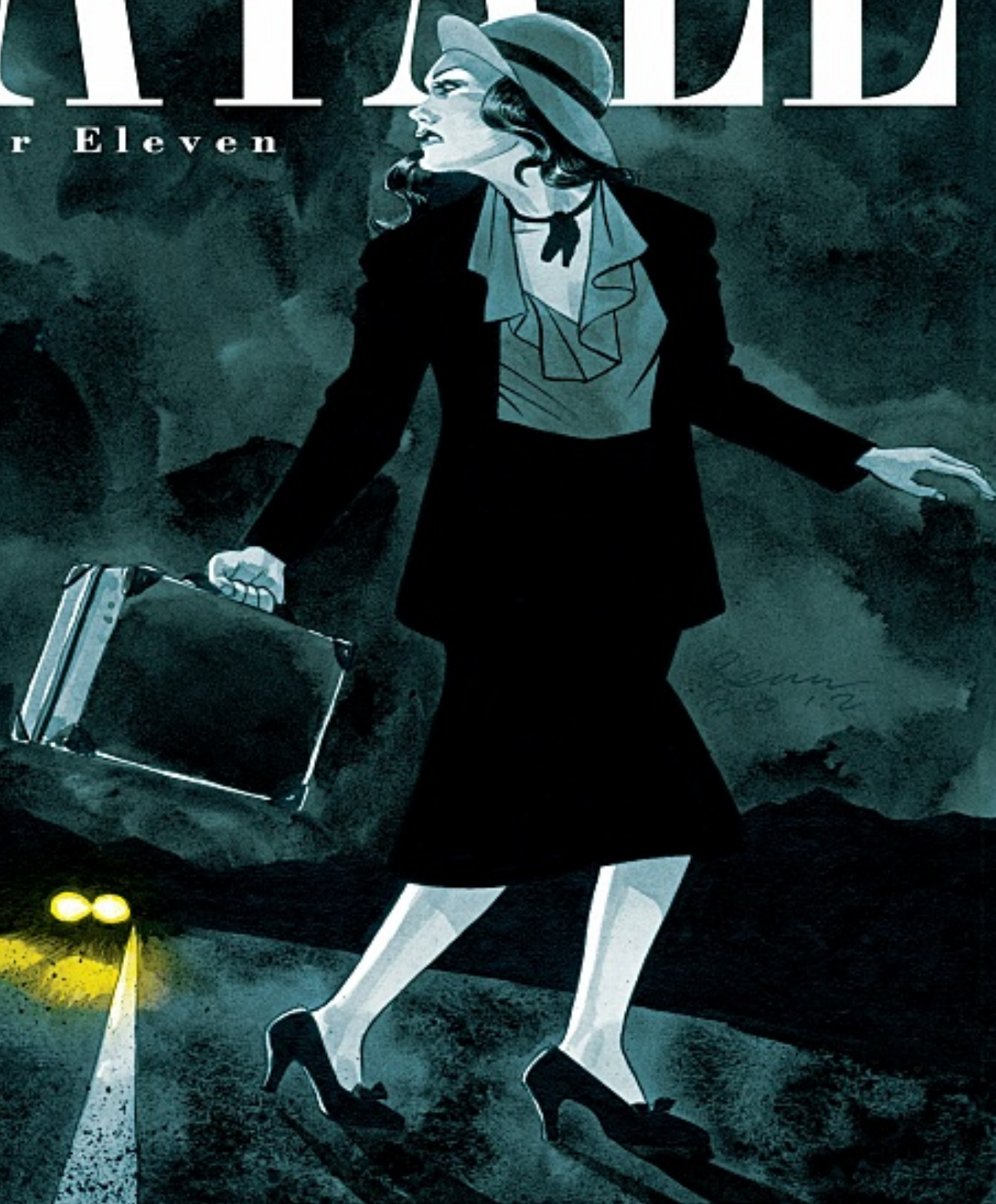


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FATALE™

Number Eleven





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The Case Of Alfred Ravenscroft



Texas
- 1936

OFFICER NELSON HAS BEEN DRINKING FOR A FEW HOURS WHEN HE REALIZES SHE ISN'T COMING BACK FOR HIM.



