MIDNIGHT AT THE STARLIGHT

ISSUE No. 1

"The Mayor Walks at Midnight!"

"The Jukebox Knows Tomorrow's Songs!"

"Coffee's On Till Sunrise!"


PAST THE LAST STOPLIGHT, WHERE THE HIGHWAY GIVES UP AND THE DESERT TAKES OVER, THERE'S A DINER THAT OPENS AT MIDNIGHT.
IT CLOSES AT SUNRISE. NOBODY REMEMBERS WHY. NOBODY ASKS. THIS IS THE STARLIGHT — AND TONIGHT, NOVA REYES HOLDS THE COUNTER.

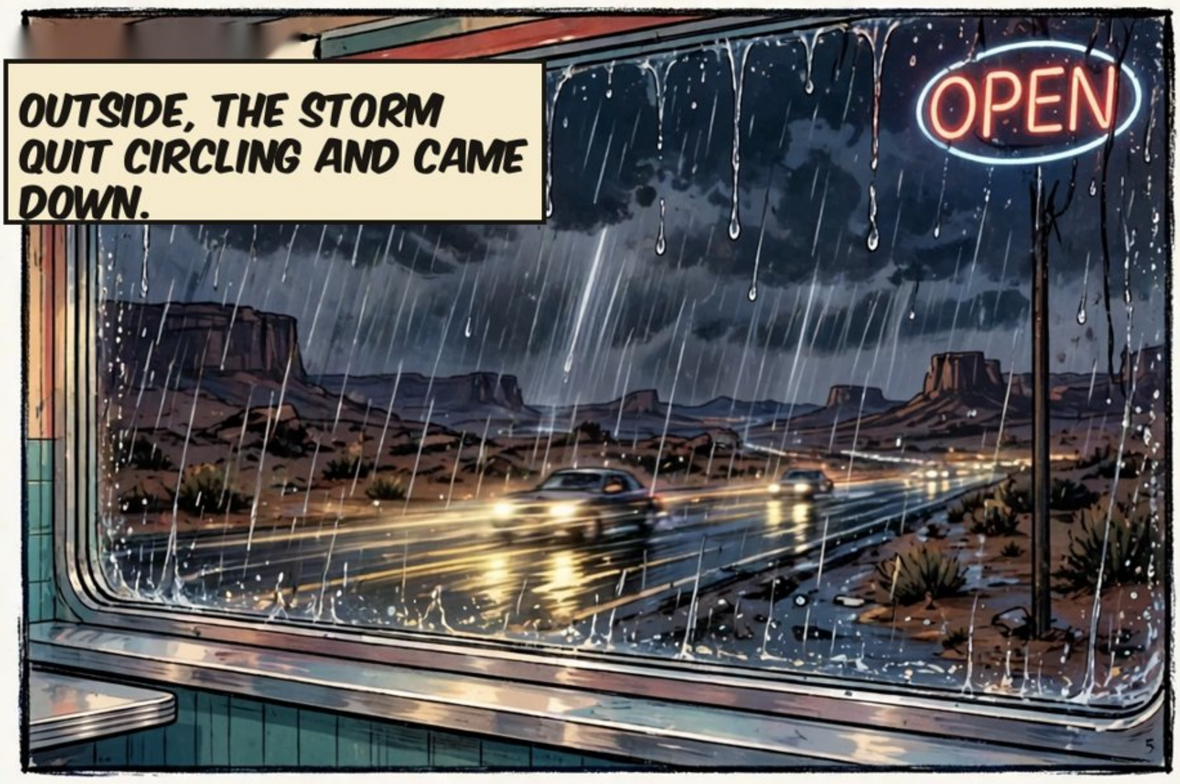

THIRD NIGHT, NOVA. APRON STRAIGHT. COFFEE ON. YOU'VE GOT THIS.


THE RULES...
DINER RULES
RULE ONE - COFFEE IS ALWAYS ON.
RULE TWO - EVERYBODY PAYS. THE OWLS PAY IN SMALL SHINY THINGS.
RULE THREE - IF THE JUKEBOX LIGHTS ITSELF, YOU HEAR IT OUT.
RULE FOUR - A SLEEPING MAN IS NEVER WOKEN. A WALKING ONE IS NEVER GRABBED.
RULE FIVE - CLOSED. TILL IT IS FINISHED, INSPECTED, AND SAFE.
RULE SIX - EVERY STORY HAS A TELLER. EVERY OWL HAS A NAME.
RULE SEVEN - WHAT THE OWLS BRING GOES IN THE TIN, TILL SOMEBODY COMES DREAMING OF IT.


ORDER UP, STAR GIRL.
GUS, YOU'VE BEEN BACK THERE SINCE BEFORE I WAS BORN, HAVEN'T YOU?


'MARCH THE THIRD. SAW A LIGHT OVER MILLER'S CROSSING THAT HUMMED IN B-FLAT.'
YOU WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING THE HIGHWAY SHOWS YOU?
TO THE NIGHT SHIFT, MISS REYES. AND TO TOMATOES— A GENTLEMAN ADAPTS.
ONE OF THESE NIGHTS, MR. NIGHT, I'M GOING TO ASK HOW OLD YOU REALLY ARE.
BOTTLE CAPS AND BUTTONS. RENT'S RENT, PARLIAMENT. MUFFINS ARE COMING.

