

# Crater





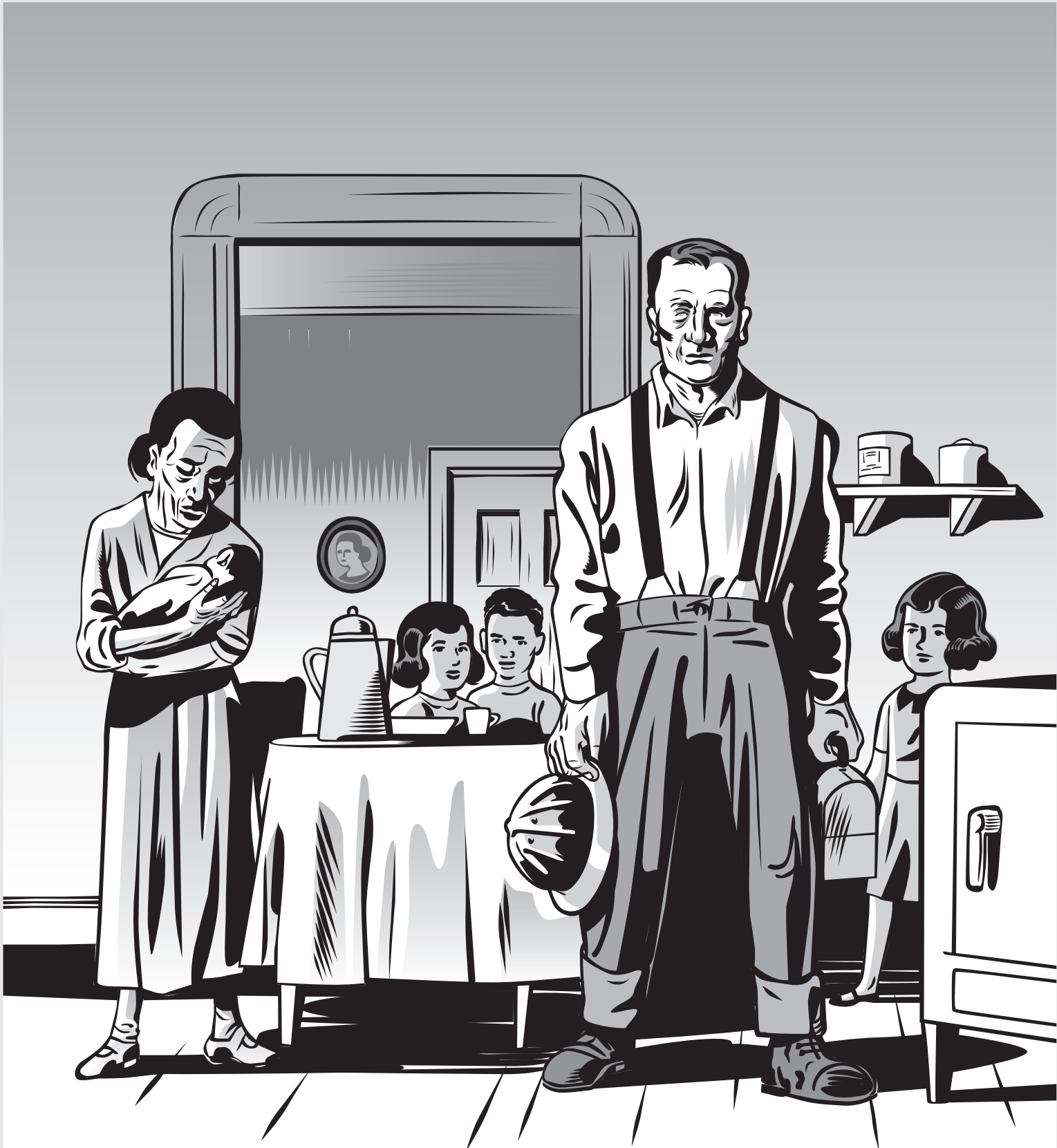
# ALMEDA AND JOE







Maxine was seven when Irene died.  
Years later, she said 'I thought that was what  
was supposed to happen. When you're seven,  
your mother dies. I didn't know any better.'

