

ED BRUBAKER SEAN PHILLIPS

FANTALE™



Number Eight

Previously...

In 1970s Hollywood, failed B-movie actor Miles and his friend Suzy stumble across Jo's path while on the run from a bizarre cult. After Josephine gets seen by one of the cult's members, their reclusive leader is revealed to be the reincarnation of her old enemy, Mr Bishop, now called Hansel...



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Interlude

Since the incident in *Santa Barbara*, I hadn't slept in the same place more than a few nights at a time.



It turns out that even in our high-speed wired world...



...you can still drop off the grid, with a bit of *effort*.

And a bit more *cash*.



More than I could *afford*, really.

But after I saw the empty eyes of the *Freak* who'd been *Following* me, all I could do was run.



Because *fear* is a great motivator:



But I didn't have a plan, and after two months on the road... I was worn out.





Maybe that's why it happened, because of exhaustion.



Or maybe it was *Jo*, playing with my head from afar.



All I know is, I *saw* something...



...And it was like a *door* ripping open in my mind.



Some forgotten *childhood* memory... suddenly *unlocked*.



Me and my Dad and *Dominic* are on a road trip to Los Angeles.

I'm six or seven... so it has to be the *late 70s*.

I don't remember much... just a few images... a few fragments...

We're visiting a *woman*.

I watch cartoons while the adults talk.

Dominic's warning her about some *men* he saw in San Francisco.

He's upset, angry... and she tries to calm him.

Later, when we're leaving, she stops my Dad...

...and says something to him...

And she sees me listening.

HEY, NICK... YOU KNOW HOW TO KEEP A SECRET, DON'T YOU?

On the way home,
Dominic breaks down.



I'm asleep by then, already
dreaming of the pretty
lady who broke his heart...



But when I wake
up, I don't think
about her again...



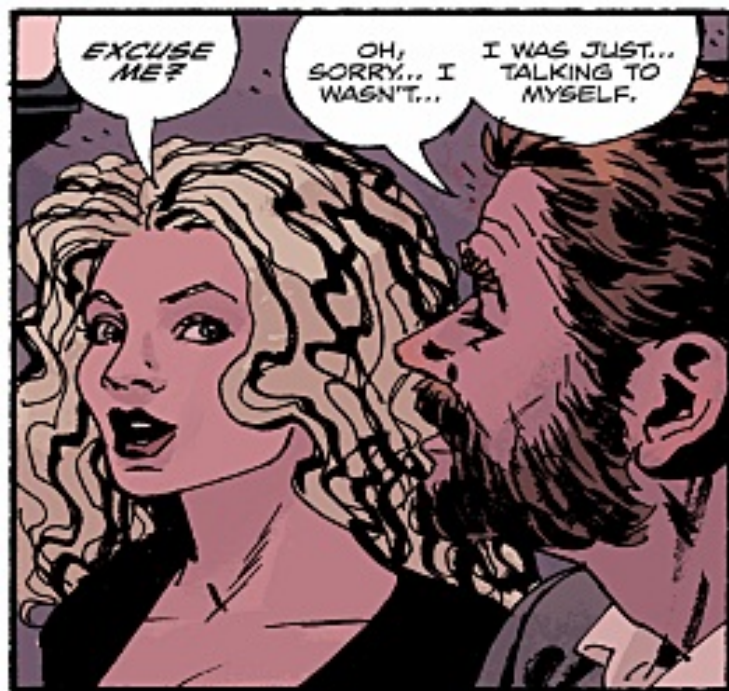
And I *don't* recognize
her when I see her at
Dominic's funeral.



EXCUSE
ME?

OH,
SORRY... I
WASN'T...

I WAS JUST...
TALKING TO
MYSELF.




UH HUNH...
STRANGE MAN,
DRINKING ALONE
AND MUTTERING
TO HIMSELF.

YOU'RE EITHER
INTERESTING
... OR A
PSYCHO.




SO,
WHICH IS
IT?






I guess she picks *'interesting'*...
Although she doesn't actually say.

