COOL AIR

YOU ASK ME TO EXPLAIN WHY I AM AFRAID OF A DRAUGHT OF COOL AIR...



IN THE SPRING OF 1923 I HAD SECURED SOME DREARY AND UNPROFITABLE MAGAZINE WORK IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK...



ONE EVENING AT ABOUT EIGHT I HEARD A SPATTERING ON THE FLOOR AND BECAME SUDDENLY AWARE THAT I HAD BEEN SMELLING THE PUNGENT ODOUR OF AMMONIA FOR SOME TIME.







I MIGHT NEVER HAVE KNOWN DR. MUÑOZ HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE HEART ATTACK THAT SUDDENLY SEIZED ME ONE FORENOON AS I SAT WRITING IN MY ROOM.



DOCTOR... PLEASE. MY HEART.

...REMEMBERING WHAT THE LANDLADY HAD SAID ABOUT THE INVALID'S HELP OF THE INJURED WORKMAN, I DRAGGED MYSELF UPSTAIRS...

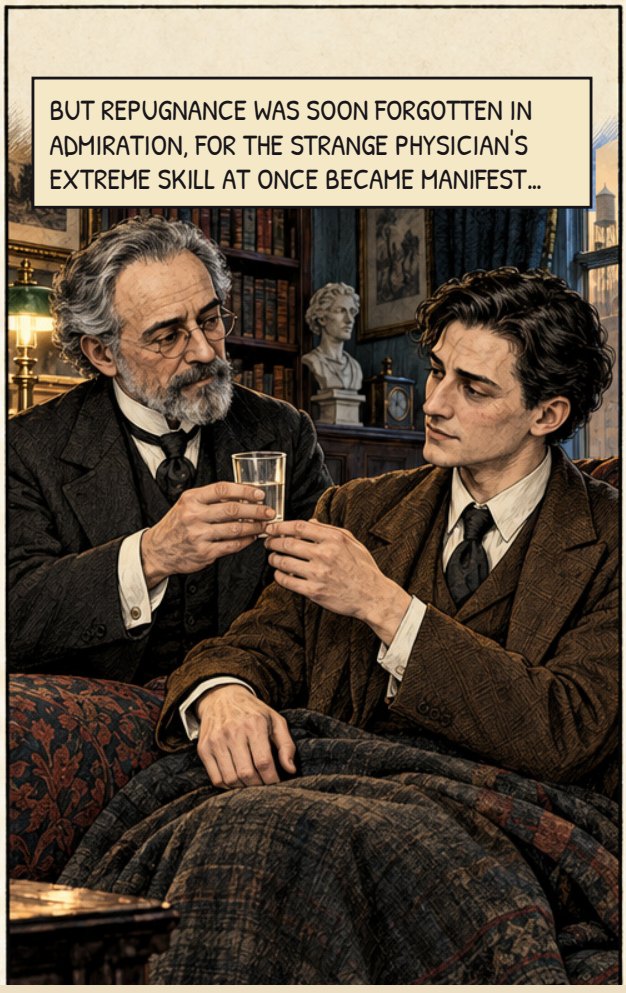


A RUSH OF COOL AIR GREETED ME; AND THOUGH THE DAY WAS ONE OF THE HOTTEST OF LATE JUNE, I SHIVERED AS I CROSSED THE THRESHOLD...

