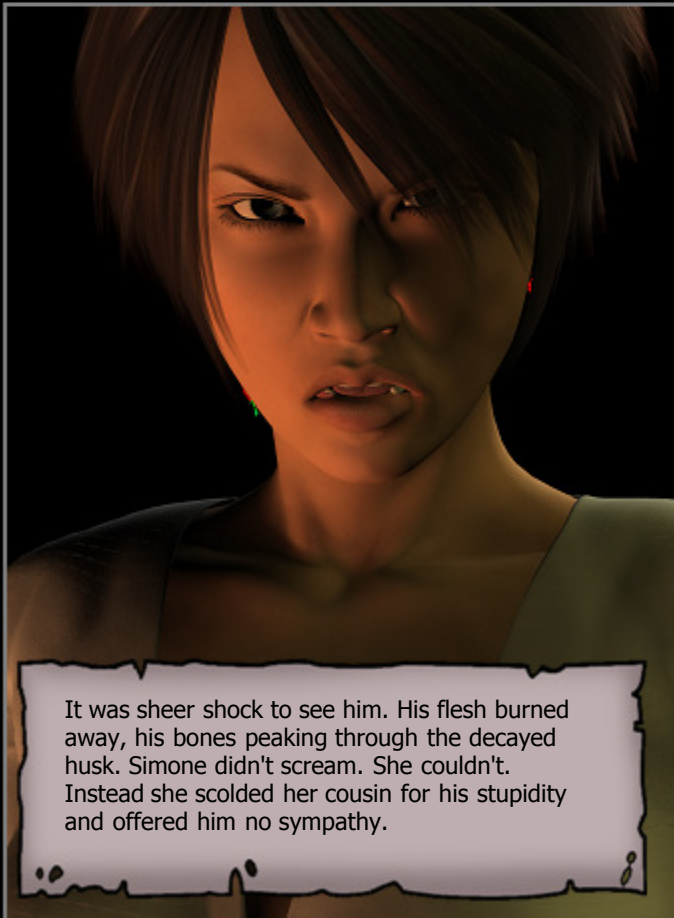
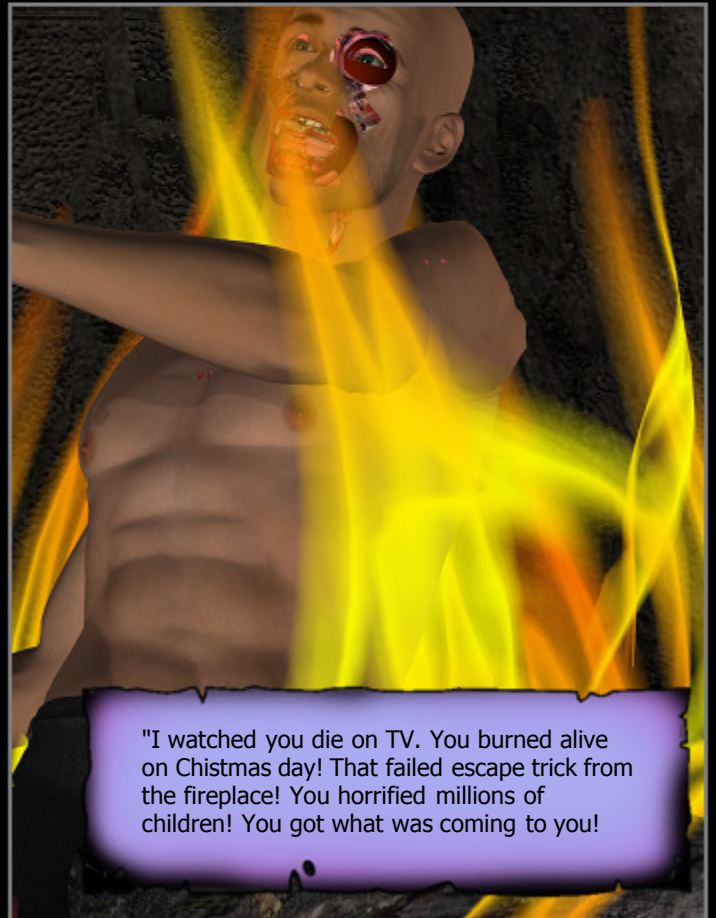


Simone came home to a visitor whom she thought had been killed years ago. It was Cousin James, the First.