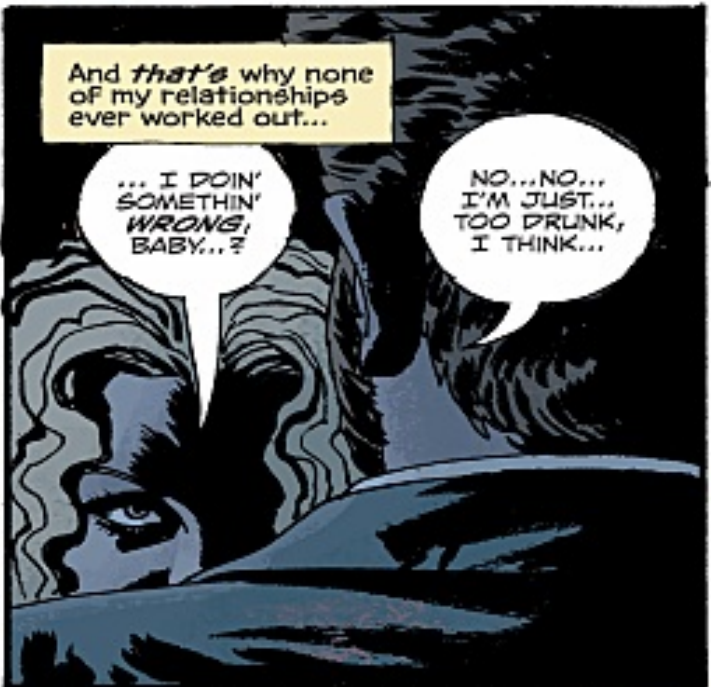
I'm too distracted to
wonder about it, really...



Realizing I haven't
even *thought* about
another woman since
I met Jo...



Wondering if she's
been hiding in my
subconscious
all my life...



And *that's* why none
of my relationships
ever worked out...

... I DOIN'
SOMETHIN'
WRONG,
BABY...?

NO...NO...
I'M JUST...
TOO DRUNK,
I THINK...



Because secretly I was
always waiting for her...

And I didn't
even know it.

In my dreams
that night, I'm
that kid again.

The one who just
got infected with
the idea of her.

But it's not a
heartache...

DAD...?
ARE YOU IN
THERE?

YEAH,
C'MON IN,
KIDDO...

...JUST
DEVELOPING
SOME
SHOTS...

WHAT'S
WRONG?

It's like
the flu...

I'M GOING
TO DIE,
DADDY...

OF COURSE
YOU ARE,
NICKY... WE
ALL ARE...

FOR WE ARE
BUT INSIGNIFICANT
GNATS IN THE
COLD FACE OF THE
UNIVERSE...

DAD,
WHAT IS
THAT?

OH THAT? THAT'S THE OWL.

HE TIES THE WORLD TOGETHER...

AND SPINS IT AROUND THE MOON EVERY NIGHT...

DO YOU WANT TO HOLD HIM?

NOO!

BUT... WHY IS IT HERE...?

OH, IT'S OKAY, KIDDO... HE DOESN'T CARE...

HE'S NOT AFRAID OF ANYTHING...

...BELIEVE ME.

--GAAHHH!

When I calm down
enough to think...

I realize there
was something *in*
that nightmare...



Some kind of *clue* to my
Josephine mystery...



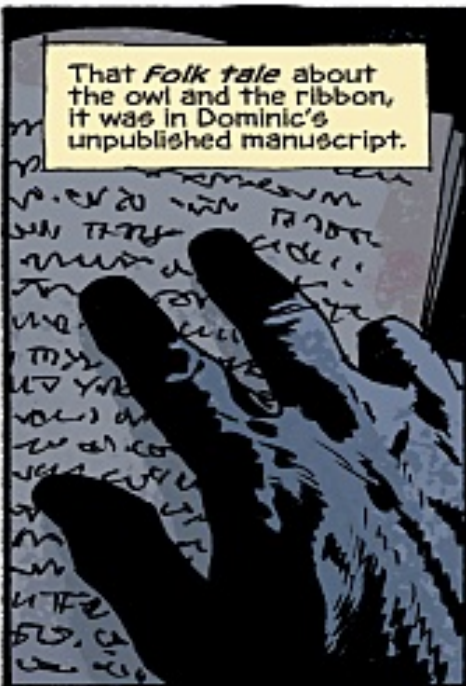
WHERE IS
IT...? WHERE
IS IT...?