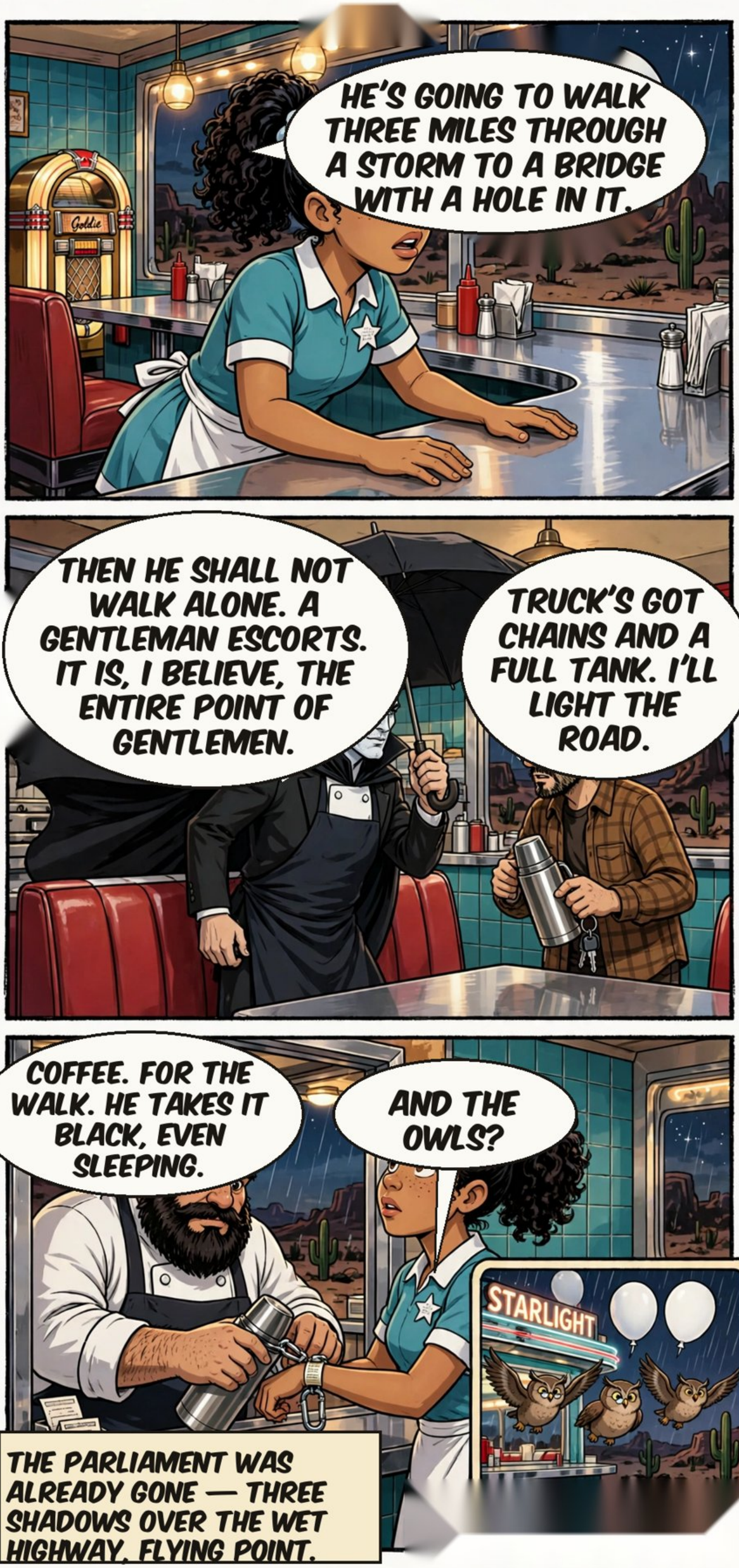

THEN, A LITTLE PAST ONE, OLD GOLDIE LIT UP ALL BY HERSELF.
THERE'S A BRIDGE O'ER MILLER'S WATER, WHERE THE ROAD GIVES UP THE GHOST — AND THE MAN WHO CHRISTENED IT IN HIS SLEEP NEVER CAME BACK TO THE COAST...
Goldie
FUNNY. GOLDIE DOESN'T USUALLY PLAY THE SAD ONES TWICE.
NOBODY'S WRITTEN THAT SONG YET, HAVE THEY?
NOT A NOTE OF IT. THAT'S TOMORROW'S SONG, STAR GIRL. AND TOMORROW SOUNDS WET.