**A Christmas
Return
Art and Story by:
Jay Libby**



It was sheer shock to see him. His flesh burned away, his bones peaking through the decayed husk. Simone didn't scream. She couldn't. Instead she scolded her cousin for his stupidity and offered him no sympathy.

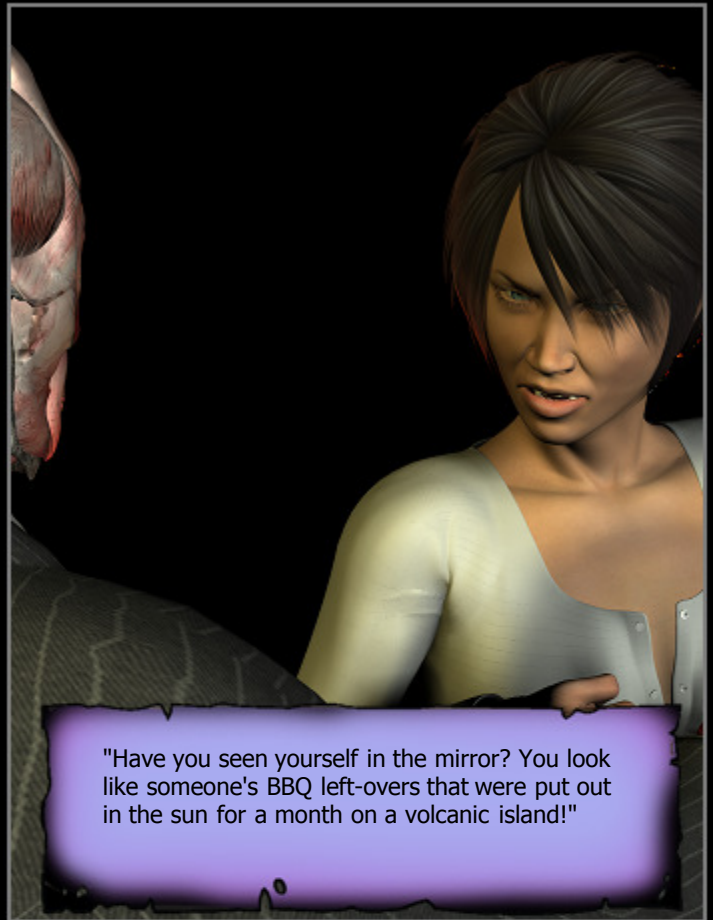


"I watched you die on TV. You burned alive on Christmas day! That failed escape trick from the fireplace! You horrified millions of children! You got what was coming to you!

"Don't be such a brat! I did it for you, my sweet little Simone. The least you could do is show pitty on me!"

