GHOST BOYS

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

BY JEWELL PARKER RHODES

Paradise on Fire

Black Brother, Black Brother

Ghost Boys

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THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Jewell Parker Rhodes

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Orion

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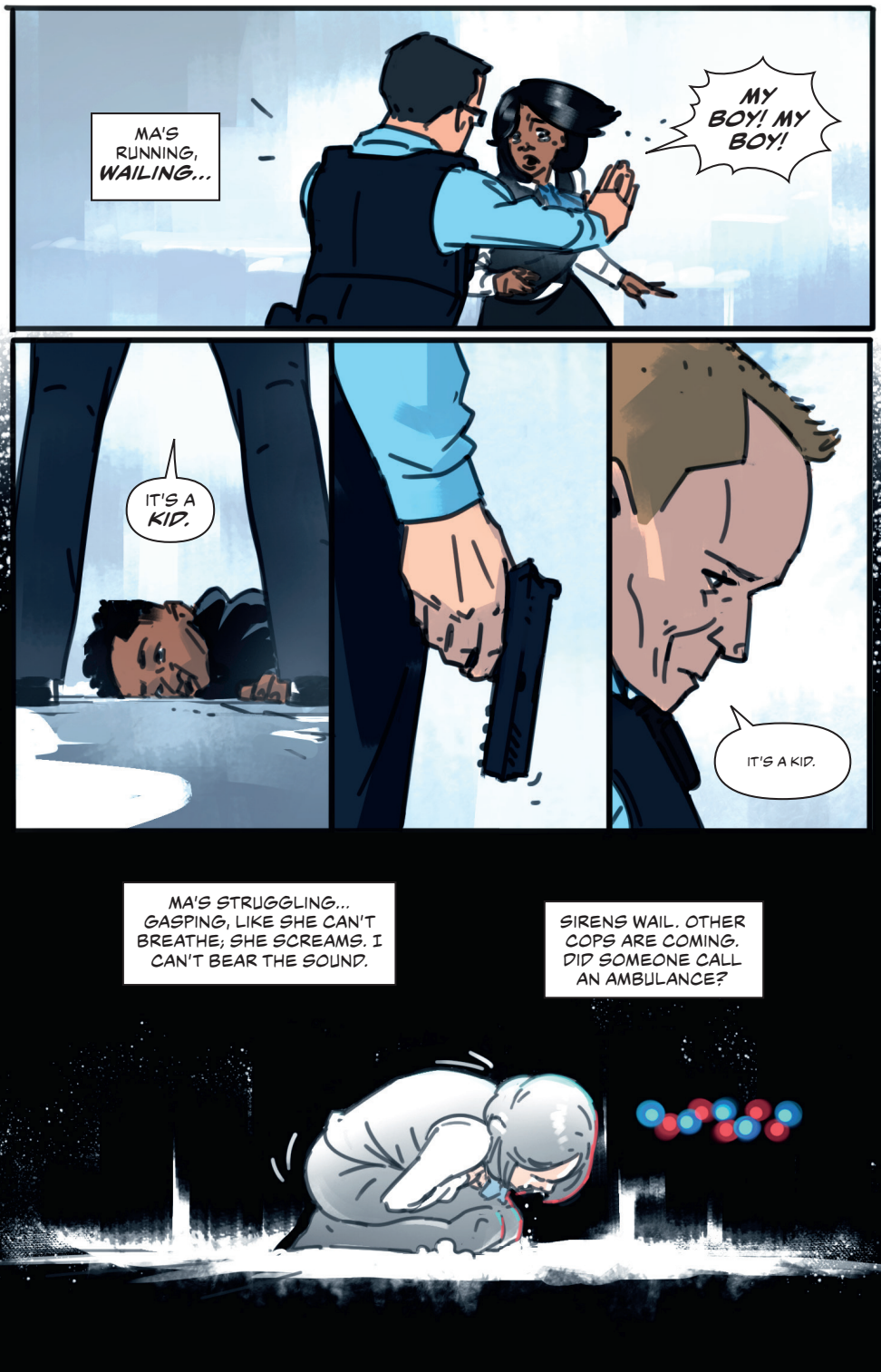
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Dedicated to the belief that we can
all do better, be better, live better.
We owe our best to each and every child.
–J. P. R.

