



*I look back at that moment, and even now, all this time later, everything seems to slow down.*

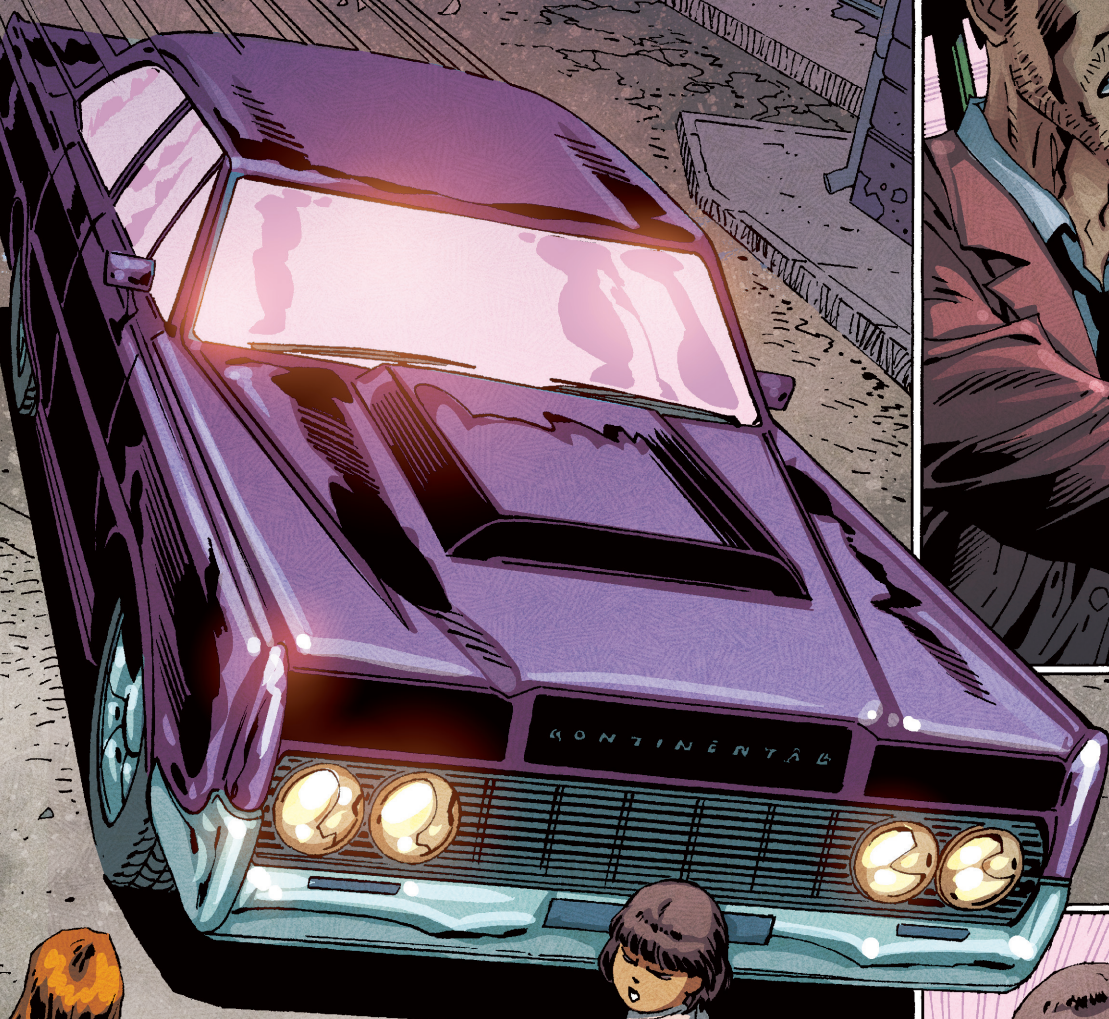


*Gloria, yelling at her bratty little brother.*

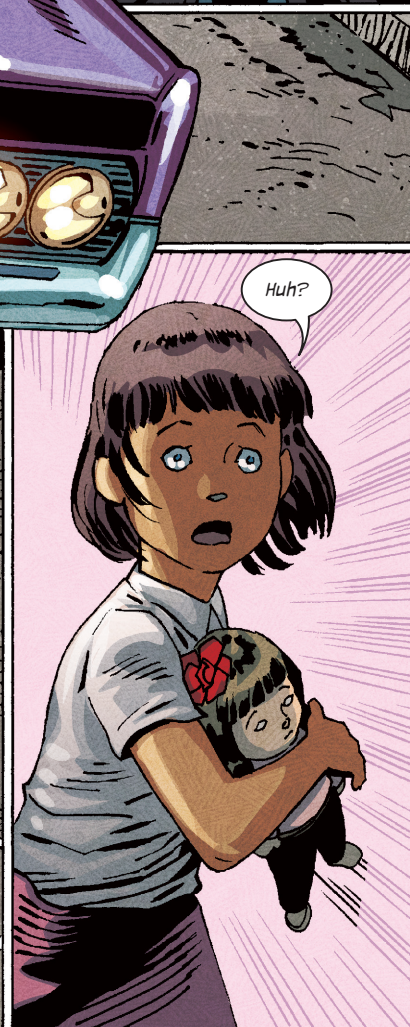
*Me, triumphantly placing the rock on square...three, I think it was...instead of tossing it, which outraged Gloria even more.*




And then she shoved me, not to get me to safety. She didn't hear the car's engine because there was nothing but fury pounding in her ears.