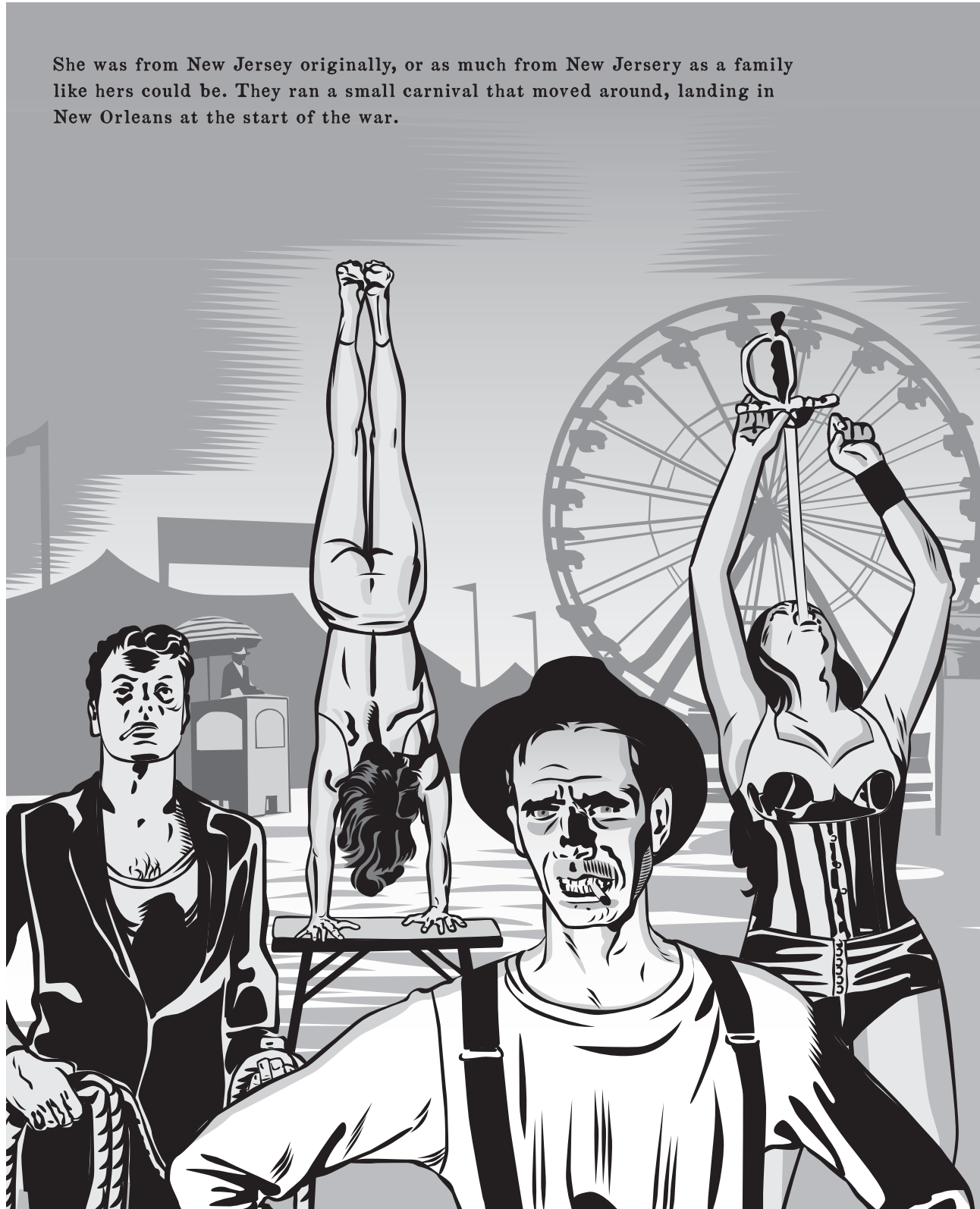


So Joe was a widower, with four children: Bobby, Maxine, Gloria and the baby, Wayne. The war had started the year before. He was working as a crane operator at Johnson shipyard.