WHERE
THE HELL
IS IT...?



That *Folk tale* about
the owl and the ribbon,
it was in Dominic's
unpublished manuscript.



And I think I'm finally
about to *understand*
whatever it means...



...When I notice
the *girl* isn't in
my bed anymore.

HEY...
WHAT'S
THAT --



-- ABOUT?



RRRRRAAAA --



KRAAAK



Do I even have to
tell you the rest?



That when I
wake up a few
hours later...



...FLEECROCK...

...Everything, even
that *manuscript*,
is gone.



Chapter Three

THERE HAD BEEN STORMY SKIES EVERY NIGHT THAT WEEK.

EVER SINCE SHE'D BEEN SEEN, SHE THINKS.



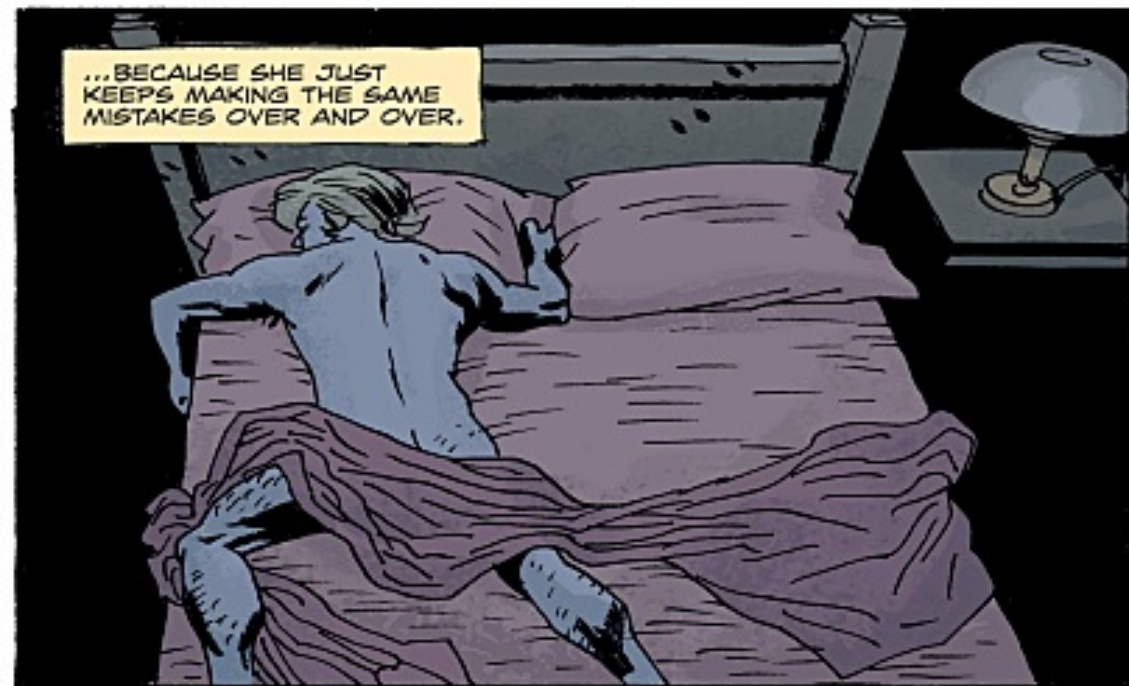
LIKE THE WORLD ITSELF IS MAD AT HER, FOR HER STUPIDITY.

OR LIKE IT'S LAUGHING...



...BECAUSE SHE JUST KEEPS MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES OVER AND OVER.