HE BREAKS OUT IN A COLD SWEAT...



AND HIS HANDS START TO SHAKE...



AS THE WORLD COLLAPSES IN ON HIM.



MEMORIES OF THE LAST WEEK FLASH ACROSS HIS MIND...



AND IT'S LIKE HE'S SEEING THEM CLEARLY FOR THE FIRST TIME...



ALL THE THINGS HE'S DONE SINCE HE MET JOSEPHINE.



THEY'D FOUND HER AT THE SCENE OF A *DOUBLE MURDER* IN CROSS PLAINS.

COVERED IN BLOOD, BUT PLEADING INNOCENCE.



NEITHER NELSON OR HIS PARTNER BELIEVED A THING SHE SAID.



BUT THAT NIGHT, HE COULDN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT HER...



LIKE SHE WAS AN *ITCH* THAT WOULDN'T GO AWAY.



HE DIDN'T *PLAN* ON HELPING HER ESCAPE...

YOU FORGET SOMETHING, NELSON?



DIDN'T PLAN ON KILLING *BILL* WHEN HE GOT IN THE WAY...



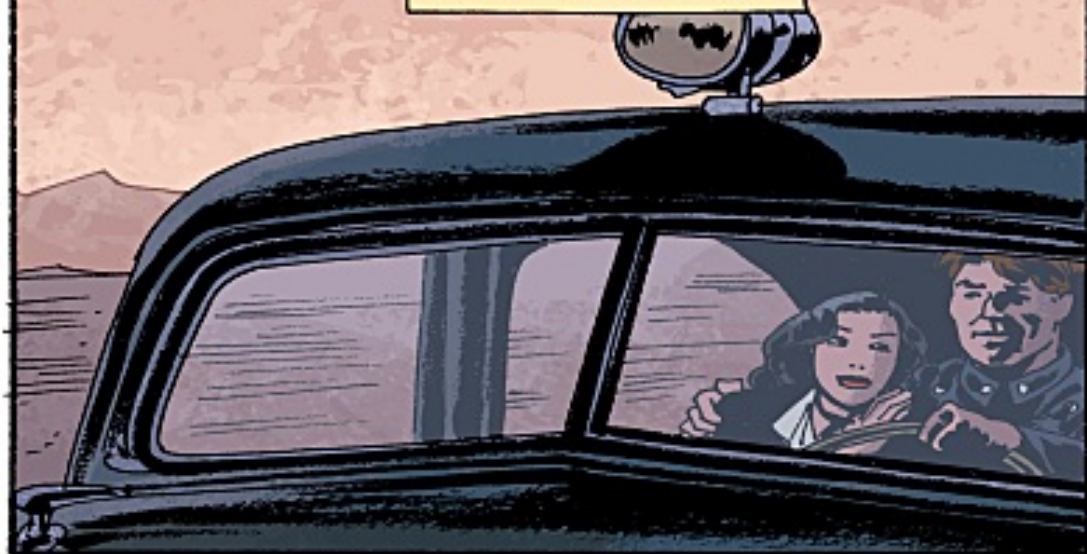
IT WAS ALMOST LIKE HE WAS A *PASSENGER* IN HIS OWN BODY.

C'MON... I'M GETTING YOU OUT OF HERE.



AND THEN THEY WERE ON THE RUN.

AND IT WAS THE MOST EXCITING THING THAT HAD EVER HAPPENED TO HIM.



THEY DROVE ACROSS TEXAS BY DAY... AND MADE LOVE EVERY NIGHT.



AND HE DIDN'T THINK ABOUT HIS DEAD PARTNER...



OR THE FIANCE HE HAD ABANDONED...



OR ANYTHING FROM HIS LIFE BEFORE JO.



