

## Chapter 4

# Place des Fleurs

One may tolerate  
a world of demons  
for the sake of  
an angel

Madame de Pompadour

Brother Stefano



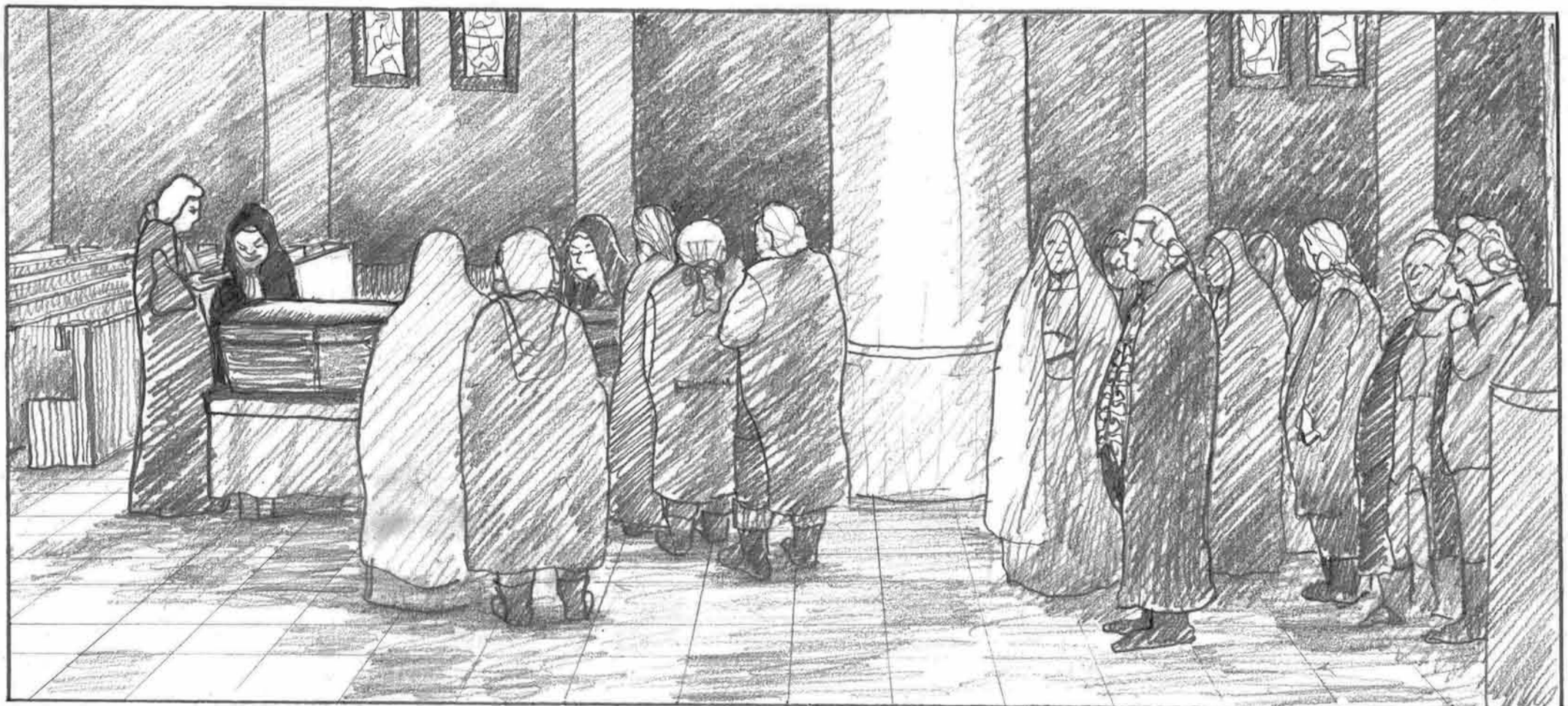
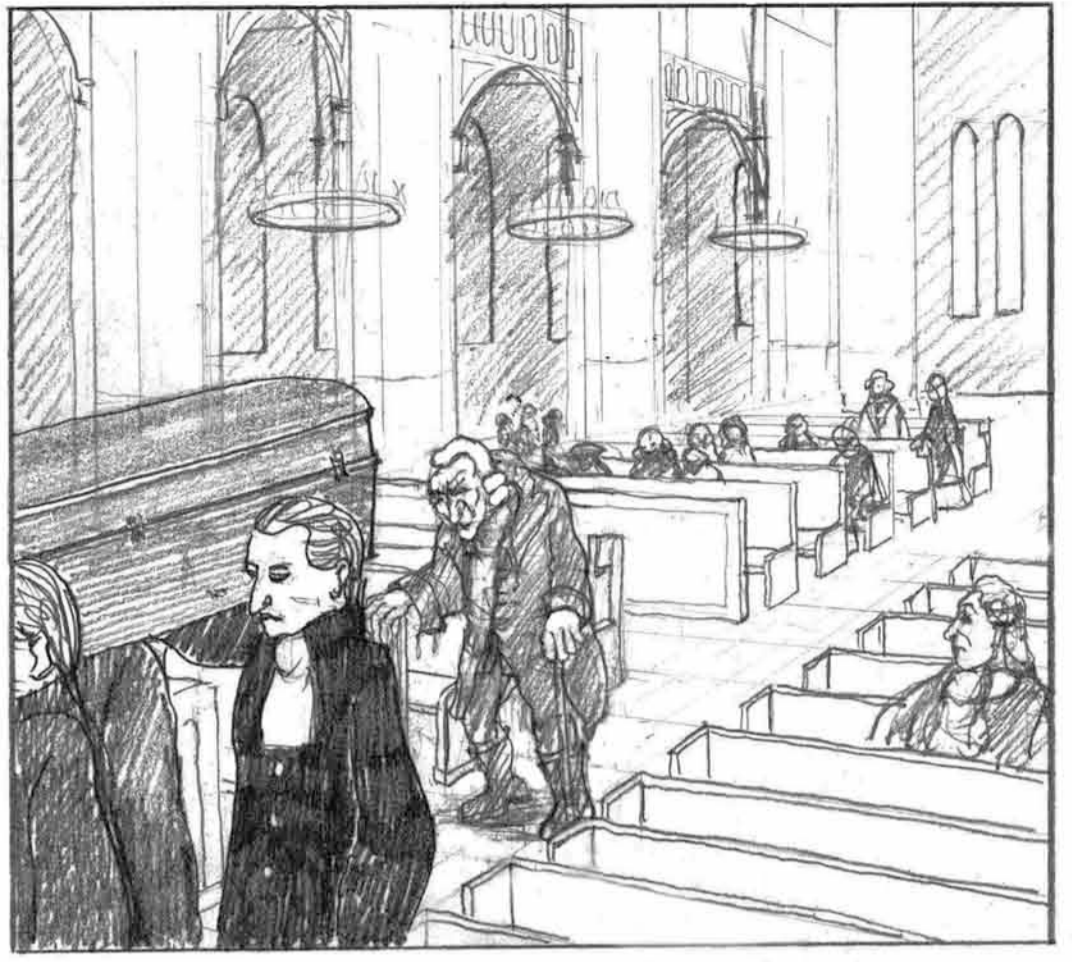
*I remember once walking beside the river Yèvre, on the way to a monastery near Bourges. The sun was fierce that day. My feet were sore and my head was throbbing. I stopped and waded into the river a little where it was shallow and sat down, my back against the slow current. I closed my eyes, enjoying the coolness. When I opened them again there was a woman on the opposite bank. She stood there, staring at me, a small boy holding on to one hand and a baby strapped to her back. In her other hand she had a basket with various roots and berries. It was early July and the price of bread was high – the last year's harvest had been poor and was running out and this year's harvest had yet to be taken in. The quality of the flour and bread was terrible. The bread was black and sour and gritty and the flour was yellow and foul-smelling. Sometimes the flour was so hard and clotted it had to be broken up with an axe. The cost of a four-pound loaf had doubled. So women did what they could to scavenge food for their families and eke out the little they had. For some time the woman just stared at me. I called across: 'Hi there'. She stayed silent for a moment then erupted with fury: 'Fat bastard! Someday God will stamp on you and everyone will laugh, and I will laugh the most. I will pray for that. Balloon of piss! I will pray that God takes you and fills you with air until you explode, you elephant of shit! I will pray for that!' The little boy, he couldn't have been any more than five-years old, broke free of his mother's grip and ran to the bank. He picked up a jagged stone and pitched it at me with all his strength, so hard he cut my cheek and drew blood. The mother laughed and walked off, the child running after her.*

*Often I wonder what made those eyes burn with such hate? What did they see? A religious parasite, perhaps, like the many thousands that plague this land of France, exploiting the superstition of the poor. Or a glutton who feasts while her children go hungry. Or a layabout who has time to waste while she has to sweat and worry all hours God sends. Or in me did she see that curse of womankind – a man?*

*Or just some sordid freak.*

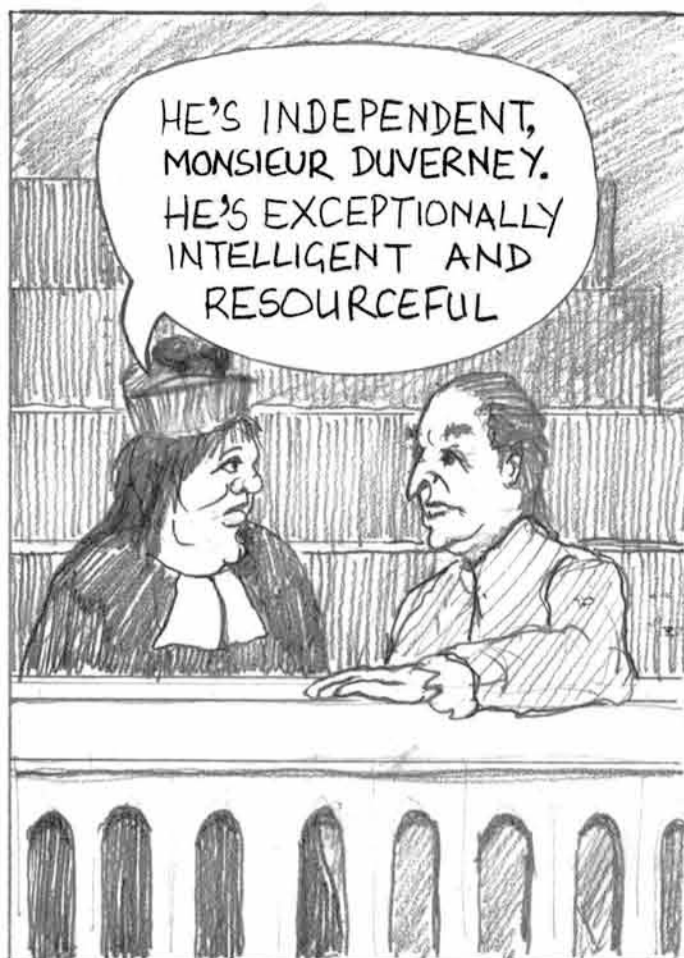
EGLISE ST ORMOND







BUT, MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ, WHY THE FOREIGNER?