SHE'S ASHAMED OF HERSELF, FOR THINKING SHE HAD CHANGED.



BUT SHE WAS JUST HIDING... AND NOW THE DARK PLACES KNEW.

AND THEY WERE ALREADY REACHING OUT, SEARCHING FOR HER.



HANK'S VISIT TODAY CONFIRMED THAT, IF SHE HAD ANY DOUBTS...

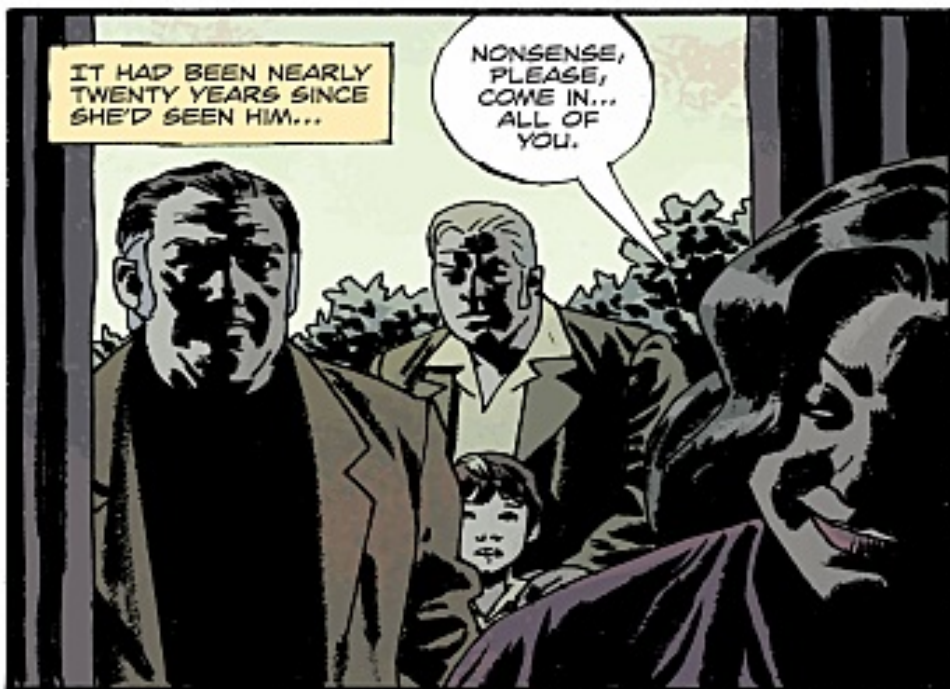
SORRY TO JUST SHOW UP LIKE THIS...

I KNOW. I KNOW I'M NOT... SUPPOSED TO...



IT HAD BEEN NEARLY TWENTY YEARS SINCE SHE'D SEEN HIM...

NONSENSE, PLEASE, COME IN... ALL OF YOU.




...AND IT MUST HAVE BEEN NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM MAKE THIS JOURNEY.

--THEY WERE IN MY BUILDING, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

THEY COULDN'T GET PAST THE OBSTRUCTION... COULDN'T GET TO ME...





BUT... YOU
AREN'T *SAFE*
ANYMORE,
JO.




ARE
YOU?




DO YOU HAVE
ANOTHER
PLACE TO
GO?

YEAH, I HAVE
A HOUSE THEY
CAN'T *GET* TO...
OUT IN THE
WOODS.




THEN GO
THERE, AND
DON'T
LEAVE...

...NOT UNTIL
YOU HEAR
FROM ME.




IT TORE PIECES OUT
OF HER TO SEE HIM
LIKE THAT...

AGING...
FRAGILE...
SCARED...



SHE COULDN'T RUIN
HIS LIFE AGAIN...



SHE COULDN'T
BEAR THAT.

SHE'D BEEN SO SCARED AFTER THAT NIGHT IN THE CEMETERY...



CLINGING TO MILES... HIDING IN HIS ARMS...

THINKING, AT LEAST THIS ONE DOESN'T HAVE A LIFE TO RUIN.