OUTSIDE, THE STORM QUIT CIRCLING AND CAME DOWN.
OPEN

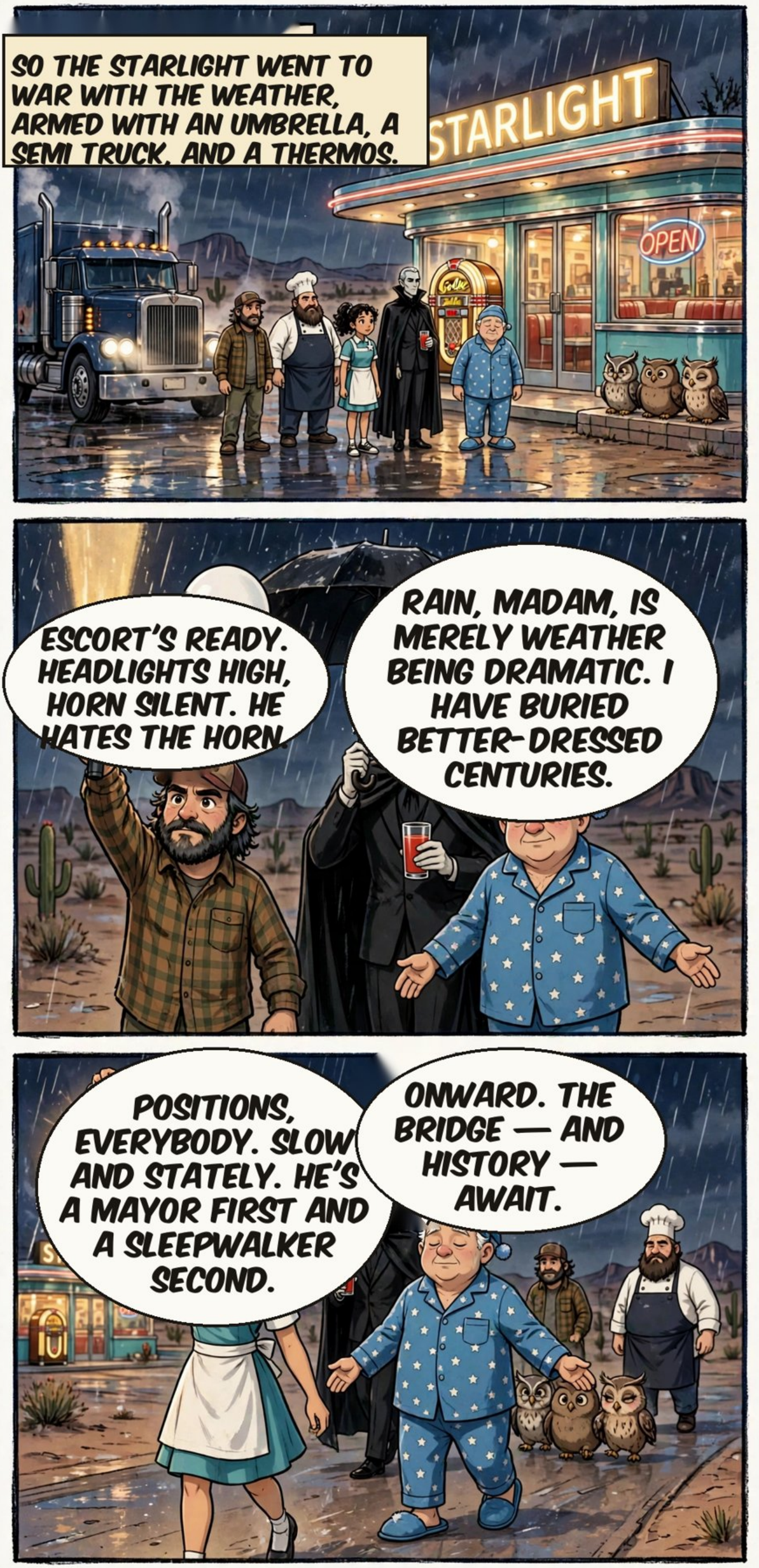

WASH'LL BE UP BY TWO. MILLER'S CROSSING'LL BE UNDER IT BY THREE.
THE NEW BRIDGE OUT THERE — THE TOWN'S DEDICATING IT TOMORROW, RIGHT?


WAS. BRIDGE AIN'T FINISHED, NOVA. THERE'S A FORTY-FOOT HOLE IN THE MIDDLE OF IT, WAITING ON A STATE INSPECTOR WHO'S WAITING ON SPRING
FORTY FEET OF NOTHING, OVER RISING WATER
THEN WHY IS GOLDIE SINGING ABOUT A MAN CHRISTENING IT... IN HIS SLEEP?

