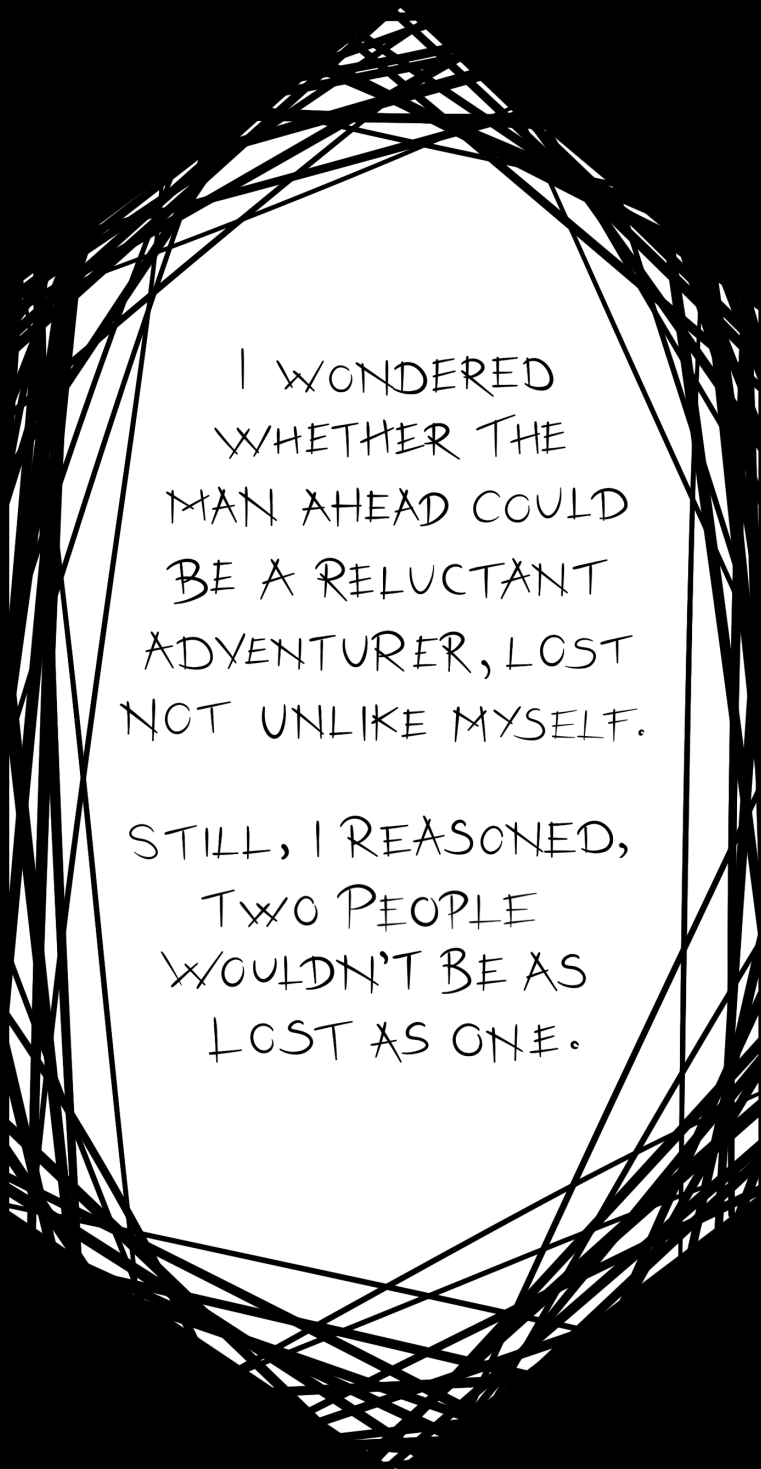




EMMI BÄT

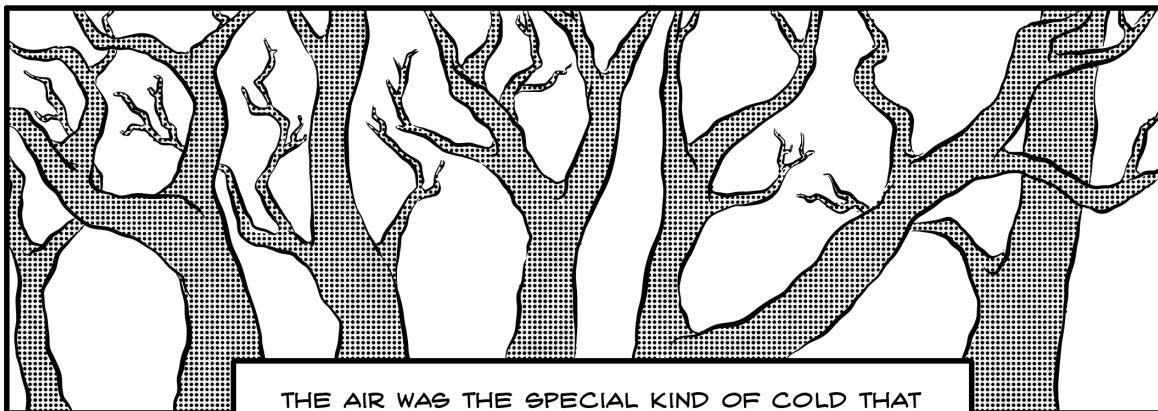
MARIA STANISLAV

MONOCHROME



I WONDERED
WHETHER THE
MAN AHEAD COULD
BE A RELUCTANT
ADVENTURER, LOST
NOT UNLIKE MYSELF.

