

**PROLOGUE.
THE CIRCLE OPENS.**

Sally.

Wake up now, Sally.

...lemme... lemme alone...

Wake up! You got to wake up!

**CALIFORNIA. SOMEWHERE IN THE DESERT.
CHARLIE AND SALLY CAMPION.**

...what is it, Charlie, what's wrong?

You got to get dressed, honey! You got to get Baby LaVon, and we got to get outta here!

Why, is it...? Was there a fire?

Sally, honey, *don't* ask questions--you just get Baby LaVon dressed so we can hurry up and go--

I got to test the wind, see how much time we got--

Sally Campion knew what leaving in the middle of the night meant.

AWOL. Charlie was going AWOL and taking her and LaVon with him.



Won't they...?
Won't they send
soldiers after
us?

Not
tonight they
won't.

Wind's
blowing east
to west. Thank
God for that.



~cough~

~cough~



Was there an
accident?



Oh, Jesus,
Mary, and Joseph,
there *was*, wasn't
there? An accident.
Out there.



I was playing
solitaire. I looked
up and saw the clock
had gone from green
to red. I turned on
the monitor. Sally,
they're all...

...D-E-A-D
down there.



What was it exactly?

I dunno, I don't want to know, but it kil... K-I-L-L-E-D them quick.



If I'd looked up even thirty seconds later, I'd be shut up in that tower control room right now, like a bug in a bottle...



Sally took one final look at the bungalow they'd lived in for the last three years.

They were leaving their entire lives behind.



If the base gates are closed, I'm gonna crash through.

Wind's blowing west. We're going east.

It's going to be all right, hon.



By dawn, they would be riding east across Nevada, and Charlie would be coughing steadily.

END PROLOGUE.

ARNETTE, TEXAS.

BILL HAPSCOMB'S
TEXACO STATION
ON ROUTE 93.

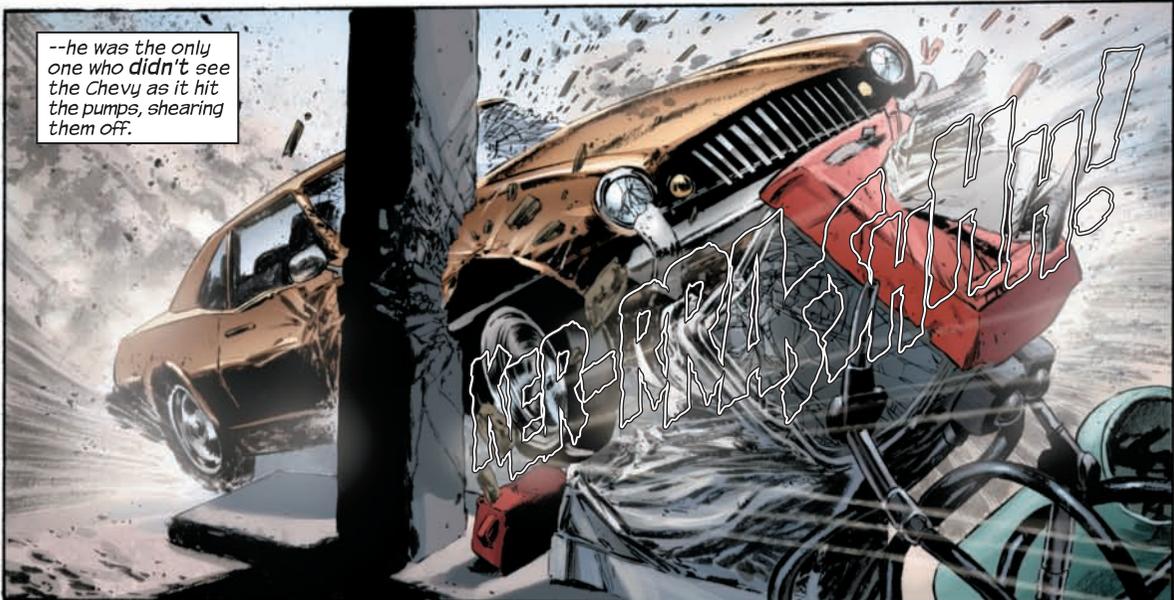




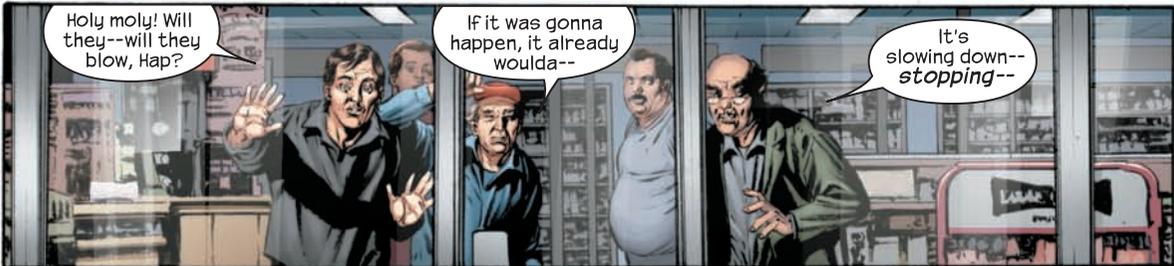


Since it was Stuart Redman, arguably the quietest man in Arnette, who flicked off all eight gas switches--

--saving his life, by the way, and the lives of his friends--



--he was the only one who didn't see the Chevy as it hit the pumps, shearing them off.