BUT NOW THEY'D FOUND WHAT SHE WAS SEARCHING FOR... THEY'D TRACKED DOWN THE WRITER...



...AND EVERYTHING WAS CHANGING.

JUST WAIT HERE... I HAVE TO DO THIS ON MY OWN.



NOW *ALL* HE CAN THINK ABOUT
IS WHAT HE'S THROWN AWAY...



THE LIVES HE'S
DESTROYED...

AND THE *BLOOD*
ON HIS HANDS...



BUT THE WORST PART
IS, THAT'S *NOT* WHAT
MAKES HIM SICK.



IT'S THAT *SHE'S*
GONE... AND SHE'S
NOT COMING BACK...



THEN HE HEARS
A *TRAIN* IN THE
DISTANCE...

...?

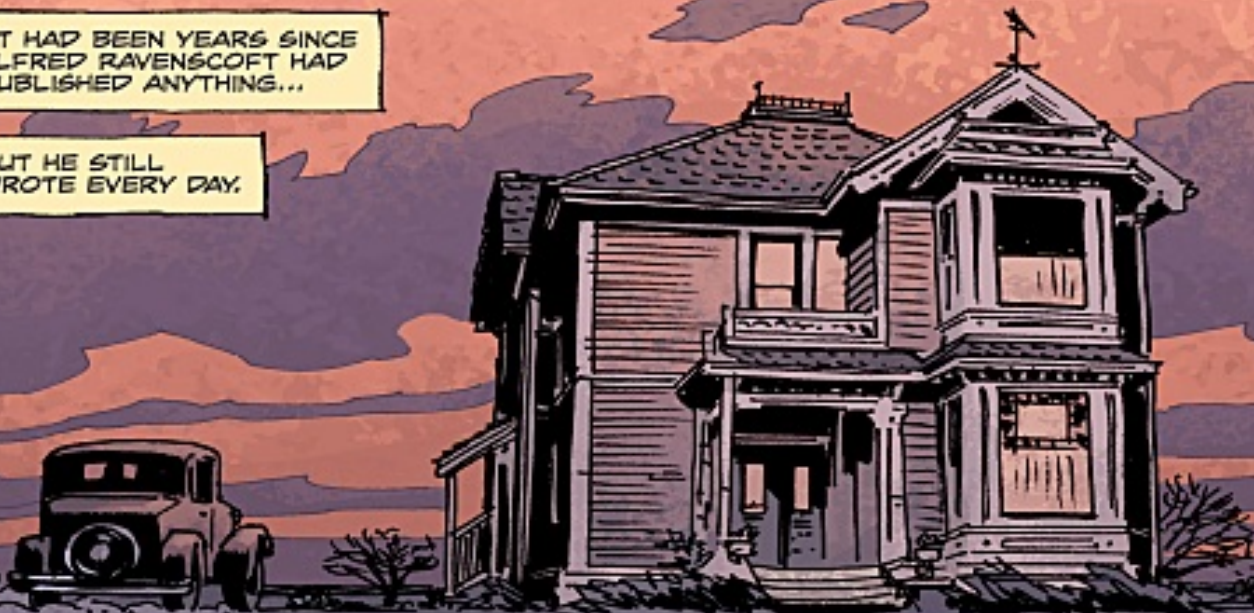


...AND FOR THE FIRST
TIME IN A WEEK, HE
MAKES A PLAN.



IT HAD BEEN YEARS SINCE ALFRED RAVENSCOFT HAD PUBLISHED ANYTHING...

BUT HE STILL WROTE EVERY DAY.



ONLY NOW HE WAS CHARTING THE COURSE OF HIS DISEASE.

KEEPING A DETAILED DIARY OF HIS OWN SLOW DEATH.

HIS MOTHER SAID IT WAS WRONG, UNNATURAL...

...TO BE SO COLD AND SCIENTIFIC AS HIS INSIDES WERE EATEN AWAY.



BUT ALFRED WASN'T AFRAID OF DYING.

WHICH WAS ODD, BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID OF NEARLY EVERYTHING ELSE.