To a better world, where we will truly be
Good Samaritans to one another.
–S. F.


I'M DEAD.
HOW SMALL I LOOK...LAID OUT FLAT.
I THOUGHT I WAS BIGGER. TOUGH. BUT I'M JUST A BIT OF NOTHING.
I'D BARELY TURNED, SPRINTING.
POW
POW
TWO BULLETS. I FELL FLAT. HARD.


MA'S RUNNING, WAILING...
MY BOY! MY BOY!
IT'S A KID.
IT'S A KID.
MA'S STRUGGLING... GASPING, LIKE SHE CAN'T BREATHE; SHE SCREAMS. I CAN'T BEAR THE SOUND.
SIRENS WAIL. OTHER COPS ARE COMING. DID SOMEONE CALL AN AMBULANCE?


I'M STILL DEAD. ALONE ON THE FIELD.
STAY BACK! EVERYONE, STAY BACK!
MORE PEOPLE COME.
JEROME. IT'S JEROME.
DOESN'T SEEM FAIR. NOBODY EVER PAID ME ANY ATTENTION.
I SKATED BY. KEPT MY HEAD LOW.
NOW I'M FAMOUS.

Chicago Tribune

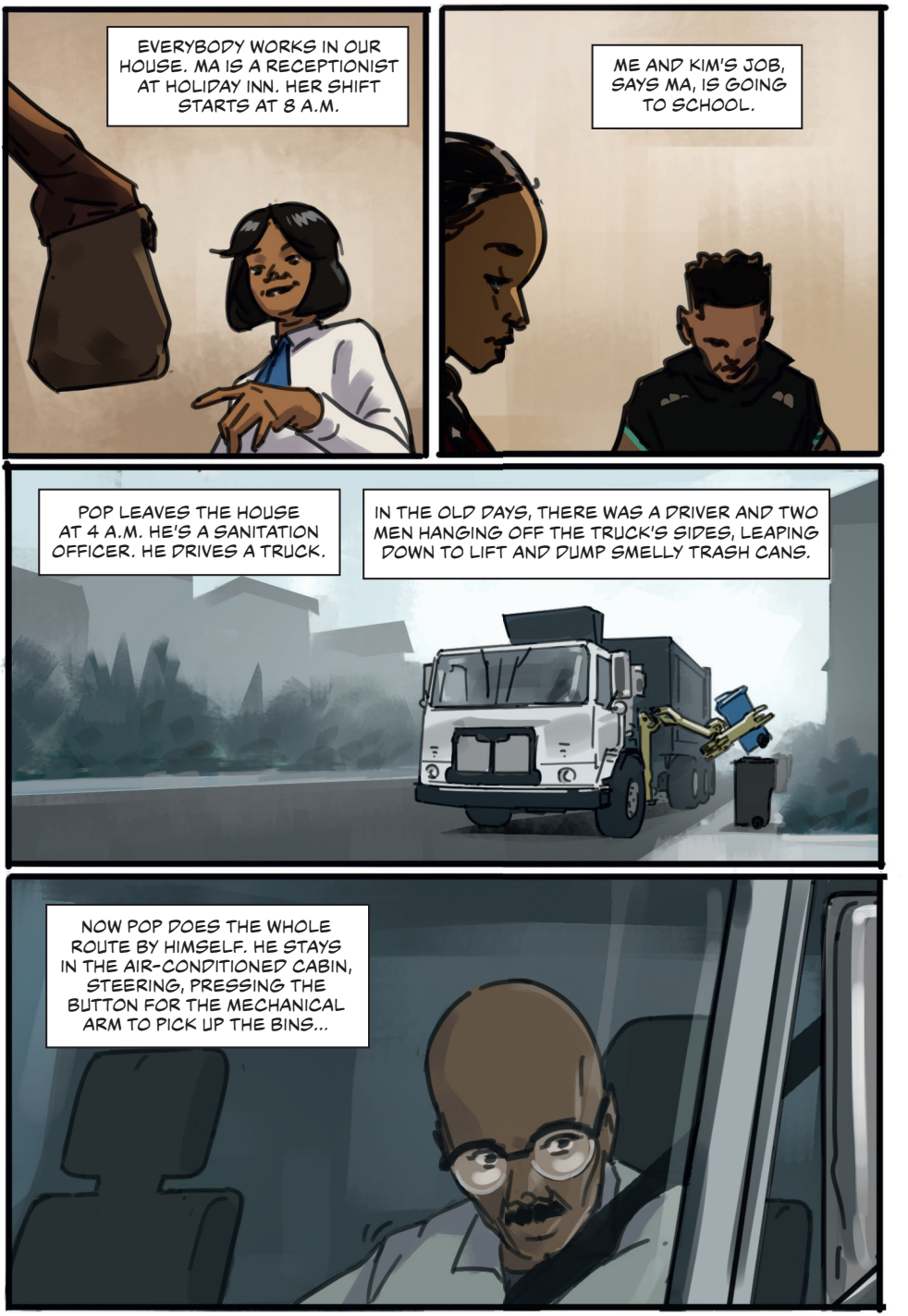
Officer: "I Had No Choice"