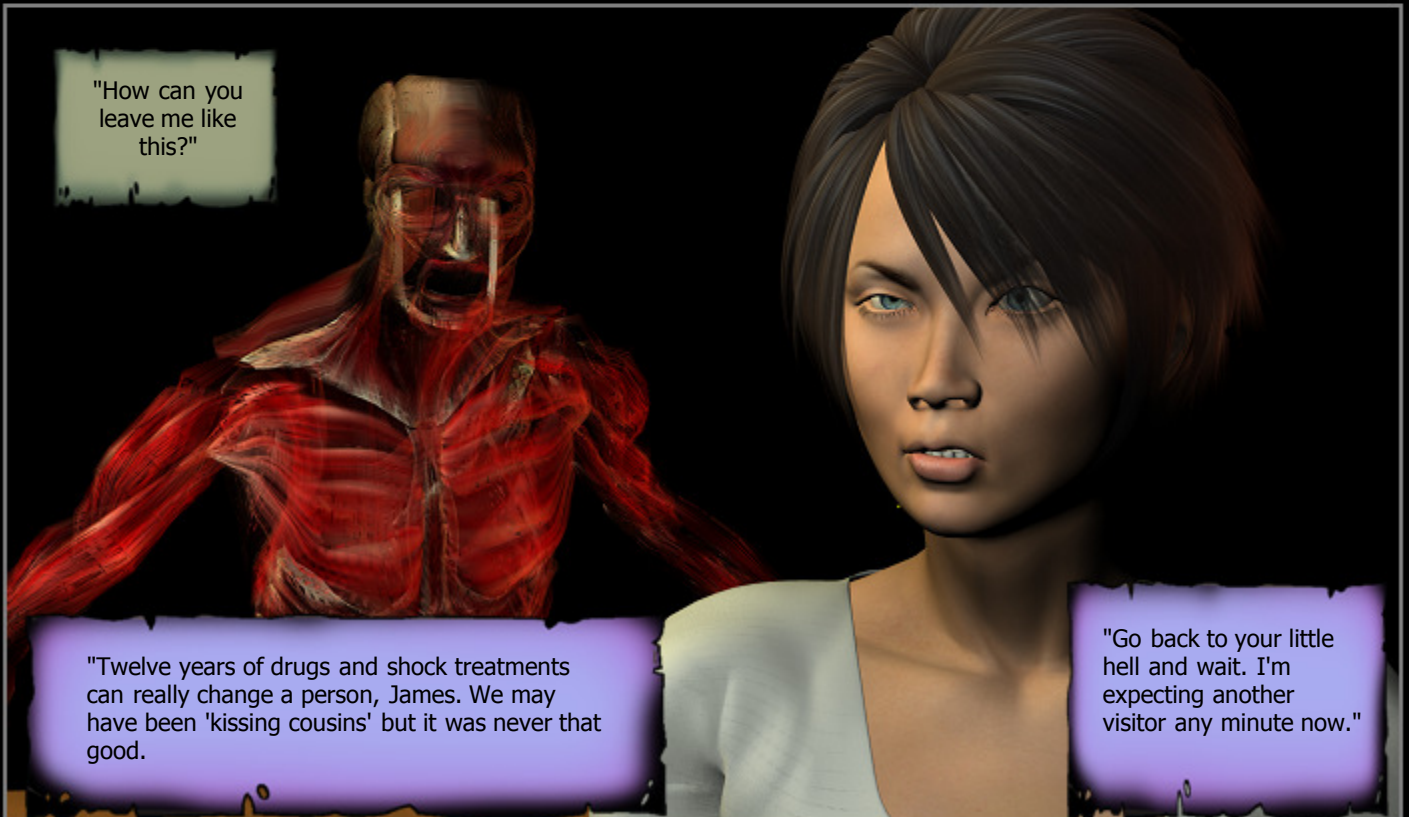


Pitty was something Simone wasn't about to offer the dead bastard. She spent months in a psych unit after his "stunt" reliving the day over and over.