CHRIST, I
HAVEN'T SEEN
ONE OF THESE
IN A LONG
TIME...

JOSEPHINE HAD FOUND THE
MAGAZINE A YEAR AGO, WHEN
SHE WAS STILL HALF-CRAZY.



MEN WOULD FOLLOW HER,
OR FIGHT OVER WHO WAS
BUYING HER NEXT DRINK.



OR ATTACK HER DATE,
LIKE SAVAGES.



WHICH IS HOW SHE'D
ENDED UP HIDING IN A
BASEMENT THAT NIGHT...



...AND FINDING A STACK OF
MAGAZINES, WAITING TO
BE USED FOR KINDLING.



WHILE SHE WAITED FOR
MORNING, SHE READ.

AND THAT'S WHERE SHE DISCOVERED THE WORK OF ALFRED RAVENSCROFT.



PUBLISHED NEXT TO TALES OF VAMPIRES AND MUMMIES, RAVENSCROFT HAD WRITTEN SOMETHING *TRULY* TERRIFYING.



HE HAD DESCRIBED JOSEPHINE'S NIGHTMARES.



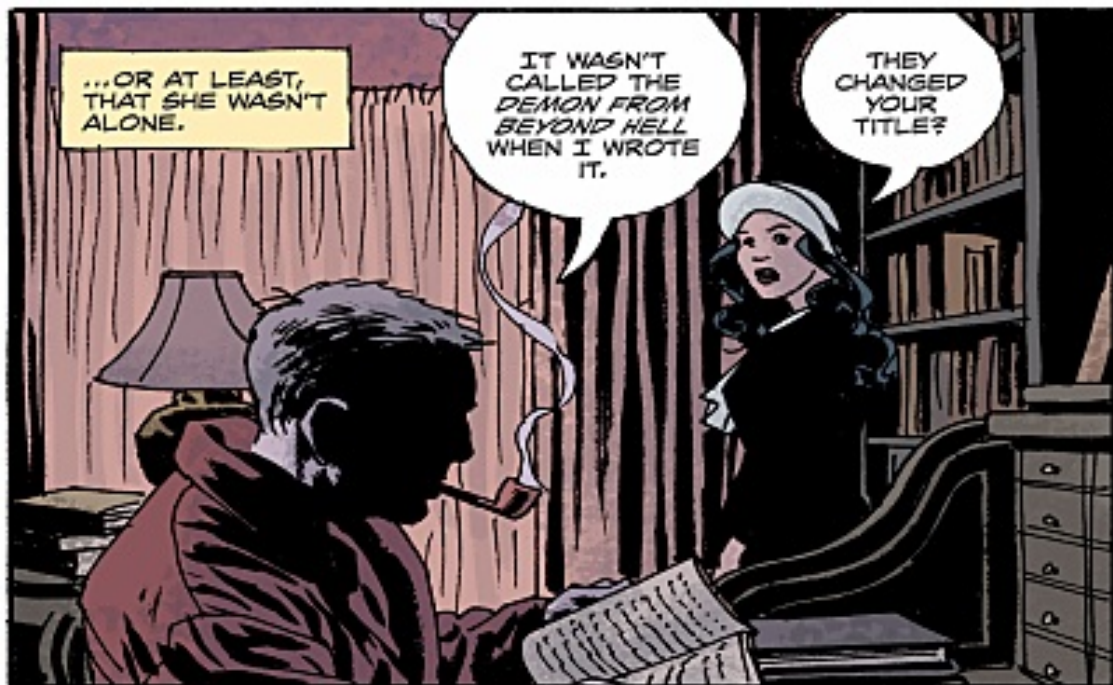
AND AS FRIGHTENING AS THAT WAS, IT LET HER KNOW SHE WASN'T INSANE...



...OR AT LEAST, THAT SHE WASN'T ALONE.

IT WASN'T CALLED THE DEMON FROM BEYOND HELL WHEN I WROTE IT.