Holy moly! Will they--will they blow, Hap?

If it was gonna happen, it already woulda--

It's slowing down-- stopping--



They could smell the gas and hear the clock-like tick of the Chevy's cooling engine--



Holy moly! If he'd been doing sixty, we'd all be dead now.

**OGUNQUIT, MAINE.
THE COLD ATLANTIC OCEAN.**



FRANNIE GOLDSMITH AND HER POET BOYFRIEND:



What...
what did you
just say?

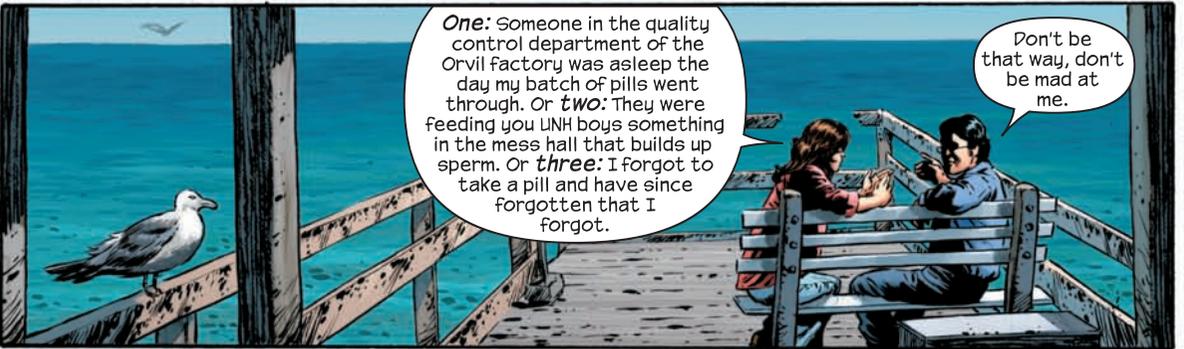
I'm
pregnant,
Jesse.

And no,
it's not a
joke.



How...how
did it *happen*?
I thought you
were on the
pill.

We-ell,
what I figure
is...



One: Someone in the quality control department of the Orvil factory was asleep the day my batch of pills went through. Or *two:* They were feeding you UNH boys something in the mess hall that builds up sperm. Or *three:* I forgot to take a pill and have since forgotten that I forgot.

Don't be
that way, don't
be mad at
me.



...
Take me
to the Dairy
Queen?



What do you want to do?
Oh, Hell.
What do you want to do?



Frannie heard it all, in those two words.
Everything she needed to know.



Let's get married.



...
No, Jesse, I don't want to marry you.

The truth, plain and simple.
Much easier to say aloud than Frannie figured it would be.
The harder part, she knew, would be telling her mother and father.

ARNETTE, THE TEXACO STATION.

Help--

Someone
get his legs--



God-damn--

It was the smell issuing from the car that made Norm Bruett turn away and start heaving. The sick stench of blood, fecal matter, vomit, and human decay.



I got 'im,
Hap--

The office,
Tommy, let's
get 'im
inside--

Stu Redman had
been in the war--

--but he'd never
seen anything so
terribly pitiful as
this.



Going by the flies,
the young woman
and baby had been
dead for awhile.





Ambulance's on the way.

...the clock went red...

...cough, cough?



Better roll him over. He's gonna choke on that mucus.



...my wife... my little girl...



They're fine, they're all right.

...they were sick...like me... since Salt Lake City...

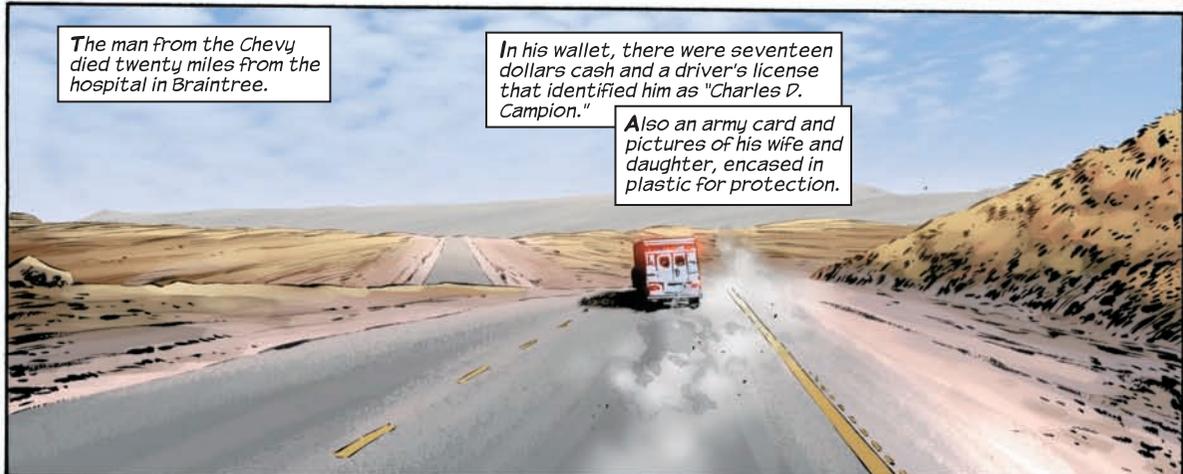
...guess we didn't move fast enough after all...

Man. Oh, man.