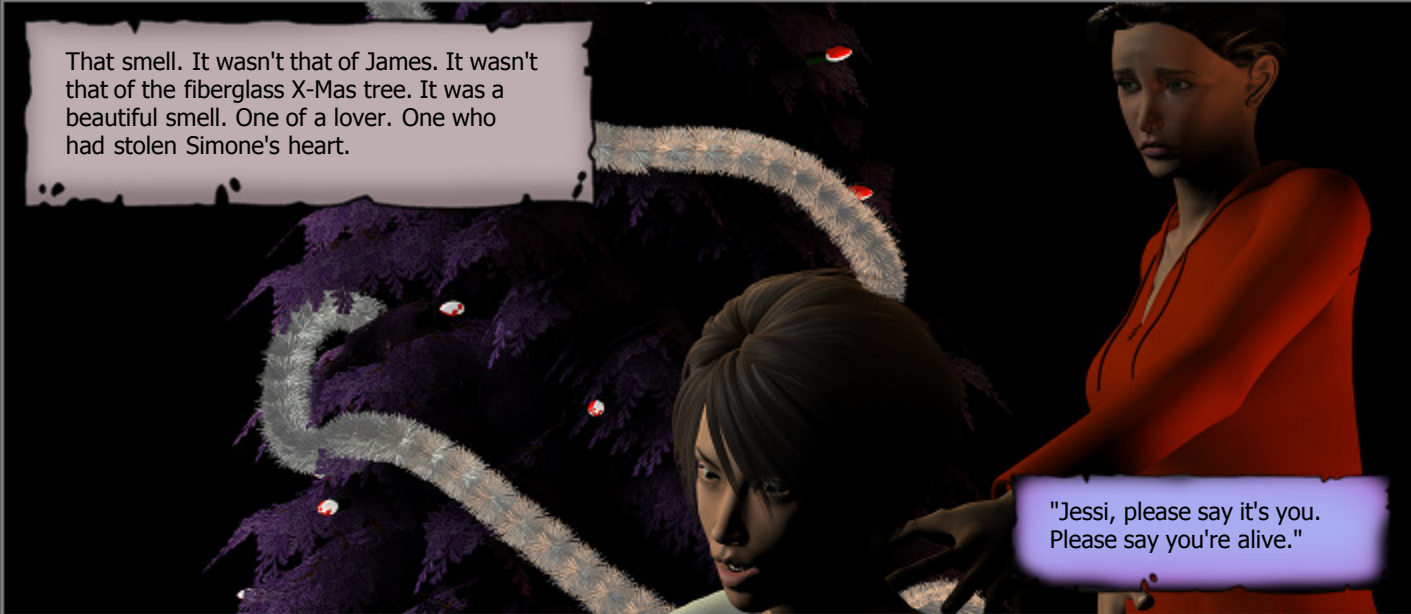
"Have you seen yourself in the mirror? You look like someone's BBQ left-overs that were put out in the sun for a month on a volcanic island!"

"How can you leave me like this?"



"Twelve years of drugs and shock treatments can really change a person, James. We may have been 'kissing cousins' but it was never that good.

"Go back to your little hell and wait. I'm expecting another visitor any minute now."

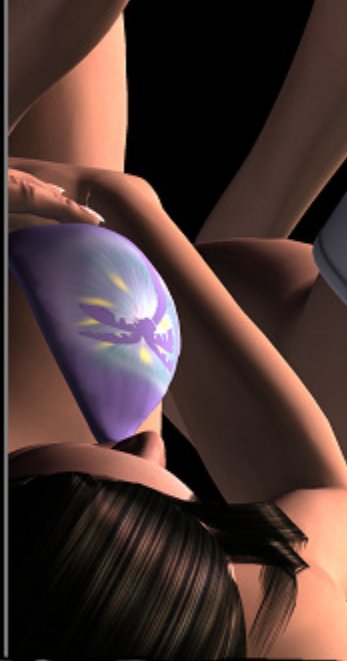


That smell. It wasn't that of James. It wasn't that of the fiberglass X-Mas tree. It was a beautiful smell. One of a lover. One who had stolen Simone's heart.

"Jessi, please say it's you. Please say you're alive."



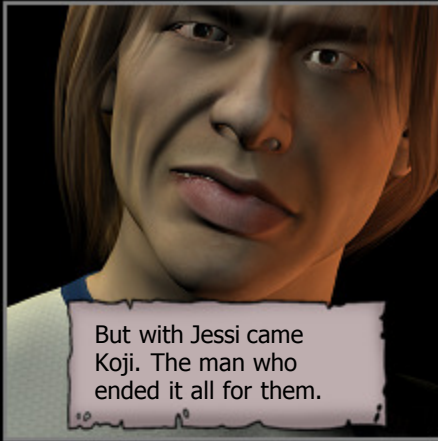
The Summer of their love awoken many things in Simone.



