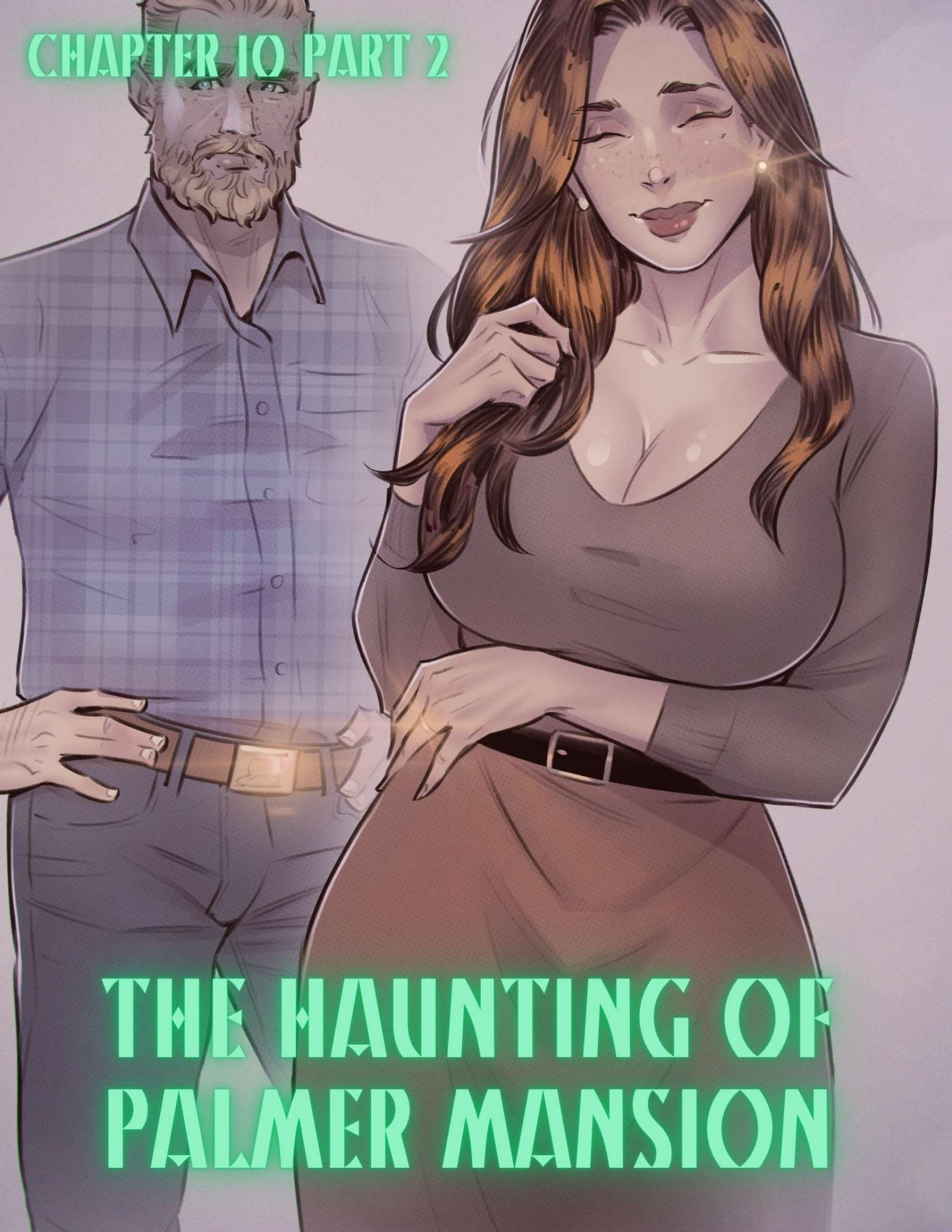




## CHAPTER 10 PART 2

# THE HAUNTING OF PALMER MANSION



# The Haunting of Palmer Mansion

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Illustrations by TenderMinDD

Written by RawlyRawls

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At dinner, George and Britt talked politics while Julie sipped her red wine and Daniel glumly pushed around broccoli on his plate. He felt a tap on his ankle and looked up. His mom had just kicked him lightly with her bare foot to get his attention.