At the shipyard, he met  
a woman. Her name was Almeda.

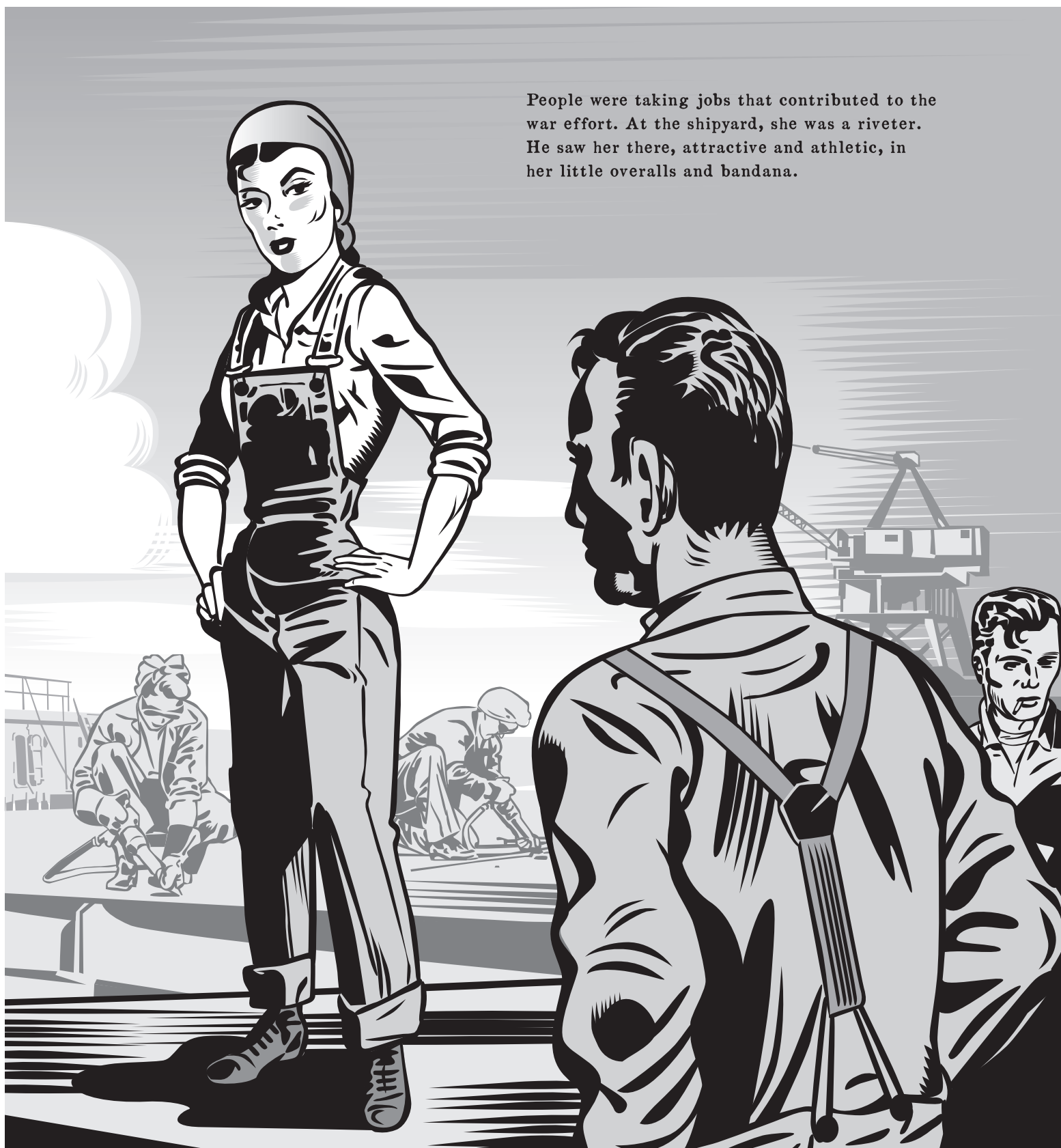


She was from New Jersey originally, or as much from New Jersey as a family like hers could be. They ran a small carnival that moved around, landing in New Orleans at the start of the war.