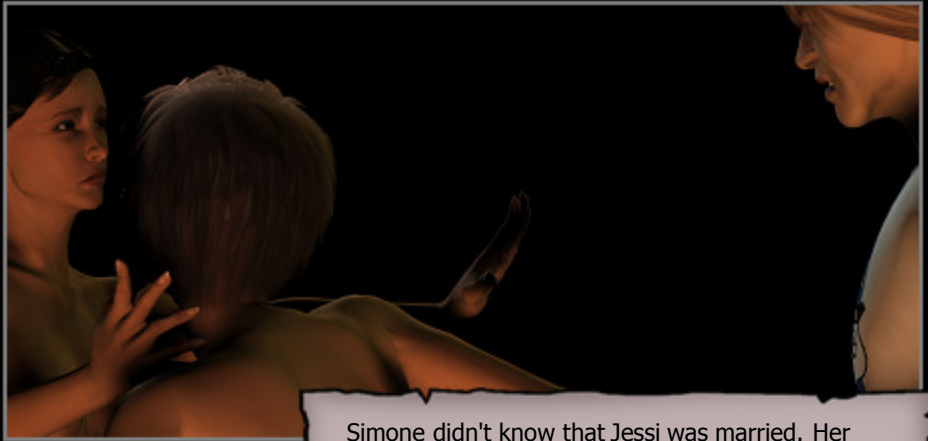
To touch another woman. To know her flesh. To learn that love did not have to be between man and woman. It could be between two souls, longing for it. Jessi gave Simone purpose.



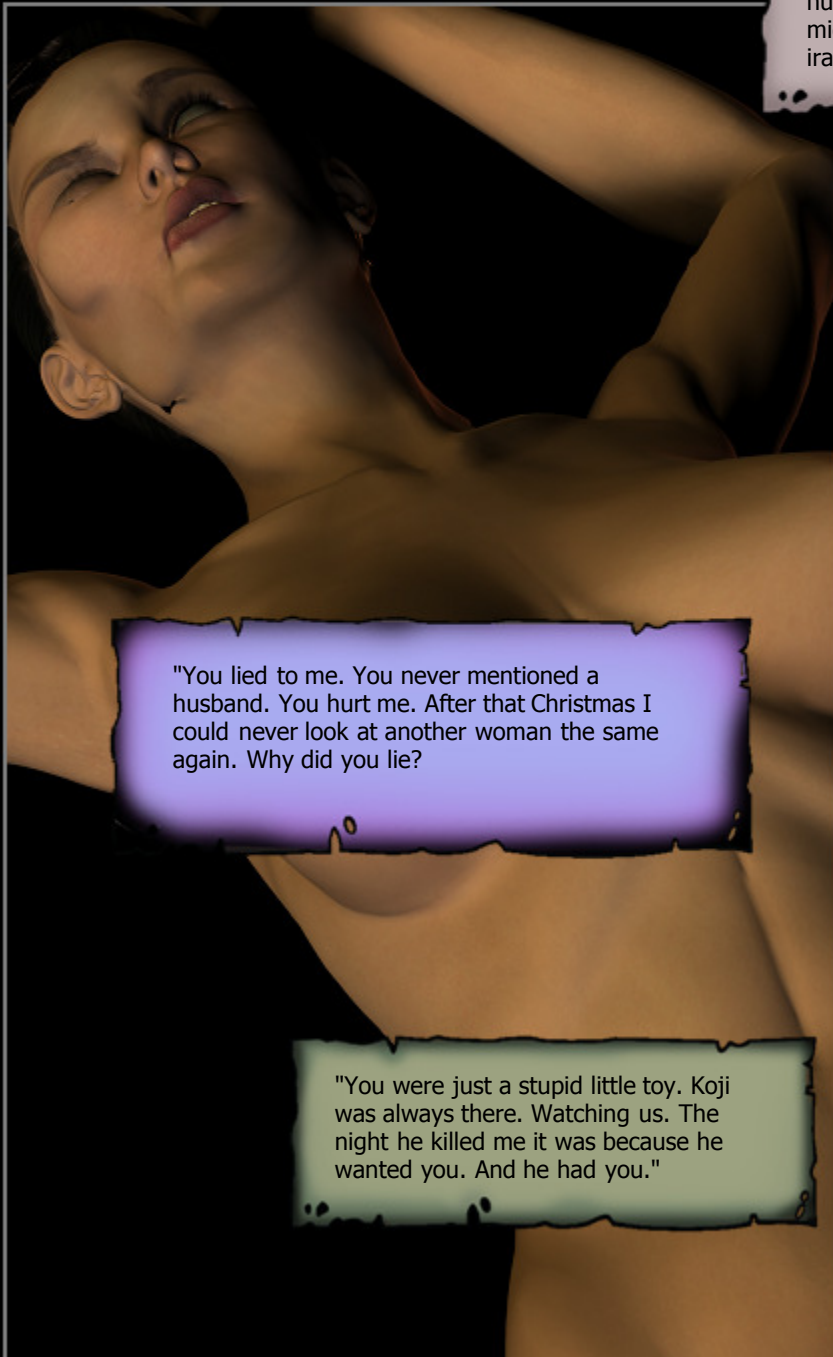
"It's me. I wanted to come back and say how much I miss you."