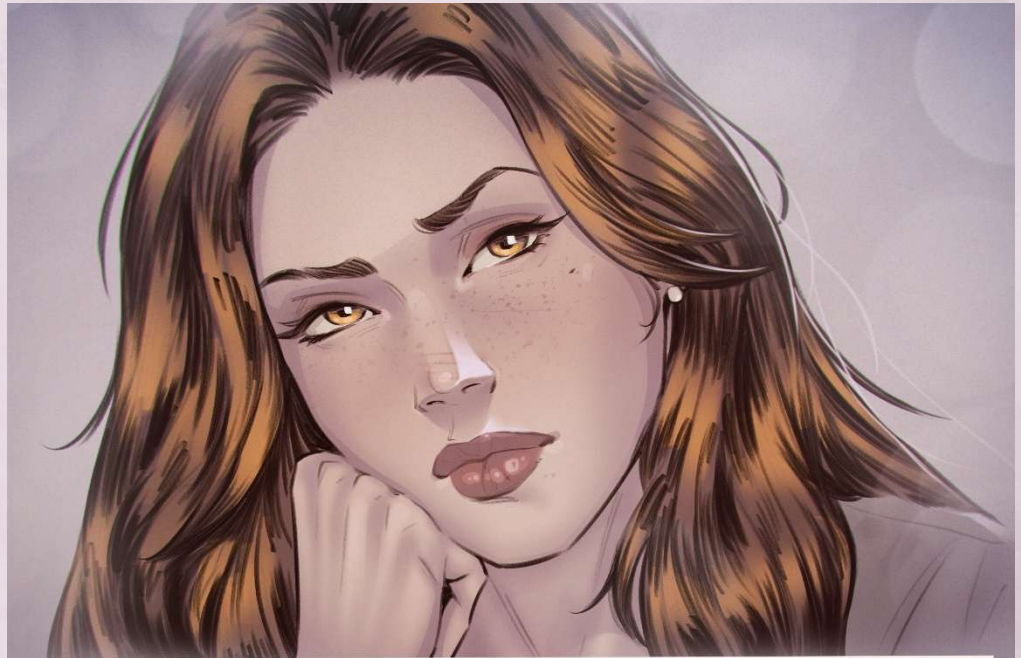
"You okay, Danny?" Julie raised an eyebrow. "Is everything ...?" She subtly nodded toward his crotch under the table. George and Britt continued their conversation, oblivious to the other half of the family. "Is everything good with you? Physically, I mean?" She could feel her cheeks grow hot, but it was a mother's duty to look after the welfare of her son.

"No, I'm okay with that right now." Daniel quickly glanced at his bloviating father and then back to his mom with that shy smile on her face. "I'm just ..." He sighed. "Never mind. Can I be excused? I have a bunch of homework."

"Sure thing, pumpkin." Julie frowned and watched Daniel take his plate into the kitchen.

"Bye, Mom." Daniel walked back through the kitchen and out to the hall. His dad and sister continued their conversation, ignoring him.

"Bye, sweetie." Julie's eyes followed his skinny butt as it disappeared out the door. Teenagers were so moody. One moment, he's smiling down at her as she gulped his semen. The next, he's barely making eye contact and disappearing to his room. She shook her head. Things were complicated. She'd give him some space and then check in with him tomorrow. That set Julie's mind in motion. Tomorrow the Samatars were coming over for their one-week follow-up. What did she need to do to prepare? Julie started a mental list.



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On the bus ride to school the next day, Daniel listened to another voicemail Penelope had left him. It was clear from the timing, that she was waiting for Brad to go to work before risking the call.

"Hello, Danny. I'm ... sorry about how yesterday ended." Her voice was thin and reedy on the recording. "I didn't mean to ... the last thing I'd do ... well, I'm just really sorry. Okay? I haven't always been there for you. But ... I'd really like to see you. If you feel like cutting school again, I'm at home. Okay, bye."