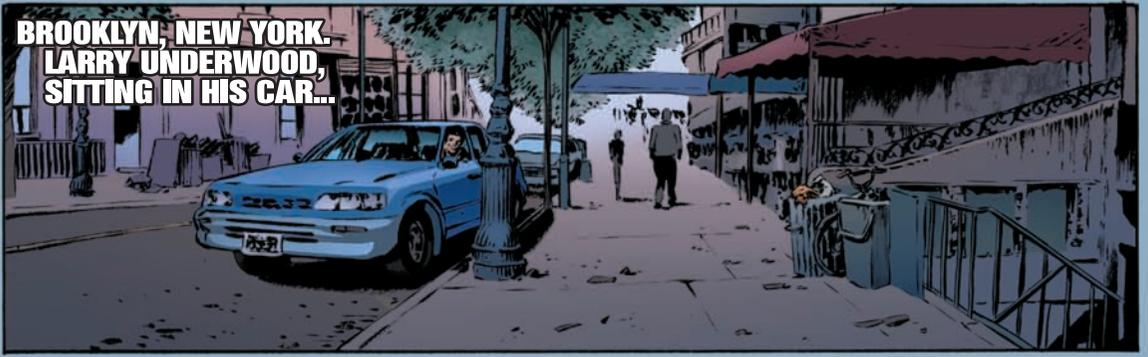


Far off but getting closer...

...Stu could hear the whoop, whoop of the Arnette Volunteer Ambulance on its way.



**BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.
LARRY UNDERWOOD,
SITTING IN HIS CAR...**



...watching a rat
take bites out of
a dead cat.



Dear New York:
I've come home.



Five days ago, he'd been
in sunny Southern California,
home of hopheads, religious
freaks, and Disneyland.

(Maybe the Yankees
are in town. That
would make this trip
worthwhile.)

For Larry, it had all started
eighteen months ago, when
he recorded a demo of one
of his songs, "Baby, Can You
Dig Your Man?"

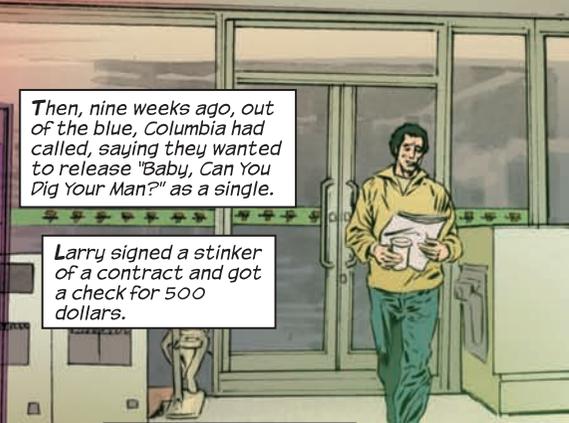
The session lasted
three days. It was
a good one.



Then, nine weeks ago, out
of the blue, Columbia had
called, saying they wanted
to release "Baby, Can You
Dig Your Man?" as a single.

Larry signed a stinker
of a contract and got
a check for 500
dollars.

Two weeks later, Larry
was reading, in Billboard
magazine, that his song
was one of three hot
prospects for the week.



Five weeks ago, the single had cracked Billboard's Hot One Hundred.

Larry found this out at a lunch with some real biggies from Columbia, who gave him another--much larger--check.

No one at the table had seemed to care that he'd been drunk.

Not long after that, the week spring came to Los Angeles, Larry heard "Baby, Can You Dig Your Man?" on the radio for the first time.

He was holding a bag of Toll House cookies, walking out of his kitchen.



I KNOW, I DIDN'T SAY I WAS COMING DOWN...

I KNOW YOU DIDN'T KNOW I WAS HERE IN TOWN...

BUT BAY-YAY-YABY YOU CAN TELL ME IF ANYONE CAN...

BABY, CAN YOU DIG YOUR MAN?

HE'S A RIGHTEOUS MAN...

TELL ME, BABY, CAN YOU DIG YOUR MAN?

Two weeks ago, the single hit number forty-seven, and the party had begun in earnest.

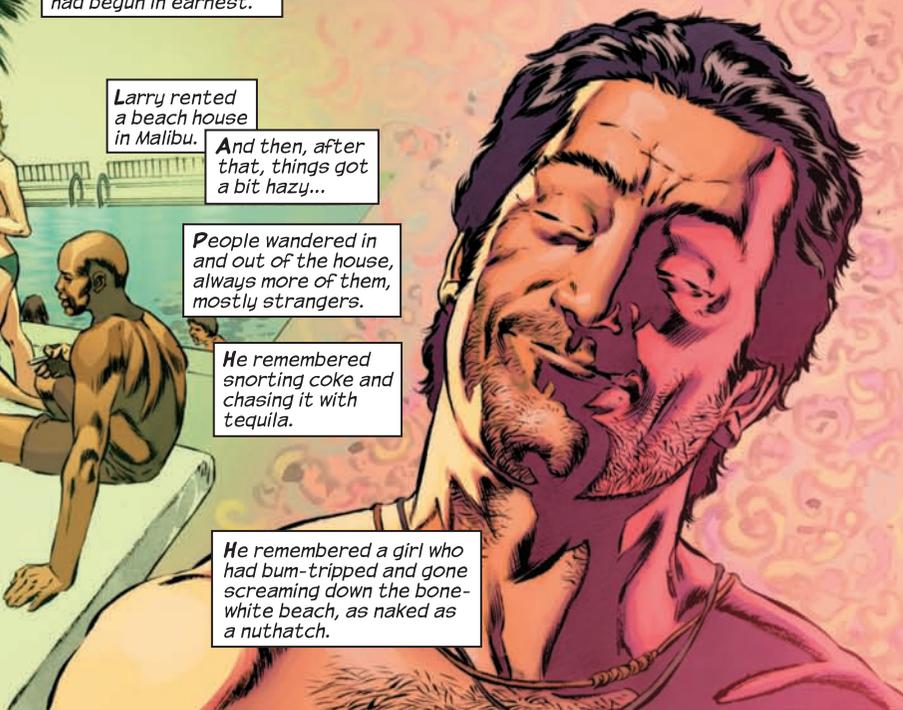
Larry rented a beach house in Malibu.