But with Jessi came Koji. The man who ended it all for them.



Simone didn't know that Jessi was married. Her husband found us on Christmas Eve, in the middle of making love. He came in drunk and irate. In seconds our lives changed forever.




"You lied to me. You never mentioned a husband. You hurt me. After that Christmas I could never look at another woman the same again. Why did you lie?"

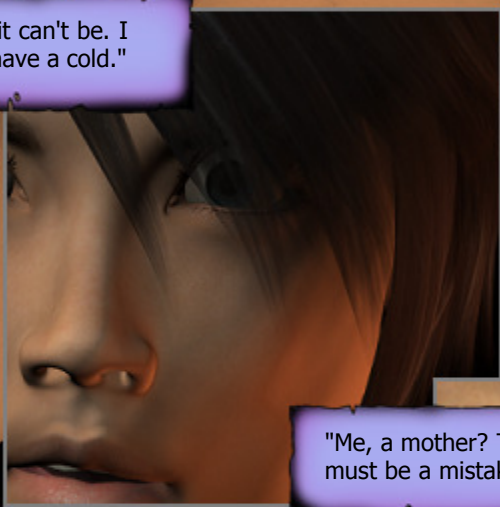
"You were just a stupid little toy. Koji was always there. Watching us. The night he killed me it was because he wanted you. And he had you."



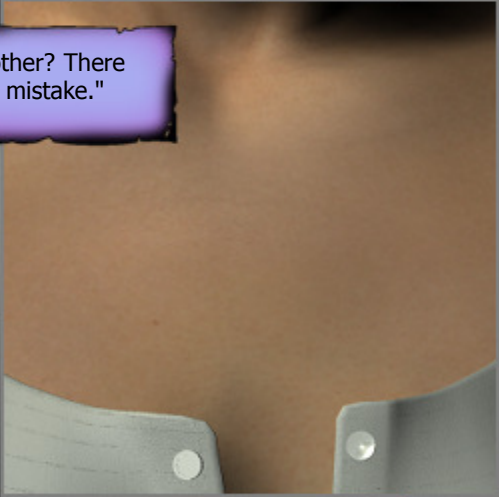
"Yeah, I know. He raped me for hours. The entire time he laughed at me. Take a hike you bitch. You've done enough here."



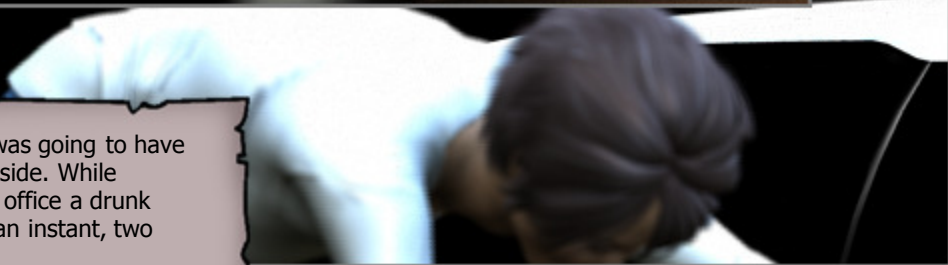

Simone remembered the feeling. Sickness, fear and regret. At first she thought she could hide it.



"No, it can't be. I just have a cold."



"Me, a mother? There must be a mistake."



There was no mistake. Simone was going to have a baby. But fate was not on her side. While walking home from the doctor's office a drunk driver changed it all for her. In an instant, two lives became one.



Simone kept a baby doll to remind her. She didn't want to forget her unborn child. And on X-Mas Eve, it would talk to her.