Daniel sighed. He wasn't that angry at her for teasing him. But he wasn't feeling great about it either. The real feeling eating at him was his worry for Eloise. He felt sick with dread that something terrible had happened to her. He texted Penelope back. *Busy with school today. I'll check in later.* He added an emoji of a dog skateboarding for good measure.



"There is a darkening in this house. Do you feel it?"

Maxamed eyed his wife as they set up their communication circle in the empty west tower. She wore her normal hijab and flowing dress, but something about her outfit irked Maxamed. Maybe it was the immodesty of her wrists. He could see an awful lot of brown skin just below the sleeves. He frowned and continued to pour his salt lines on the old hardwood.

"I feel it." Khadra nodded with solemnity at her husband. "We dealt the demons a blow last week. This week I think we will wipe them from this Earth."

"Yes, indeed." Maxamed finished his lines and sat cross legged in the circle, careful not to stretch his suit trousers. He tossed his black tie over his shoulder. He thought of the inhabitants of this house. The children away at school. The husband and wife blissfully minding their own business fixing the bathroom downstairs. And all the others that dwelled in this space. He looked at the flat black dreamstone they'd placed at the center of the circle and thought he could see a faint vision. It was a solar system of spirits. A fertile feminine planet, with so many moons. A large, frigid outer planet, quite masculine and on an erratic elliptical path. And other small celestial bodies, quickly gliding around a large dark, pulsing star. Maxamed often got his visions in this way, a translation of what is and was. He tried to use the demons from his vision to locate the demons in this house. "Sit with me, woman."

"Yes." Khadra moved inside the salt circle and sat cross-legged opposite the dreamstone from her husband. She watched the matte, black stone, ready for whatever vision Allah would bestow. The next thing she knew, her husband and the room were gone and she stood in the library doorway downstairs. Khadra had never had a vision this strong before. She sucked in her breath and blinked. Trying to bring herself back to the room with her husband, but she could not.



The walls were hung with strange portraits she'd not seen before. The lighting flickered and she looked at a sconce on the wall. She recognized the whale oil lamp from her books on history. A loud slapping sound startled Khadra and she slunk further into the shadows of the doorway. She peeked down the hall to see a large man shaking a redheaded woman by the shoulders.



"You're nothing but a bitch in heat." The man let go of her shoulders and backhanded her across her pretty, freckled face.

The woman fell to her knees. "It wasn't me, Frederick. It was the house." She looked up at him, wilting on the floor. Tears ran down her white cheeks and caught the lamplight. "This house wants something from us."

"Where's the boy?" Frederick loomed over her, with dark, black eyes and a drooping black mustache.

"Please, he's only nineteen." The woman's hands went to her belly and Khadra noticed for the first time that under her long, flowing dress, she carried a pregnant belly.

Frederick reached down and slapped her again. She cried out and fell sideways, now lying prone on the floor.

"You're a smart woman, Mrs. Samatar." A voice just over Khadra's shoulder nearly gave her a heart attack.

"Who's there?" Khadra turned to look back into the dark library. Standing just a few feet behind her in the shadows of the unlit room was the same woman that was lying out in the front hall. Except, this version of the woman was not pregnant. She looked deathly pale, and she had cuts and bruises wherever her long-dress left her skin exposed.

"I am Mrs. Eloise Palmer." Eloise gave the dark-skinned woman a little curtsy. "And as I said, you are smart. What do you witness out in my hall?"

