A man with short brown hair, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and green tie, is seated at a grand piano. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The piano is dark wood with a white keyboard. The background is dark with a red curtain on the right side.

Did you get the picture? Do you want to do another take?

This time I want to tell you about the inspiring, life-affirming and in some ways sad story of Bill Tipton, a Jazz Legend. I'm not going to pornify his story too much in order to pay respect to his legacy. There is going to be a few sex scenes though.

Mom, Look!
That man is
playing music.
Can I learn that
instrument too?

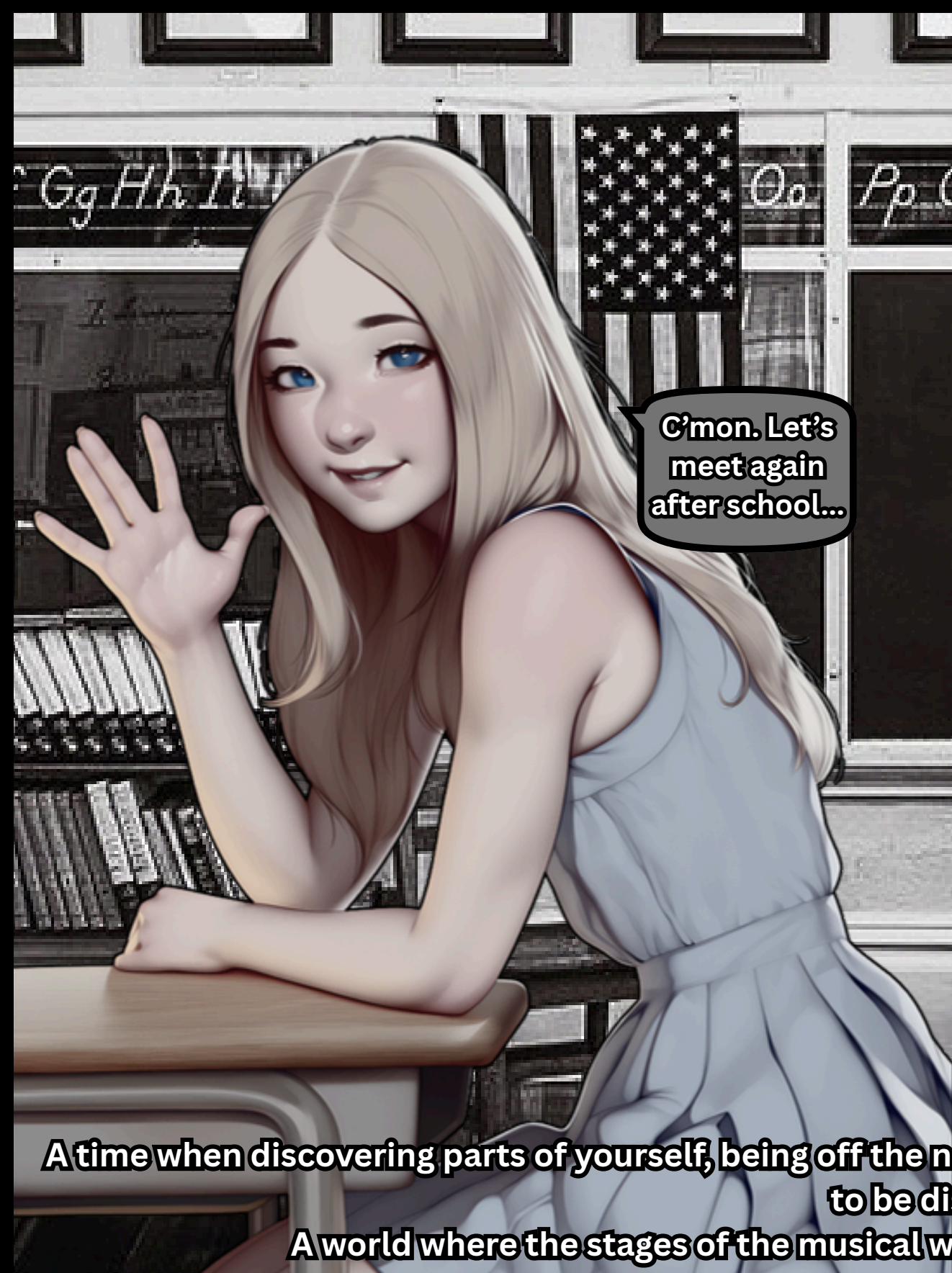


I think that's jazz,
Darling. I've read
about it in the
newspaper...
Music like that is
not for well
behaved girls.



playing jazz and changing Billy's life.