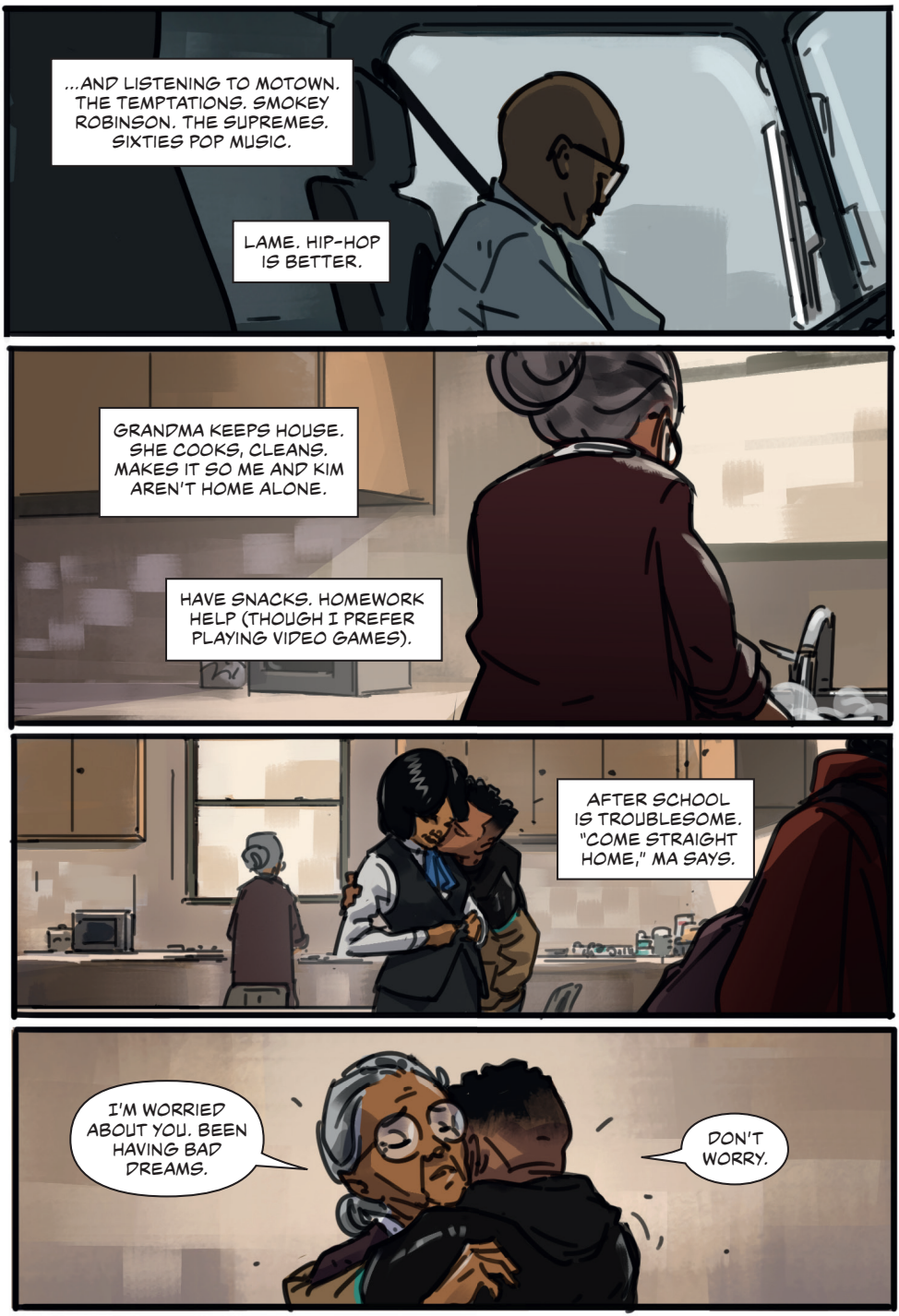
Jerome Rogers, 12, shot at abandoned Green Street lot. Officer says, "He had a gun."