And then, after that, things got a bit hazy...

People wandered in and out of the house, always more of them, mostly strangers.

He remembered snorting coke and chasing it with tequila.

He remembered a girl who had bum-tripped and gone screaming down the bone-white beach, as naked as a nuthatch.



He remembered...

Six days ago, June 13, Wayne Stuckey sitting him down on the beach in front of his party house, saying:

You have to pull the plug, Larry.

The booze, the dope, the whoring.

The party's got to end.



If I pull the plug...I'm gonna look like the asshole of the world.

Yeah, they'll call you names, but they're not your friends. Your friends saw what was happening and split the scene three days ago. Every last one of them but me.

Stuckey was the closest thing Larry had to a brother. And he made sense.

Go back to your house and pull the plug, Larry. Then you get in your car and you go. Just go, man. And stay away until you're right in the head.



So that's what Larry Underwood had done. Driven across the country and come home, to New York. And was now sitting in his car, drifting in and out of sleep, wondering if he dreamed the rat eating the--

TAP
TAP
TAP



Mom...

I knew that was you, from the window. Come on up and I'll make you breakfast.



After eggs, bacon,
toast, juice, and
coffee.



So
you came
back.



I guess...
I got to
missing you,
Mom.



Oh? Is *that* why you wrote
me so often? 'Cause you
missed me so much?



I--I'm
not much
of a letter
writer...



I hear that song you got on the radio.

I tell people, that's my son. That's Larry. Most of them don't believe it.



I get a royalty. A certain percent of every...



...of every...



...record...

He was crying, suddenly. The truth was: He had come home because he was afraid and he wanted his mother.



Larry...

...do you want to stay here, son?

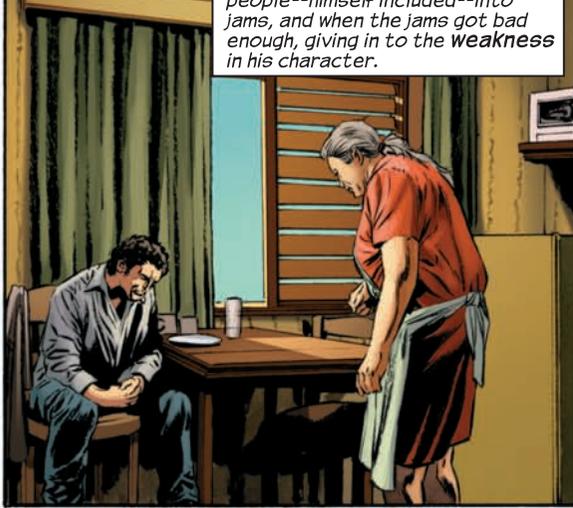
The rollaway's still in the back bedroom.



Could I...? Would you mind?

Alice Underwood looked at her son. Now a grown man...but still the same old Larry.

Going along, not thinking, getting people--himself included--into jams, and when the jams got bad enough, giving in to the **Weakness** in his character.



Once, she had told herself Larry would change. But now Alice feared that his days of change--of the **deep** and fundamental sort her minister called a change of **soul** rather than of heart--were done.



Oh, there was the **potential** for good in her son, **great** good. But Alice knew:

This late on, it would take nothing short of a **catastrophe** to bring it out.