Imagine growing up in a world right after WWI. Jazz was a new music genre at the time and frowned upon by the leading white class of the 20's. A term originally used by white folk to derogatorily refer towards all kinds of music not following the current social norms. A time when equality was still a far away dream.



C'mon. Let's meet again after school...



We... we really shouldn't... Not after... you know... what happened last time...

A time when discovering parts of yourself, being off the norm was still a big taboo. Sometimes it was even dangerous to be discovered.

A world where the stages of the musical world were still reserved exclusively for men.



Billy moved to Oklahoma City as soon as he was 18 years old. He wanted to perform the music he had build a passion for.

It was the Depression and Oklahoma was a dry state, but in boom-town, oil-rich Oklahoma City people were dancing. However...

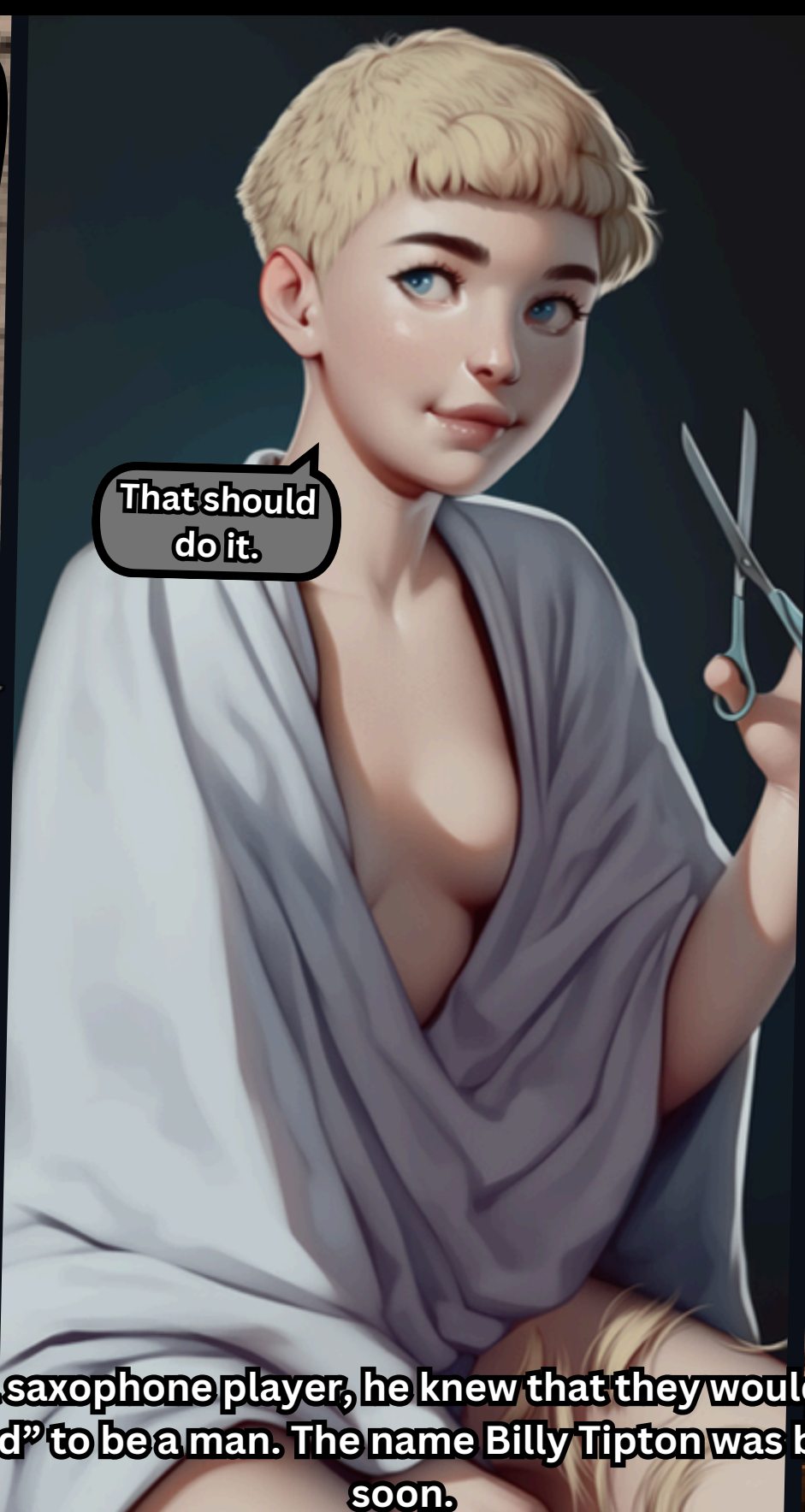


Oh Come on...
Just ask around.
Everyone will tell
you that I am one
of the best in this
city...