alive


COME STRAIGHT HOME. YOU HEAR ME, JEROME? COME STRAIGHT HOME.
I WILL.
I ALWAYS DO.
PROMISE?
PROMISE.
SAME RITUAL EVERY DAY.
I'M THE GOOD KID. WISH I WASN'T.
I'VE GOT TROUBLES, BUT I DON'T GET IN TROUBLE. BIG DIFFERENCE.

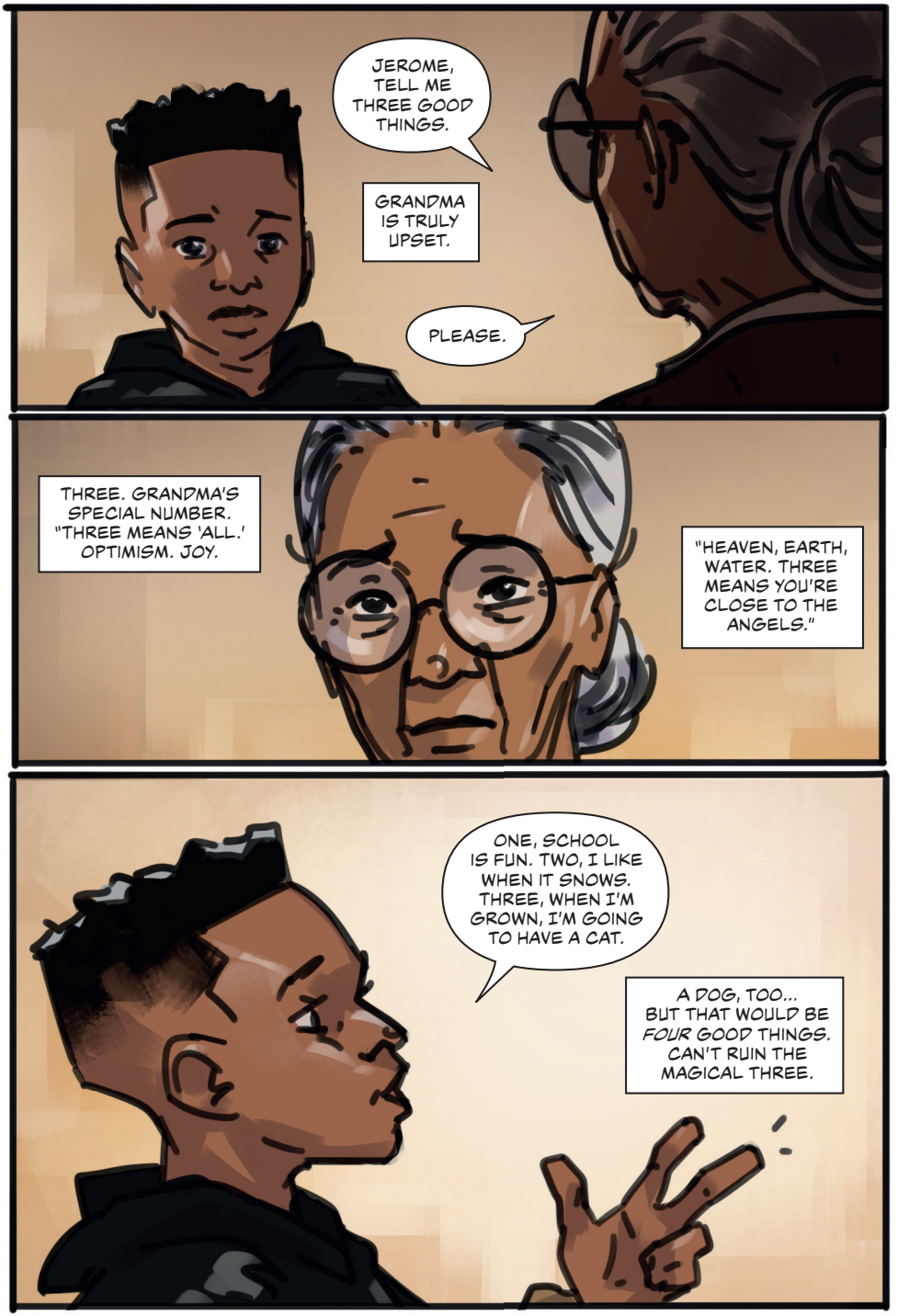

I GET TEASED OFTEN, BUT WHEN I'M A GROWN-UP, EVERYBODY'S GOING TO BE MY FRIEND.
I MIGHT EVEN BE PRESIDENT. LIKE OBAMA.
KIM SAYS SHE BELIEVES ME. THAT'S WHY I PUT UP WITH HER.
SHE CAN BE ANNOYING. ASKING TOO MANY QUESTIONS.
LIKE: "WHAT MAKES A CLOUD?" "WHY'RE THEIR SHAPES DIFFERENT?" TELLING ME: "*MINECRAFT* IS STUPID." BEGGING ME TO HELP PICK OUT A LIBRARY BOOK.
HURRY UP. ELSE YOU'LL BE LATE.


EVERYBODY WORKS IN OUR HOUSE. MA IS A RECEPTIONIST AT HOLIDAY INN. HER SHIFT STARTS AT 8 A.M.
ME AND KIM'S JOB, SAYS MA, IS GOING TO SCHOOL.
POP LEAVES THE HOUSE AT 4 A.M. HE'S A SANITATION OFFICER. HE DRIVES A TRUCK.
IN THE OLD DAYS, THERE WAS A DRIVER AND TWO MEN HANGING OFF THE TRUCK'S SIDES, LEAPING DOWN TO LIFT AND DUMP SMELLY TRASH CANS.
