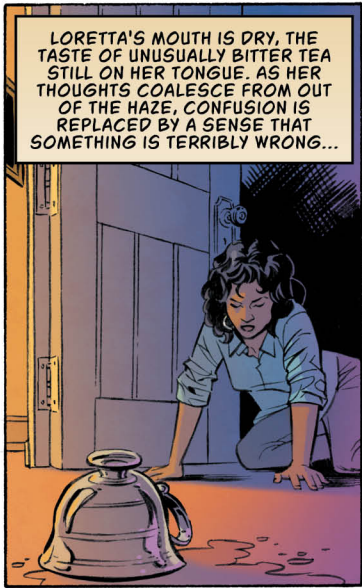
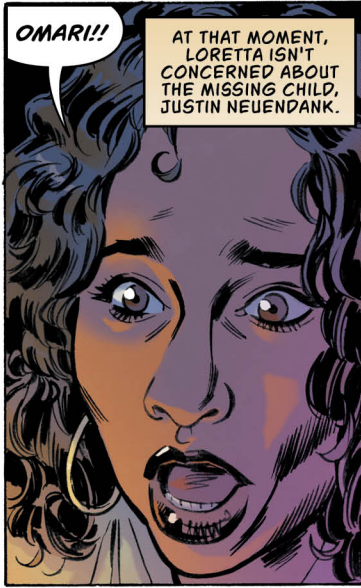


ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER **LORETTA GLASS** COLLAPSED ON THE FLOOR OF HER SON'S BEDROOM THERE HAD BEEN THE DREAMS.

STRANGE AND FRIGHTENING, THE NIGHTMARES FEATURED SCREECHING INHUMAN THINGS THAT COULD NOT, AND SHOULD NOT, EXIST IN THE REAL WORLD.



LORETTA'S MOUTH IS DRY, THE TASTE OF UNUSUALLY BITTER TEA STILL ON HER TONGUE. AS HER THOUGHTS COALESCE FROM OUT OF THE HAZE, CONFUSION IS REPLACED BY A SENSE THAT SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG...



OMARI!!!

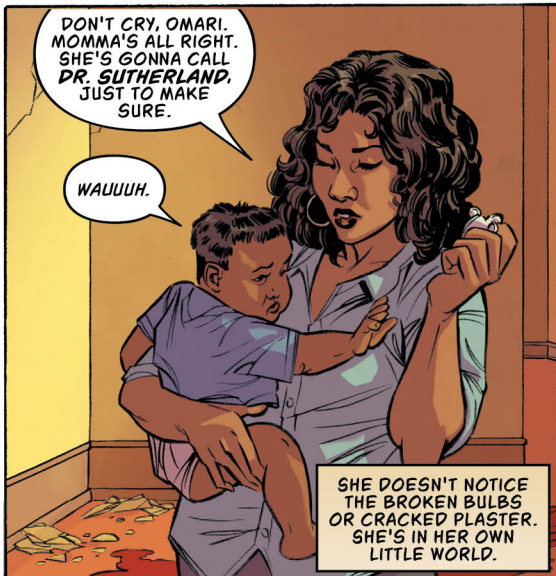
AT THAT MOMENT, LORETTA ISN'T CONCERNED ABOUT THE MISSING CHILD, JUSTIN NEUENDANK.



SHE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THE FBI AGENTS RENTING HER EXTRA ROOMS, OR ABOUT THE SILLY GIRL, **AUGUST**, WHO'S SUPPOSED TO CLEAN UP MESSSES AND BUY TEA WHEN IT RUNS OUT.

MNUH.

OH GOD. MY BABY BOY. MY BABY.



DON'T CRY, OMARI. MOMMA'S ALL RIGHT. SHE'S GONNA CALL **DR. SUTHERLAND**, JUST TO MAKE SURE.

WUUUUH.

SHE DOESN'T NOTICE THE BROKEN BULBS OR CRACKED PLASTER. SHE'S IN HER OWN LITTLE WORLD.



WUUUUH.

EVERYTHING'S OKAY. YOU'RE OKAY.

NOTHING MATTERS BUT HER SON.

IMAGINARY FIENDS

THE CAT'S PAW

PART 5

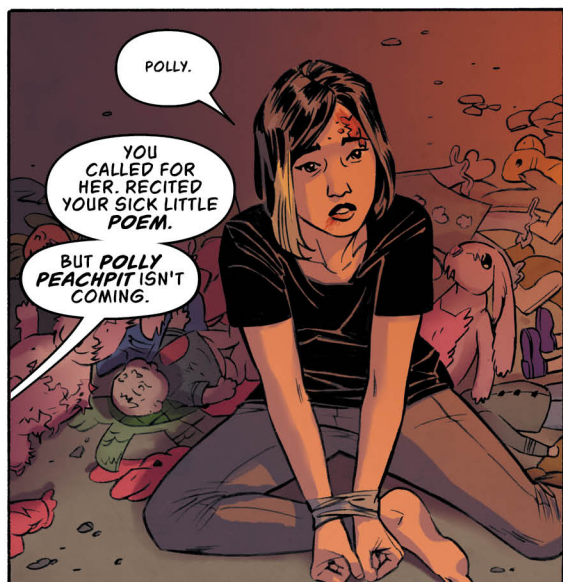
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NO ONE'S
HURT.

NOT THE
MONSTERS IN
HER DREAMS...

...OR THE INVISIBLE
BLOOD HER SHOES
TRACK DOWN THE
STAIRS.