HE'S INDEPENDENT, MONSIEUR DUVERNEY. HE'S EXCEPTIONALLY INTELLIGENT AND RESOURCEFUL

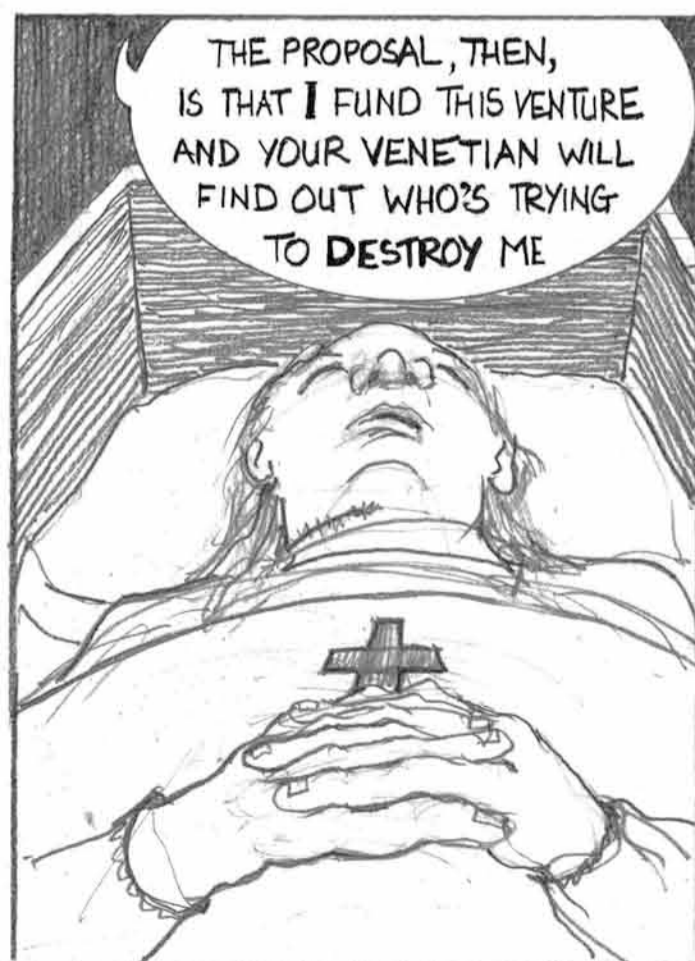


MOREOVER, HE'S SEEKING FUNDS FOR A VENTURE WHICH HE'S CONFIDENT WILL SECURE FOR HIMSELF A CONSIDERABLE FORTUNE



THAT POOR FELLOW DOWN THERE...

...ANOTHER OF MY FAITHFUL WORKERS CUT DOWN



THE PROPOSAL, THEN, IS THAT I FUND THIS VENTURE AND YOUR VENETIAN WILL FIND OUT WHO'S TRYING TO DESTROY ME



YES

MADAME DE POMPADOUR IS A PARTICULAR FRIEND OF MINE ...



... AND SHE HAS INVITED HIM TO THE PALAIS ROYAL FOR ENTERTAINMENTS THERE YOU WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH HIM





PONT NEUF, PARIS

You've never forgiven her.  
What drives it so deep into you?

After so many years.

But she was a widow. At 26.

And you were just one of six children.  
To clothe and feed.



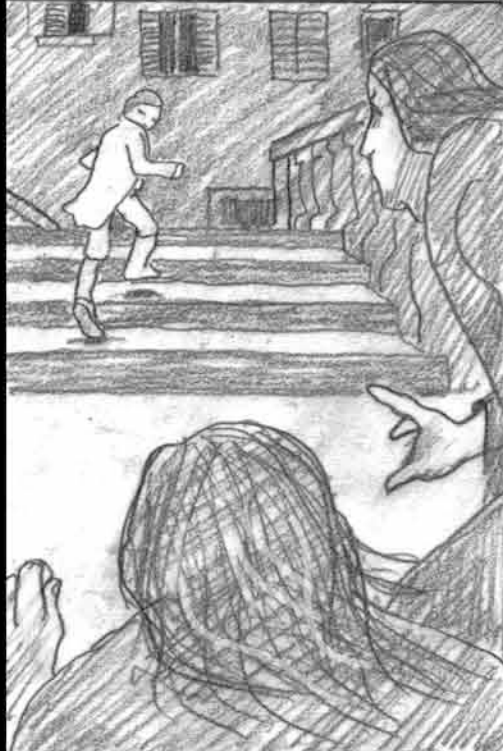
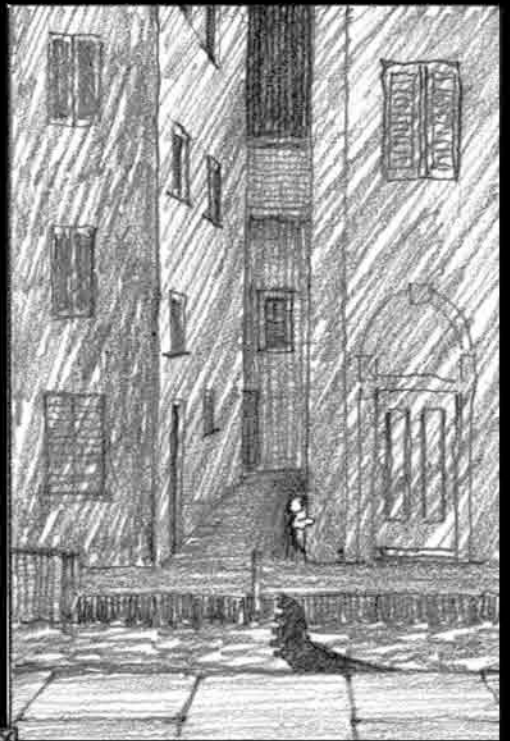
Who are you to judge her?

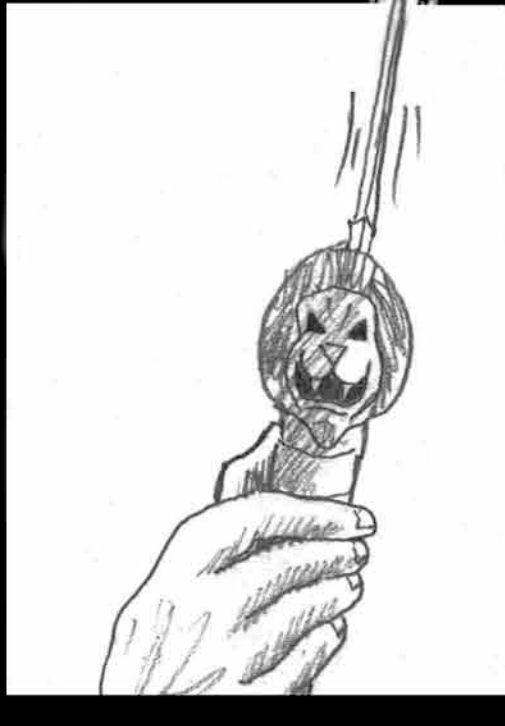
Especially you.

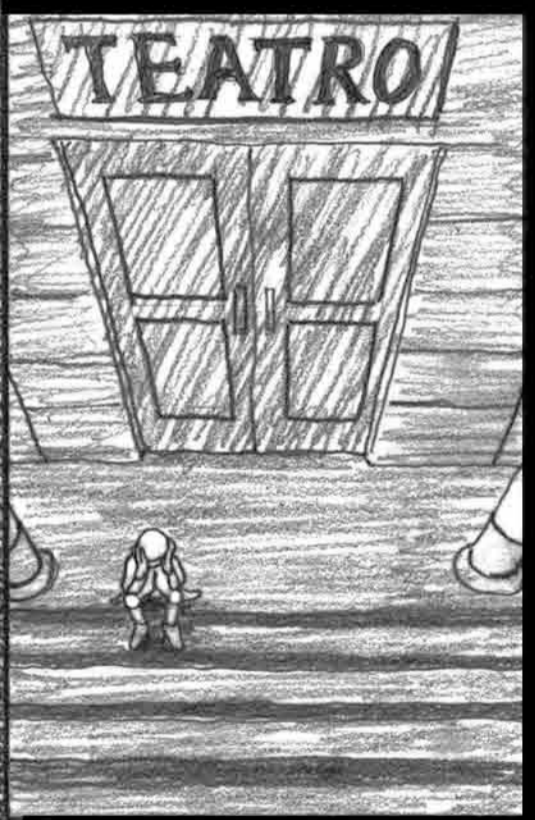
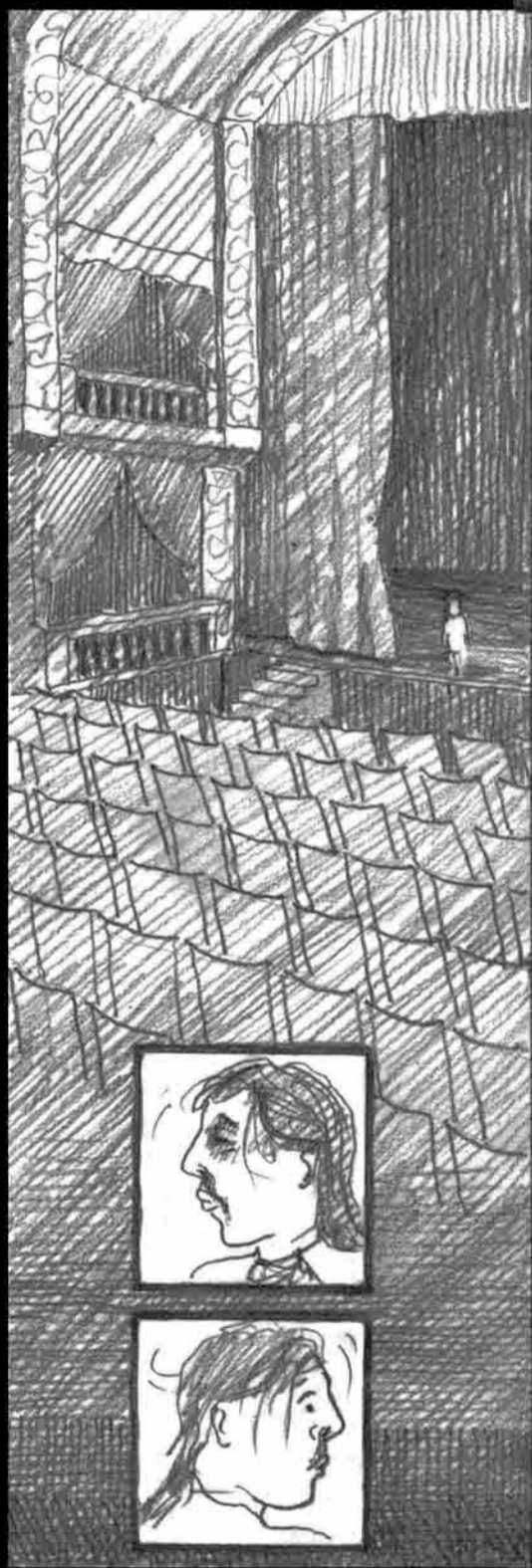
Especially you.