People were taking jobs that contributed to the war effort. At the shipyard, she was a riveter. He saw her there, attractive and athletic, in her little overalls and bandana.





He started courting her. She had a daughter named Rose from a previous marriage. Did she tell him she was widowed? Divorced? Whatever the stories they told each other, they hit it off.

They got married. He was 34. She was 23.



She moved into the house on Barataria Boulevard in Marrero, a stepmother to a family of four plus Rose.

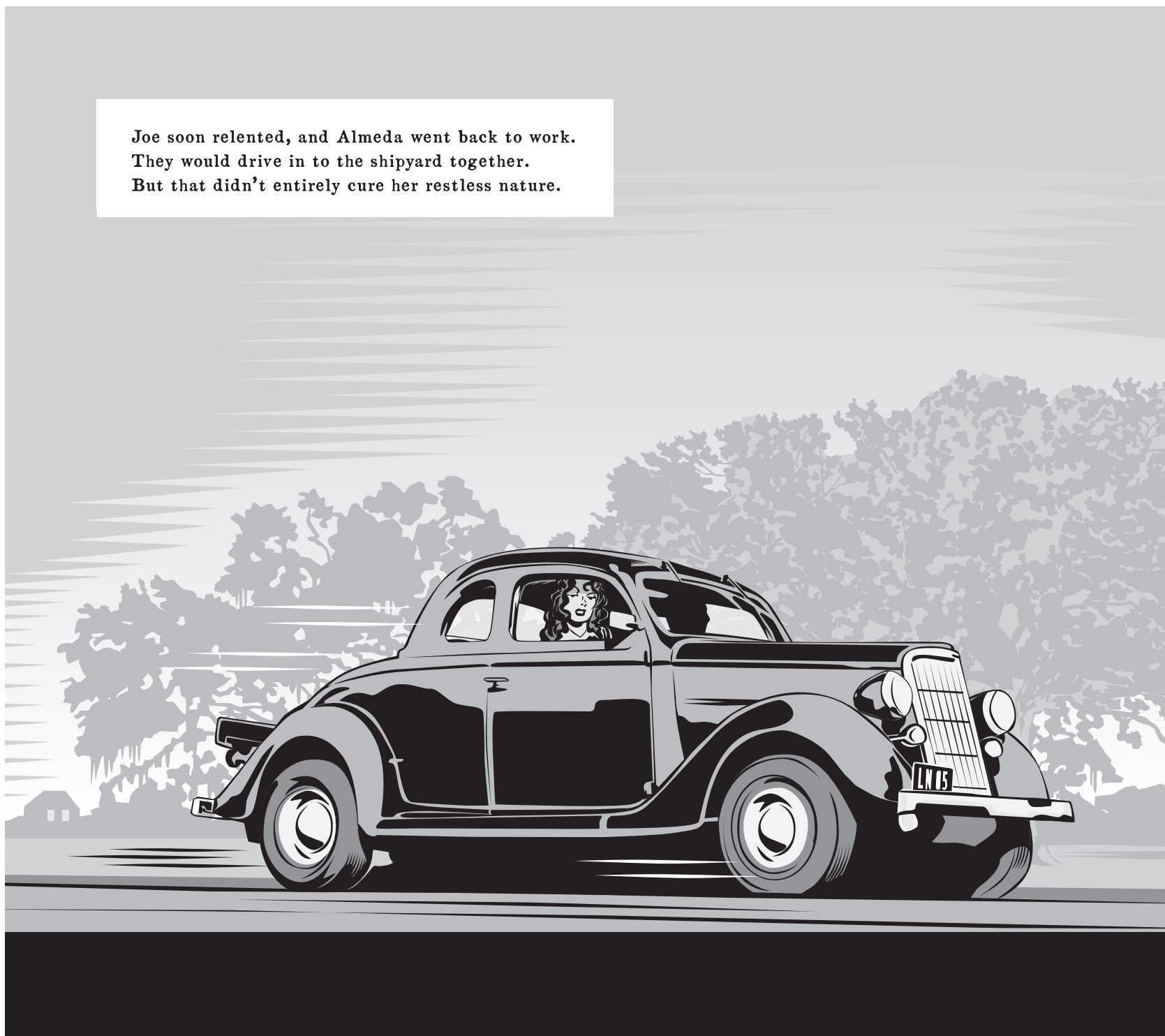


Soon after, Joe's mother-in-law, who was living there taking care of the kids, moved out. That was Alzire Crochet, Irene's mother. She had other relatives in Loreauville who needed her.



Almeda became miserable ... out of her job, cooking and cleaning for an instant family while Joe went back to the shipyard and his buddies ...

Joe soon relented, and Almeda went back to work.  
They would drive in to the shipyard together.  
But that didn't entirely cure her restless nature.





Almeda wanted to go places, do things. They got in the habit of stopping for a few drinks after a hard day at the shipyard. One night at a bar ...





... she got too friendly with some guy.



Joe laid him out, and then he went after Almeda.



He broke her jaw.