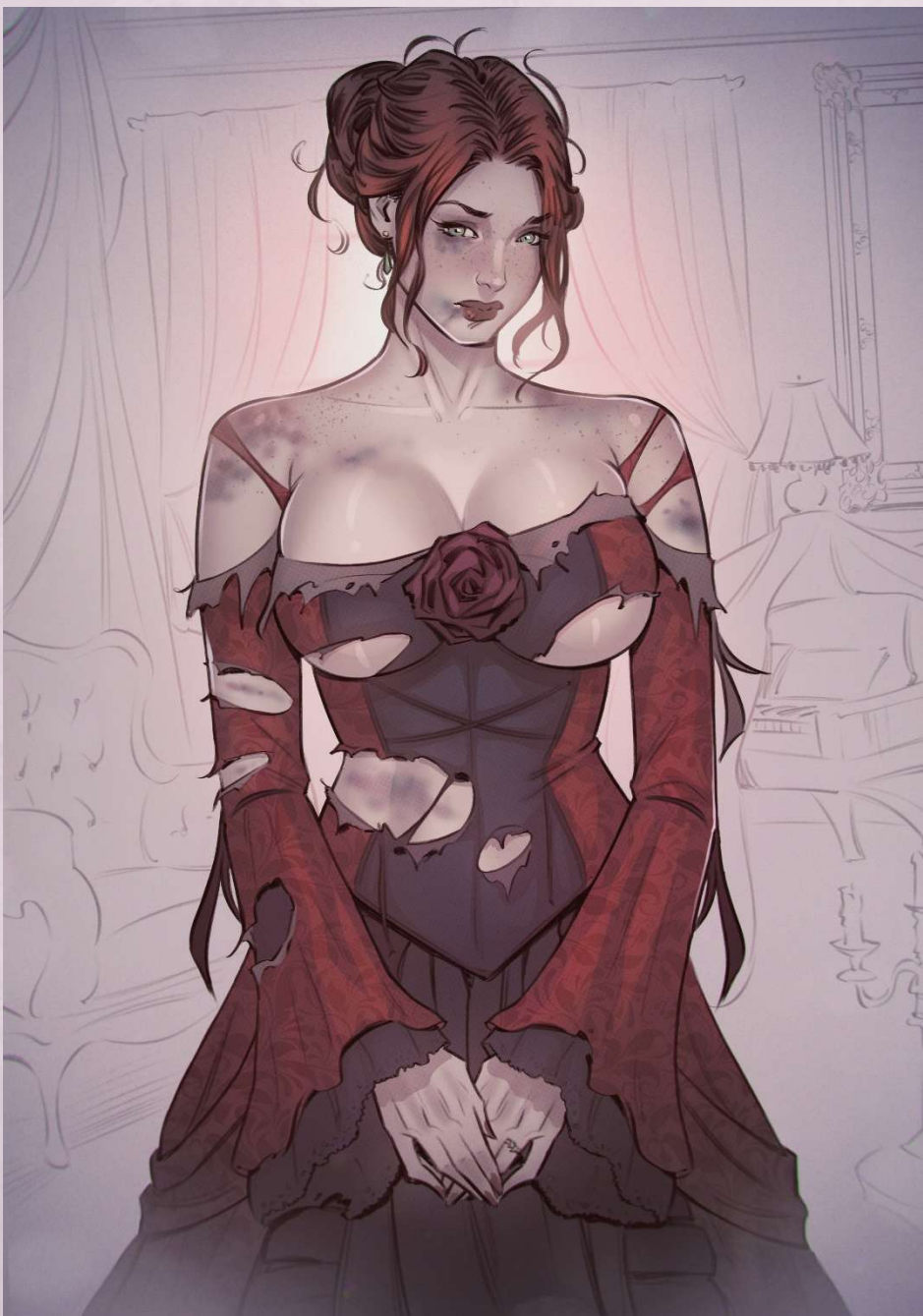
Khadra looked back out the doorway and saw the man grab a fist full of the other Eloise's collar and hoist her up in the air.

"The boy?" Frederick hissed.

"Never," the hallway Eloise said.

Khadra turned back to the library Eloise with wide eyes. "The birth of demons," she whispered.

"Poetic." Eloise's smile would have been pretty but for the oozing blood and missing teeth. "And not far off. Frederick is a monster of the first order. I tried to stop him, but I could not. I only delayed him. And now I am weakened, Mrs. Samatar. Most feeble." Eloise let out a raspy cough. It sounded like she had fluid in her lungs.



"I will not help you, demon." Khadra knew of demonic tricks. She looked back into the hall where Frederick choked hallway Eloise with both hands, her feet dangling above the floor. Hallway Eloise sputtered two words. "The ... baby ..."

"What do I care for another's vile babe?" Frederick lowered his right hand and unbuckled his belt. "You behave the trollop. I'll treat you as a trollop." He lowered his trousers.

"Sickening." Khadra turned away from the scene in the hall and stepped into the room, closer to the library Eloise. "You planted that hellish phallus in my home."