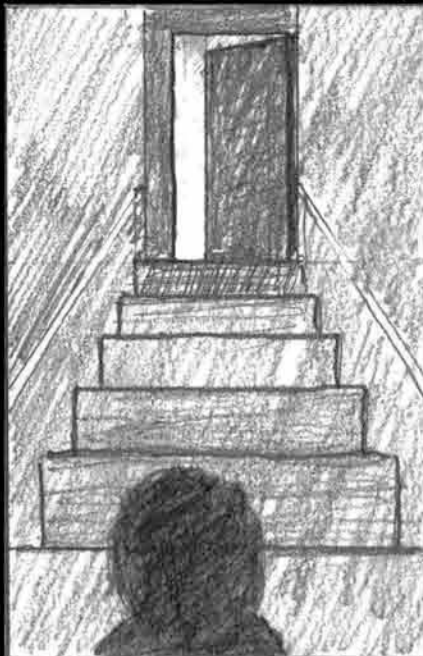
Yet the rawness of it is still there.  
The darkness that it takes you to.

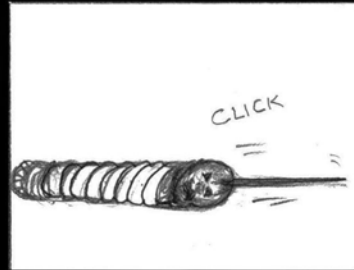
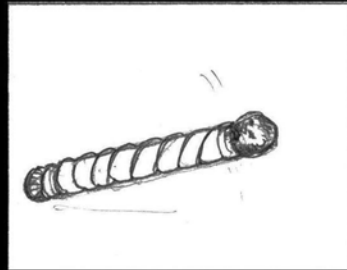
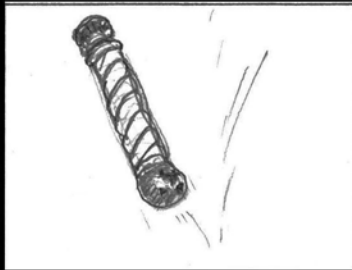
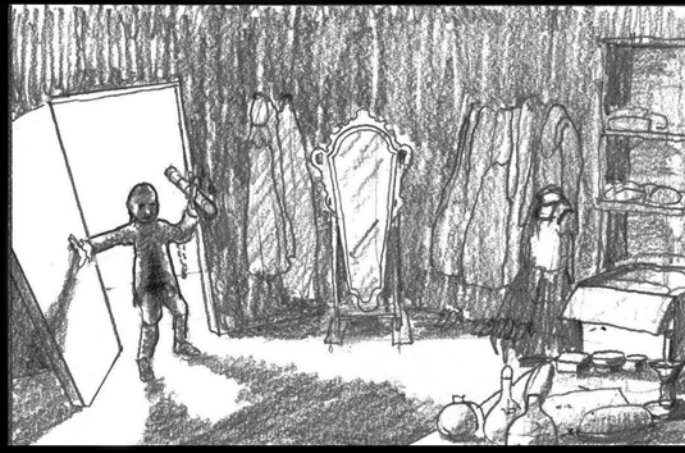
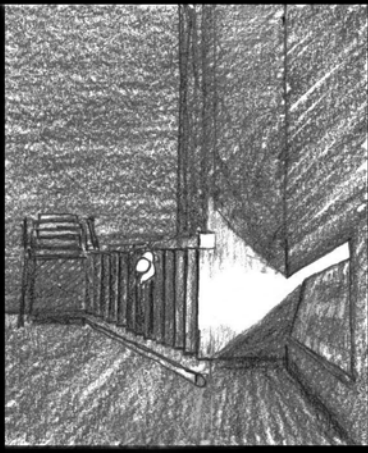
# VENICE, TWENTY YEARS EARLIER