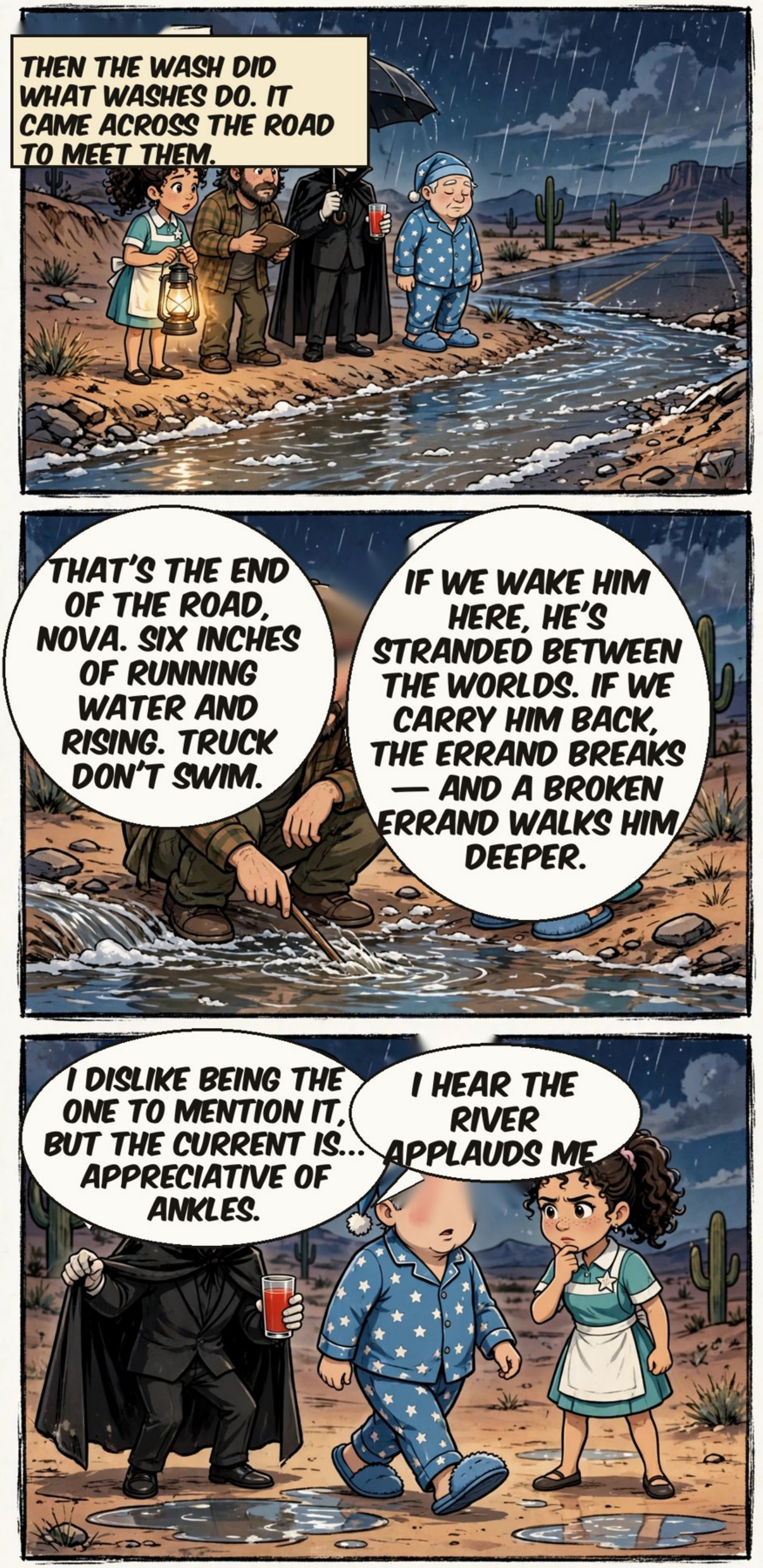

AT HALF PAST ONE, THE DOOR OPENED ALL BY ITSELF. IT DOES THAT FOR HIM.
MR. MAYOR... YOU'RE ASLEEP.
CITIZENS. THE HOUR HAS COME. TONIGHT, THIS TOWN DEDICATES ITS BRIDGE.
HAS BEEN FOR SIX BLOCKS. DON'T WAKE HIM, NOVA. WAKING A WALKER MID-ERRAND STRANDS HIM BETWEEN THE WORLDS TILL SUNRISE — GROGGY, LOST, AND COLD.
MY REMARKS ARE PREPARED. MY RIBBON AWAITS. WHERE IS MY PROCESSION?


HE'S GOING TO WALK THREE MILES THROUGH A STORM TO A BRIDGE WITH A HOLE IN IT.
Goldie
THEN HE SHALL NOT WALK ALONE. A GENTLEMAN ESCORTS. IT IS, I BELIEVE, THE ENTIRE POINT OF GENTLEMEN.
TRUCK'S GOT CHAINS AND A FULL TANK. I'LL LIGHT THE ROAD.
COFFEE. FOR THE WALK. HE TAKES IT BLACK, EVEN SLEEPING.
AND THE OWLS?
STARLIGHT
THE PARLIAMENT WAS ALREADY GONE — THREE SHADOWS OVER THE WET HIGHWAY. FLYING POINT.


STAR GIRL...?
WAIT. HE DOESN'T NEED THAT BRIDGE. HE NEEDS A BRIDGE. A DEDICATION. A RIBBON. A CROWD.
HE'S ASLEEP, HOLLIS. IN HIS DREAM, THE BRIDGE IS WHEREVER HE CHRISTENS IT. SO WE GIVE HIM ONE HE CAN'T FALL OFF OF.
MISS REYES, THAT IS EITHER MADNESS OR MUNICIPAL GENIUS.
IT'S BOTH. IT'S A SMALL TOWN. — PARKING LOT. PAINT. SODA BOTTLE. AND ONE NAPKIN.
THE MAYOR IS PLEASED WITH THESE PREPARATIONS


SO THE STARLIGHT WENT TO WAR WITH THE WEATHER, ARMED WITH AN UMBRELLA, A SEMI TRUCK, AND A THERMOS.
STARLIGHT
OPEN
ESCORT'S READY. HEADLIGHTS HIGH, HORN SILENT. HE HATES THE HORN.
RAIN, MADAM, IS MERELY WEATHER BEING DRAMATIC. I HAVE BURIED BETTER-DRESSED CENTURIES.
POSITIONS, EVERYBODY. SLOW AND STATELY. HE'S A MAYOR FIRST AND A SLEEPWALKER SECOND.
ONWARD. THE BRIDGE — AND HISTORY — AWAIT.


THREE MILES OF WET HIGHWAY. THEY MADE IT EXACTLY ONE HUNDRED YARDS.
...THE MAN WHO CHRISTENED IT IN HIS SLEEP...
SHE'S STILL SINGING THE SAD VERSION.
A FINE NIGHT! THE CONSTITUENCY IS... DAMP!
THEN WE AIN'T CHANGED IT YET. KEEP WALKING, STAR GIRL.


THEN THE WASH DID WHAT WASHES DO. IT CAME ACROSS THE ROAD TO MEET THEM.
THAT'S THE END OF THE ROAD, NOVA. SIX INCHES OF RUNNING WATER AND RISING. TRUCK DON'T SWIM.
IF WE WAKE HIM HERE, HE'S STRANDED BETWEEN THE WORLDS. IF WE CARRY HIM BACK, THE ERRAND BREAKS — AND A BROKEN ERRAND WALKS HIM DEEPER.
I DISLIKE BEING THE ONE TO MENTION IT, BUT THE CURRENT IS... APPRECIATIVE OF ANKLES.
I HEAR THE RIVER APPLAUDS ME