"Your husband brought it into your home." Eloise shook her head slowly. She reached her hands to her belly, but there was no pregnancy there to protect. "And I don't control such things."

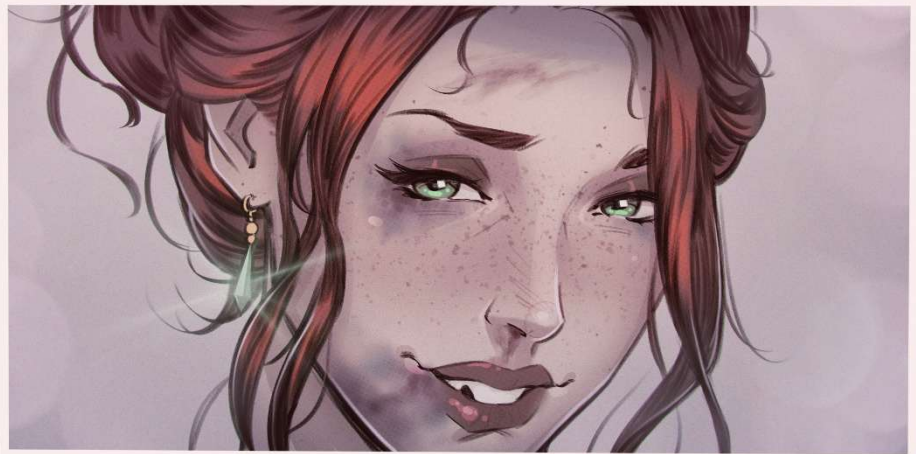
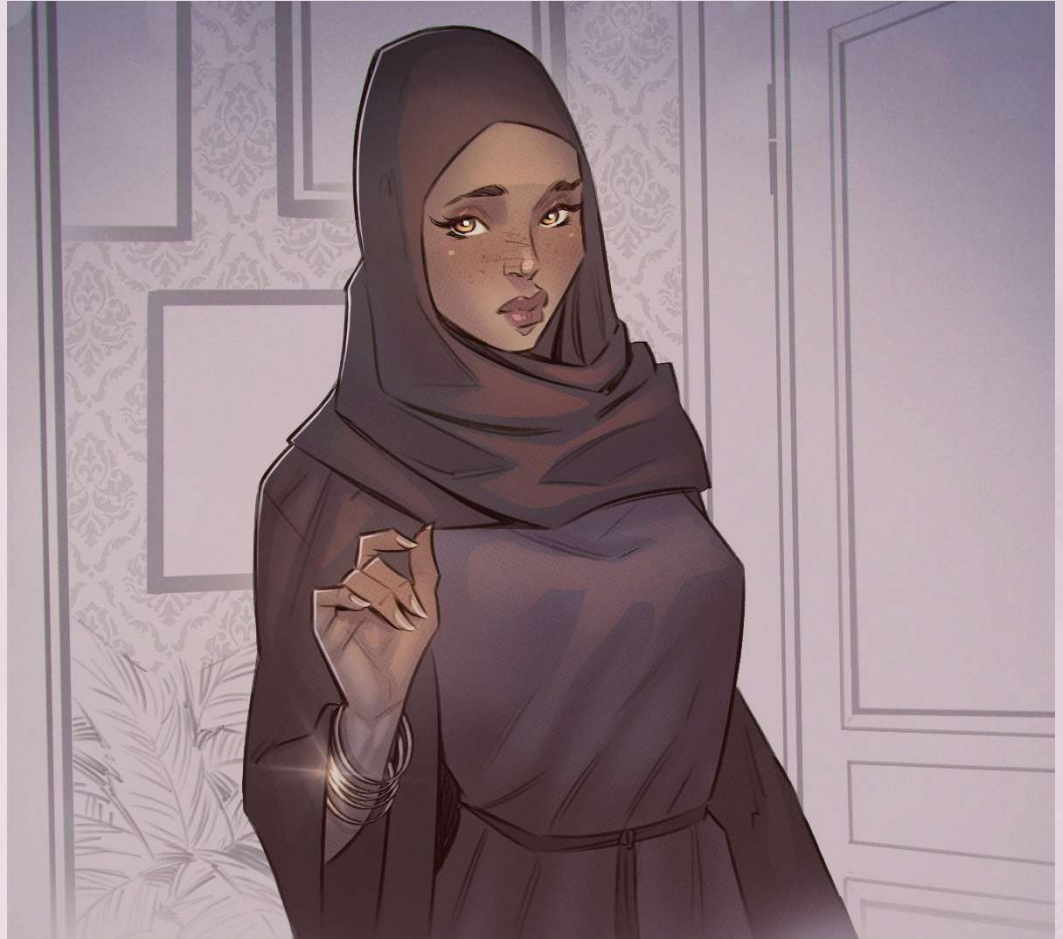
"I will not help you." Khadra closed her eyes and willed herself back to her husband.