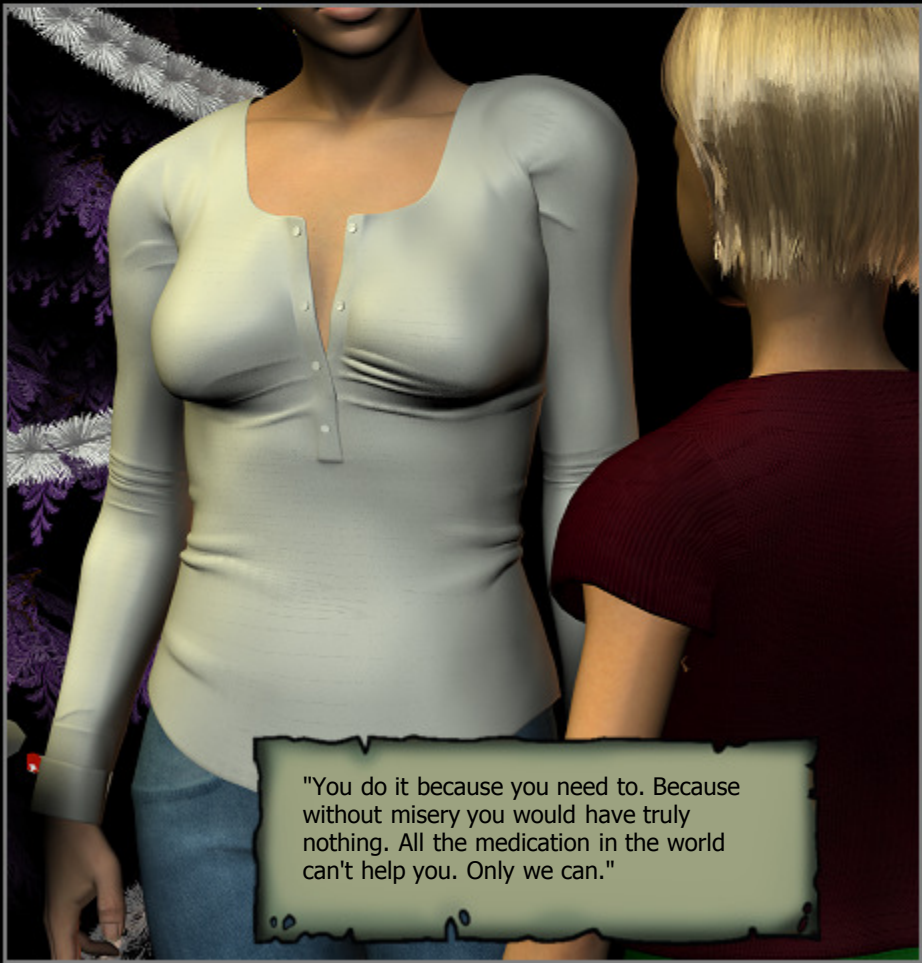
"We wish you a Merry Christmas!"



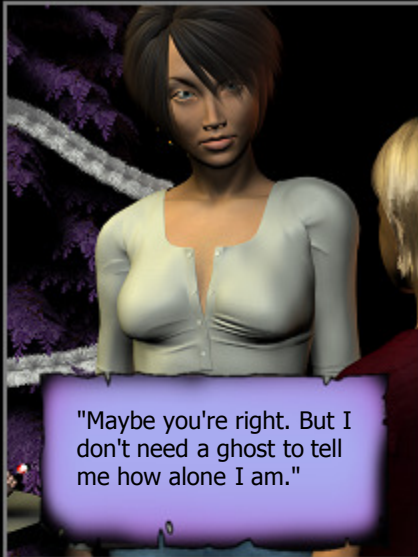
"Mommy. Hold me, Mommy. Please."



"Why am I doing this? What is the point of torturing myself?"