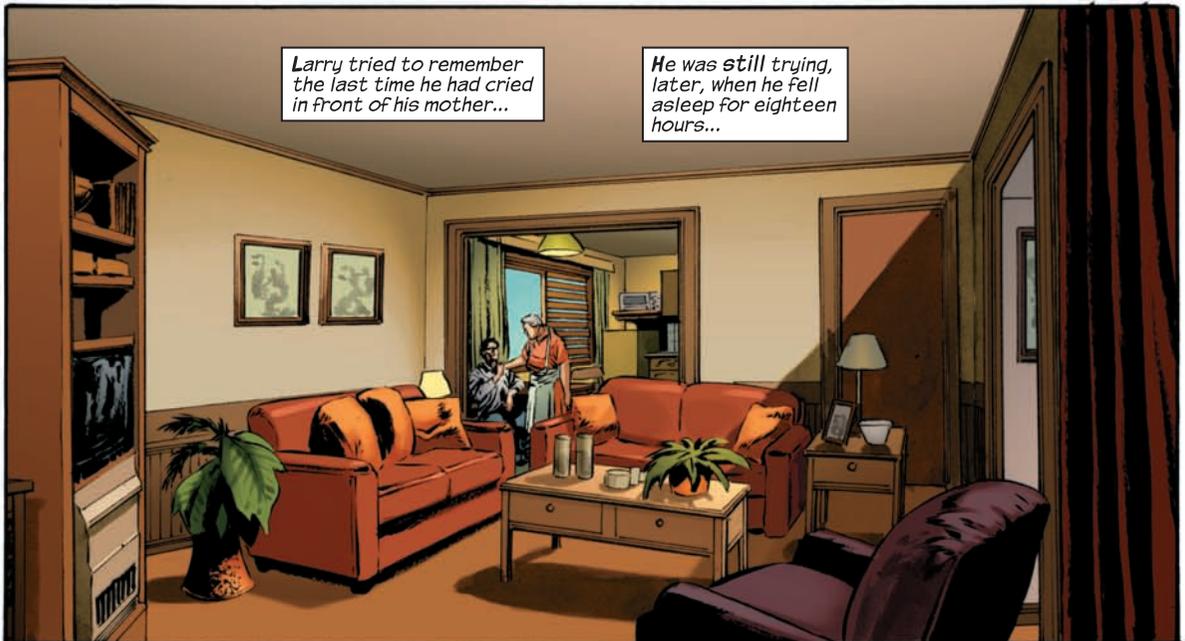


You're tired. I'll make up the bed and then you can sleep.



Larry tried to remember the last time he had cried in front of his mother...

He was **still** trying, later, when he fell asleep for eighteen hours...



ARNETTE, NORM BRUETT'S HOUSE, THE NEXT DAY.

You kids shutcha heads!

Bobby and Luke Bruett:

Yes, Daddy!

Yes, Daddy!

With no sign of their mother Lila anywhere.

Norm felt tired and had a queasy, thumping headache...

Like he was hungover, but he'd only had three beers at Hap's before Campion arrived in his Chevy...

A hit song came over the cracked Philco radio by the stove--

**BUT BAY-YAY-YABY YOU CAN TELL ME IF ANYONE CAN...
BABY, CAN YOU DIG YOUR MAN?
HE'S A RIGHTEOUS MAN...**

Norm turned it off before it could split his head--

CLICKK!

And found the note Lila had left for him sitting next to it--



She was out babysitting for Ralph Hodges' wife.

Ralph's three kids.

For a dollar.



It was hard to think past the headache, but Norm slowly pieced it together...

His wife had gone to babysit another woman's kids and stuck him with Luke and Bobby...

For a lousy dollar...

Hard times, these.



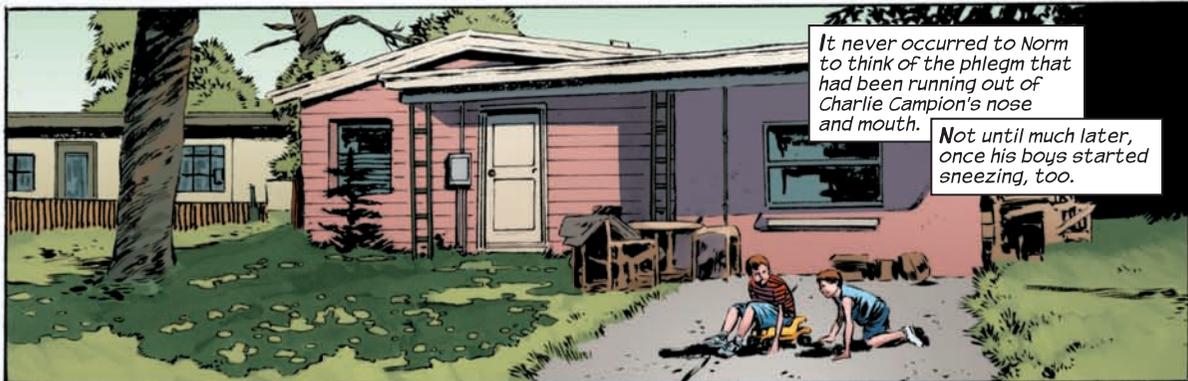
He was trying to decide if he was hungry or not when it came out of him. A big, wet--

AHH-GHOO!



So he was sick, too. On top of everything else.

Coming down with a summer cold.

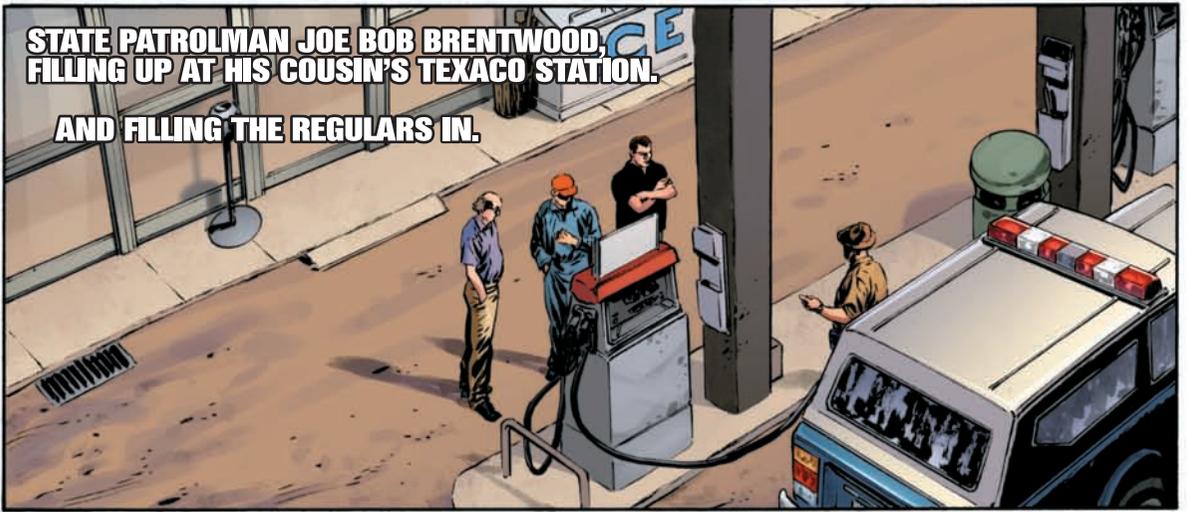


It never occurred to Norm to think of the phlegm that had been running out of Charlie Campion's nose and mouth.