NOW POP DOES THE WHOLE ROUTE BY HIMSELF. HE STAYS IN THE AIR-CONDITIONED CABIN, STEERING, PRESSING THE BUTTON FOR THE MECHANICAL ARM TO PICK UP THE BINS...


...AND LISTENING TO MOTOWN. THE TEMPTATIONS. SMOKEY ROBINSON. THE SUPREMES. SIXTIES POP MUSIC.
LAME. HIP-HOP IS BETTER.
GRANDMA KEEPS HOUSE. SHE COOKS, CLEANS. MAKES IT SO ME AND KIM AREN'T HOME ALONE.
HAVE SNACKS. HOMEWORK HELP (THOUGH I PREFER PLAYING VIDEO GAMES).
AFTER SCHOOL IS TROUBLESOME. "COME STRAIGHT HOME," MA SAYS.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU. BEEN HAVING BAD DREAMS.
DON'T WORRY.


GRANDMA WORRIES THE MOST. SHE HAS DREAMS. "PREMONITIONS," SHE CALLS THEM.
THAT'S MY OTHER JOB--COMFORTING MA AND GRANDMA.
WORRIES ABOUT BAD THINGS HAPPENING. BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, OR WHY.
SOMETIMES I DREAM LIGHTNING STRIKES. OR EARTHQUAKES.
SOMETIMES IT'S DARK CLOUDS MUSHROOMING IN THE SKY. I WAKE TROUBLED.
REMEMBERING HER WORDS, I WORRY. I KNOW MA WILL REMIND HER TO TAKE HER BLOOD PRESSURE PILL.