"I ask not for myself. I ask for the boy." Eloise sighed in exasperation. "I am stuck here and cannot help him."

"I will not help your demon child." Khadra's words bit into Eloise.

"Not that boy." Eloise's voice began to fade. "The Anderson boy. Daniel. Go to him and see that he is safe. Do whatever you must to comfort him."

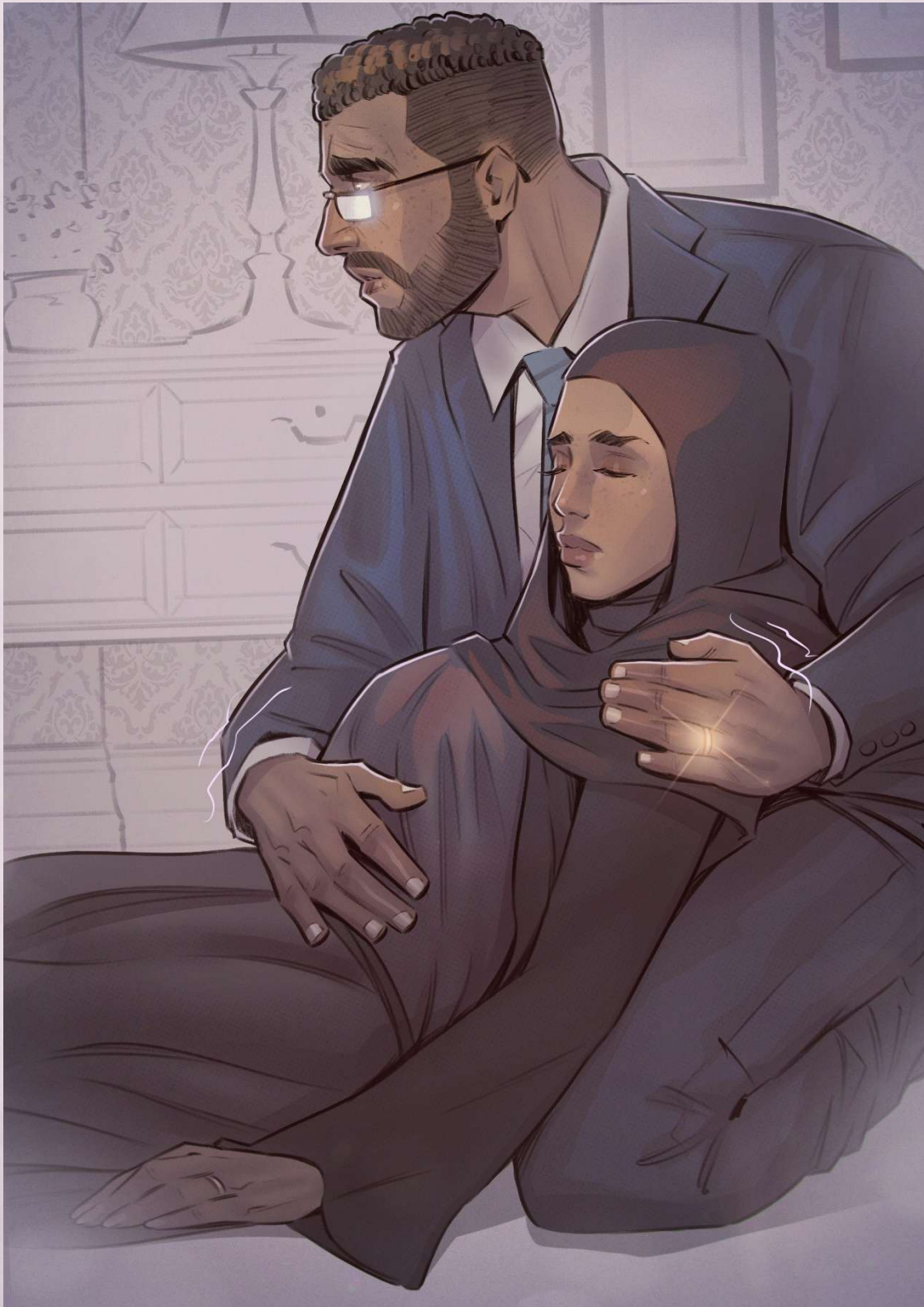
"What?" But it was too late. First a surge of heat flashed quickly through her slim body, then a wave of nausea swept over Khadra and she was back in the tower room with her husband. She pitched sideways and lost consciousness.