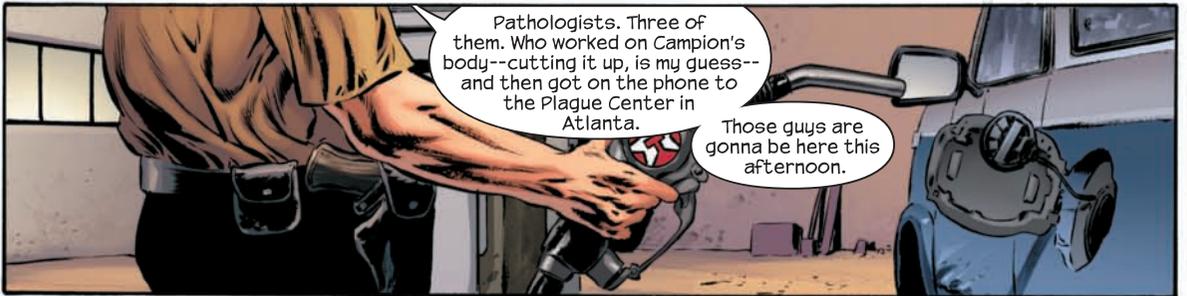
Not until much later, once his boys started sneezing, too.

STATE PATROLMAN JOE BOB BRENTWOOD,
FILLING UP AT HIS COUSIN'S TEXACO STATION.

AND FILLING THE REGULARS IN.



They who?



A heavy silence fell over the men.

Stu watched Hap take a handkerchief out of his pocket and wipe his nose with it.





I woke up this morning sneezin' and hackin' away. Had a mean headache, too.

I took some aspirin and it's gone down some, but I'm still full of snot.



Hap stared at Vic, scared. Then admitted:

Norm Bruett has a cold, too. That's why he ain't here, he's home with his boys, sick as a dog.



Maybe we're all coming down with it. What that Campion had. What he died of.



For the first time in a long while, Stu spoke:

You know, Hap...

...it might not be such a bad idea to close the station.

"Just for today..."



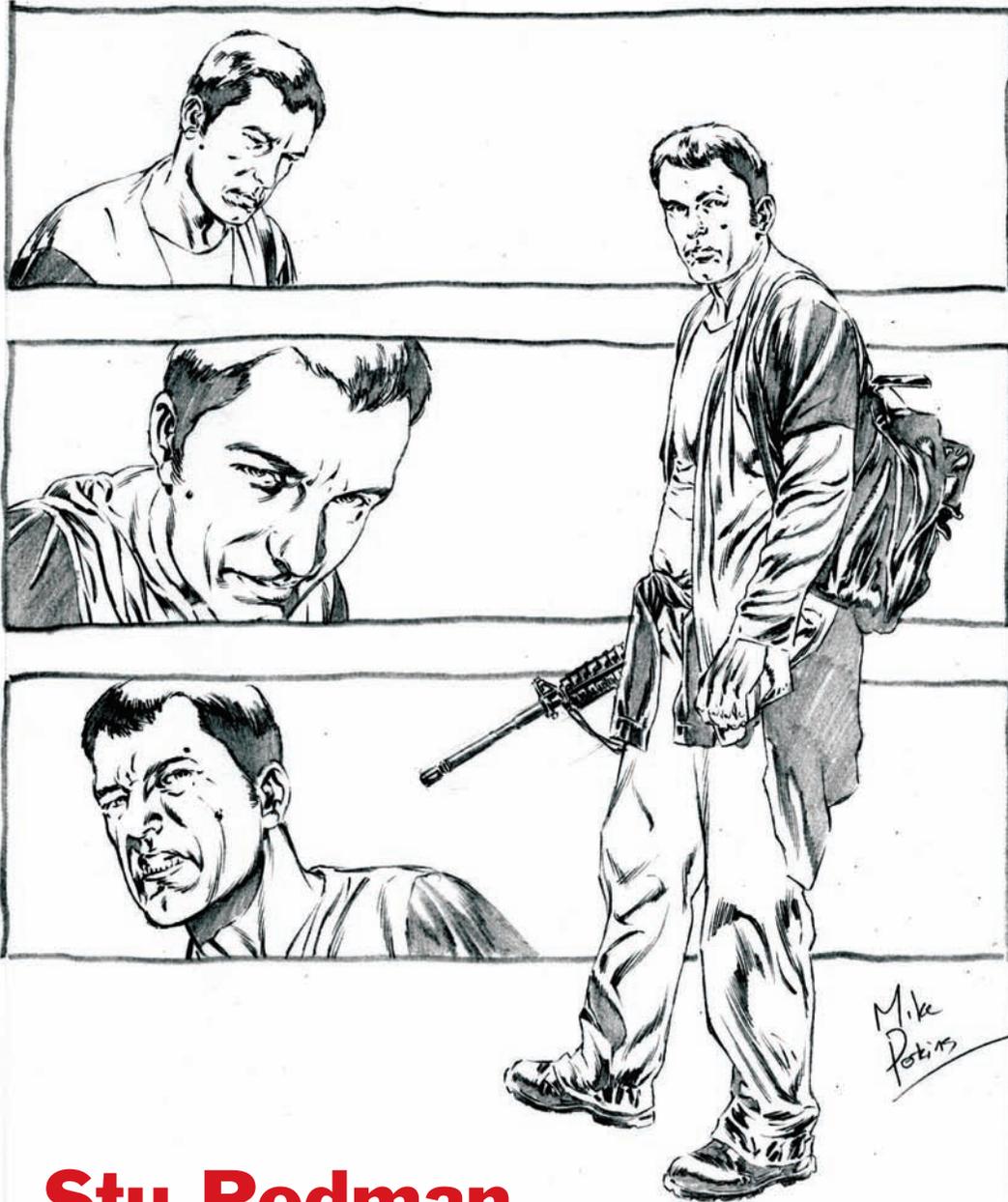
TO BE CONTINUED...