THEY CHANGED YOUR TITLE?



THEY DID IT ALL THE TIME. MY STORY WAS CALLED TO THE UNSEEN EYES...





...BUT THAT'S **NOT** WHAT YOU CAME ALL THIS WAY TO FIND OUT, IS IT?

NO, MR RAVENSCROFT. I'M MORE INTERESTED IN THE **CONTENT** THAN THE TITLE.

I WANTED TO KNOW WHERE THAT **STORY** CAME FROM...



HNNH...



NEVER KNOWN MANY **WOMEN** WHO'D READ PULP YARNS...

MOTHER WON'T EVEN **LOOK** AT MINE.



I'M NOT SURE YOU'D WANT HER TO.



HEH HEH... PROBABLY **NOT**...



SO... ARE YOU GOING TO TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO **KNOW**?



OH... I **DOUBT** IT...

BUT I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOU **ASKED**...

It was 1898 when
Mother dragged me
off down to Mexico...

She'd taken up with a *rich*
man named McVicar, who
was leading an expedition.



I'd seen her that way before,
looking at some man like he
was going to save her...

But Mr McVicar's *servants*
acted like that, too. More like
followers or *devotees*.



Seemed I was the
only one immune
to his charms...

At the time, I thought it
was because I was just
a twelve year old kid...



But years later,
I'd have different
ideas about that.



On the fourth night, what had already been weird got weirder.

McVicar was yelling at his people, saying they'd lost the trail...

And the next morning they were burning the *carcasses* of two burros who'd been mauled in the night.

But their wounds were strange and jagged, like some awful *teeth* had torn into them.

And McVicar didn't rouse from his tent...

NO, NOT UNTIL THE CEREMONY...

CAN YOU... CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT IT IS WE'RE SEARCHING FOR?


THE MASTER SEEKS THE WAY THROUGH...

THE DOORWAY TO THE GODS.

BUT... THERE'S ONLY ONE GOD.


PFFF... STUPID CHILD...

THAT'S NO GOD AT ALL.



I tried to tell Mother these people were all insane, that we should turn back...

But she wouldn't hear me.



By then, she was becoming more and more like the *native* women in the expedition.

Dancing to music from deep in the earth...



I barely recognized her.

And as their savage night raged on, I snuck away... into McVicar's tent.

Planning to hide out and stab him in his sleep...

Instead, I found *something*... an ancient book, laid out as if for prayer.

Written in a language I never saw before or since...

But I turned its pages anyway, as if I were *compelled*...

And *images* began to flood my mind...

Like an assault, a cascade of horrors.

A cold dread crept across the stars in the skies.

But I couldn't look away.

Not until their million eyes turned away from me.

GAHH -- !

YOU...





IT WAS A LONG TIME BEFORE THOSE VISIONS I SAW FADED...

AND I'VE SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE SINCE THEN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THEM...




WELL, THAT AND TAKING CARE OF MOTHER.



SHE CAME HOME EVENTUALLY, TOO... BUT SHE LEFT BIG PIECES OF HERSELF IN MEXICO.


OH... I'M SO SORRY.




NO REASON TO BE... SHE MADE HER OWN BED.



DID SHE SAY WHAT THEY FOUND DOWN THERE?



NO, SHE NEVER DID. SHE JUST CRIED ABOUT McVICAR A LOT.



BUT SHE NEVER SAID MUCH OF INTEREST AT ALL UNTIL THIS MORNING...




...WHEN SHE TOLD ME YOU'D BE COMING HERE TODAY.

WHAT?!




SHE SAID IT'D
BE SOMEONE
WHO'D SEEN
WHAT WE
HAD...

BUT AFTER ALL
THIS TIME, I DIDN'T
THINK ANYONE
WOULD EVER FIND
THE TRUTH IN MY
STORIES.



MAYBE I
SHOULD TALK
TO YOUR
MOTHER?



OH... I DON'T
THINK *THAT'S*
SUCH A GOOD
IDEA.