BUT SHE FELT *ALIVE* AGAIN, TOO, IN HIS PASSION.

AN UNINTENDED SIDE EFFECT, BUT IT WAS THERE... THAT SPARK.



AND NOW HANK HAD BROUGHT BACK EVERYTHING *ELSE* SHE'D BEEN TRYING TO FORGET...



NOT JUST THE MEN WHO FOLLOWED THE MONSTER...

HEY...





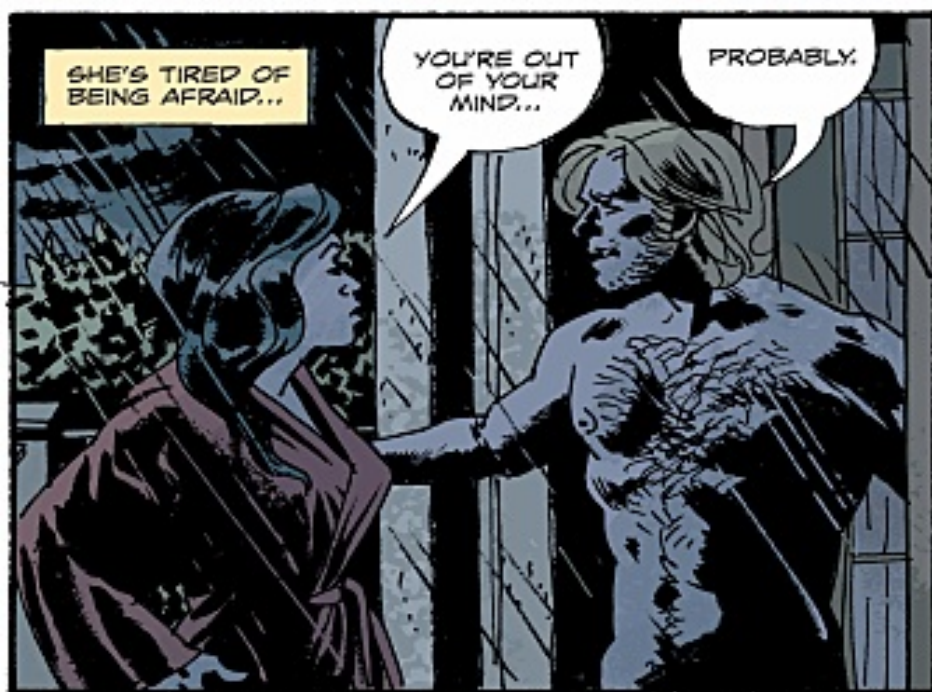
...WHAT'RE YOU DOING? IT'S RAINING...

JUST THINKING.



AND THERE'S A FIRE STARTING INSIDE HER, SHE THINKS.

WELL, COME BACK TO BED... I'M AWAKE AGAIN, TOO.



SHE'S TIRED OF BEING AFRAID...

YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND...

PROBABLY.



TIRED OF HIDING...

HEY, WHY DID I HAVE TO STAY UP HERE WHEN THAT OLD GUY CAME OVER?

OH... DON'T START, MILES...



...JUST BE HAPPY WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT.

TIRED OF MEMORIES...



...AND TIRED OF RUNNING FROM THIS GODDAMN STORM.

IF HE COULD *SEE* HIS
HANDIWORK, HANSEL
WOULD BE SMILING.

INSTEAD, HE WAS THINKING
ABOUT WHICH SERVANT TO
SACRIFICE NEXT.

AND WONDERING HOW
MANY MORE HE COULD
AFFORD TO LOSE...

...WITH NO
RESULT.

HE CURSES
HIMSELF *AGAIN*
FOR HIS GREED...


AND FOR UNDERESTIMATING
THE *WOMAN'S EFFECT* ON
HER VICTIMS...

THAT *FAT COP BASTARD*
HAD TAKEN MORE THAN
JUST HIS *EYES* THAT DAY..




HE'D TAKEN AWAY HIS
ONLY CONNECTION TO
THE *TRUE* WORLD...