STILL, I REASONED,
TWO PEOPLE
WOULDN'T BE AS
LOST AS ONE.



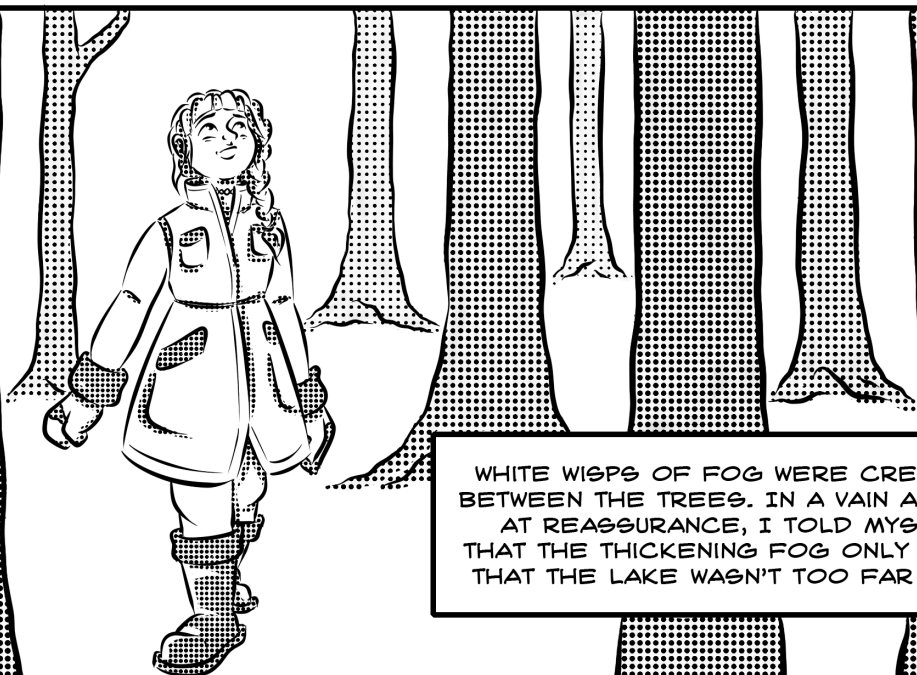
THE AIR WAS THE SPECIAL KIND OF COLD THAT
YOU ONLY GET RIGHT BEFORE THE DAWN,
AND THE WHITENING COLOUR OF THE SKY
SEEMED TO CARRY THAT CHILL.



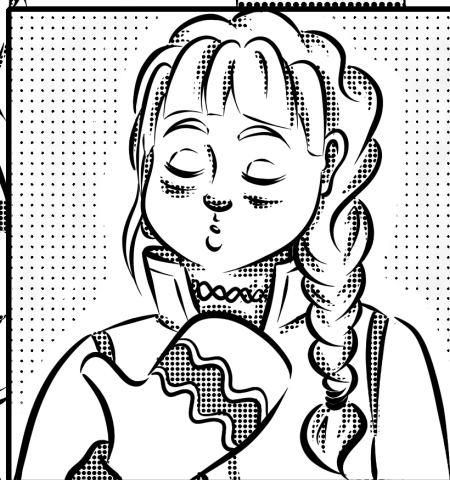
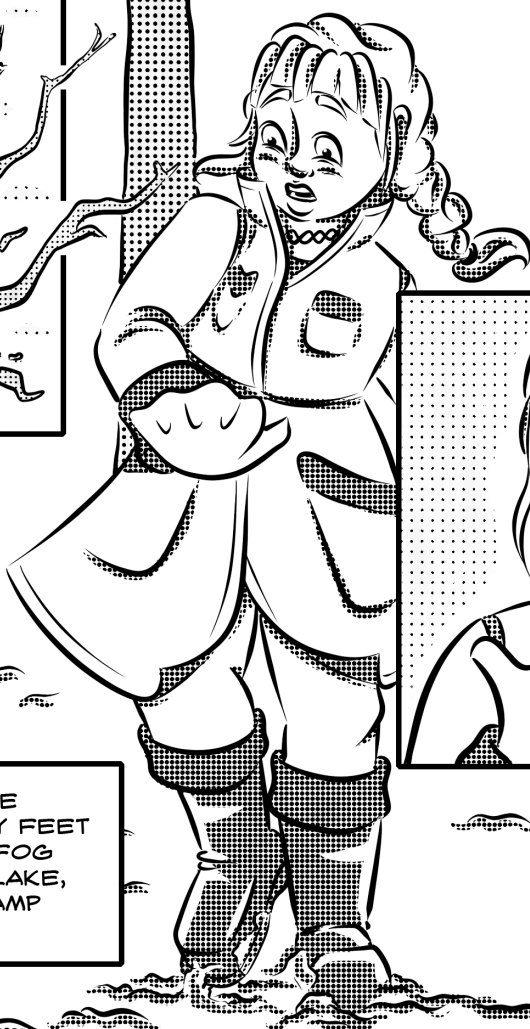
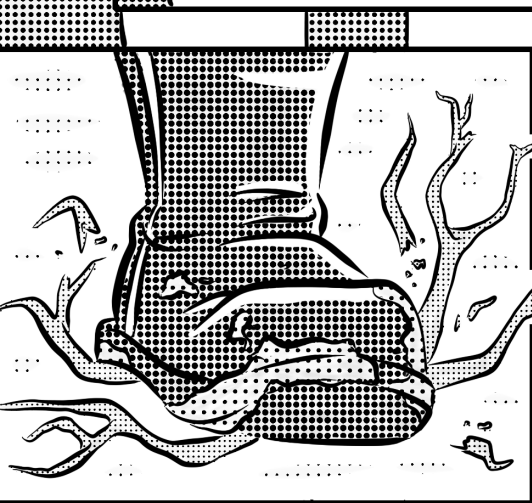
WHEREVER DID I GET THE IDEA
THAT TRAVERSING THIS FOREST
IN THE MORNING WOULD BE
ANY LESS FRIGHTENING THAN
CAMPING BY THE LAKE THAT
LAY ON THE OTHER SIDE?