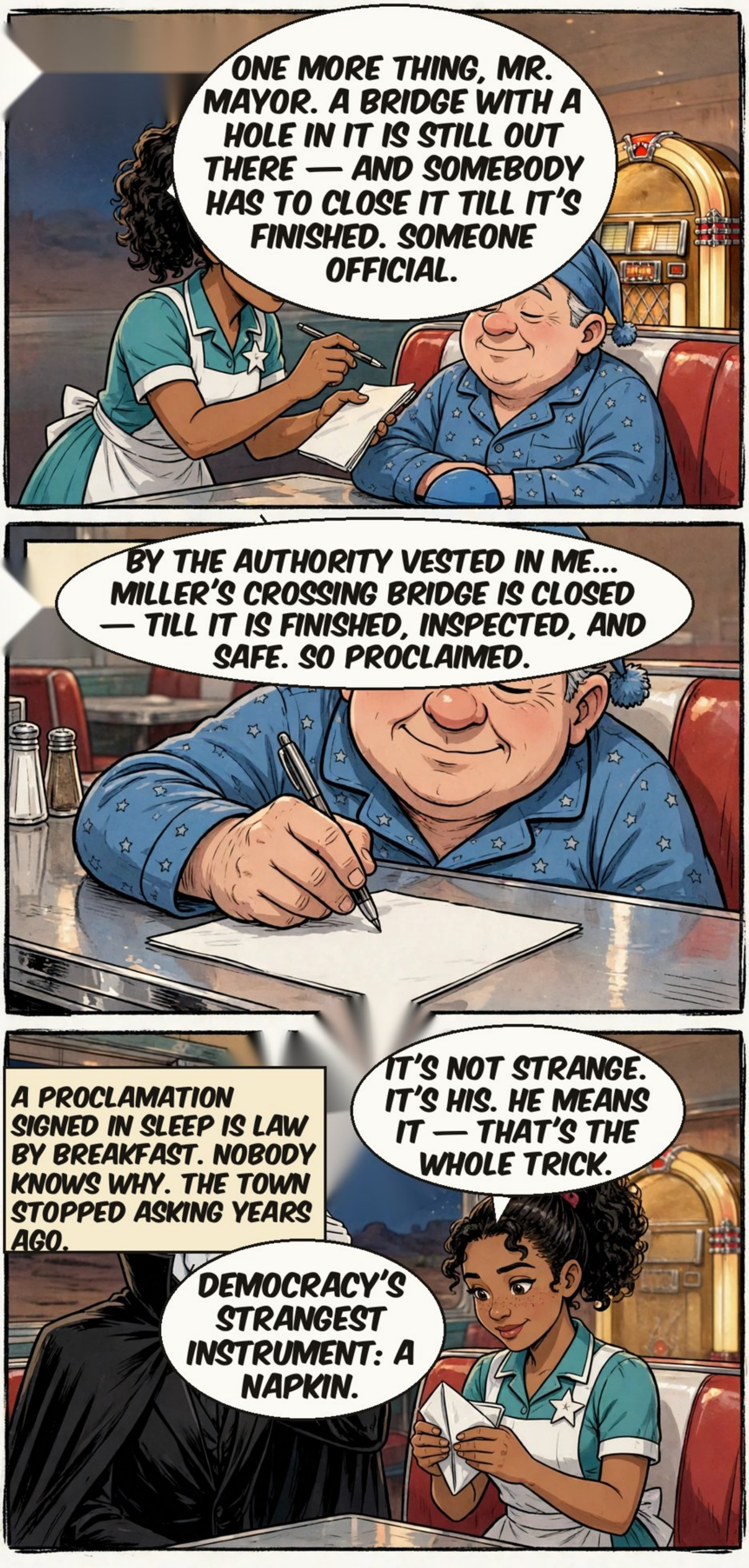

NOBODY WAKES. NOBODY TURNS BACK. WE DEDICATE RIGHT HERE — NO. BETTER.
HOLLIS — YOUR HEADLIGHTS. AMBROSE — THE UMBRELLA'S HIS CANOPY. PARLIAMENT — WHERE ARE MY WITNESSES?


THREE OWLS SETTLED ON THE MILE MARKER LIKE A PANEL OF JUDGES.

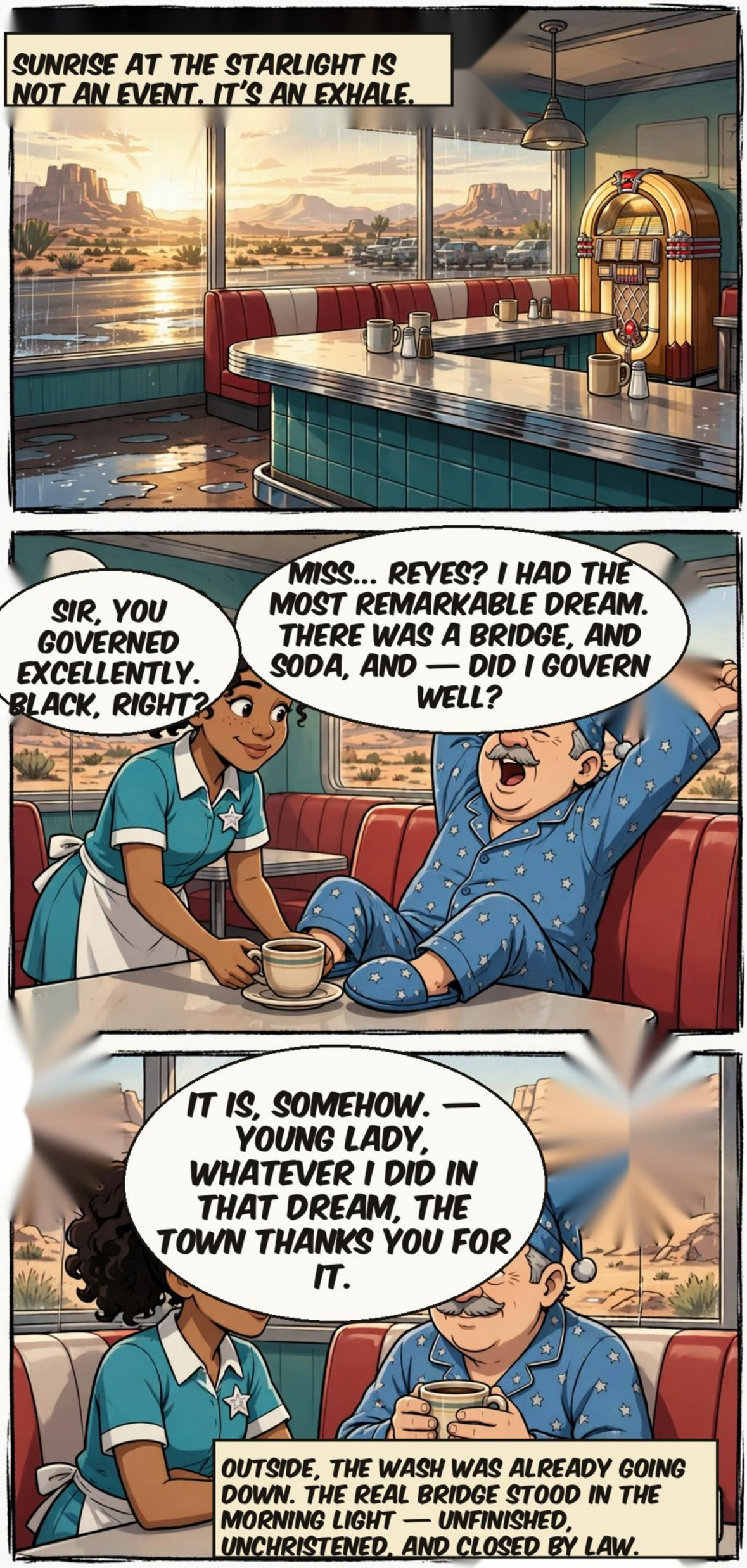

BACK TO THE LOT. STATELIER THAN EVER. THE BRIDGE HE NEEDS IS THE ONE THAT CAN'T DROWN — AND IT'S BEEN BEHIND US THE WHOLE TIME.
STARLIGHT
THE MAYOR ACCEPTS THIS SCENIC ROUTE