Everyone wants
to play here. I'm
sure you're nice
ma'am, but I
don't hire
women.

In those days there was a lot of competition amongst musicians in the city and even though Billy was described as one of the best by Bandmembers and others around him, he barely got hired enough in order to cover his expenses due to being a woman.



When he heard of a band looking for a saxophone player, he knew that they wouldn't hire a woman. For the first time in his life, he dressed like and "pretended" to be a man. The name Billy Tipton was born and was not going to leave all too soon.




My god...
Look at her...



Keep at it!
FUCK! I'm
almost there!

You are so
incredibly
hot!

Around the same time, he met his first documented girlfriend and later wife. He was 19 at the time and the woman everyone called Non-Earl was in her early thirties. They lived together in a boarding house. In those days, Billy was still known by his old name by day, but on stage and among colleagues, everyone knew him as a young man. He did his best to hide his chest and waistline, but the fact alone that he was a showman was explanation enough for most people.




Babe, don't be such a prude. I want to make you feel good too.

Thanks, but I like doing that for other's way more... Maybe another time.

For several years, Billy crossdressed for work-purposes but in his day to day life, he was just considered a gay woman living with his girlfriend. Once he began to adopt the Billy persona, life in general became much easier for him. As a woman, he would have had to fight a society unwilling to allow him to direct his own destiny, but as a man, it was expected.




Some years later, in the very early 40's, Billy and Non-Earl moved to Joplin. Billy had at that point fully adopted his new identity. Other than Non-Earl, everyone thought of him as Billy Tipton. A young handsome heterosexual Gentleman. He was so convincing, that he even needed to find an excuse as to why he wasn't going to Europe when America joined the allied forces in WWII. He explained that he had a severe rip injury that didn't heal properly and with that had also found an excuse for wearing the binder.




Please hun... I'll do anything.

Billy I've made my decision...



Take any seat, I'll get us some drinks before the show starts.

My husband the jazz-star!



No, believe me. I think he's some hermaphrodite or something...

Non-Earl soon had enough of playing a traditional house-wife for her husband. She left him in order to get back into a more exciting life-style. Soon after he met his second wife June, who was only 17 when they first met. Billy had invented a story about mutilated genitals in order to excuse his lack of a penis. Something he made sure no one ever saw. June soon started to spread rumors about Billy and left a few years later.



**OH GOD! YES,
LIKE THAT!**

I'm close too.

With his third wife Betty, things went alot smoother. Although the two of them were sexually active, Betty would later say that she hadn't known of Billy having been born a woman. "neat, clean, and he didn't use foul language with me... cute as a bug! Such a nice smile!" she'd later tell those who asked about him. The marriage lasted eight years without her suspecting him. Sex only took place in very dark rooms and Billy didn't want to be touched by his partner while performing the act.



In 1954 the Billy Tipton Trio was founded. They grew more and more successful, but as they traveled around and became more well known, keeping his secret became more and more dire. Every now and again someone from his past would turn up or someone would notice something. They came close to a huge breakthrough but Billy declined, probably fearing that he could be discovered.