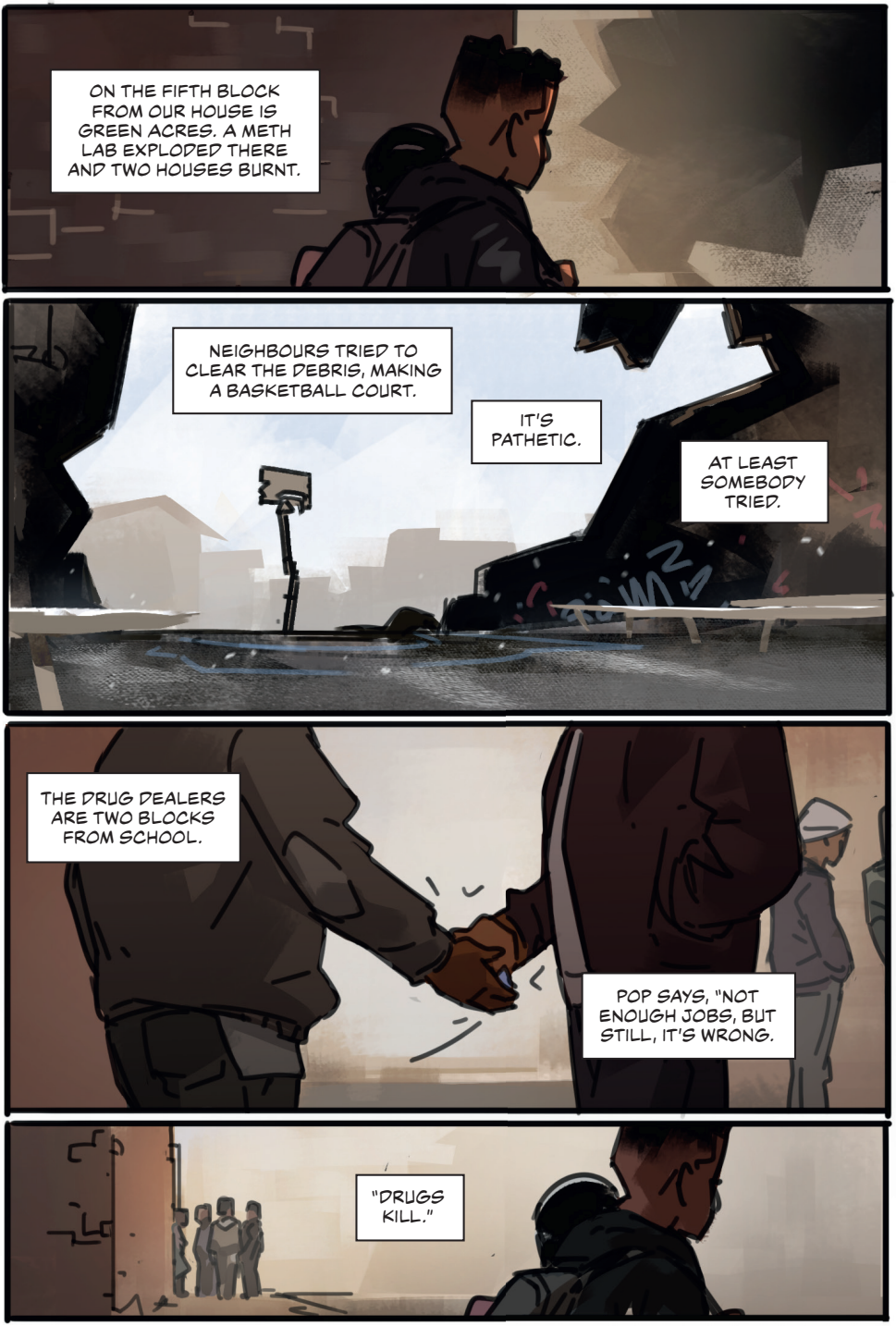

POP WORRIES, TOO, BUT HE USUALLY DOESN'T SAY SO. EARLY MORNING, BEFORE HE LEAVES FOR WORK, HE ALWAYS STOPS BY MY ROOM. (KIM'S, TOO.)
I'VE GOTTEN USED TO IT.
HE LOOKS AND LOOKS--
--THEN GOES TO WORK.


JEROME, TELL ME THREE GOOD THINGS.
GRANDMA IS TRULY UPSET.
PLEASE.
THREE. GRANDMA'S SPECIAL NUMBER. "THREE MEANS 'ALL.' OPTIMISM. JOY.
"HEAVEN, EARTH, WATER. THREE MEANS YOU'RE CLOSE TO THE ANGELS."
ONE, SCHOOL IS FUN. TWO, I LIKE WHEN IT SNOWS. THREE, WHEN I'M GROWN, I'M GOING TO HAVE A CAT.
A DOG, TOO... BUT THAT WOULD BE *FOUR* GOOD THINGS. CAN'T RUIN THE MAGICAL THREE.