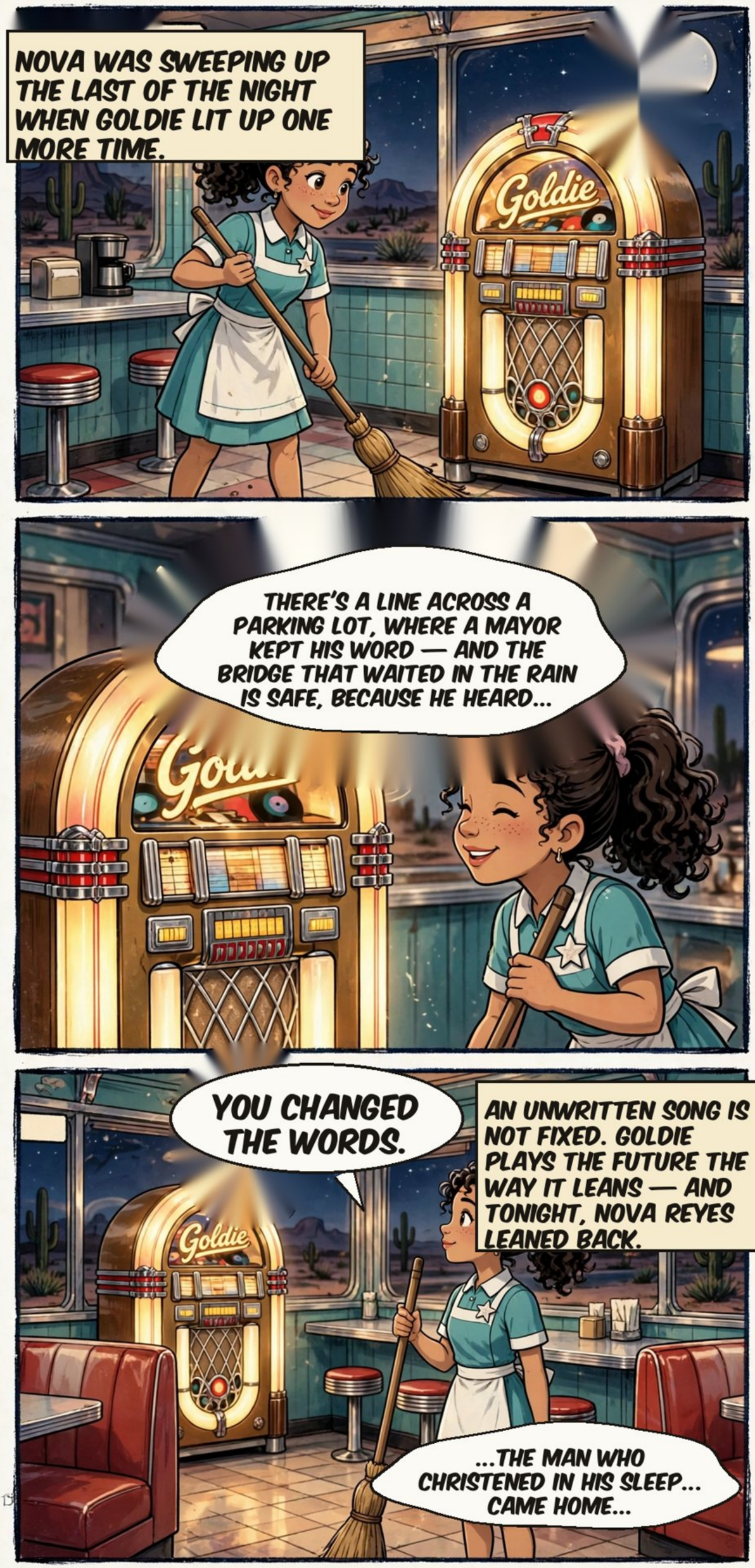

GUS HAD UNDERSTOOD EVERYTHING FROM THE PASS-THROUGH WINDOW. COOKS DO.
ONE BRIDGE. FRESH PAINT. NO HOLE.
GUS, YOU BEAUTIFUL MIND, YOU PAINTED A BRIDGE ON THE PARKING LOT.
PARKING LOT NEEDED A BRIDGE.
AT LAST. MY BRIDGE. CITIZENS — ATTEND.