ALTHOUGH, I SUPPOSE THAT
SPENDING THE WHOLE
NIGHT OUT THERE,
JUST TO WATCH THE SUNRISE,
WOULD BE BEYOND
EVEN MY RECKLESSNESS.

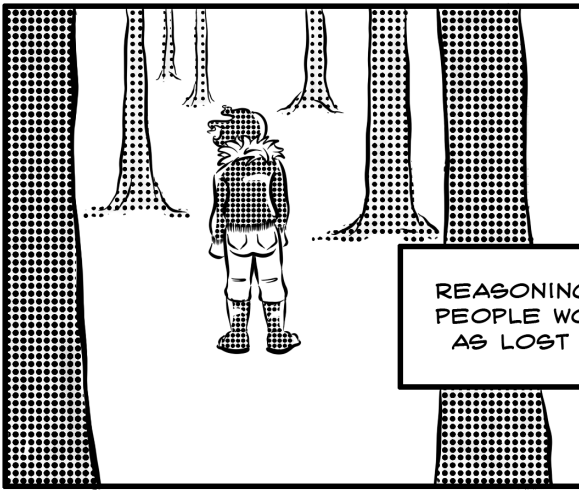




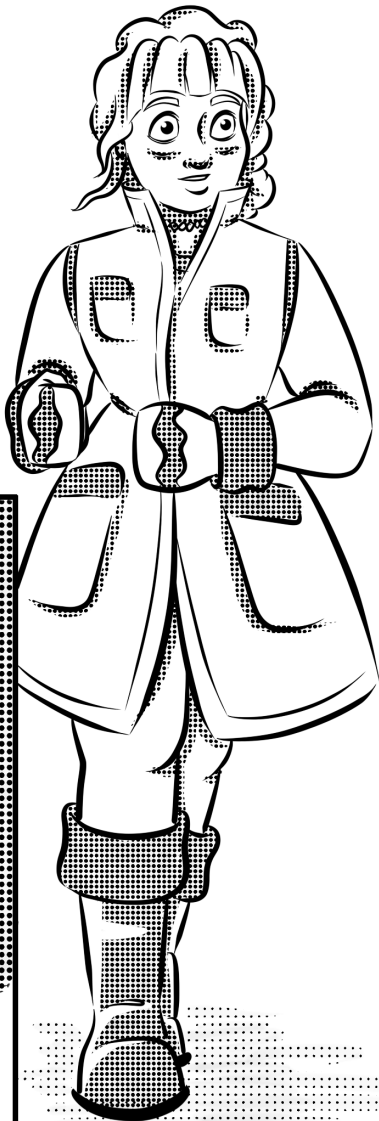
WHITE WISPS OF FOG WERE CREEPING BETWEEN THE TREES. IN A VAIN ATTEMPT AT REASSURANCE, I TOLD MYSELF THAT THE THICKENING FOG ONLY MEANT THAT THE LAKE WASN'T TOO FAR AWAY.



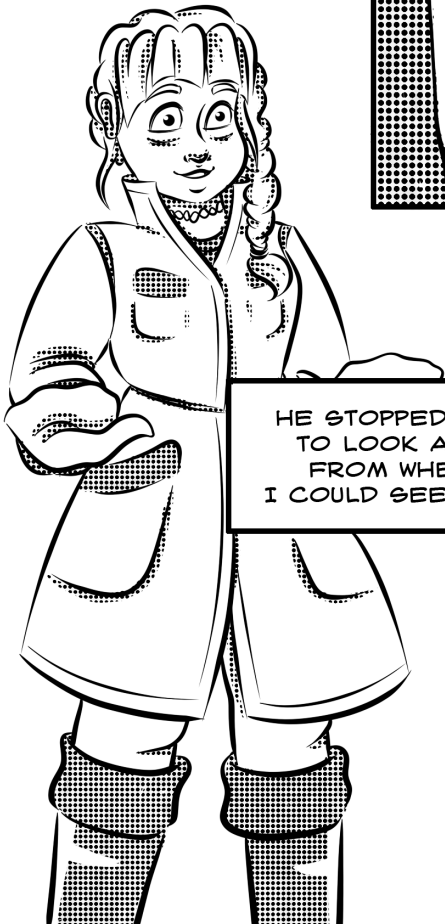
ONLY WHEN I HEARD THE GROUND SQUELCH UNDER MY FEET DID I REALISE THAT THE FOG HAD NOT LED ME TO THE LAKE, BUT RAHTER, TO THE SWAMP THAT BORDERED IT.