I'M AFRAID I
HAVE TO
INSIST,
ALFRED.

HE HESITATES JUST
LONG ENOUGH FOR
HER TO FEEL GUILTY...

...BUT SHE DIDN'T COME
ALL THIS WAY TO LEAVE
WITHOUT ANSWERS.



SURE...
OKAY...



...BUT I
WOULDN'T
EXPECT TOO
MUCH.

I
NEVER
DO.



MOTHER?
ARE YOU IN
THERE?

WE'VE GOT A
VISITOR.



MOTHER...?



OH, THERE YOU ARE...

MISS JOSEPHINE HAS SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU.

OH MY GOD...



I TOLD YOU SHE LEFT *MOST* OF HERSELF DOWN IN MEXICO.



WHAT IS THAT?!

THAT'S *MOTHER*, OF COURSE... AND NOW SHE'S *ANGRY* AT ME.



SHE DOESN'T LIKE TO BE *SEEN* THIS WAY. SHE --



HEY! WAIT!

BUT EVEN IF SHE WANTED TO,
JO COULDN'T SLOW DOWN.

INSTINCT AND FEAR
PROPELLED HER.



SHE'D HEARD THAT
THING SCREAMING
INSIDE HER HEAD.



AND SO ALFRED
RAVENSCHROFT NEVER GOT
TO TELL HER HIS SECRET.



THAT HE'D FIGURED OUT WHY
MR MCVICAR'S CHARMS
HADN'T WORKED ON HIM...



THAT IT WAS THE SAME REASON
HE COULD SEE THE FIRE BURNING
DEEP INSIDE JOSEPHINE.



NO, I KNOW,
MOTHER... I'M
SORRY...

I DIDN'T HAVE
ANY CHOICE... I
COULDN'T SAY
NO...



AND THAT'S WHEN HE REALIZED SHE
DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT SHE WAS.



THERE WAS
NO END TO IT.



EVERY TIME SHE
THOUGHT SHE
UNDERSTOOD THE
NIGHTMARE...



...ANOTHER
LAYER FELL
AWAY AND A
NEW HORROR
WAS REVEALED.



BUT SHE
WASN'T SEEING
THINGS. SHE
WASN'T INSANE.



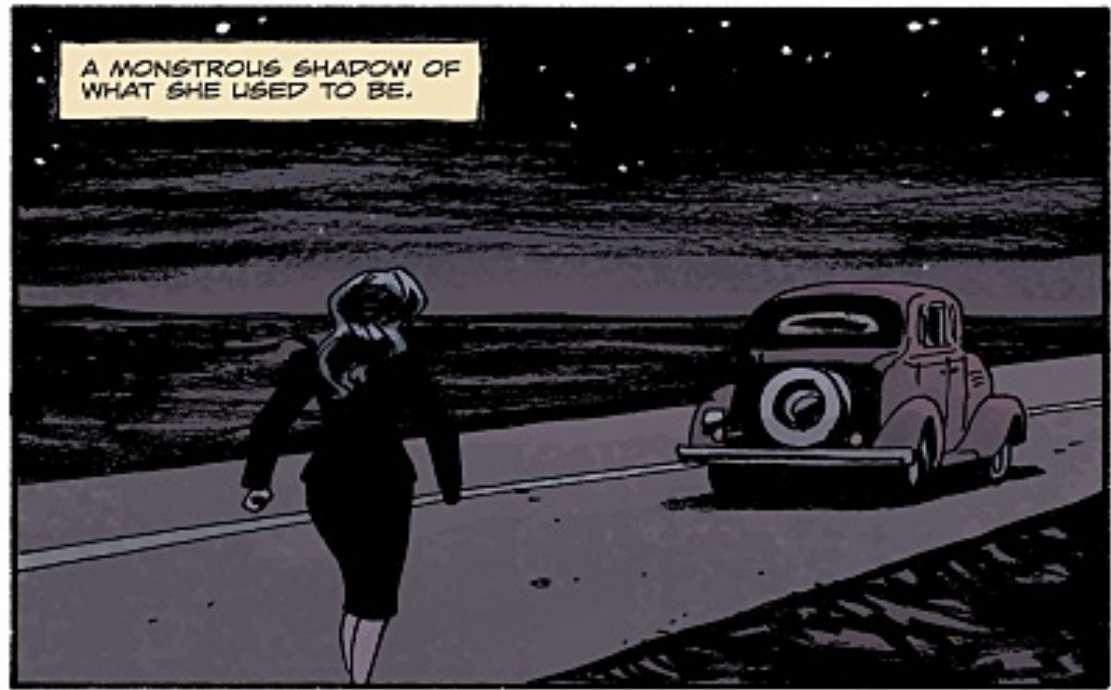
RAVENS-CROFT MAY
HAVE BEEN, THOUGH,
BECAUSE HE *SAW*
WHAT HIS MOTHER
REALLY WAS.