WHERE HIS
FATHERS LIVED...



FOR TWENTY YEARS
HE'D BEEN TRAPPED
IN THIS PRISON...

UNABLE TO FEEL
THE COLD TOUCH
OF THE UNIVERSE
INSIDE HIM...



UNABLE TO READ
HIS MASTER'S
NAME SCRAWLED
ACROSS THE SKY...

AND UNABLE TO
SEE THE WOMAN,
OR SENSE HER
PRESENCE...

HE'D TAKEN WHAT PLEASURE HE COULD IN THOSE YEARS...

AND DONE HIS DUTY TO HIS PATRONS...



BUT EVEN MANIPULATING THESE PEASANTS INTO INSANITY AND MURDER...

IT WAS AN EMPTY PLEASURE.



BUT HE KNEW THE UNIVERSE WELL, AND NOTHING THE DEMON GODS HAD TOUCHED...



...WAS EVER TRULY FREE OF THEIR GRASP.



AND SOON HE'D HAVE HER...

AND HE'D KNOW THAT TOUCH AGAIN.







THIS FEELS AMAZING... YOU SHOULD COME IN...

I'M OKAY HERE... AND I'VE GOT THE BEST VIEW.

JUST GET YOUR FEET WET.



HE FELT SICK SAYING NO TO HER, EVEN FOR SOMETHING THAT SMALL...



...BUT MILES COULDN'T SWIM, AND DIDN'T WANT TO ADMIT IT.

HEY, WE'RE GONNA BE LATE, BABE.




HE COULDN'T BEAR THE IDEA OF LOOKING WEAK IN JOSEPHINE'S EYES.




SO... THE METHOD CHURCH WAS SELLING THAT FILM REEL YOU STOLE?

YEAH, AND FOR A LOT, I'M GUESSIN'.



THAT'S A BIG PART OF WHAT THEY DO...

SELLIN' SICK SHIT TO RICH FUCKS.



AND YOUR FRIEND SUZY... IS SHE THE OTHER PART OF WHAT THEY DO?









THIS WHOLE HOUSE
JUST FELT *WRONG*,
SUZY THOUGHT.



GAVE OFF UGLY *VIBES*...
LIKE SOME NIGHTMARE...

BUT SHE WAS THE ONLY
ONE WHO COULD FEEL IT.



AND THAT
JOSEPHINE...

SHE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO
COULD TELL SOMETHING WAS
OFF ABOUT *HER*, TOO.



NO ONE WHO LOOKED
LIKE THAT LIVED
ALONE IN A BIG EMPTY
NIGHTMARE HOUSE.



LIKE "WHATEVER
HAPPENED TO
BABY JANE?"

OR *NORMA DESMOND*...



HIDING FROM YOUR
MYSTERIOUS PAST...
THAT'S WHAT *OLD*
LADIES DID...



NOT -



WAIT...
WAIT...



JESUS --
THAT'S --
THAT --



OH
FUCK...



HELLO?
IS
SOMEBODY
IN HERE?



SINCE JOINING THE CHURCH, SUZY HAD SEEN THINGS MOST PEOPLE WOULDN'T BELIEVE...

EVEN IF THEY WERE CAPABLE OF SEEING THEM.

RANLH MARKET
WE NEVER CLOSE



AND SHE KNEW -- SHE ALWAYS KNEW -- IT WASN'T JUST THE DRUGS...



BUT SHE'D NEVER SEEN ANYONE LIKE THAT... WHO STAYED YOUNG FOREVER...



WHAT THE HELL WAS THIS WOMAN?



FUCK...
FUCK FUCK
FUCK...

SOME KIND OF DEMON?



HEY, SUZY SCREAM... WE'VE BEEN LOOKING EVERYWHERE FOR YOU.



WHA - WAIT -
WAIT -

GET IN THE FUCKING CAR,
SUZY...



To Be Continued



FATALE Number Eight Ed Brubaker Sean Phillips

Rated M / Mature