REASONING THAT TWO
PEOPLE WOULDN'T BE
AS LOST AS ONE...



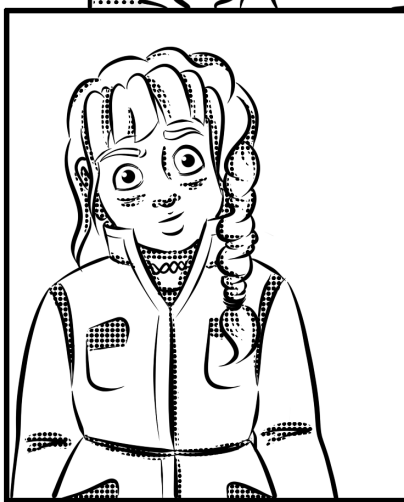
... I DECIDED TO
CATCH UP WITH HIM.



HE STOPPED AND TURNED
TO LOOK AT ME. EVEN
FROM WHERE I WAS,
I COULD SEE HIM SMILING.

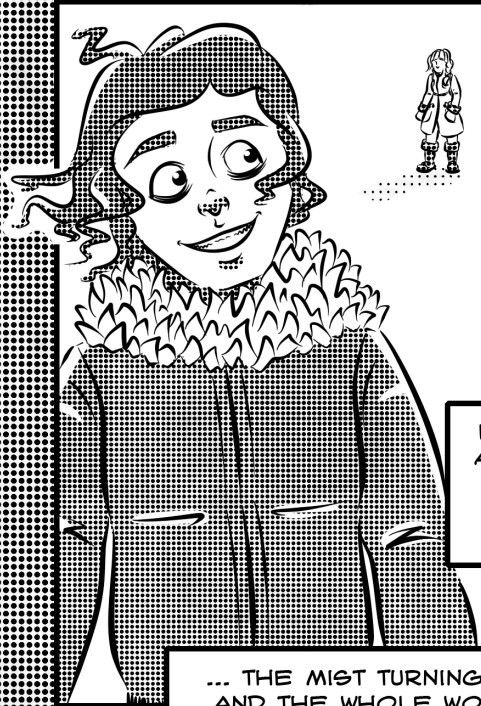


HE WAS CLEARLY HAPPY
TO SEE ANOTHER
HUMAN BEING TO KEEP
HIM COMPANY IN THE MIDDLE
OF THIS COLD AND CREEPY
MORNING.



HE STARTED WALKING AGAIN.
I TOOK HIS SMILE AS
A SIGN TO FOLLOW.

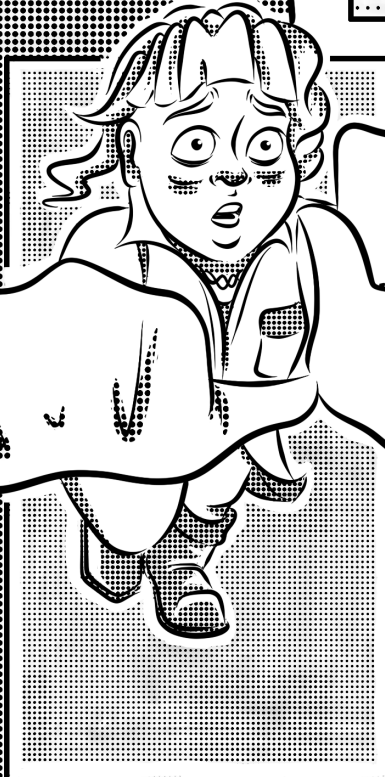
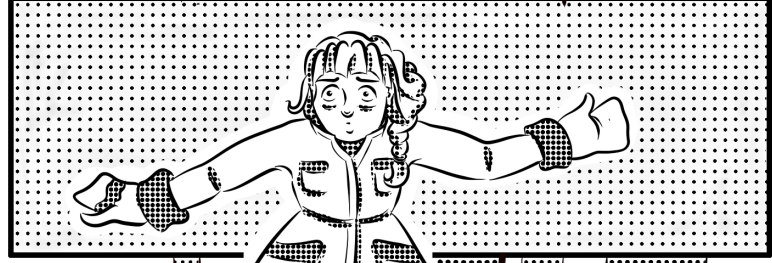




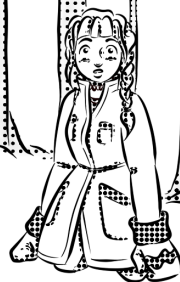
A FEW MORE TIMES
HE WOULD STOP,
ALLOWING ME TO
CATCH UP A LITTLE.