EXACTLY WHAT SHE NEEDED TO HEAR.
FINE, I'VE TOLD HER. I'M FINE.
BYE!
STUDY HARD.
MA'S HAPPY I COMFORTED GRANDMA, BUT UNHAPPY WITH HER SOUTHERN WAYS.
MA SAYS SHE WANTS ME AND KIM TO BE ED-YOU-CATED.
SOMETIMES THE POKE HURTS A BIT. BUT I GET IT.
GRANDMA DROPPED OUT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO CARE FOR HER YOUNGER SISTERS.
MA AND POP FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL.
ME AND KIM ARE SUPPOSED TO GO TO COLLEGE.


KIM IS NICE. BUT I DON'T TELL HER THAT.
WHEN SHE'S A TEENAGER, I'LL BE GROWN. EVERYBODY WILL WORRY MORE ABOUT HER THAN ME.
MA ALWAYS SAYS, "IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD, GETTING A CHILD TO ADULTHOOD IS PERILOUS."
I LOOKED UP THE WORD. *PERILOUS*. "RISKY, DANGEROUS."
PAH!
CAN'T BE GOOD ALL THE TIME. LATER, I'LL TAKE MY ALLOWANCE AND BUY KIM A BOOK. SOMETHING SCARY, FUN.


OUR WALK TO SCHOOL HAS GOT TO BE JUST RIGHT.
NOT TOO FAST LIKE WE'RE RUNNING--
--NOT TOO SLOW LIKE WE'RE DARING SOMEONE TO STOP US.
GREEN STREET ISN'T PEACEFUL.
IT ISN'T GREEN, EITHER.
JUST HOUSES, SOME LIVED IN, SOME ABANDONED.
OUT-OF-WORK MEN PLAY CARDS ON THE STREET.
EIGHT BLOCKS TO TRAVEL BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL.


ON THE FIFTH BLOCK FROM OUR HOUSE IS GREEN ACRES. A METH LAB EXPLODED THERE AND TWO HOUSES BURNT.
NEIGHBOURS TRIED TO CLEAR THE DEBRIS, MAKING A BASKETBALL COURT.
IT'S PATHETIC.
AT LEAST SOMEBODY TRIED.
THE DRUG DEALERS ARE TWO BLOCKS FROM SCHOOL.
POP SAYS, "NOT ENOUGH JOBS, BUT STILL, IT'S WRONG.
"DRUGS KILL."


THE WORST, THOUGH, ARE SCHOOL BULLIES. THEY NEVER LEAVE YOU ALONE.
MOST DAYS I TRY TO STAY NEAR ADULTS.
LUNCHTIME I HIDE IN THE LOCKER ROOM, THE SUPPLY CLOSET, OR THE BATHROOM.
KIM KNOWS.
I'LL MEET YOU AFTER SCHOOL.
YOU ALWAYS DO. YOU GOING TO HAVE A GOOD DAY?
YEAH.
I'M SEARCHING FOR EDDIE, SNAP, AND MIKE.
THEY LIKE TO DUMP MY BACKPACK. PUSH ME, PULL MY PANTS DOWN. HIT ME UPSIDE THE HEAD.


KIM'S SMART FOR A THIRD GRADER. SHE KNOWS SURVIVING THE SCHOOL DAY ISN'T EASY FOR ME.
SHE NEVER TELLS, THOUGH.
MA, POP, AND GRANDMA HAVE ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT.
THEY KNOW KIM'S POPULAR AND I'M NOT.
KIMMEEE!
BUT THEY DON'T NEED TO KNOW I'M BEING BULLIED.
YO, JEROME!


OH NO.
IT'S MIKE--
--EDDIE--
--AND SNAP.
DAMN.
HAVE TO BE SUPER CAREFUL.
DURING LUNCH, I'LL HIDE IN THE BATHROOM.
MAYBE THEY'LL FORGET ABOUT ME?
FIND ANOTHER TARGET?
I CAN HOPE.
JUST LIKE I HOPE I'LL WIN THE LOTTERY.
A MILLION DOLLARS.


dead