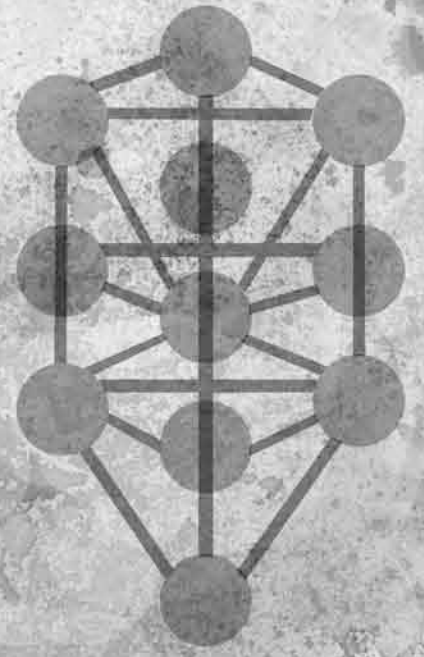




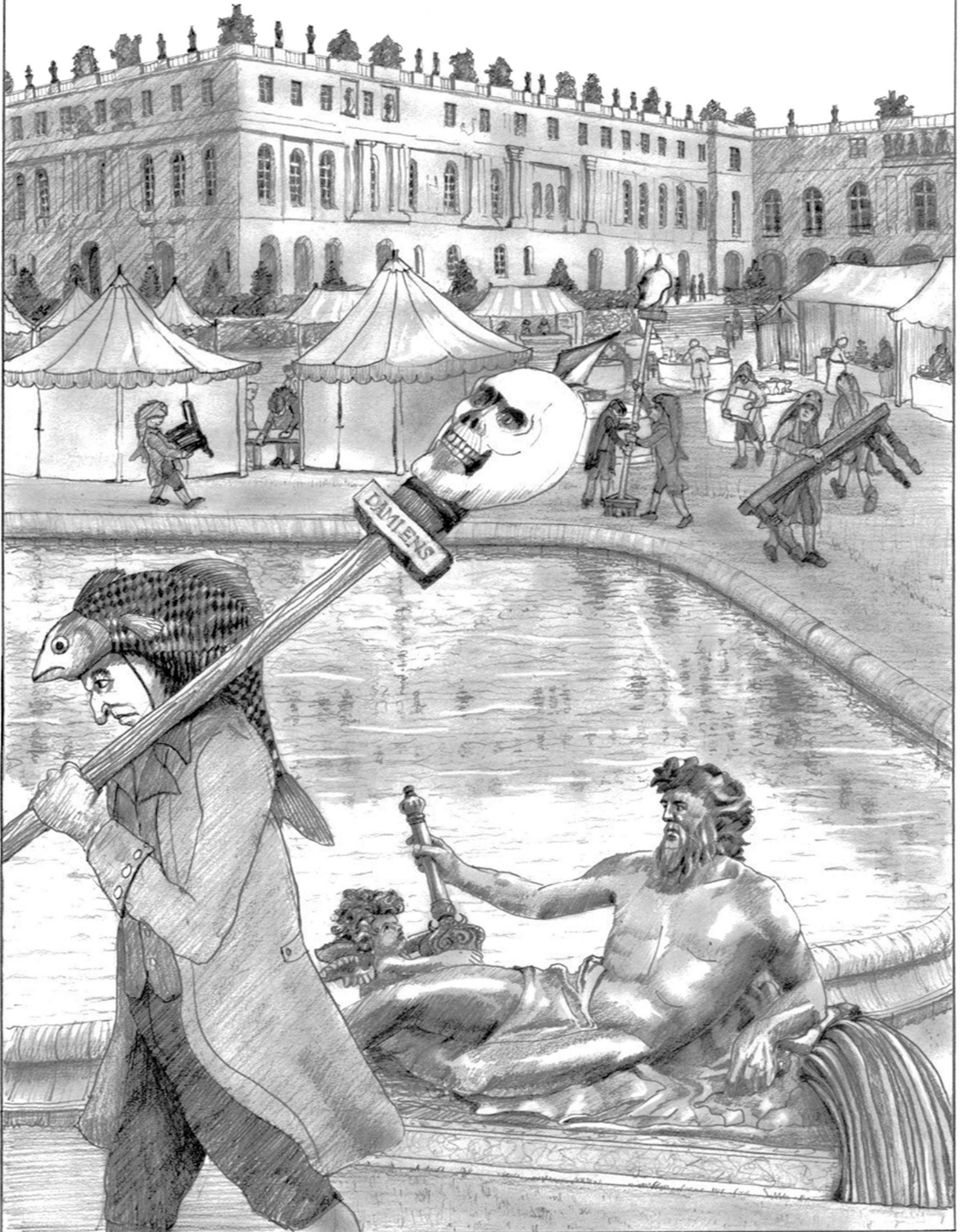




4 9 2  
3 5 7  
8 1 6



THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES



THE BOUDOIR OF  
MADAME DE POMPADOUR



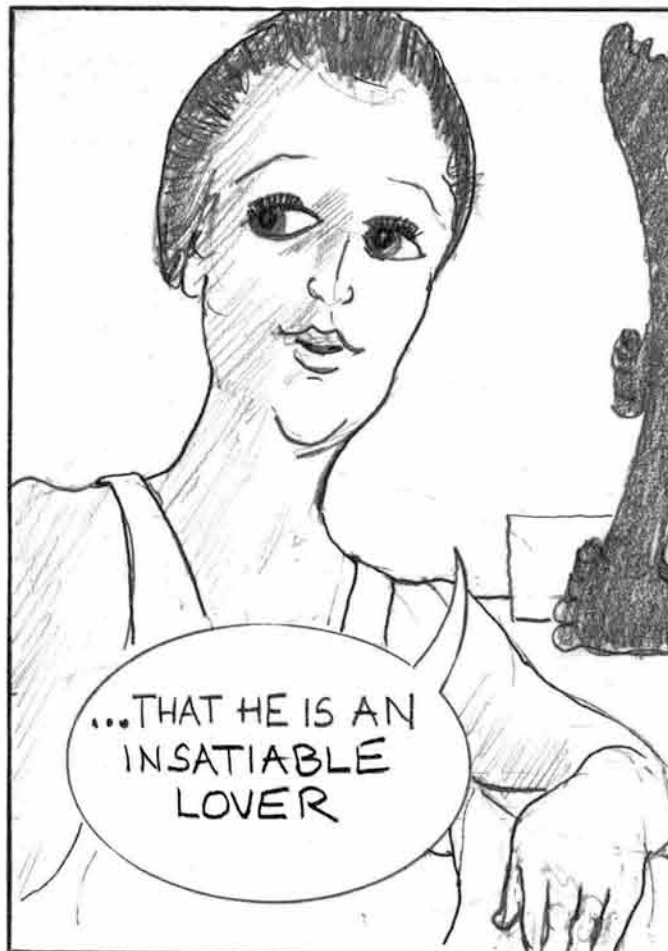
MADAME DE BOUFFLERS,  
YOU KNOW HE ARRIVED ON  
THE DAY DAMIENS TRIED  
TO KILL THE KING

AND THERE ARE  
ALL SORTS OF  
STORIES ABOUT  
HIM

...THAT HE IS A VENETIAN SPY...  
...THAT HE IS AN ACCOMPLISHED  
MATHEMATICIAN...  
THAT HE HAS A PROFOUND  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
MYSTERIES OF THE CABBALA...



...THAT HE IS AN  
INSATIABLE  
LOVER

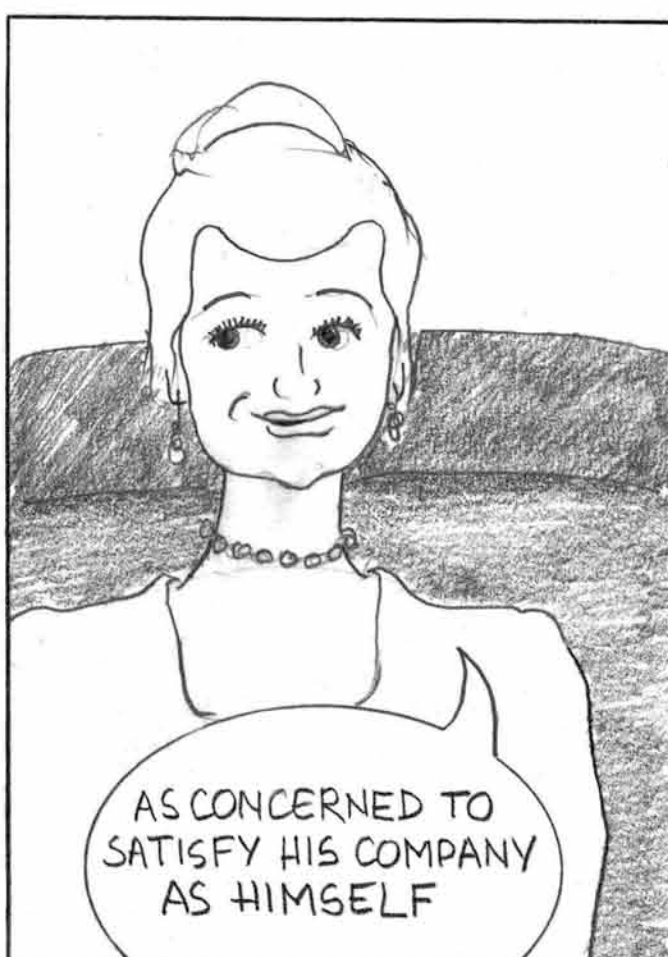


HE HAS A GREAT APPETITE,  
IT IS TRUE

BUT ALSO HE HAS  
A MOST CULTURED  
ETIQUETTE

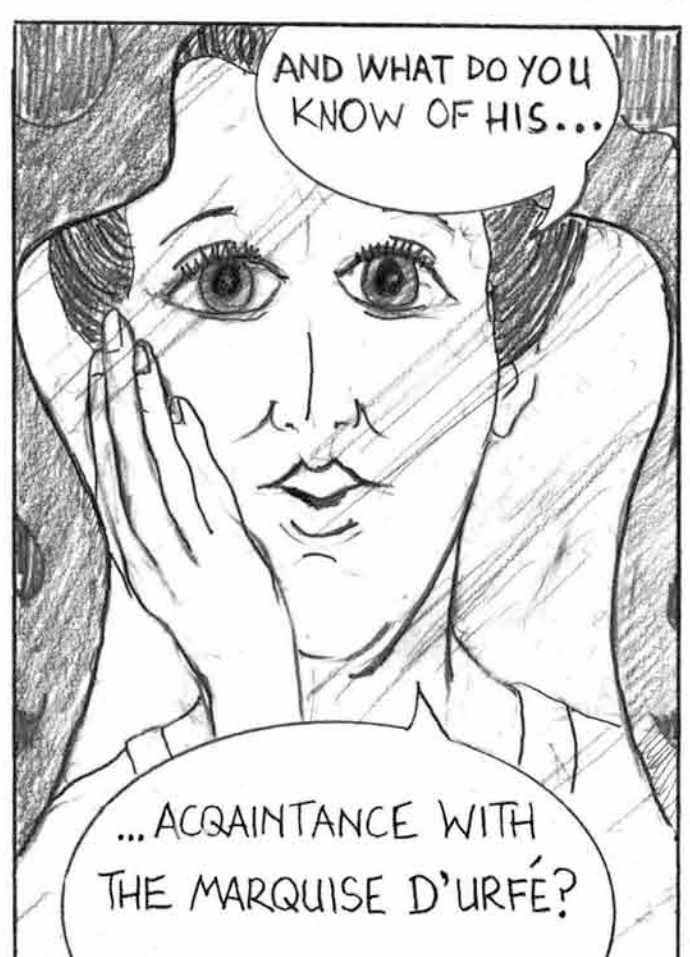


AS CONCERNED TO  
SATISFY HIS COMPANY  
AS HIMSELF



AND WHAT DO YOU  
KNOW OF HIS...

...ACQUAINTANCE WITH  
THE MARQUISE D'URFÉ?





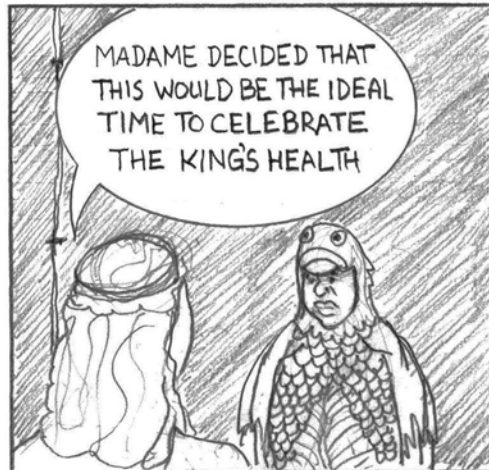
THERE ARE RUMOURS THAT HE HAS BECOME AN ALLY IN HER QUEST TO FIND AN ELIXIR FOR ETERNAL YOUTH.

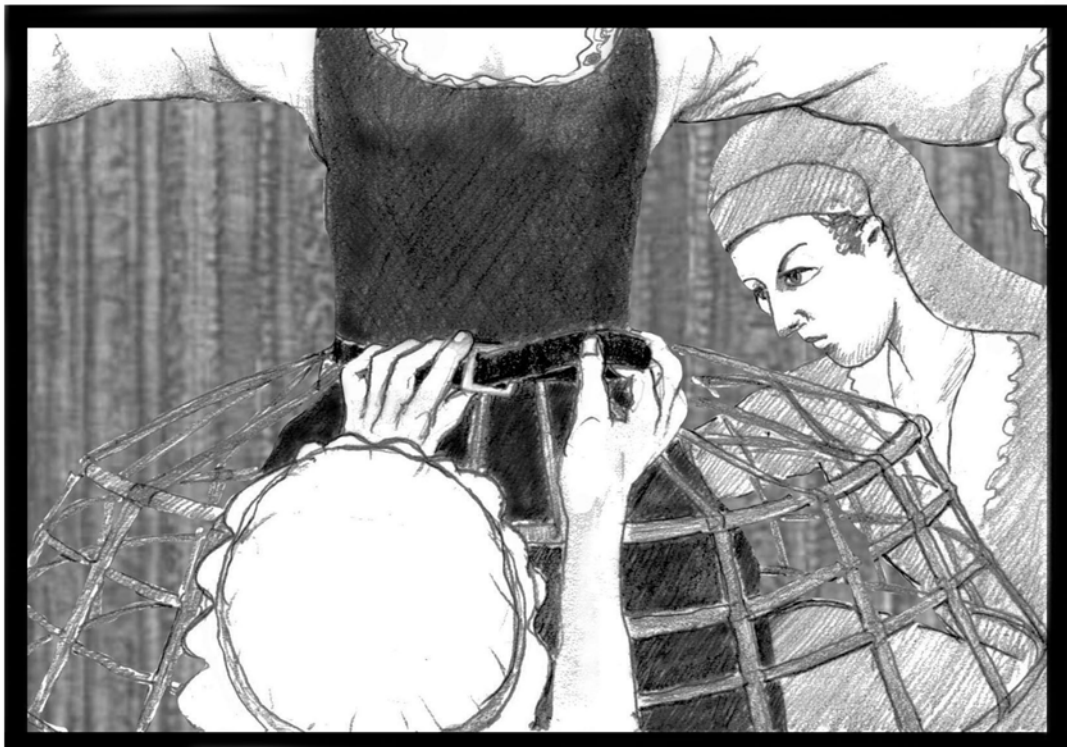
IT SEEMS HE HAS CONVINCED THE OLD WOMAN THAT WITH A COMBINATION OF THE STARS AND HIS CABBALISTIC ARTS SHE WILL FALL PREGNANT AND GIVE BIRTH TO HERSELF AS AN IMMORTAL BEING