LOOKING BACK
AT ME WITH THE
SAME SMILE,
STANDING
MOTIONLESS...

... THE MIST TURNING HIM
AND THE WHOLE WORLD
MONOCHROME...

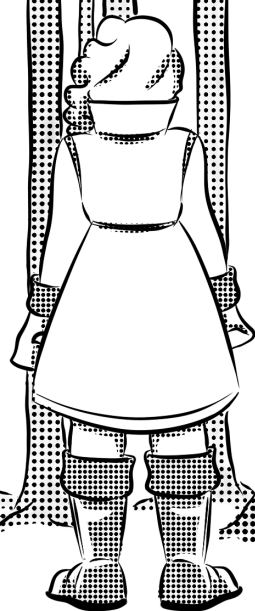
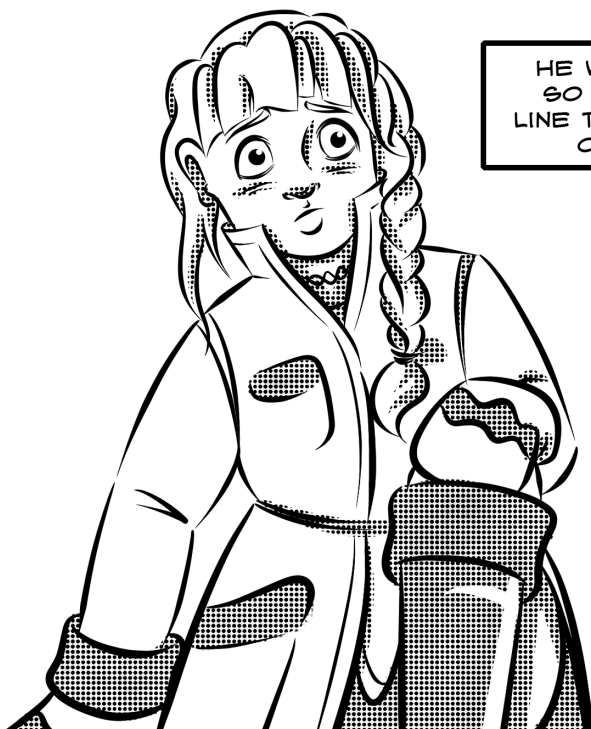


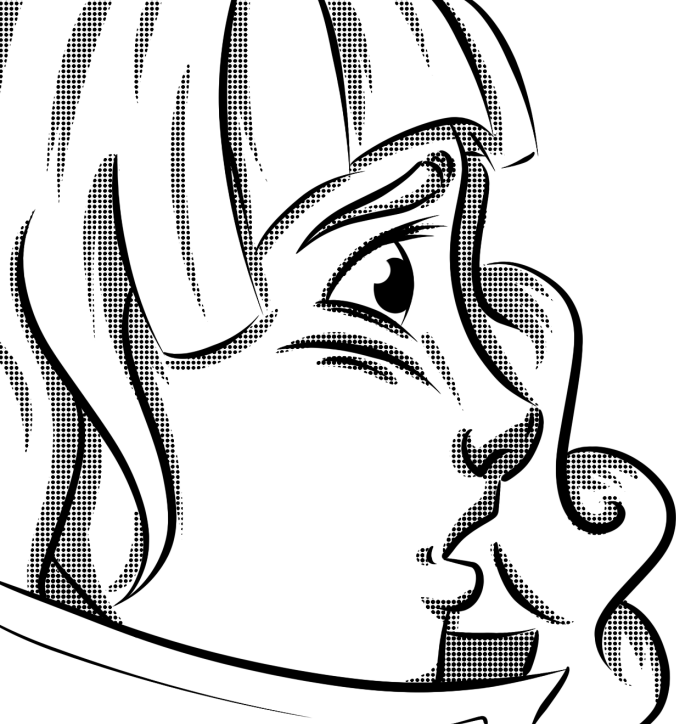
I COULDN'T SEE HIM ANYMORE.



HOW COULD SOMEONE
DISAPPEAR WITHOUT A TRACE
IN A MATTER OF SECONDS?..

HE WAS GONE, AND
SO WAS THE TREE
LINE THAT USED TO BE
ON MY RIGHT.





TAKING A SHARP BREATH,
I HELD THE AIR IN MY CHEST
UNTIL I FELT I'D SUFFOCATE
UNLESS I EXHALED.

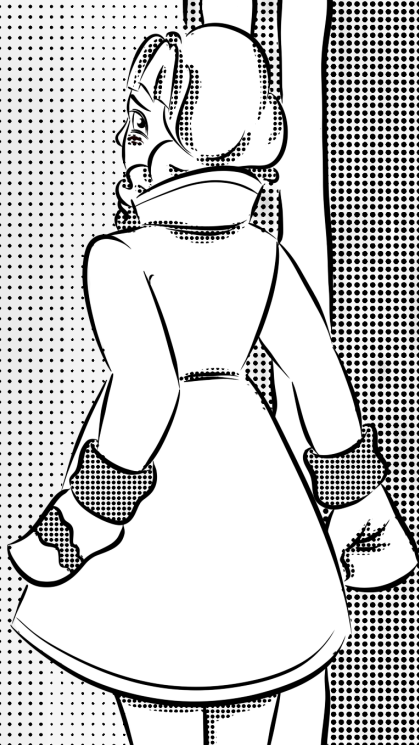
I FELT DIZZY FOR THIS, BUT AT
LEAST IT STOPPED ME FROM
RUNNING IN A RANDOM DIRECTION.