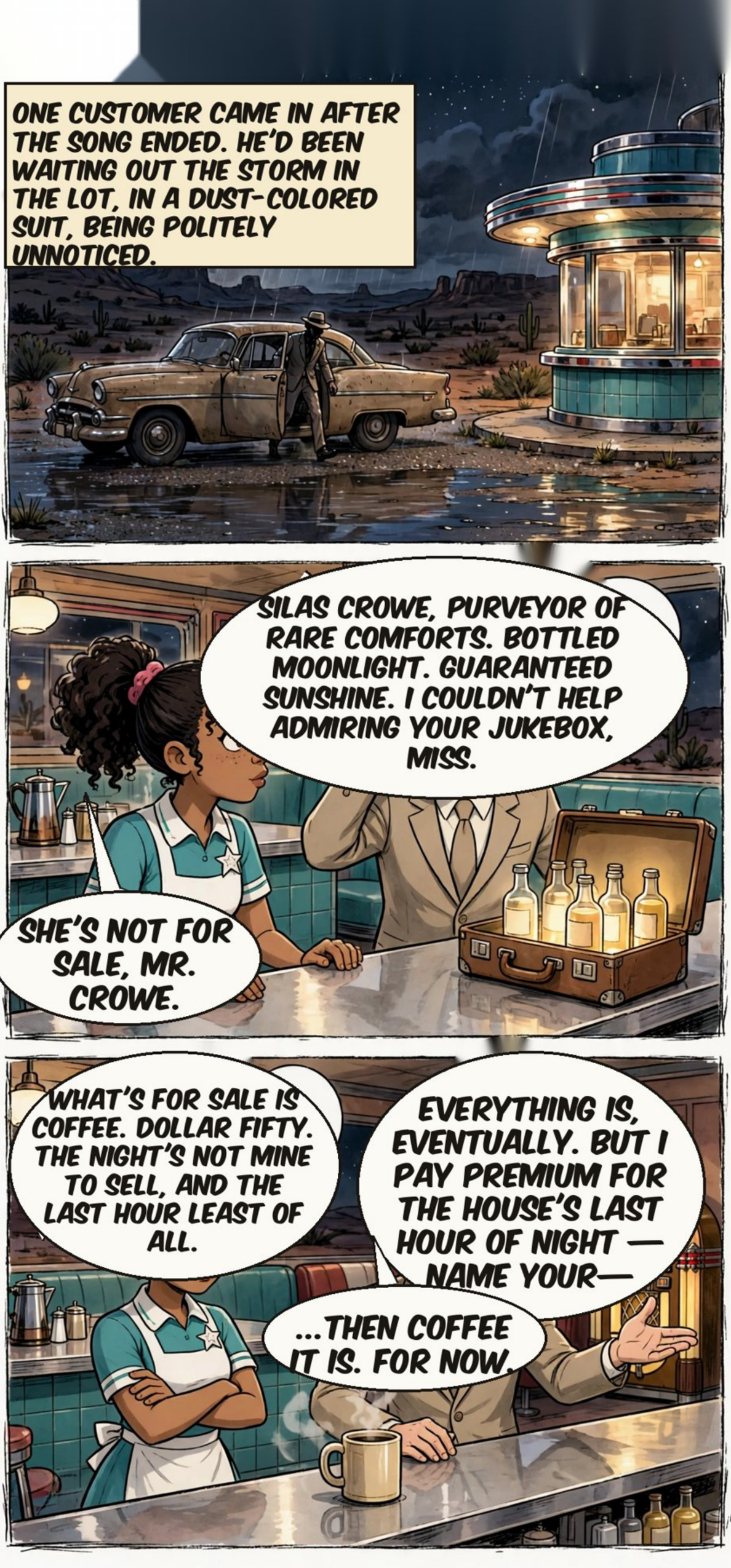

WE DEDICATE THIS SPAN TO EVERY TRAVELER WHO EVER NEEDED TO GET TO THE OTHER SIDE.
STARLIGHT
BRIDGE LIN
GUS'S GRAPE SODA. SHAKE IT, SIR. AIM AT THE LINE.
POP!
'OCTOBER. THE MAYOR DEDICATED THE PARKING LOT. IT HELD.'
Goldie
HE CHRISTENED THE PAINTED BRIDGE WITH GRAPE SODA, SOLEMN AS ANY ADMIRAL, WHILE THE OWLS APPLAUDED IN THE ONLY WAY OWLS CAN — SILENTLY, AND ALL AT ONCE.


ONE MORE THING, MR. MAYOR. A BRIDGE WITH A HOLE IN IT IS STILL OUT THERE — AND SOMEBODY HAS TO CLOSE IT TILL IT'S FINISHED. SOMEONE OFFICIAL.
BY THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN ME... MILLER'S CROSSING BRIDGE IS CLOSED — TILL IT IS FINISHED, INSPECTED, AND SAFE. SO PROCLAIMED.
A PROCLAMATION SIGNED IN SLEEP IS LAW BY BREAKFAST. NOBODY KNOWS WHY. THE TOWN STOPPED ASKING YEARS AGO.
IT'S NOT STRANGE. IT'S HIS. HE MEANS IT — THAT'S THE WHOLE TRICK.
DEMOCRACY'S STRANGEST INSTRUMENT: A NAPKIN.