JUST A
GHOST.

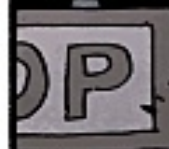


A MONSTROUS SHADOW OF
WHAT SHE USED TO BE.

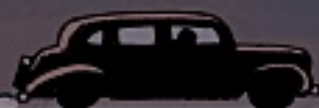


THERE HAD TO
BE AN END TO IT,
SOMEWHERE...
SOMEHOW.

THERE HAD
TO BE.



RAIL
CROSSING
ROAD



THIS IS GOOD,
NELSON THINKS.

THIS MAKES
SENSE.



MAYBE IT'S THE ONLY
THING THAT'S MADE
SENSE IN DAYS.



HE CAN'T FACE
TOMORROW,
HE KNOWS THAT.

BUT SOMEHOW HE
CAN FACE *THIS*.



HE TELLS HIMSELF
IT WON'T HURT.



AND TRIES TO
PICTURE JOSEPHINE
ONE LAST TIME.



AND THAT'S WHEN
THEY FIND HIM...



I'M SORRY,
OFFICER...

... BUT I *CAN'T*
LET YOU THROW
YOUR LIFE AWAY
LIKE THIS.

NOT WHEN YOU
AND I HAVE *SO*
MUCH TO TALK
ABOUT.



GET HIM,
BOYS.

HEY! GET OFF -
LET ME
GO!



GET HIM
IN THE
CAR...

HE STILL
REEKS
OF THE
WOMAN...



...SO WE'RE
NOT TOO FAR
BEHIND.



THAT NIGHT, ALFRED RAVENSCROFT WAKES UP WITH AN IDEA FOR A NEW STORY...

THE FIRST ONE HE'S HAD IN YEARS.



AND ONCE HE STARTS WRITING, HE FINDS HIMSELF LOST IN IT...



NOT NOTICING THE SUNRISE OR ITS ARC ACROSS THE SKY.



ALL HE CARES ABOUT IS HIS STORY...

ABOUT A WOMAN WHO GLOWS LIKE A LURE CAST INTO THE DARKEST OCEANS OF TIME.



IT'S DAYS BEFORE HE REALIZES HIS MOTHER IS GONE.



HE SEARCHES EVERY CORNER OF THEIR HOUSE...



...BUT SHE'S NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.



SHE HAD YELLED AT HIM FOR HOURS AFTER THE WOMAN LEFT, UNTIL HE STOPPED LISTENING.

AND NOW HE'S SURROUNDED BY SILENCE.



HE LOOKS AT THE PAGES HE'S WRITTEN, AND FINDS THEM MEANINGLESS.



NEARLY UNINTELLIGIBLE.



AND HE FEELS HIS DISEASE AGAIN... GNAWING.



...OH MOTHER... WHY...



THE MEN WHO ARE CHASING JOSEPHINE ARRIVE TWO DAYS LATER...



...BUT ALFRED RAVENSCROFT IS LONG DEAD BY THEN.





FATALE Number Eleven Ed Brubaker Sean Phillips

Rated M / Mature