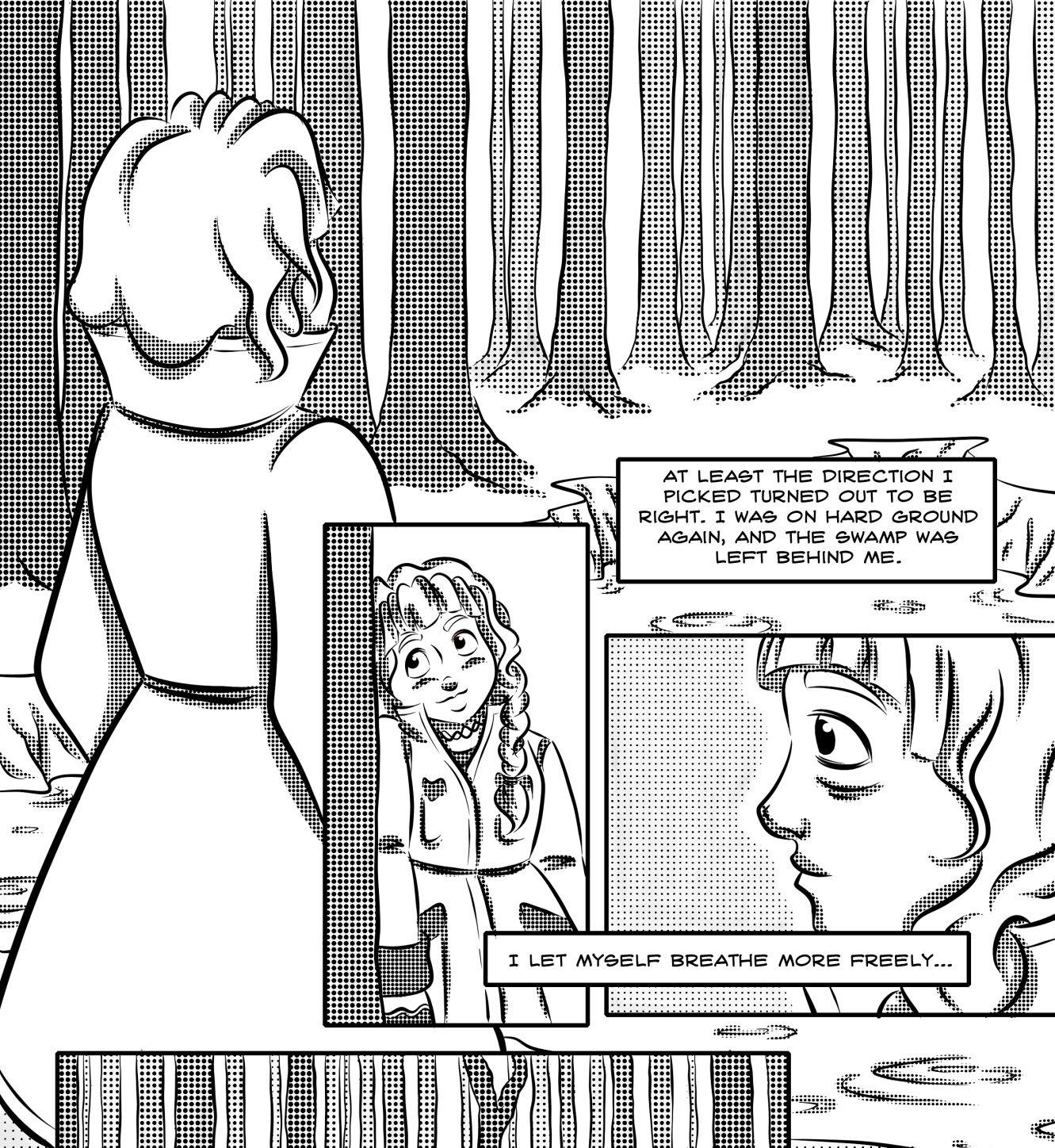


I WOULD BE FINE.

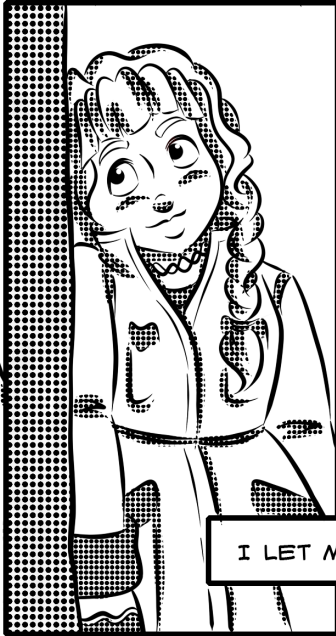
I HAD STRAYED SOMEWHAT
DEEPER INTO THE SWAMP.
NOT TO WORRY.