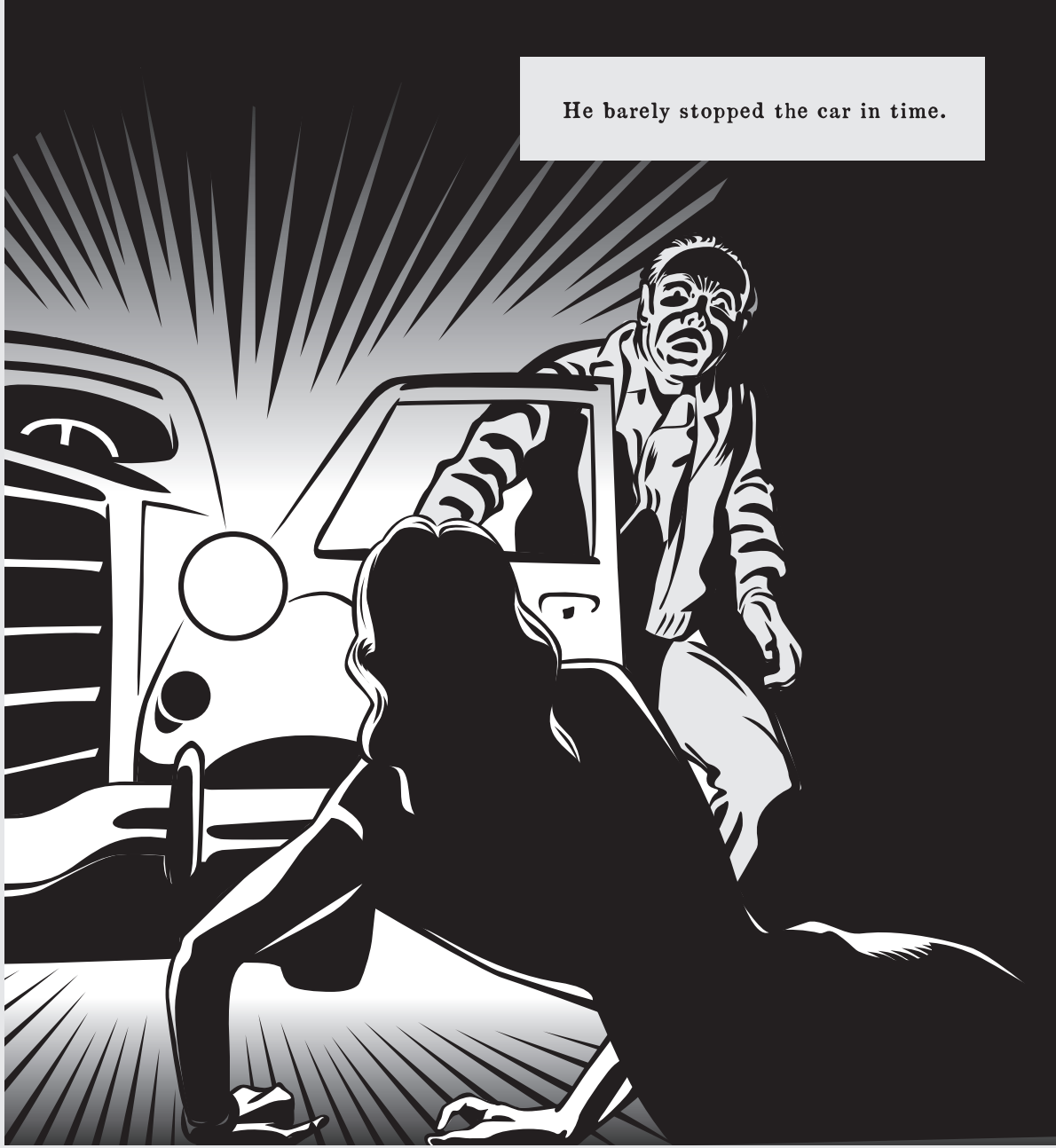


They wired her jaw, and she had to go back home. Her behavior got erratic. She would sometimes leave the kids alone in the house abruptly, just take off for a while. Then she found out she was pregnant.



The situation got worse. One night, Almeda stepped in front of Joe's car as he came down the drive after work, perhaps in an attempt to hurt herself enough to miscarry.

He barely stopped the car in time.



This train of events didn't seem to change Joe's intention of keeping her home. By then she was just too pregnant to change anything. Deanna was born soon after.



Finally, Almeda played her last card. She admitted to Joe that Rose's father was still alive, in fact she was still married to him and another man besides. She had three husbands.



How much was true? It must have been a convincing story. Maybe she showed him a marriage certificate, or he went and talked to her parents. They were in St. Bernard Parish. Whatever the truth, Joe had enough. He sought an annulment. It was granted a couple of months later.





Almeda, Rose and Deana left. Maxine, Gloria and the others didn't see their half-sister again until she was a teenager.



Joe became desperate after that, unable to cope. He convinced Grandma Crochet to come back, but he started drinking heavily as work continued and the war dragged on.





He found out there was a life insurance policy on all military men, \$10,000 to the family of any serviceman killed in action. It must have been enough to make him make up his mind to do something, anything, or maybe he just got drunk. One day in February 1945 he enlisted in the Navy.



He went to training in Rhode Island. He was activated on April 4.  
He was a Seabee. About a month later, Germany surrendered.  
It became a family joke. Joe joins the Navy, Hitler gives up.



But the war wasn't over. His unit was sent to the Pacific.