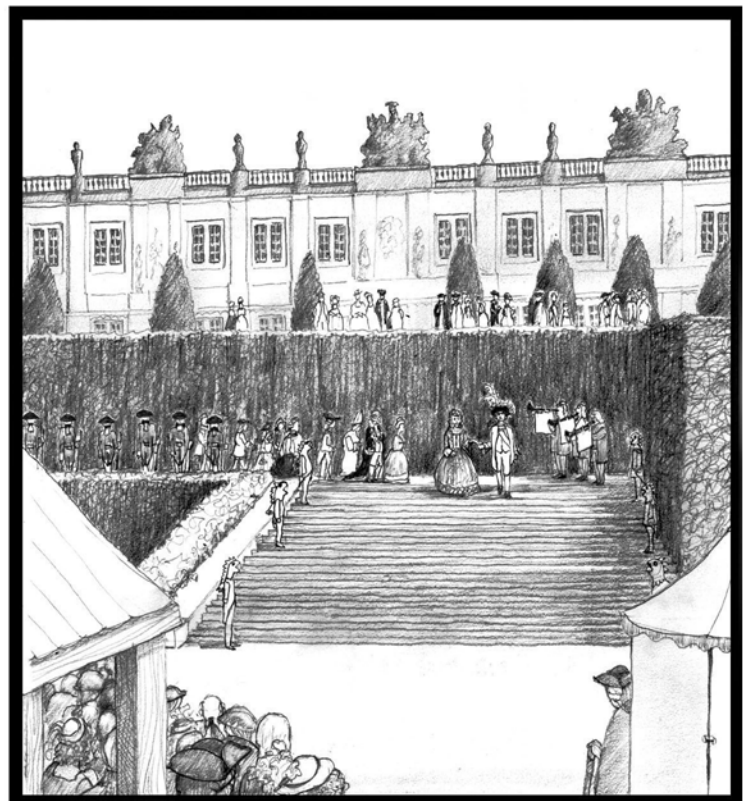
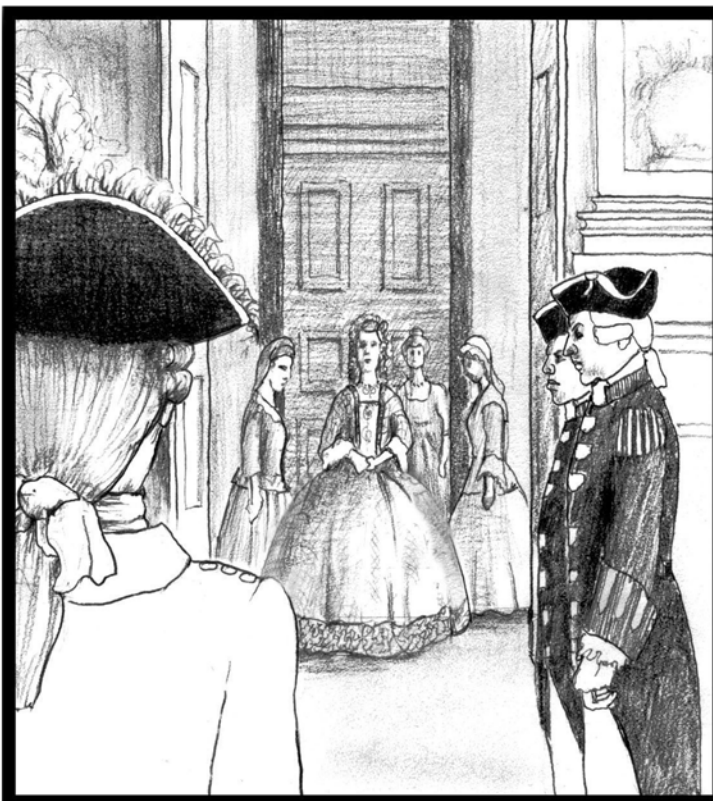
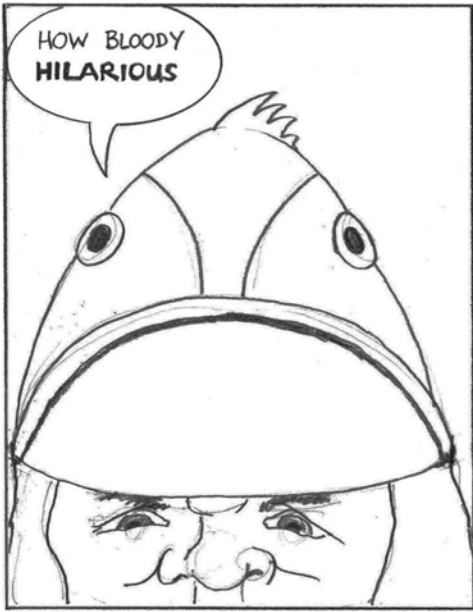


HE DINES REGULARLY WITH HER. SHE HAS LAVISHED A FORTUNE ON HIM







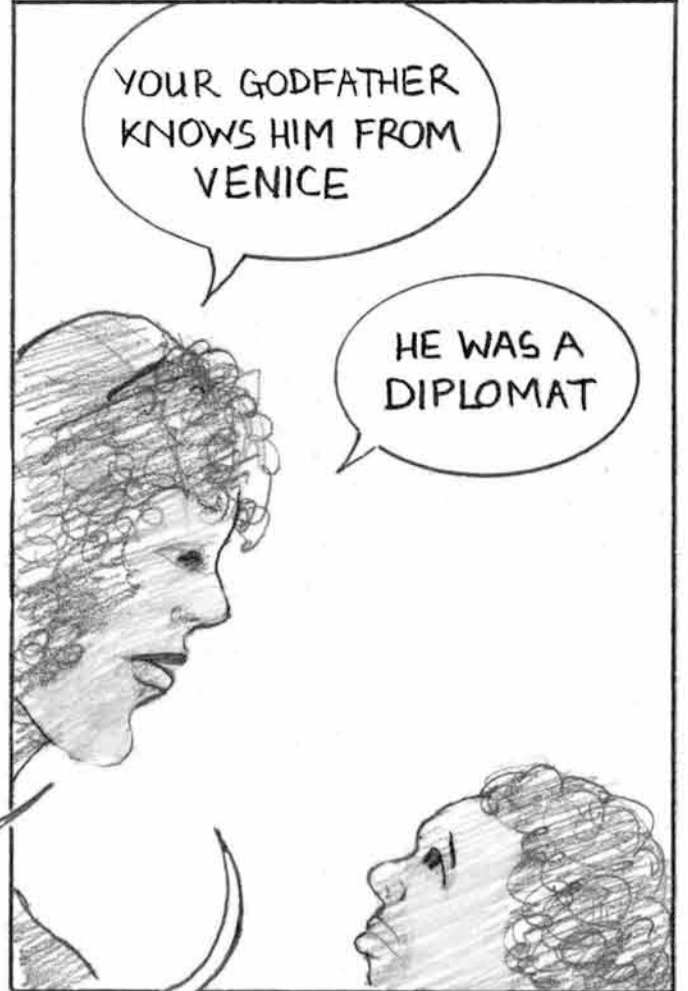




WHO ARE THOSE MEN WITH MONSIEUR GIACOMO?