ALL I HAD TO DO
WAS STEP BACKWARDS,
CHECKING THE GROUND,
AND I WOULD BE FINE.

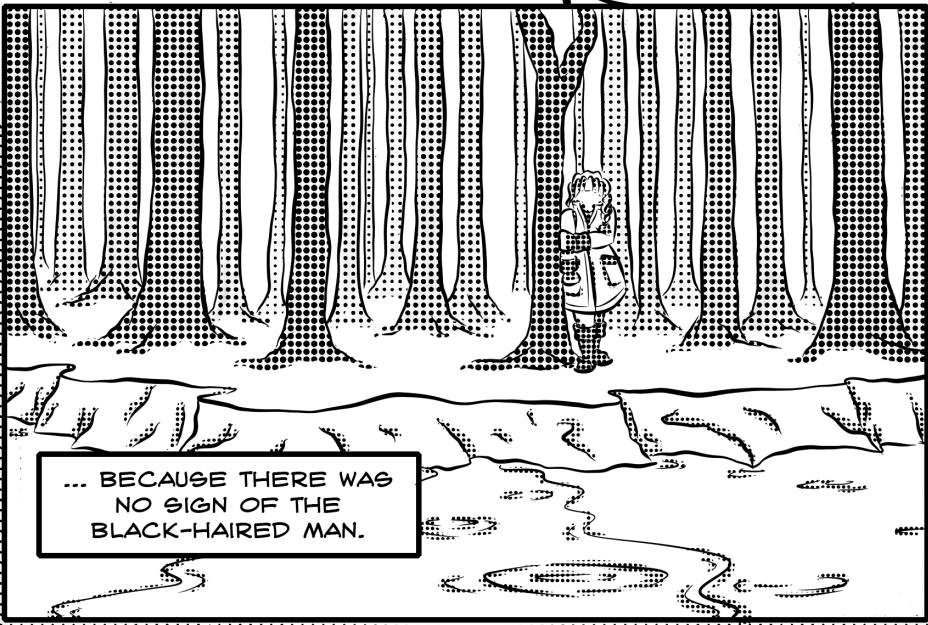




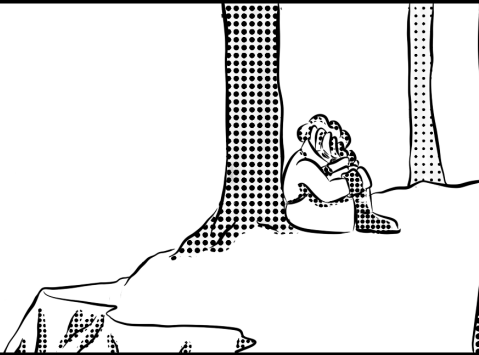
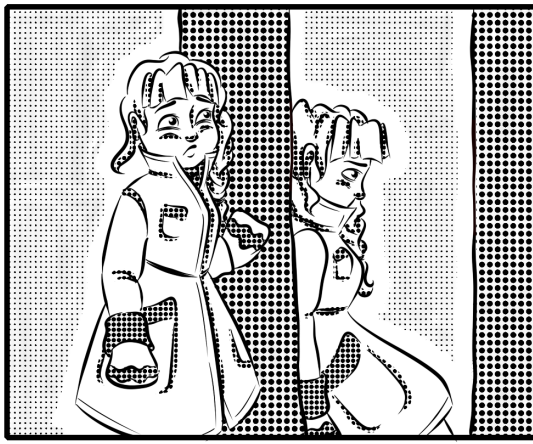
AT LEAST THE DIRECTION I PICKED TURNED OUT TO BE RIGHT. I WAS ON HARD GROUND AGAIN, AND THE SWAMP WAS LEFT BEHIND ME.



I LET MYSELF BREATHE MORE FREELY...



... BECAUSE THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE BLACK-HAIRED MAN.



THAT WAS IT. I WASN'T GOING TO MOVE ANYWHERE FROM THAT SPOT UNTIL IT WAS WELL INTO DAYLIGHT.

I MUST HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP.



DID YOU GET LOST?



HM. YES.
I THOUGHT I'D
GET TO THE LAKE, BUT
I FOLLOWED SOMEONE GOING
THE WRONG WAY AND GOT
TOO FAR INTO
THE SWAMP.

YOU WOULDN'T BE
THE FIRST. A YOUNG MAN
GOT LOST HERE ONCE, TRYING
TO FIND HIS WAY TO THE LAKE
WHERE HIS LOVER WAS WAITING
FOR HIM. HE'S BEEN
LOOKING FOR THEM
EVER SINCE.