STEPHEN KING

THE STAND



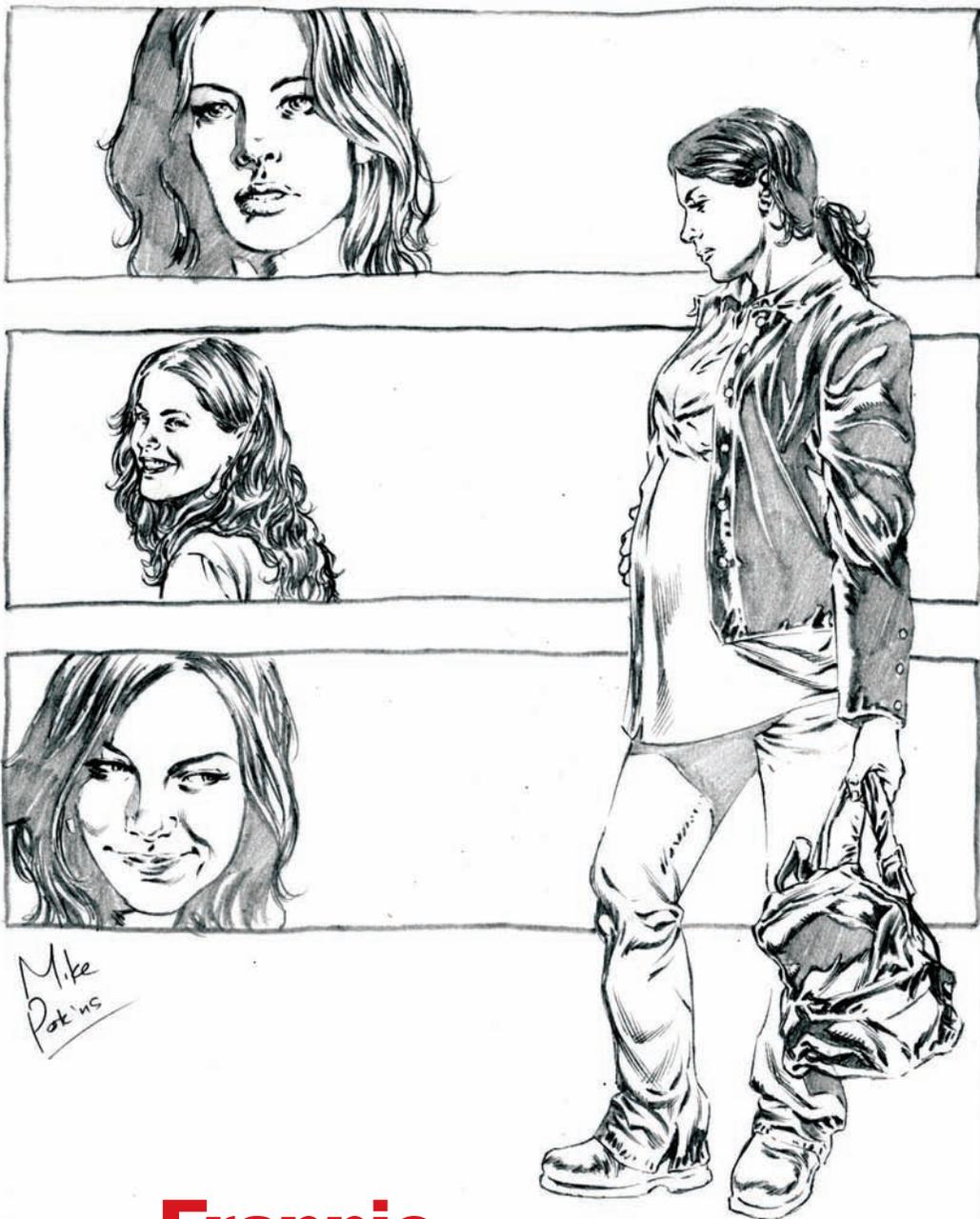
SKETCHBOOK



Stu Redman

AGUIRRE-SACASA ON STU REDMAN: He's our story's Everyman. Down to Earth, no-nonsense, decent, and plain-spoken. Steady and stoic. He's like John Proctor in "The Crucible" by Arthur Miller: A good man, trying to do his best during Godless times.