POLLY.

YOU CALLED FOR HER. RECITED YOUR SICK LITTLE POEM.

BUT POLLY PEACHPIT ISN'T COMING.



YOUR IMAGINARY FRIEND IS DEAD. CHARLIE CHOKECHERRY KILLED HER.

HE DID HIS PART.



NOW I JUST HAVE TO DO MINE.

CAMERON. WAIT...



CAN'T YOU SEE THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON HERE? KIDS HAVE BEEN GOING MISSING HERE FOR YEARS. A LITTLE BOY DISAPPEARED LAST WEEK, AND THERE HE IS, DRESSED LIKE A CAT WITH SOME OTHER KIDS IN SOME WEIRD STOCKHOLM SYNDROME DAZE.



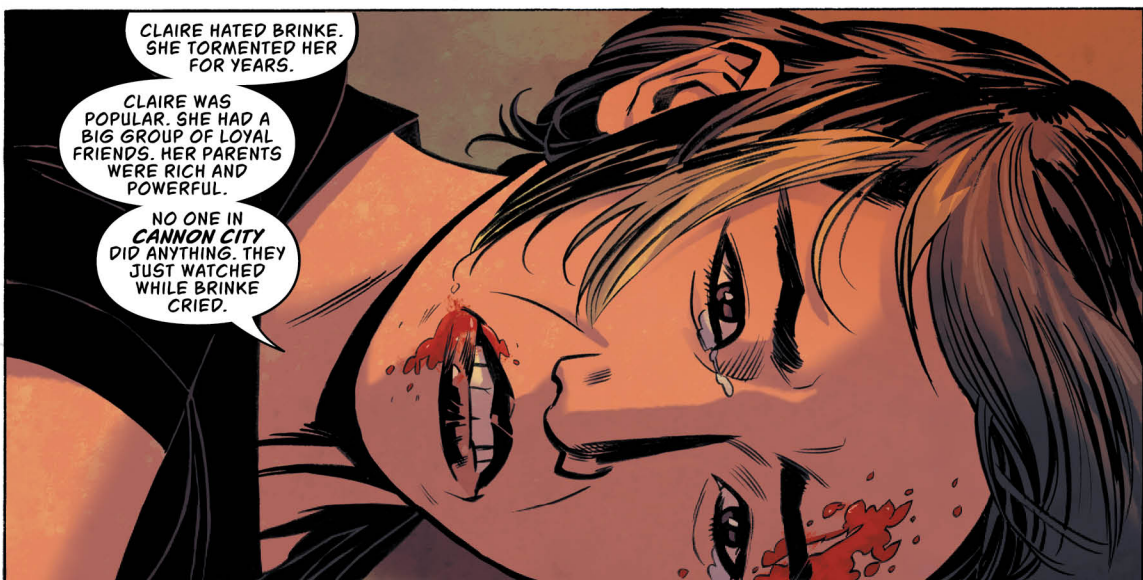
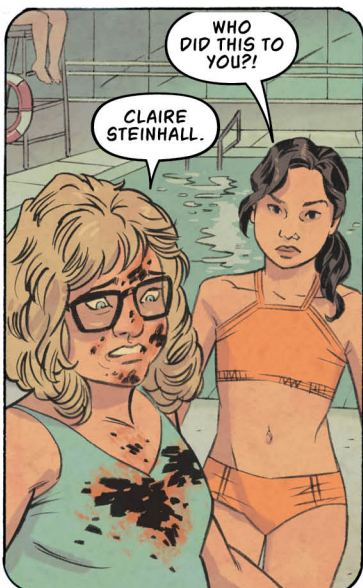
I'M TRYING TO HELP THIS TOWN, CAMERON. I CAN SEE THEM--THE THINGS LIKE POLLY THAT MAKE PEOPLE DO BAD THINGS. I'M WORKING FOR THE FBI.

THAT'S WHY I'M WALKING FREE.



I...I HURT BRINKE BAD. I KNOW THAT.

BUT I CAN HELP THOSE KIDS AND MAKE SURE NO ONE ELSE DISAPPEARS. JUST LET ME GO SO I CAN FIND MY PARTNER.





THE REAL WORLD WAS SO CRUEL TO BRINKE.

SO I INVITED HER INTO MINE.



IT WAS EASIER FOR HER TO BELIEVE IN A BEAUTIFUL LAND WHERE THE MONSTERS LURKED IN THE SHADOWS AND DIDN'T JUST LOOK LIKE PRETTIER, BETTER-DRESSED VERSIONS OF US.



IT WAS EASIER TO UNDERSTAND POLLY. SHE WAS CRUEL AND ALIEN, BUT SHE COULD COME TO LOVE HER IF BRINKE WERE SPECIAL ENOUGH.

AND SHE'D BE THERE FOR HER AS LONG AS SHE ALWAYS LOVED HER BACK.



NOT LIKE HER DAD, WHO WAS TOO ANGRY AND DRUNK TO GIVE HER A REASSURING HUG.

SHUT UP.

OR HER BROTHER, WHO SAID SHE WAS JUST WEAK. THAT SHE NEEDED TO GET TOUGH AND HANDLE HER OWN PROBLEMS.



SHUT UP. YOU DID THIS. TO HER. TO ME.

YOU--YOU DIMINISHED ME. YOU TORE ME FROM A BETTER WORLD.



YOU LEFT ME WITH NOTHING BUT A LESSER REFLECTION OF MYSELF.