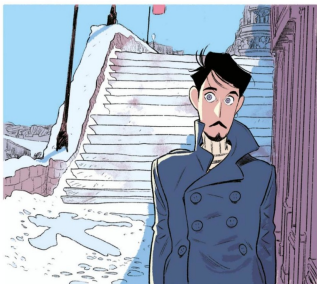


DO YOU KNOW WHY THIS NEIGHBORHOOD WAS NICKNAMED THE STEPS? AN ARCHDUKE WHO ONCE VISITED THE CITY REFUSED TO GET OUT OF HIS CARRIAGE AND WALK THROUGH TOWN BECAUSE OF ALL THE THOUSANDS OF STEPS.

SO THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED HERE STARTED CALLING THE NEIGHBORHOOD THE STEPS AS A JOKE. EVER SINCE THEN, IT'S BEEN A TRADITION FOR ALL MAYORAL CANDIDATES TO VISIT THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.

ALTHOUGH, GIVEN THE SNOW AND YOUR CONDITION, YOU COULD HAVE BROKEN WITH TRADITION.









MY CONDOLENCES REGARDING YOUR FATHER. I'M SO SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS.

OH, SO YOU FINALLY RECOGNIZED ME.



OF COURSE, DUMMY!
HOW COULD I EVER FORGET?



BUT I'M A PUBLIC FIGURE NOW.
IF I WERE SEEN HAVING DINNER
ALONE WITH A MAN, IT WOULD
CREATE A SCANDAL.



MY FATHER HAD BEEN ILL FOR
A WHILE... I SHOULD HAVE COME
BACK SOONER, BUT AS YOU CAN
SEE, I ALWAYS ARRIVE TOO LATE.

IS THE BABY
ALL RIGHT?

OH, YES, THANKS. IT WASN'T
A SERIOUS FALL. THE DOCTOR
SAYS THERE'S NOTHING
TO WORRY ABOUT.

I'M POSITIVE IT'S A GIRL.
IN FACT, I'VE BEEN CALLING HER
CLAUDIA. GIUSEPPE THINKS IT'S
A BAD IDEA, BECAUSE "JUST
FOR ONCE," I COULD BE WRONG.



GIUSEPPE?!

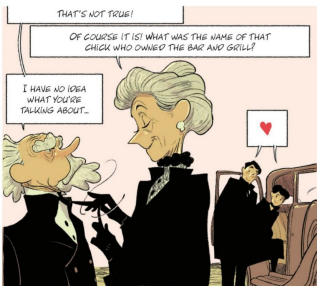
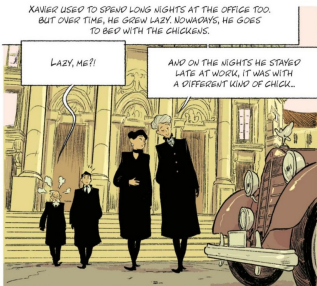
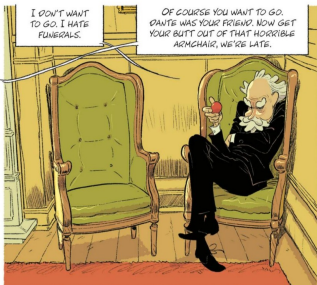
DID YOU ENJOY IT? OUR SPECIAL
TONIGHT IS BOLD AND INTENSE:
SWORDFISH RAVIOLI.
HERE IS YOUR KNIFE...

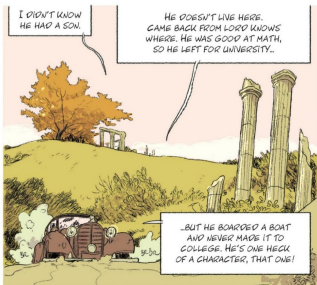
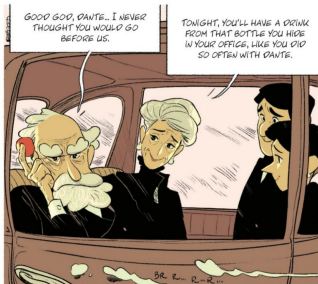
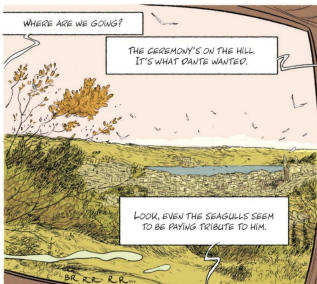




CHAPTER
3

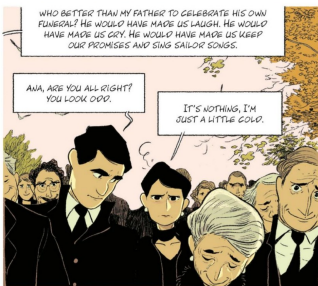


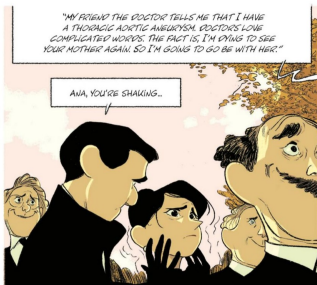






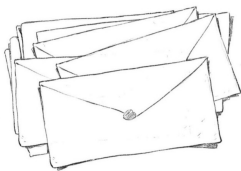
WELL, DOES HE LOOK LIKE DANTE?