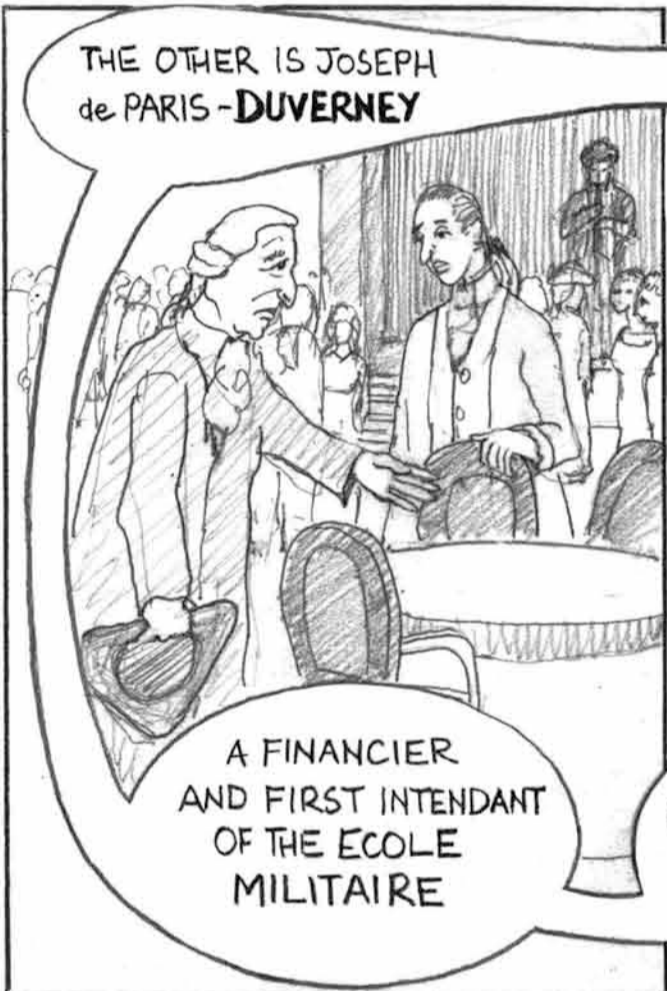


THE ONE FACING US IS ABBÉ DE BERNIS



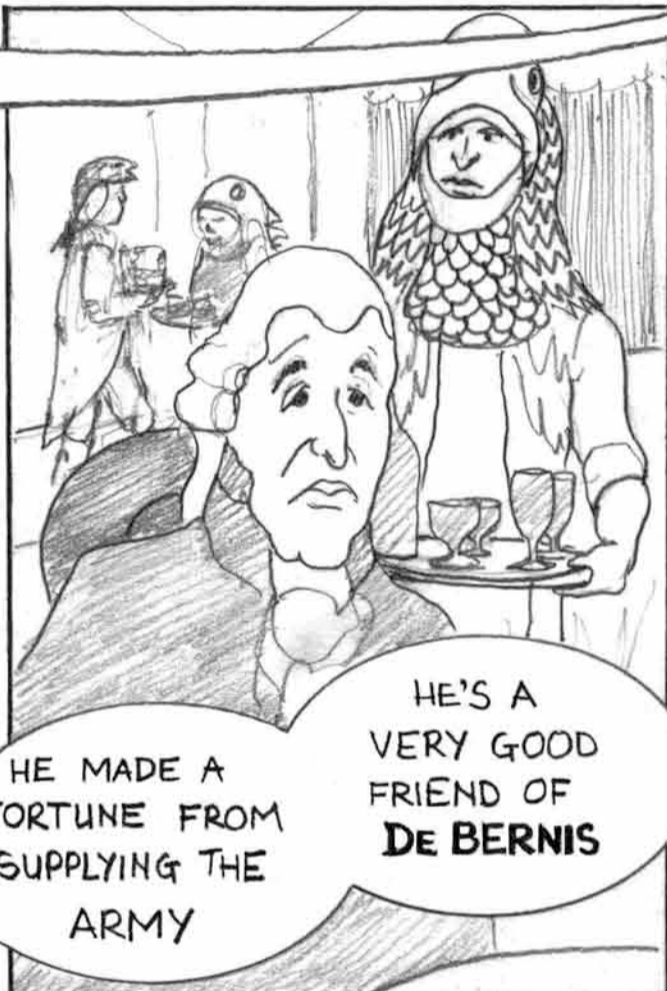
YOUR GODFATHER KNOWS HIM FROM VENICE

HE WAS A DIPLOMAT



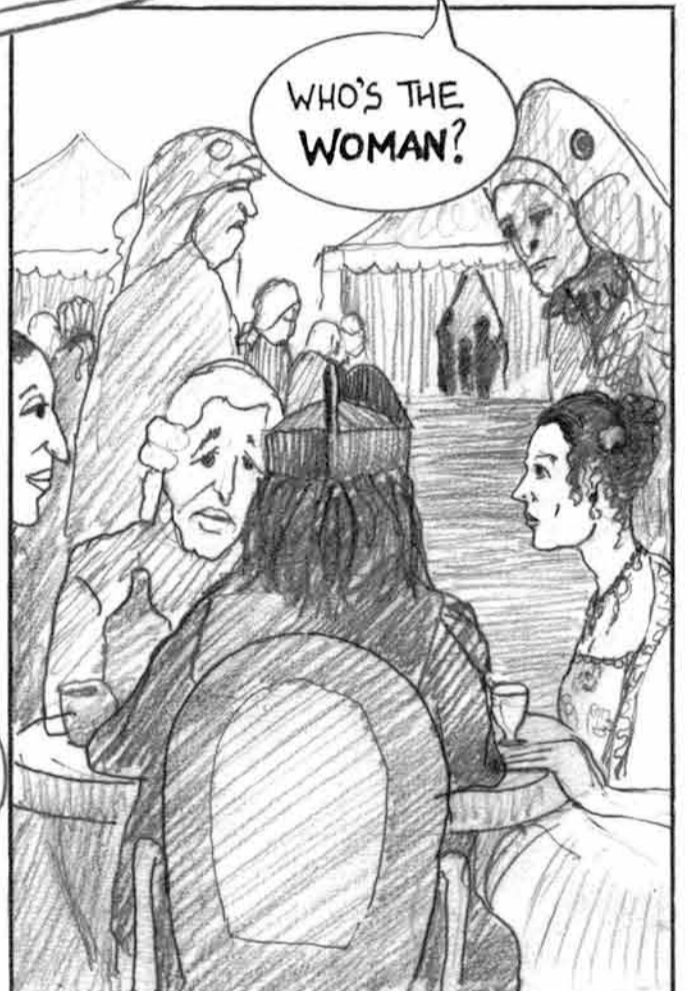
THE OTHER IS JOSEPH de PARIS - **DUVERNEY**

A FINANCIER AND FIRST INTENDANT OF THE ECOLE MILITAIRE



HE MADE A FORTUNE FROM SUPPLYING THE ARMY

HE'S A VERY GOOD FRIEND OF **DE BERNIS**

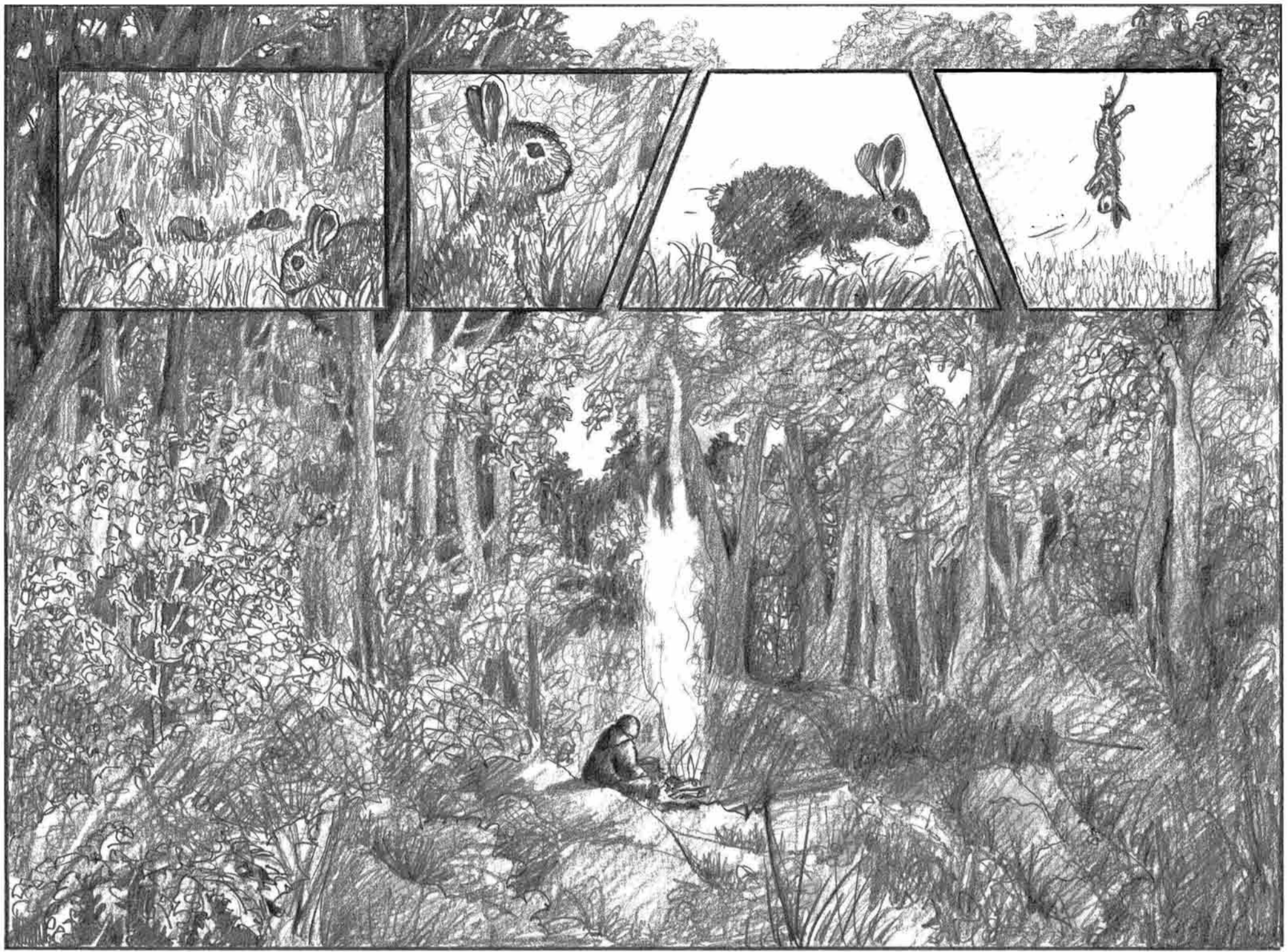


WHO'S THE WOMAN?



SHE IS GABRIELLE DUVERNEY. THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF MONSIEUR JOSEPH







JOIN ME?



BACK WITH THAT DEGENERATE DE BERNIS I SEE



DEGENERATE?



IT IS THE SAME DE BERNIS, I TAKE IT, WHO YOU MET IN VENICE...

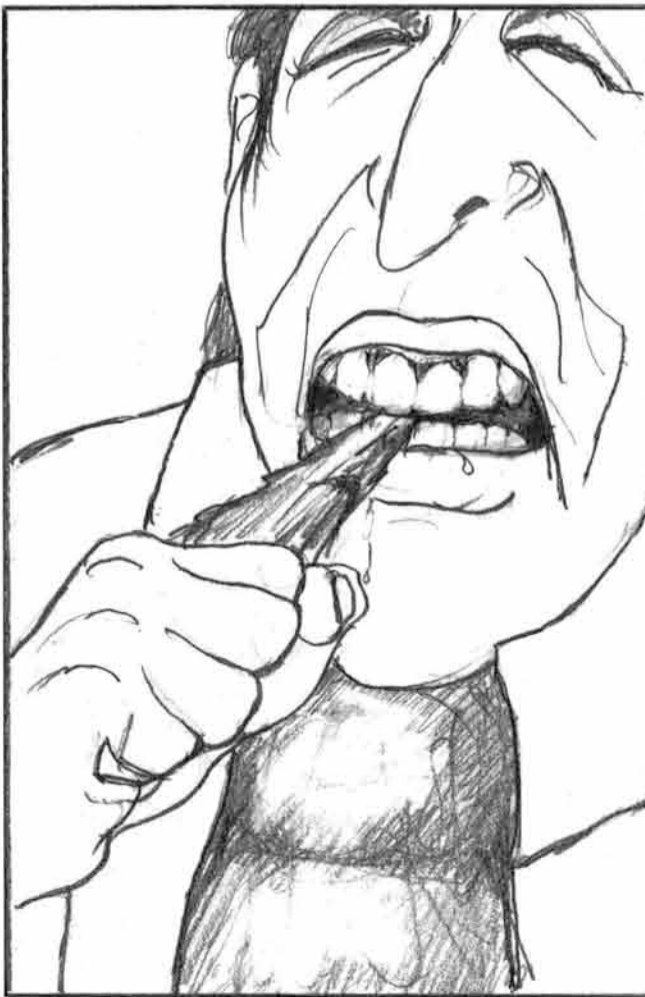


...AND WHO PAID TO WATCH YOU POKE HIS MISTRESS..



THE MISTRESS WHO WAS ALSO...

...A NUN IN SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI?