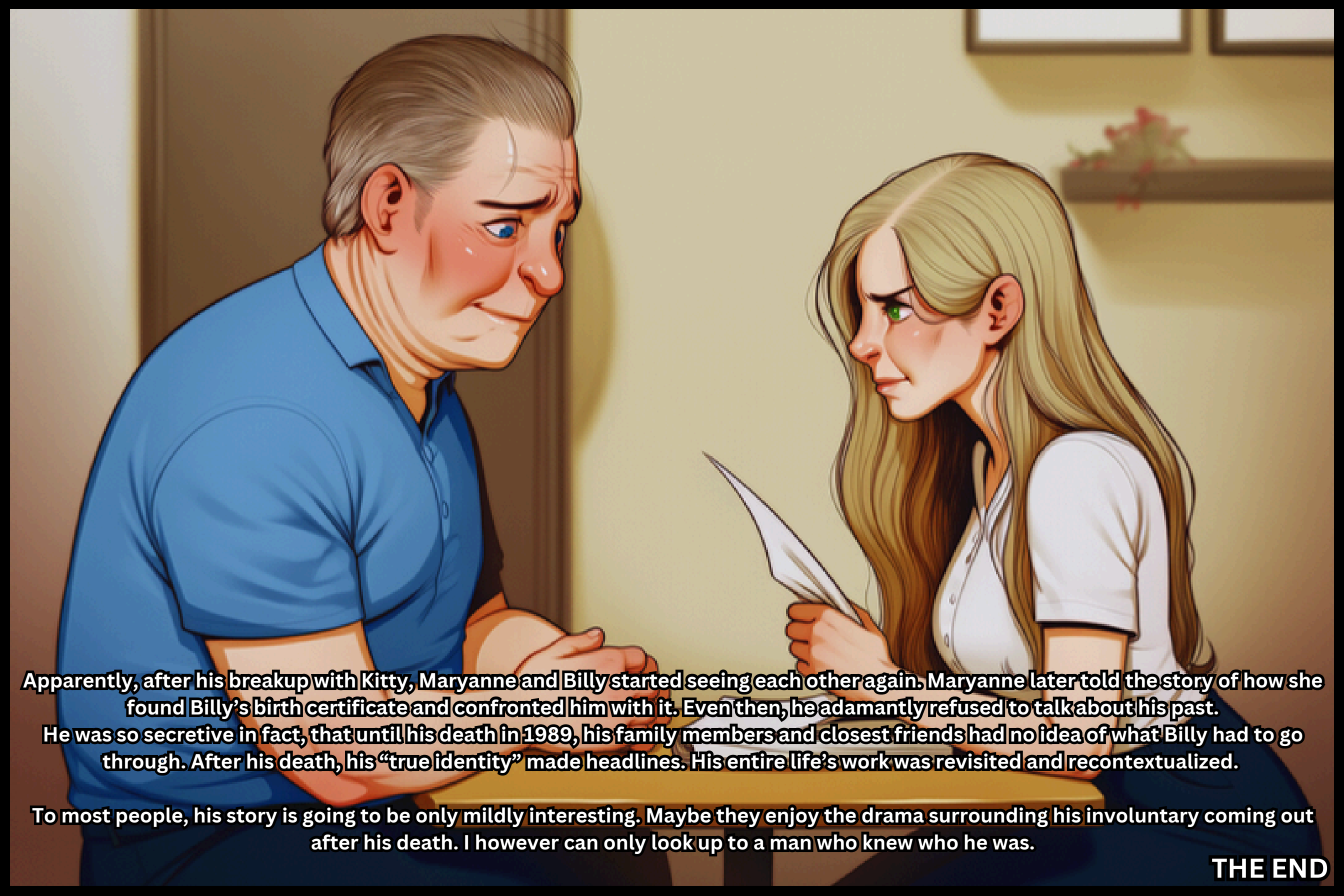


His relationships with the women in his life seemed to be very happy. And I really don't want to dispute that. Whether with his 4th wife Maryann



Or his 5th wife Kitty, who he raised 3 children with. Children who would later describe their father as a loving and caring person. I think his story is inspiring. He lived the life he wanted despite all odds and against all hurdles.

However, when I put myself in his shoes, I can't help myself but imagine him to have been lonely in a certain sense. It must've been hard to keep all of this a secret. It must've been hard to do all of this alone, without anyone knowing. As much as I look up to how strong this brave man has been, I hope that all following generations are going to have it much easier than him.



Apparently, after his breakup with Kitty, Maryanne and Billy started seeing each other again. Maryanne later told the story of how she found Billy's birth certificate and confronted him with it. Even then, he adamantly refused to talk about his past. He was so secretive in fact, that until his death in 1989, his family members and closest friends had no idea of what Billy had to go through. After his death, his "true identity" made headlines. His entire life's work was revisited and recontextualized.

To most people, his story is going to be only mildly interesting. Maybe they enjoy the drama surrounding his involuntary coming out after his death. I however can only look up to a man who knew who he was.

THE END