No, she was trying to avenge my assault on her beloved Dee-Dee.



A dramatic comic book illustration of a young girl with brown hair and a large red flower in her hair, falling from a multi-story city building. She is wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. A large splash of white liquid is coming out of her stomach area. The street below is filled with tall buildings, including one with a 'DRY CLEANERS' sign. The sky is a deep red, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The perspective is from above, looking down at the girl as she falls.

Everyone looks back on their lives and has their first memory.

I knew this one guy whose first memory was pain. He was running high fevers and his parents were swaddling him in freezing towels.

And a girl remembers sitting in the back seat of her parents' station wagon.

Me...

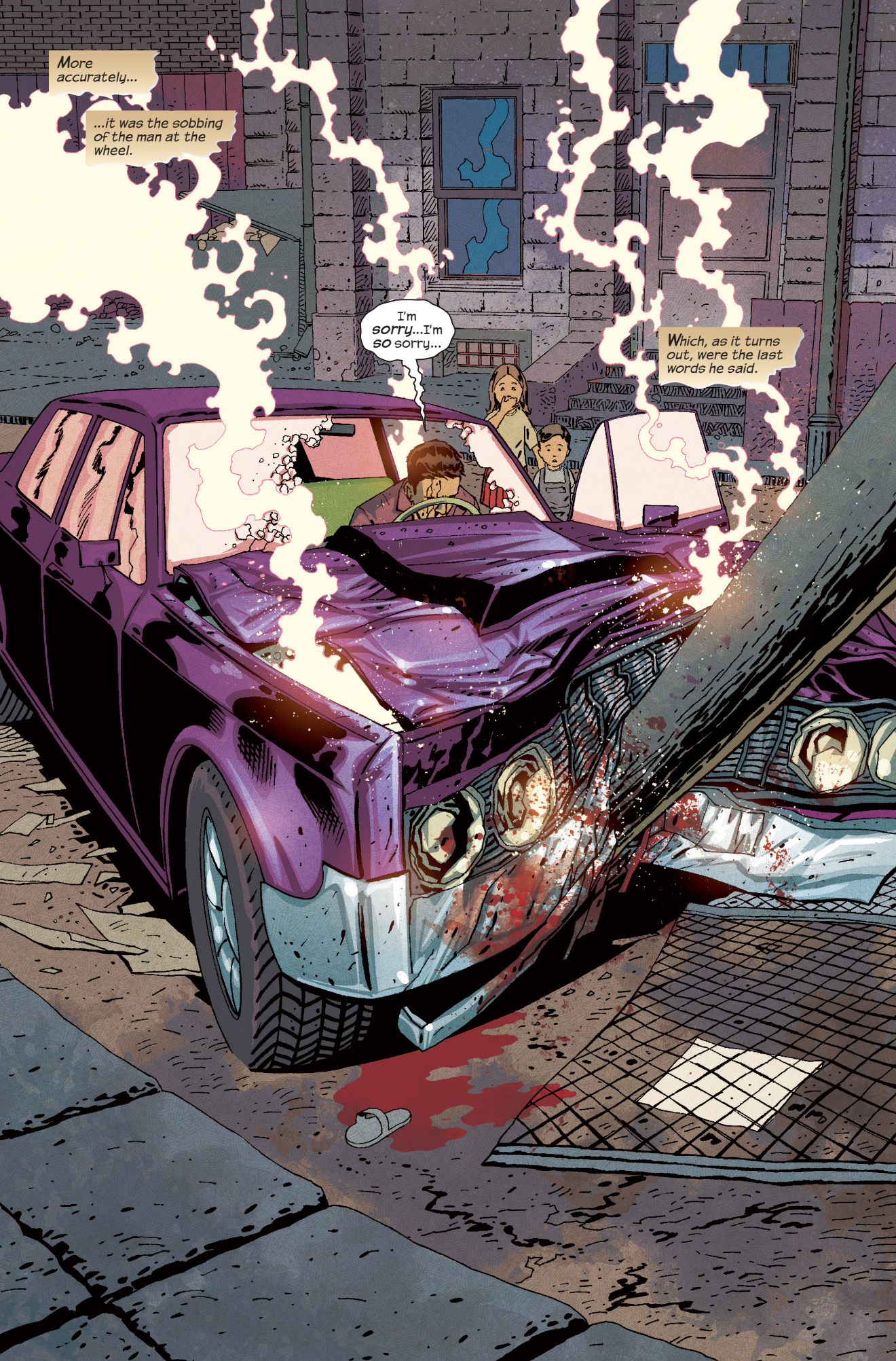
My first memory was my sister's death.

More accurately...

...it was the sobbing of the man at the wheel.

I'm sorry...I'm so sorry...

Which, as it turns out, were the last words he said.





Neighbors came running, screaming from every direction.

Me, I had no idea what had happened. I was only two. I didn't have any grasp of death.



I mean, I understood it enough in that I knew my cowboy could die in a shootout. But I had no grasp of its permanence.



I kept waiting for Gloria to stand up. Brush herself off.

I didn't know that the rattle I'd heard from the driver's throat was the last noise he was going to make.



I didn't know anything except that Mommy was shrieking Gloria's name and I couldn't for the life of me understand why Gloria wasn't answering.