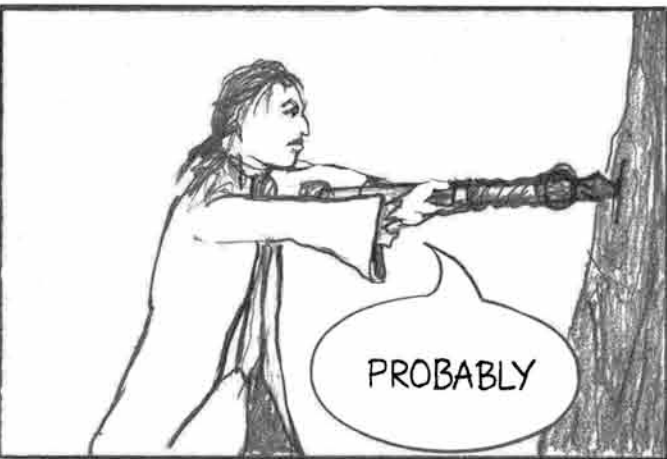
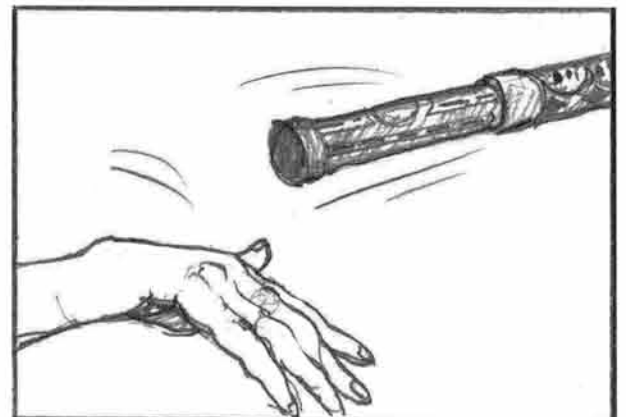
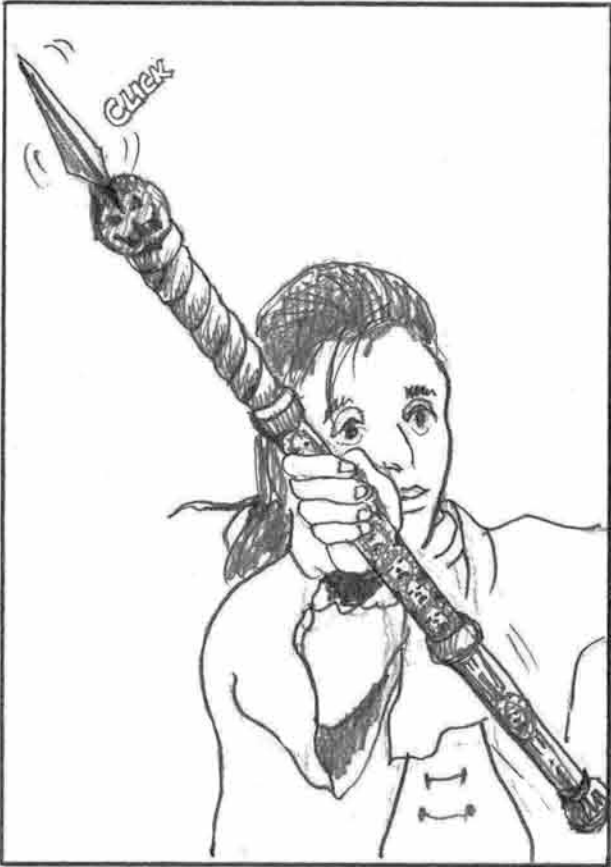


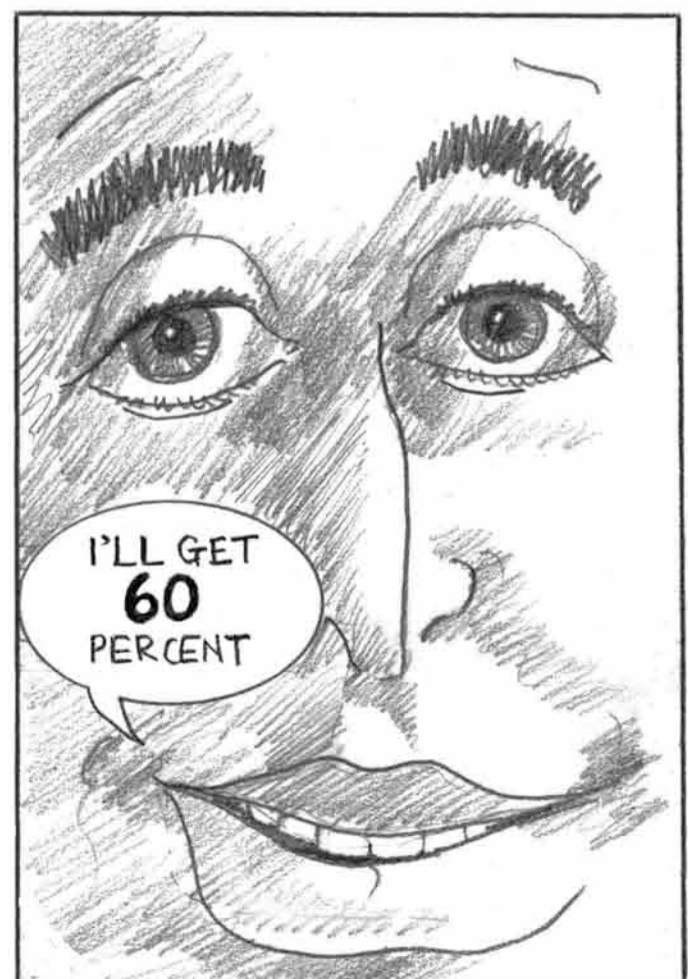
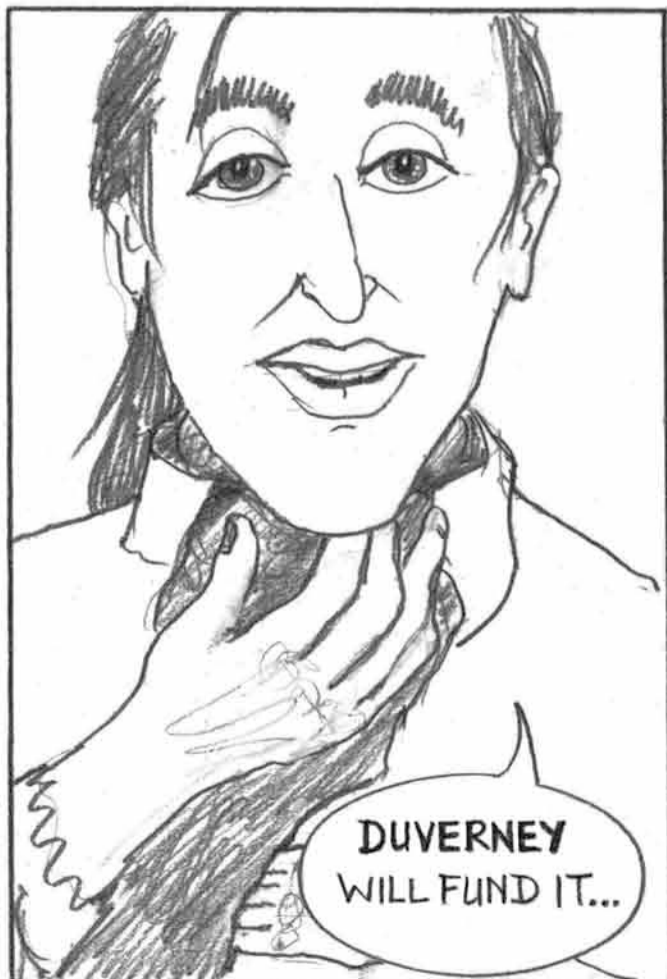
MMM... TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT DID I?

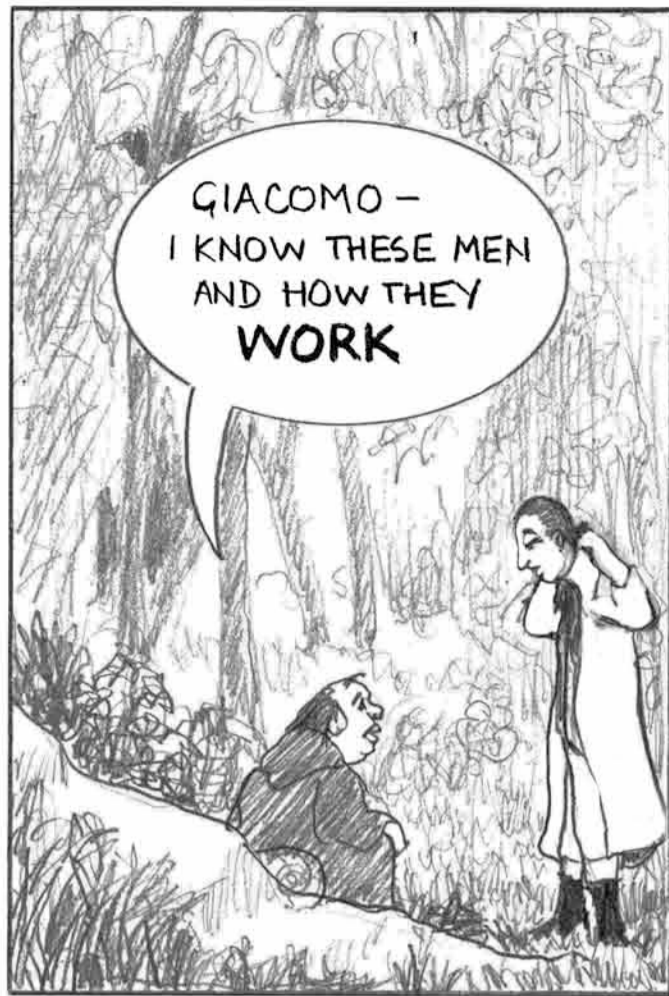
EVERY DETAIL



COME ON STEFANO. THESE ARE JUST GAMES. THERE'S NO HARM.