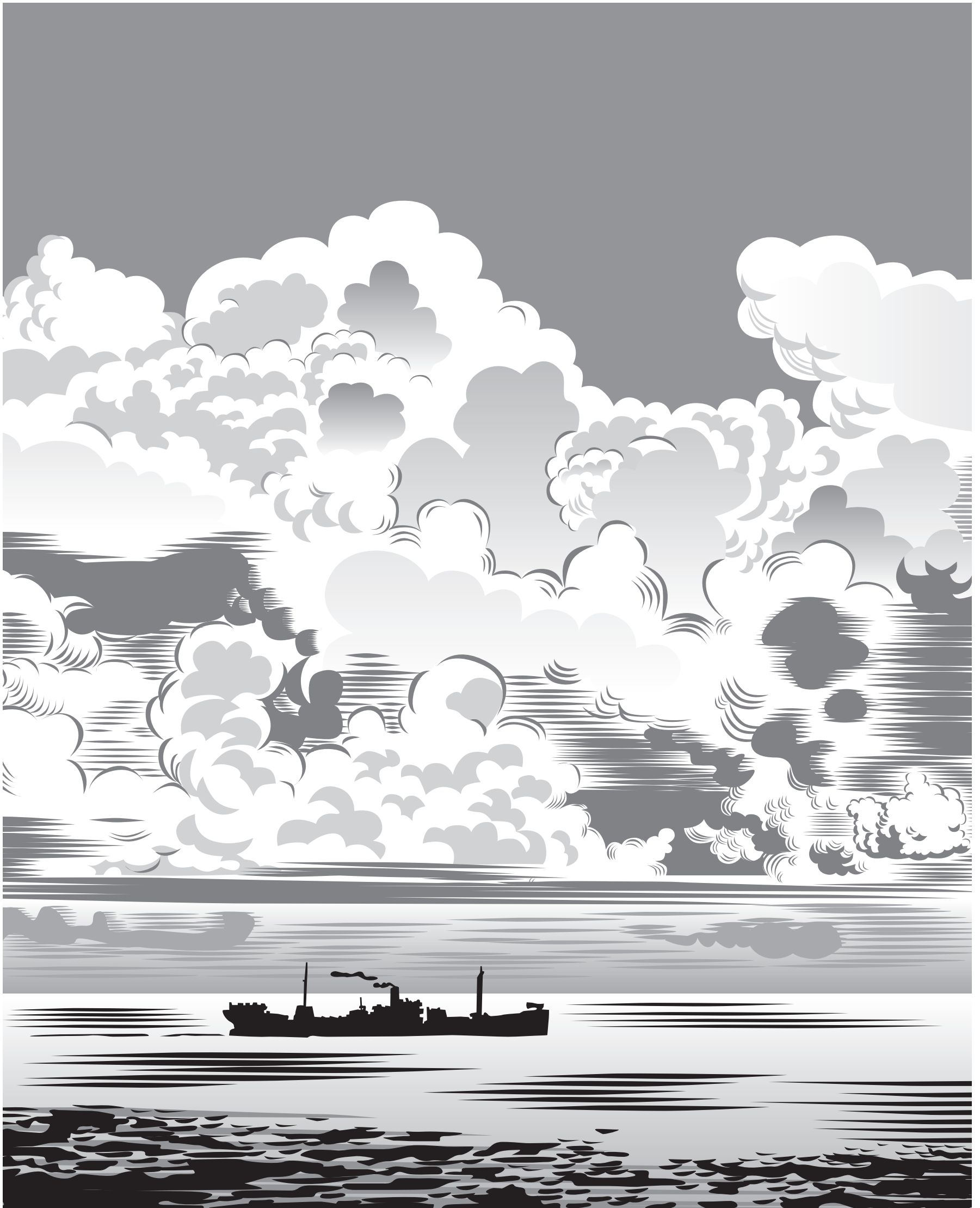


They went to Okinawa. It was the biggest battle of the war. His Seabee battalion wasn't on the front lines, but they were often under attack as they struggled to rebuild airstrips and salvage damaged ships and planes. Joe was sure he was going to die sitting on a tractor.



One night, during the worst of the fighting, he had a dream. Irene came to him, and told him to go back home and marry Beulah. Beulah was her sister.