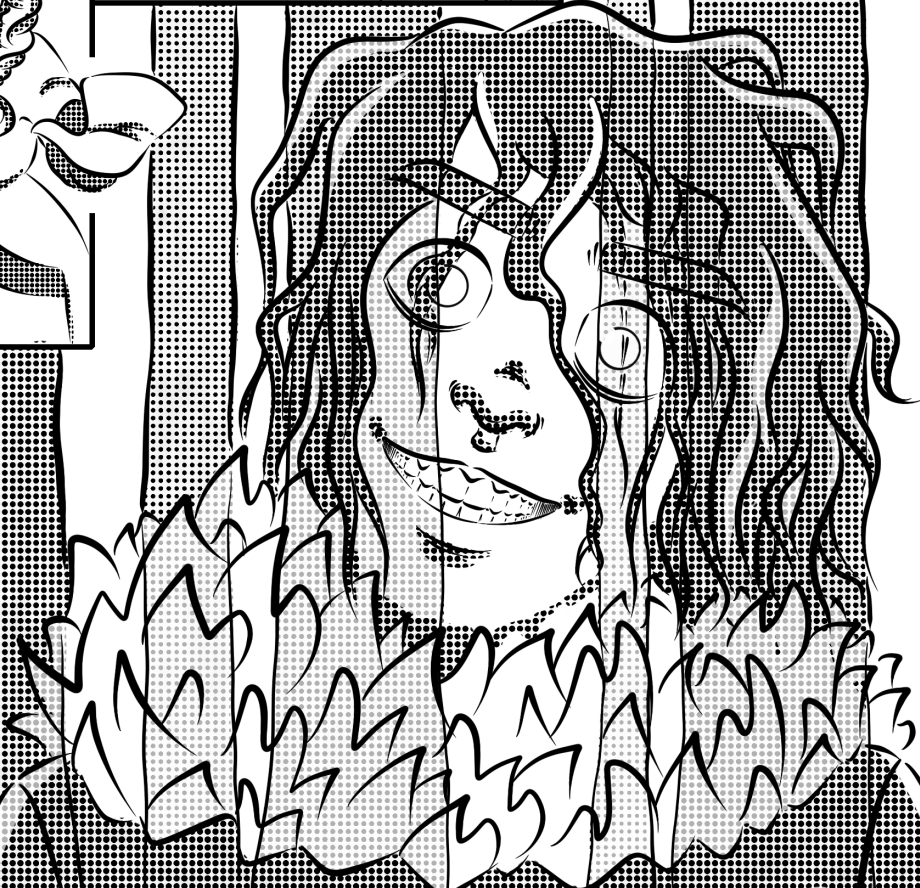
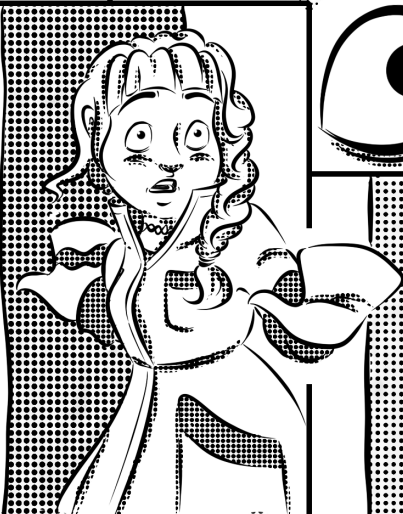
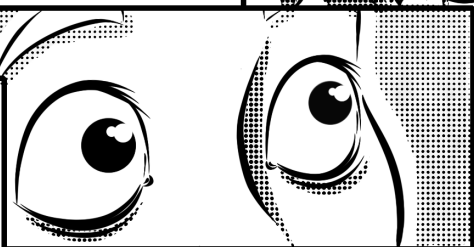
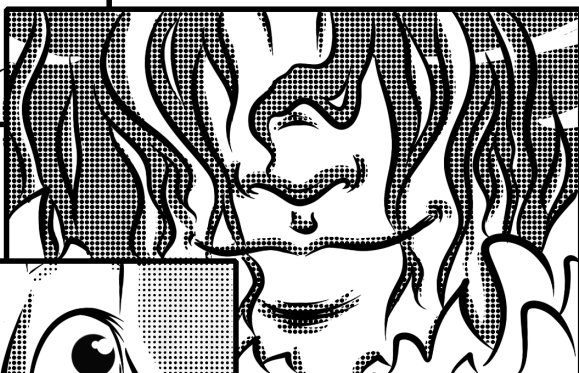
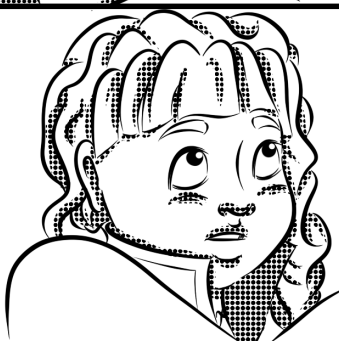
YOU MEAN,
LIKE, A GHOST?

CALL IT
WHAT YOU LIKE.

I TOOK THE HAND
OFFERED TO ME,
AND PULLED MYSELF
TO MY FEET.

IT'S A GOOD
THING I MET
YOU THEN.

INDEED.



MONOCHROME

EMMI (ART)

TWITTER: @EMMIBAT

TUMBLR: INKINGBATS

MARIA (WORDS)

TWITTER: @EL-QUENT

TUMBLR: THE-DESERT-CWL