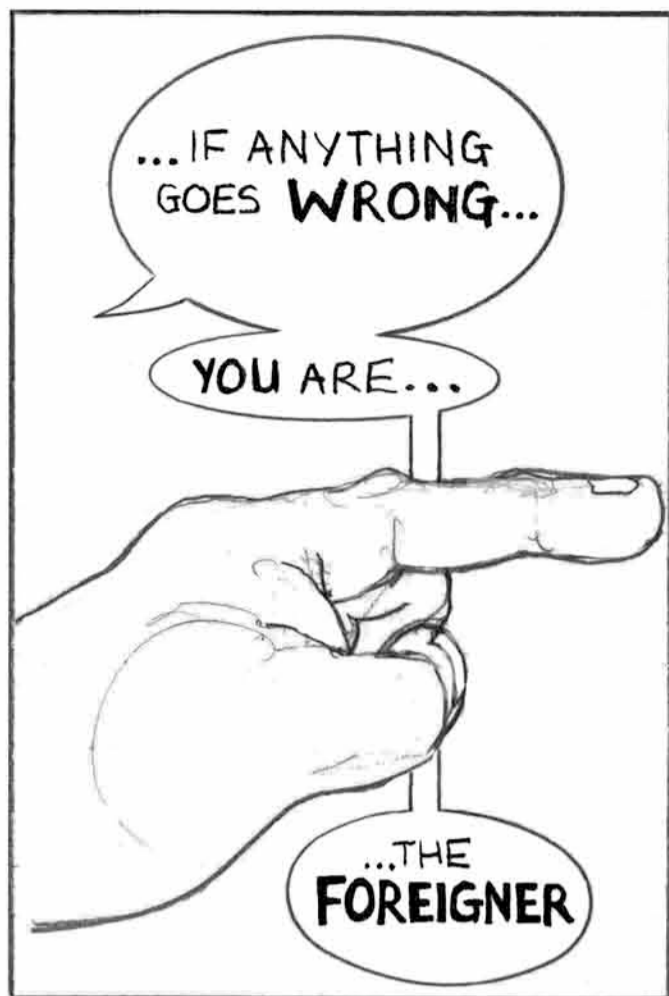


GIACOMO -  
I KNOW THESE MEN  
AND HOW THEY  
**WORK**



DON'T TRUST  
**EITHER OF**  
THEM

REMEMBER...



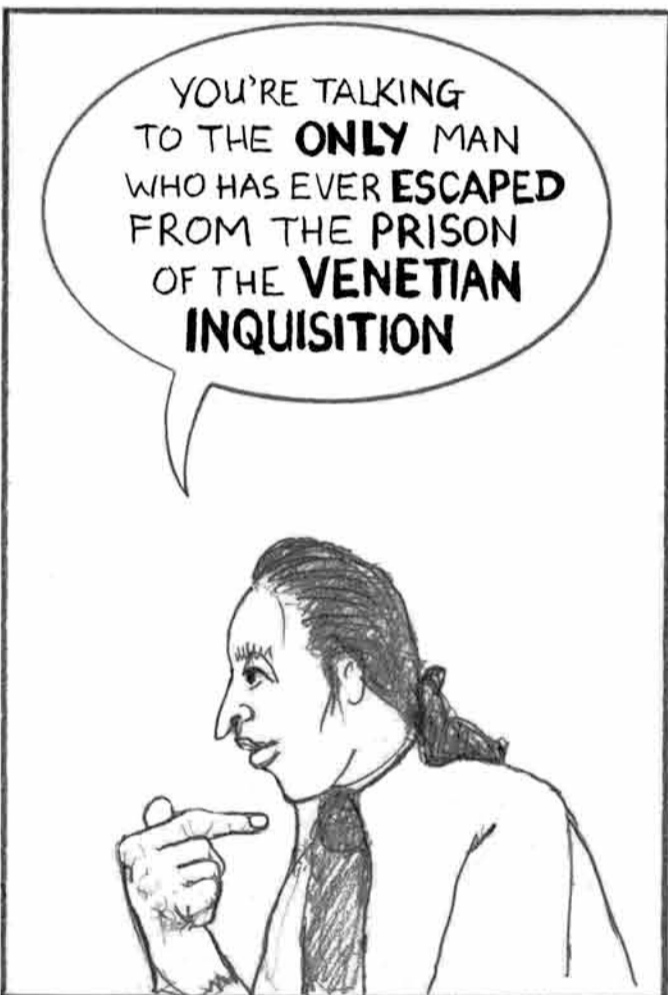
...IF ANYTHING  
GOES **WRONG...**

YOU ARE...

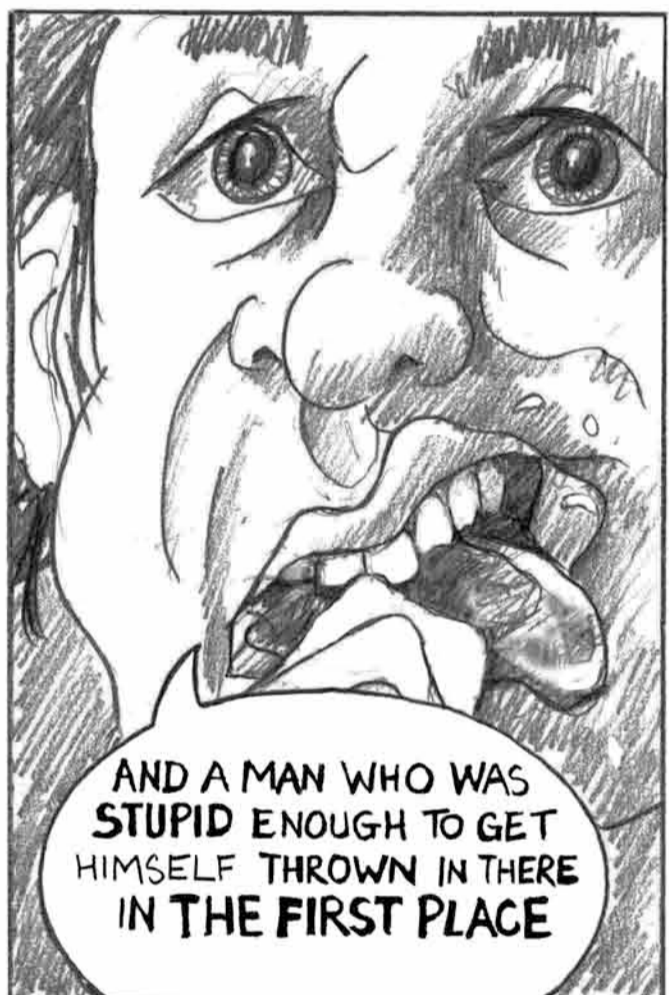
...THE  
**FOREIGNER**



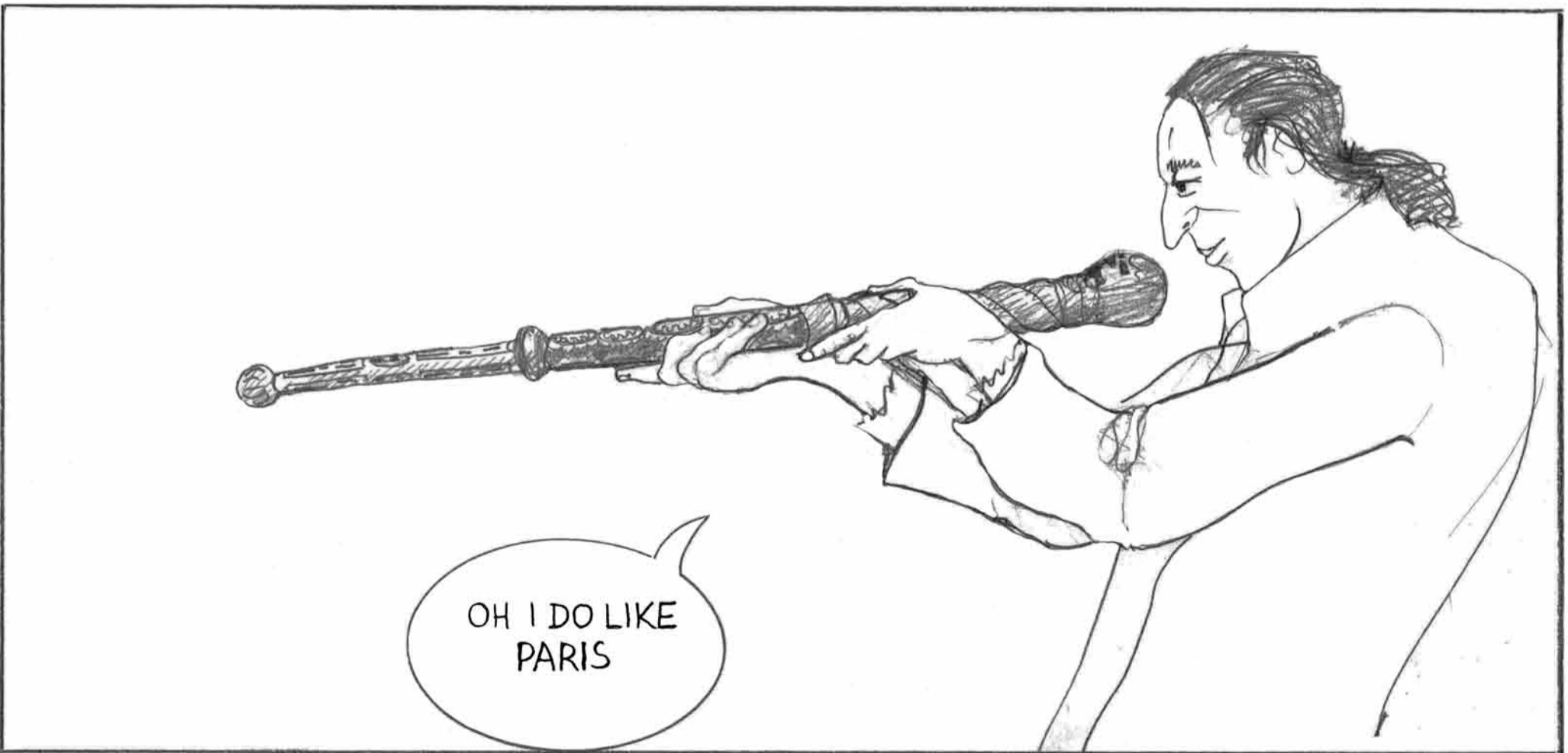
DEAR STEFANO



YOU'RE TALKING  
TO THE **ONLY** MAN  
WHO HAS EVER **ESCAPED**  
FROM THE PRISON  
OF THE **VENETIAN**  
**INQUISITION**



AND A MAN WHO WAS  
**STUPID** ENOUGH TO GET  
HIMSELF THROWN IN THERE  
IN THE **FIRST PLACE**



OH I DO LIKE  
PARIS