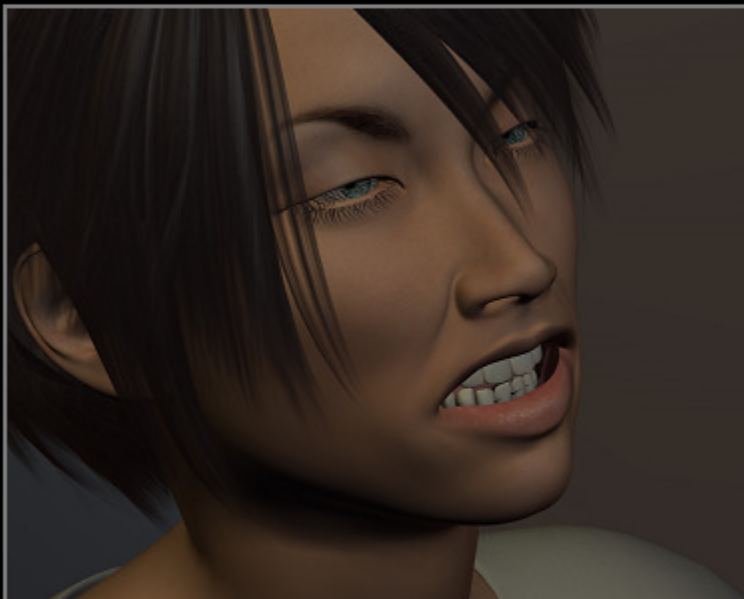
"You do it because you need to. Because without misery you would have truly nothing. All the medication in the world can't help you. Only we can."



"Maybe you're right. But I don't need a ghost to tell me how alone I am."



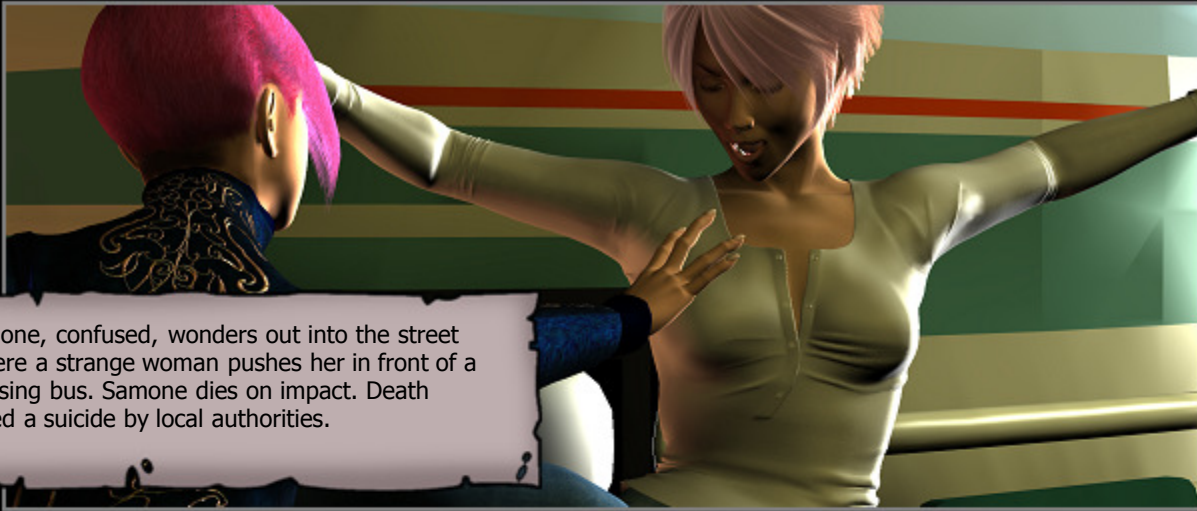
"Yes you do. Mommy. You want me to haunt you."



Simone made her way to the street looking to escape the doll. Her head screamed for her Shine. But she had none. Simone ran into a phone booth to call for help.



"Shine. I need shine now!"



Simone, confused, wonders out into the street where a strange woman pushes her in front of a passing bus. Simone dies on impact. Death ruled a suicide by local authorities.



"My plan worked out perfect."

"Yes it did. She's gone for good."

"Now it's just you and I, forever."

"Yes, James. Forever."

The lessons of life are sometimes twisted. In Simone's case, she was led to believe that her whole life was nothing but bad luck. Her doctor, James Hyde, made sure that her psychosis was in full bloom.

Doctor Hyde discovered that Shine could be used as a tool to manipulate those around him. Simone's death was welcome. It meant one less failure and one less string. But now he had Miki. A women willing to kill for him.