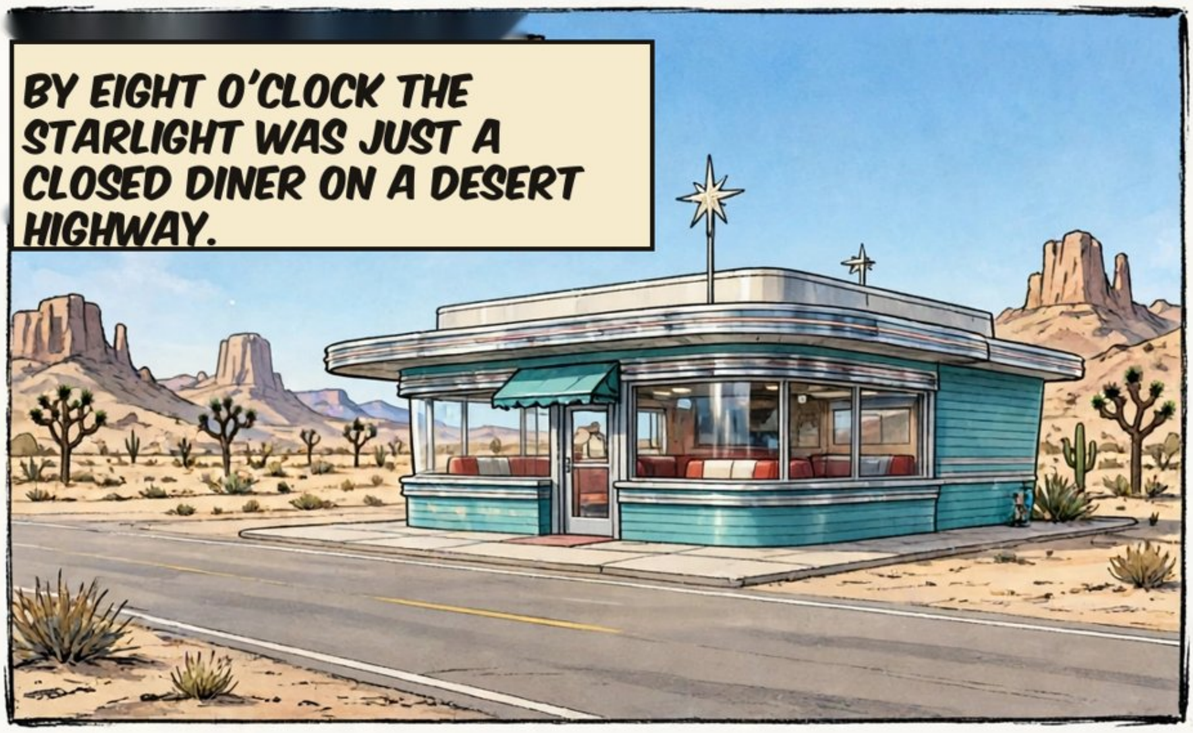

LAST CALL AT THE STARLIGHT IS A BOOTH, A BLANKET, AND A MAN SLEEPING THE RIGHT WAY — STILL, AND DONE.
OPEN
HE SNORES IN COMPLETE SENTENCES.
LOG SAYS A WALKER WHO FINISHES HIS ERRAND SLEEPS CLEAN. HE'LL WAKE AT SUNRISE REMEMBERING A DREAM ABOUT A BRIDGE OPENING.
AND THE TOWN WAKES TO HIS SIGNATURE, CLOSING A BRIDGE THAT WOULD'VE HURT SOMEBODY.
TO THE NIGHT SHIFT. IT HOLDS.


SUNRISE AT THE STARLIGHT IS NOT AN EVENT. IT'S AN EXHALE.
MISS... REYES? I HAD THE MOST REMARKABLE DREAM. THERE WAS A BRIDGE, AND SODA, AND — DID I GOVERN WELL?
SIR, YOU GOVERNED EXCELLENTLY. BLACK, RIGHT?
IT IS, SOMEHOW. — YOUNG LADY, WHATEVER I DID IN THAT DREAM, THE TOWN THANKS YOU FOR IT.
OUTSIDE, THE WASH WAS ALREADY GOING DOWN. THE REAL BRIDGE STOOD IN THE MORNING LIGHT — UNFINISHED, UNCHRISTENED, AND CLOSED BY LAW.


NOVA WAS SWEEPING UP THE LAST OF THE NIGHT WHEN GOLDIE LIT UP ONE MORE TIME.
Goldie
THERE'S A LINE ACROSS A PARKING LOT, WHERE A MAYOR KEPT HIS WORD — AND THE BRIDGE THAT WAITED IN THE RAIN IS SAFE, BECAUSE HE HEARD...
YOU CHANGED THE WORDS.
AN UNWRITTEN SONG IS NOT FIXED. GOLDIE PLAYS THE FUTURE THE WAY IT LEANS — AND TONIGHT, NOVA REYES LEANED BACK.
...THE MAN WHO CHRISTENED IN HIS SLEEP... CAME HOME...


ONE CUSTOMER CAME IN AFTER THE SONG ENDED. HE'D BEEN WAITING OUT THE STORM IN THE LOT, IN A DUST-COLORED SUIT, BEING POLITELY UNNOTICED.
SILAS CROWE, PURVEYOR OF RARE COMFORTS. BOTTLED MOONLIGHT. GUARANTEED SUNSHINE. I COULDN'T HELP ADMIRING YOUR JUKEBOX, MISS.
SHE'S NOT FOR SALE, MR. CROWE.
WHAT'S FOR SALE IS COFFEE. DOLLAR FIFTY. THE NIGHT'S NOT MINE TO SELL, AND THE LAST HOUR LEAST OF ALL.
EVERYTHING IS, EVENTUALLY. BUT I PAY PREMIUM FOR THE HOUSE'S LAST HOUR OF NIGHT — NAME YOUR—
...THEN COFFEE IT IS. FOR NOW.


NIGHT'S END HAS ITS OWN PAPERWORK.
ENTRY'S WRITTEN. 'ASK HER ABOUT THE NAPKIN,' FUTURE ME.
RULE SEVEN. WHAT THE OWLS BRING GOES IN THE TIN, TILL SOMEBODY COMES DREAMING OF IT.
ONE EARRING, TWO CAPS, A COIN FROM A COUNTRY THAT ISN'T. SOMEBODY'S DREAMING OF THESE.
GRILL'S OFF. COFFEE'S ON TILL THE LAST SECOND. HOUSE RULES.
GUS LIGHT
STARLIGHT
SEE YOU ALL AT MIDNIGHT.


BY EIGHT O'CLOCK THE STARLIGHT WAS JUST A CLOSED DINER ON A DESERT HIGHWAY.


CARS PASSED. NOBODY SLOWED. IN TOWN, THE HARDWARE STORE OPENED, THE NAPKIN PROCLAMATION WENT UP IN THE WINDOW OF THE COURTHOUSE — LAW BY BREAKFAST — AND TWO STATE INSPECTORS, READING IT, QUIETLY MOVED THEIR VISIT UP TO TUESDAY.
AND A GIRL OF SIXTEEN COUNTED HER TIPS AT A KITCHEN TABLE, AND PUT THEM IN AN ENVELOPE MARKED MOTORCYCLE, AND SLEPT THE WHOLE DAY THROUGH, SMILING.
THE BRIDGE CAN WAIT. SHE CAN'T — SHE'S DUE AT MIDNIGHT.



NEXT MONTH IN NO. 2 — 'WHAT SILAS CROWE LEFT BEHIND'

THE SALESMAN PAID EXACT CHANGE... OR DID HE? PLUS: THE COIN FROM A COUNTRY THAT ISN'T — AND THE NIGHT THE JUKEBOX PLAYED A WEDDING SONG FOR NOBODY. ON THE STAND NEXT MONTH!

— END OF ISSUE NO. 1 —