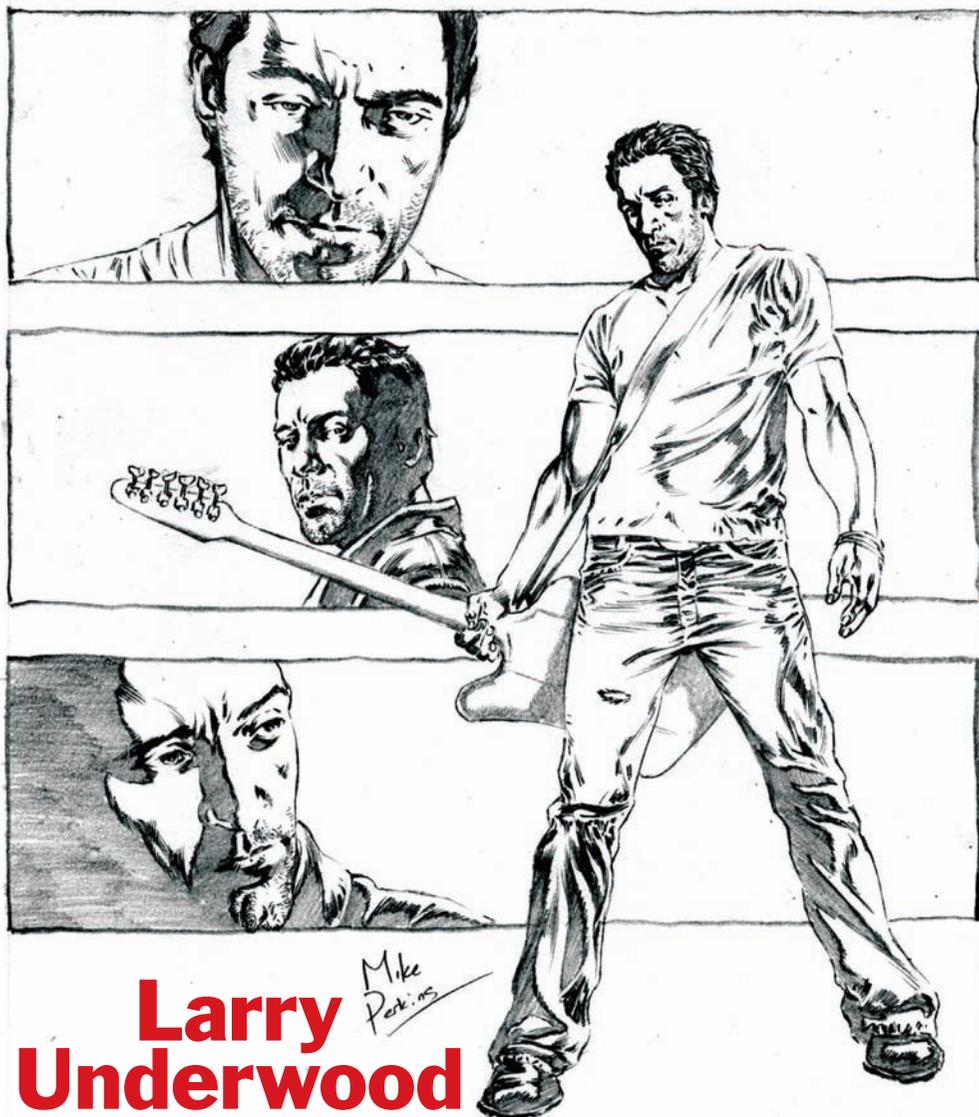
PERKINS ON STU REDMAN: Yup, the Everyman. Constantly striving just to live a normal life. Trying to be a football star at school, trying to be a hard worker in a dying business, trying to be a normal husband and father in a tragically short marriage ... yet ... Stu needs to carry the dignity and determination that will see him through so very many hardships to come.



Frannie

AGUIRRE-SACASA ON FRANNIE. My favorite character in the novel. I didn't give Mike Perkins much art direction in terms of how he should draw our characters — for that, there's always the original novel to refer to, and anyway, Mike's a genius — but for Frannie, I *did* write: "We have to fall in love with her immediately." Which, of course, we do. Just like Harold Lauder and Stuart Redman do.

PERKINS ON FRANNIE: Aaah, dear Frannie. Just following the descriptions right there in the book, you know you have to fall in love with her. She has to have that glint of fun and mischief in her eyes but also the determination to be a strong survivor ... and not just for herself.



Larry Underwood

AGUIRRE-SACASA ON LARRY UNDERWOOD. Stephen King's novels and stories frequently feature artists as heroes or anti-heroes. Usually, for obvious reasons, these artists are writers; Thad Beaumont in *The Dark Half* and Ben Mears in *Salem's Lot* immediately spring to mind, but the list goes on and on. In *The Stand*, we have singer/songwriter Larry Underwood, on the brink of stardom when the super-flu hits, which — to me — is Larry in a nutshell: Wrong place, wrong time.

What I like best about Mr. Underwood (note his last name, pun fully intended, I'm sure) is that, at the start of *The Stand*, everyone has basically given up on him — including Larry, himself — and that somehow, as unlikely as it seems, he *does* go through what his mother describes as a "change of soul." What makes Stephen King such a brilliant writer is that for quite a long while, you're not entirely sure which side Larry's gonna end up on: Good or evil.

He also happens to be a key player in one of the novel's most terrifying set pieces: His and Rita's escape from Manhattan via a corpse-choked Lincoln Tunnel.

PERKINS ON LARRY UNDERWOOD: My favorite character in the book. Larry has to represent both what we would like to be and what we hope we never turn into. He should be recognizable as "the rock star" but tries to hide the fact. There should be a darkness to him — a darkness he truly wishes to overcome within himself.