CHAPTER
2



May 29, Letter 423.

My dear Zeno,

I woke up smiling this morning.
Isn't that wonderful?



Last night, Giuseppe proposed to me and I decided to say yes.

For a woman such as myself,
Giuseppe is the perfect man,
and then some.



When I first met him, he was in his last year of university. I can still see him, standing at the top of the stairs, with such a friendly face. I thought to myself that he was too tall and that his hairstyle made him look like a choir boy. Now I like the fact that he's so tall...



I was speechless yesterday.
I just stood there with a huge
dumbstruck smile on my lips.

Right then, it was your face
that came to mind. If I had
said "yes" to him or kissed him
right then and there, I would
have felt like I was cheating
on him.

And I would never want to
cheat on Giuseppe.



You must think I'm an idiot. How could I have believed you were the love of my life when we only ever spent one night together, years ago?

I looked for you, I waited for you, and I wept... Until the day I finally told myself that I would never see you again. I want to love a man who will stay by my side.


I want to start a family, live a nice, organized life, and grow old without too many worries.



And so I decided that this letter would be the last one.

From now on, you will be nothing more than a pleasant memory
that I will keep tucked away in a corner of my mind and
that will resurface on nights I can't sleep.





Honestly, I'm afraid to even think what might happen if you were to show up in my life again. I think you would turn it upside down.

Wherever you are, stay there, please.

Farewell,

A.



I've been writing letters and throwing them into the sea for years in the hope that one might reach you.

I know it's silly, but I don't know where to send them. My early letters all sounded the same, saying that I started looking for you the moment we parted. That I would find you one day.



My crewmates make fun of me. They say that I've come down with the sailor syndrome: I've fallen in love with a siren I've only seen once, and I am doomed to search for her the world over without ever finding her.



They're probably right... You're bound to have started a family, and I am nothing more to you now than a story you'll tell your grandchildren.

I've gotten used to life at sea. The crew is like an open family. Someone's always joining while someone else is always leaving. But we all have one point in common: we're incapable of living a stable life on solid ground. I earned a degree in physics via correspondence school and now I would like to start a doctorate. Though it may take me a while to write my dissertation on the high seas.



What about you? What's become of you? You told me you would never go back to our town after university, because you wanted to accomplish great things... And I'm sure that's exactly what you're doing. That's your destiny.



Mine changed forever the day I fell into the sea... When I came to, my mind and my soul had both undergone a profound change.



Who knows, perhaps you and I weren't written in the stars. Perhaps we were destined to be apart. To be completely honest, I can't picture you running the world from some dilapidated old boat, and I can't picture myself eating the same breakfast in the same kitchen for forty years.

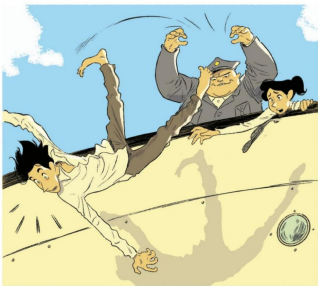
Inevitable, but impossible. Separated by infinity. United by the horizon. At that point where two parallel lines finally come together. One day, perhaps, always.

Z.

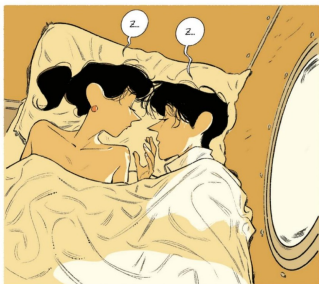
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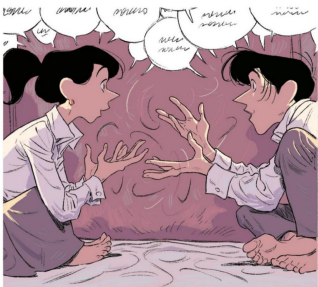
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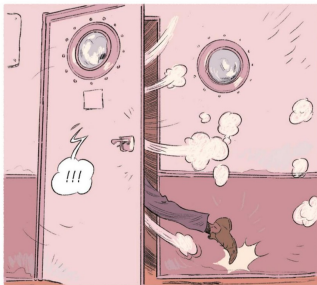


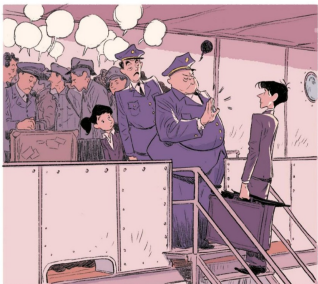














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Thank you, Mar, for your support, love, and patience.

Jordi

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