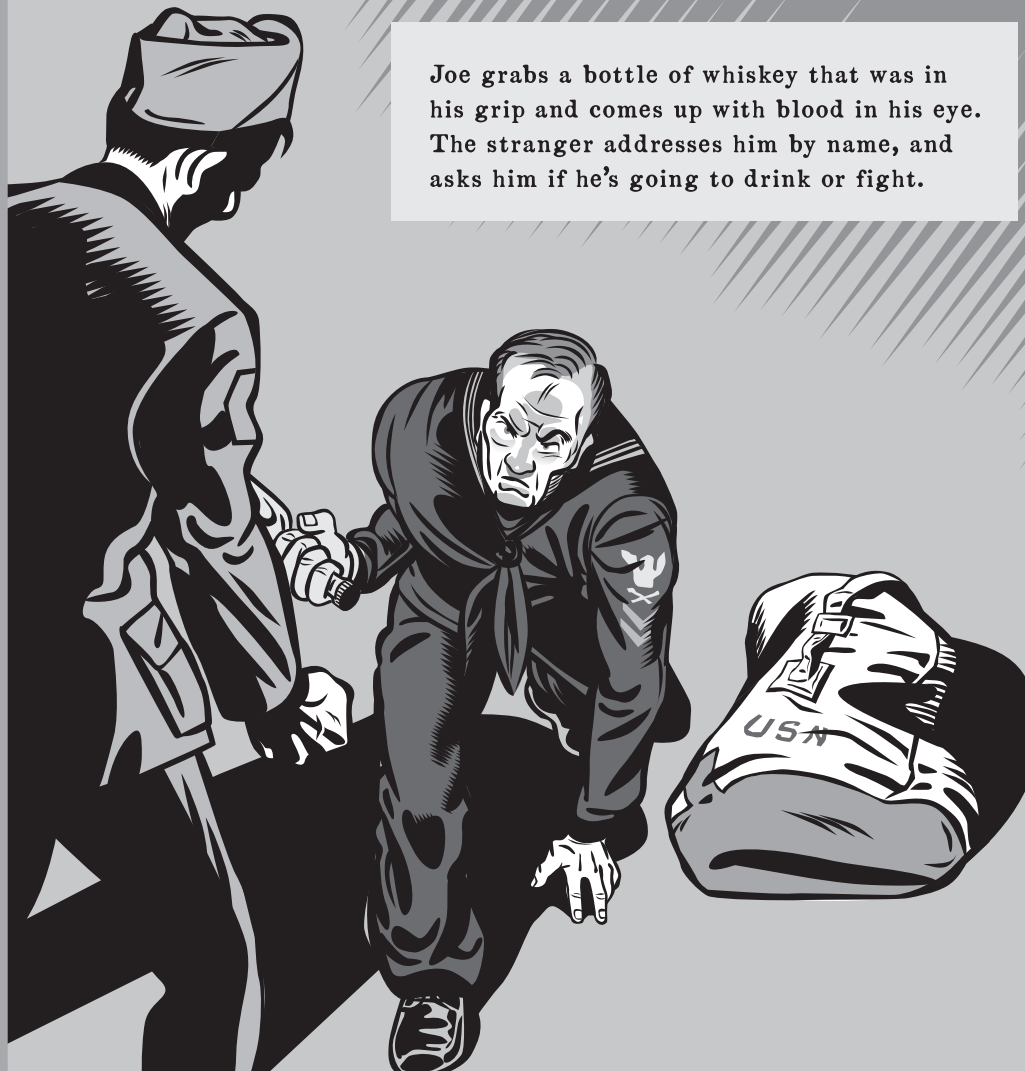


He hung on, and one day the war was over. A couple of months later, he was shipped back to the States.

It must have been in San Francisco that he had a strange encounter. At some depot where he was getting ready to take a train home, a big soldier walks up to him and slugs him in the chest, knocking him down.



Joe grabs a bottle of whiskey that was in his grip and comes up with blood in his eye. The stranger addresses him by name, and asks him if he's going to drink or fight.



At that moment, Joe recognizes him. It's Ralph Breaux, a cousin of Irene's from Loreauville, who Joe knew from his days on Weeks Island before the war. They hug, war survivors.



They proceeded to drink and carouse all the way back to Louisiana.





Joe arrived without warning on Maxine's 11th birthday, November 16, 1945, dirty, drunk and dishevelled.



## **Crater** **Issue no. 4**

**Crater, the journal of a shallow depression,  
is a publishing project of dubious origins.**

**'Almeda and Joe' is a true story. Some elements of the narrative  
had to be reconstructed based on available information.**

**Note about the text: Crater is set in a custom-designed typeface  
called Anton, derived from letter forms in a facsimile copy of a  
Civil War-era issue of Harper's Weekly.**

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