“Khadra?” Maxamed rose quickly. His wife had fainted. A wind blew through the circular room and spread the salt all about the floor. Maxamed could feel a great evil receding. Whatever his wife had done, it had worked. “Khadra?” He felt her pulse and it was strong, thank Allah. He lifted her up and carried her downstairs.

Behind him the matte stone shook and cracked. Pulsing red fissures spread along the black mineral in meandering paths. The glowing red embedded in the rock looked almost like living veins.

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"Where am I?" Khadra opened her eyes to find herself in a strange bedroom, lying on top of the covers on an unknown bed. She smiled when her eyes focused and found the concerned face of her husband. George and Julie Anderson also looked on by the foot of the bed.

"You're in our guest bedroom." Julie's half-smile was weak and worry etched itself in lines on her face.

"What ..." Khadra tried to sit up but her head fell back on the pillow, pushing her hijab down on her forehead. She reached up to adjust it with trembling hands. "... happened?"

"I am not sure." Maxamed watched his wife very closely. "You seem to have expended a great energy to rid this house of the demons that plagued it. I've never seen such a thing before. You even broke our dreamstone. I've tested the house thoroughly with every instrument we possess. This house is now clean." A faint, proud smile passed across his dark lips. "Can you walk? It is time to fetch the children from your mother's."

"I don't think so." Khadra tried to lift herself again, but she found that a deep fatigue had settled in her bones. "Perhaps you pick up the children and I'll rest here for a little while?"

"Yes." Julie nodded and looked for confirmation at her frowning husband. "We would be happy to have you stay. Wouldn't we George?"

George grumbled. He was ready to be done with this circus. But he nodded his assent.

"I'll bring you some soup and you can rest until you regain your strength." Julie nodded again, happy to have something to offer these helpful people. "You can even stay the night, if it suits you."

"We could not impose." Maxamed eyed the woman and her hospitality with suspicion. "But if you would care to make a donation, that would be very much appreciated. We performed a difficult task here." He actually had no idea how his wife had done what she'd done, but it did indeed seem difficult.

"We're a little short on funds." Julie shrugged and gave Maxamed an apologetic smile.

George sighed. "I'll tell you what we can do. If you need any repairs on your house, I'll come by and do some work. Free of charge."

"That is most kind." Maxamed nodded his accord. "We do have such needs."

A faint snore came from the bed. Maxamed, George, and Julie all looked back at Khadra. She'd drifted off to sleep.

"I will fetch my children now." Maxamed looked around the guest bedroom, and then pressed his lips together. "I will call in two hours' time. If my wife still sleeps, I will take you up on your hospitality. There are no more demons in this house. She may rest at ease."

"Of course." Julie nodded. "We'll take good care of her."

"Thank you." Maxamed turned for the door. He had to collect his equipment, drive over to his mother-in-law's house, take his children home, feed them, bathe them, and put them to bed. It was not father's work, but he could make do for one night. His wife deserved a good rest after what she'd accomplished.