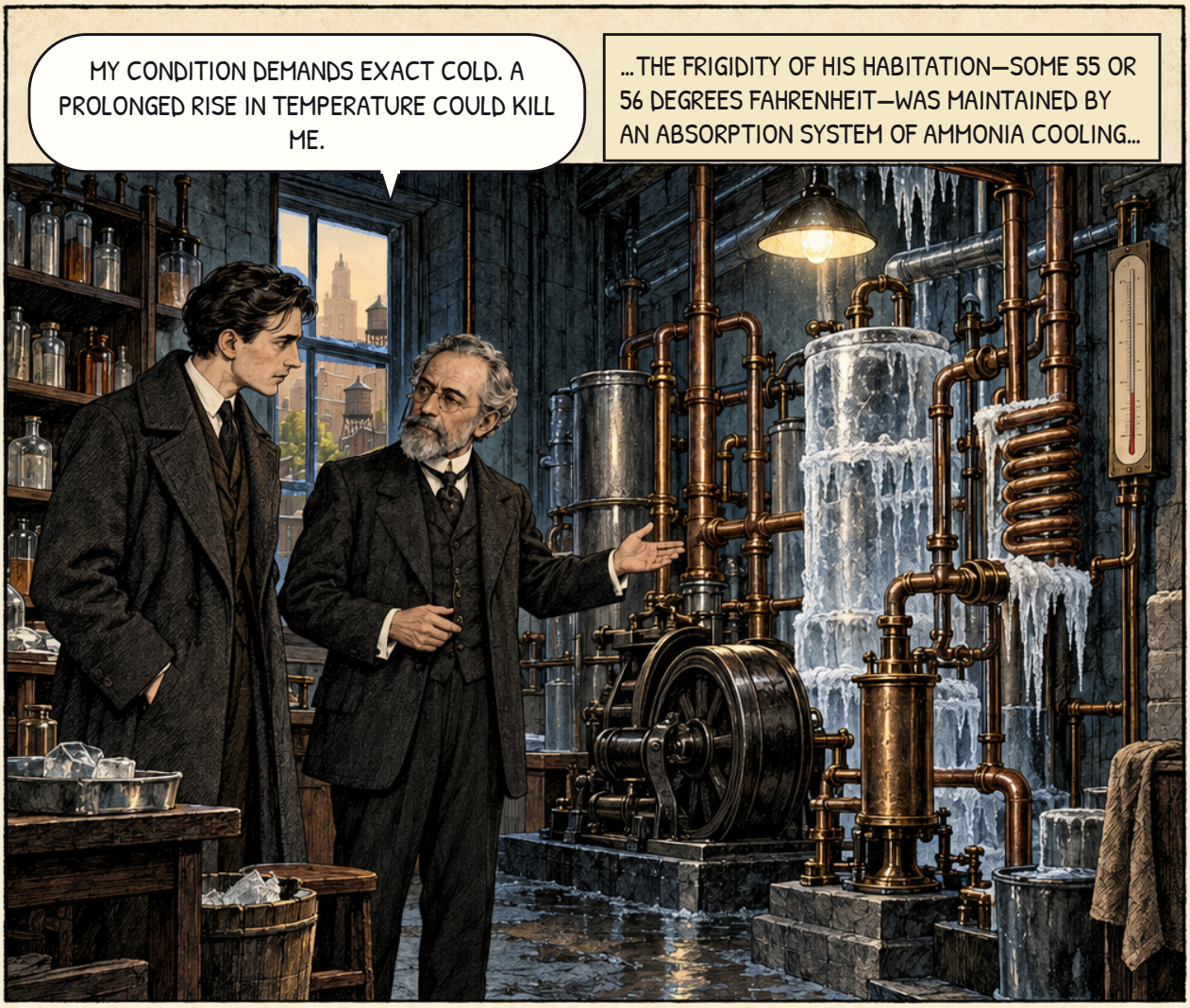


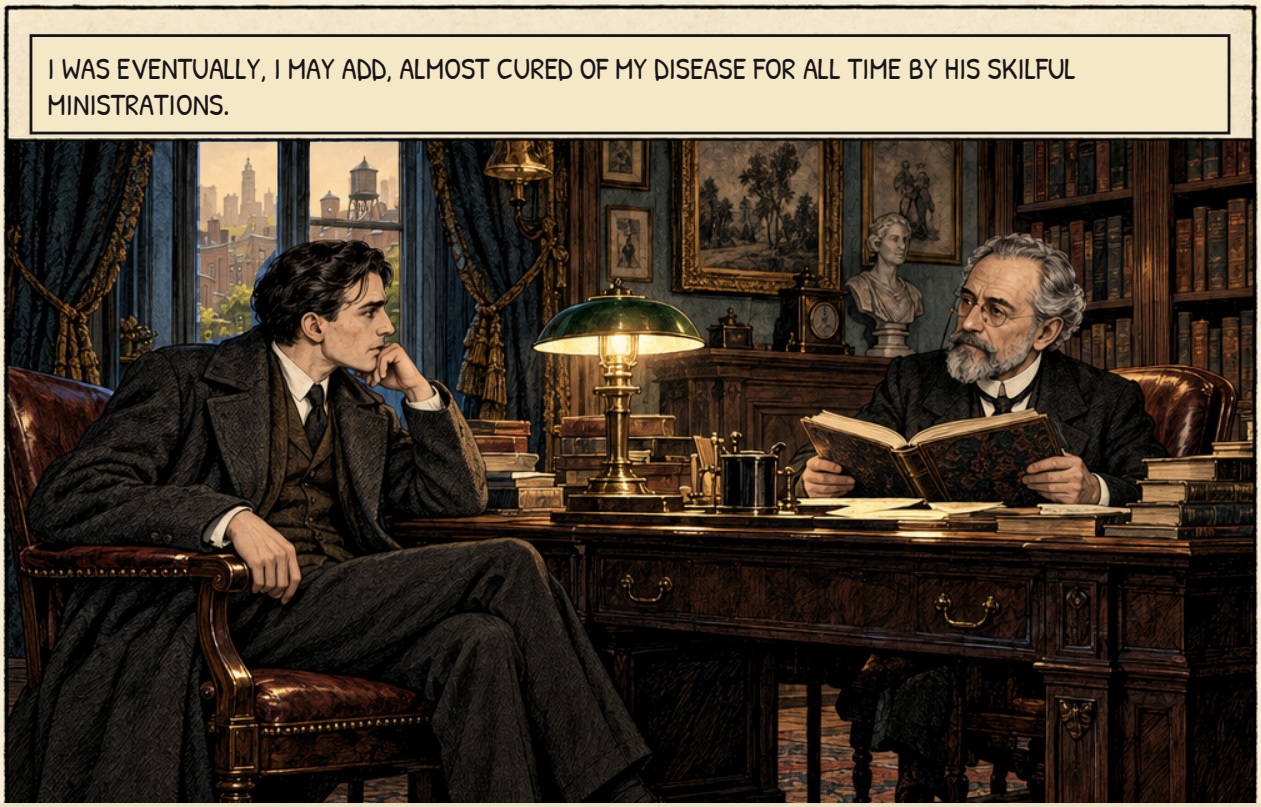


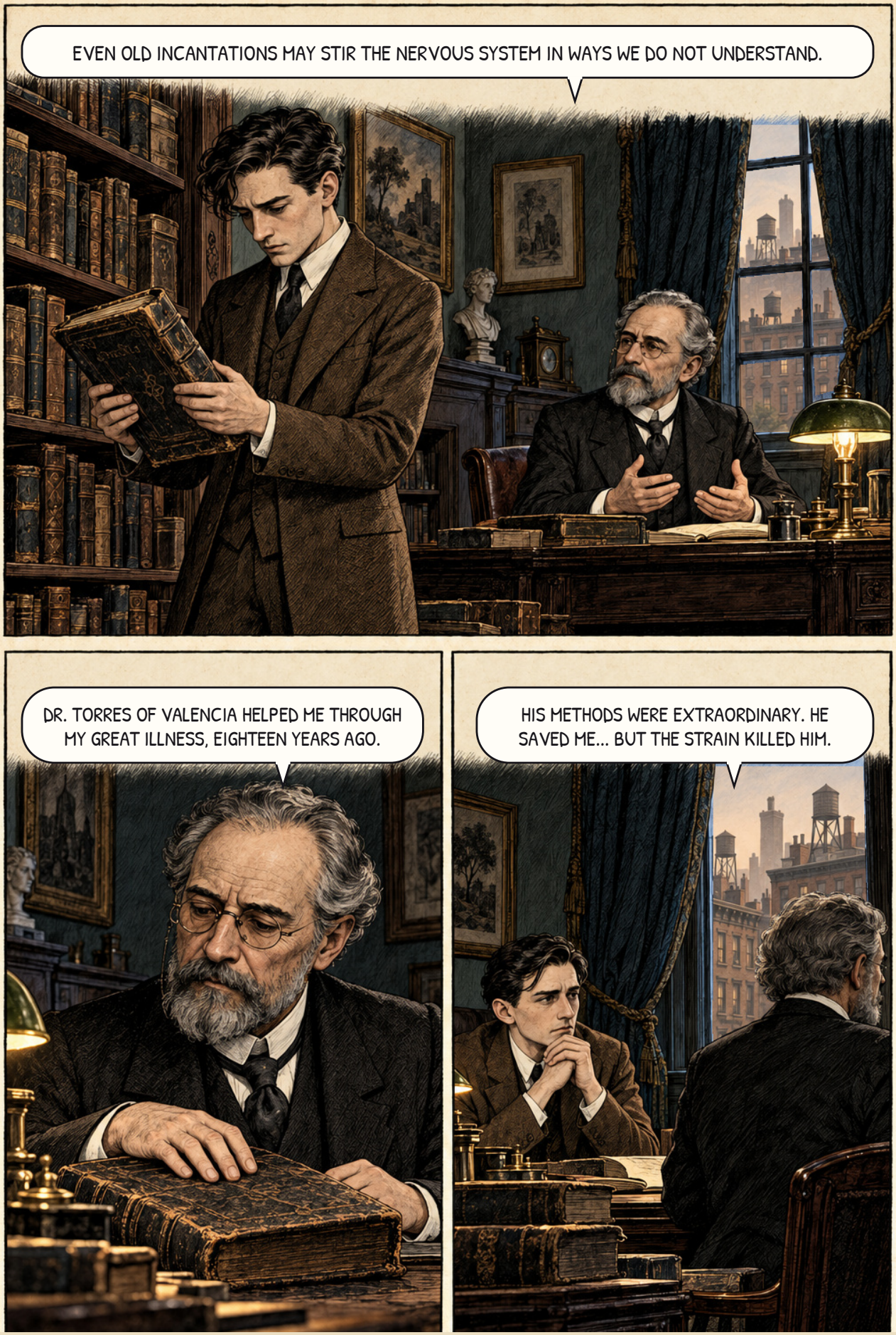
BUT REPUGNANCE WAS SOON FORGOTTEN IN ADMIRATION, FOR THE STRANGE PHYSICIAN'S EXTREME SKILL AT ONCE BECAME MANIFEST...




I HAVE SPENT MY FORTUNE FIGHTING DEATH. IT IS MY BITTEREST ENEMY.
WILL AND CONSCIOUSNESS MAY OUTLAST THE ORGANS—IF THE BODY IS CAREFULLY PRESERVED.
...I COULD NOT EVEN PERCEIVE THAT HE BREATHED AS THE FLUENT SENTENCES ROLLED URBANELY OUT.
PERHAPS I SHALL TEACH YOU TO EXIST WITHOUT A HEART AT ALL.

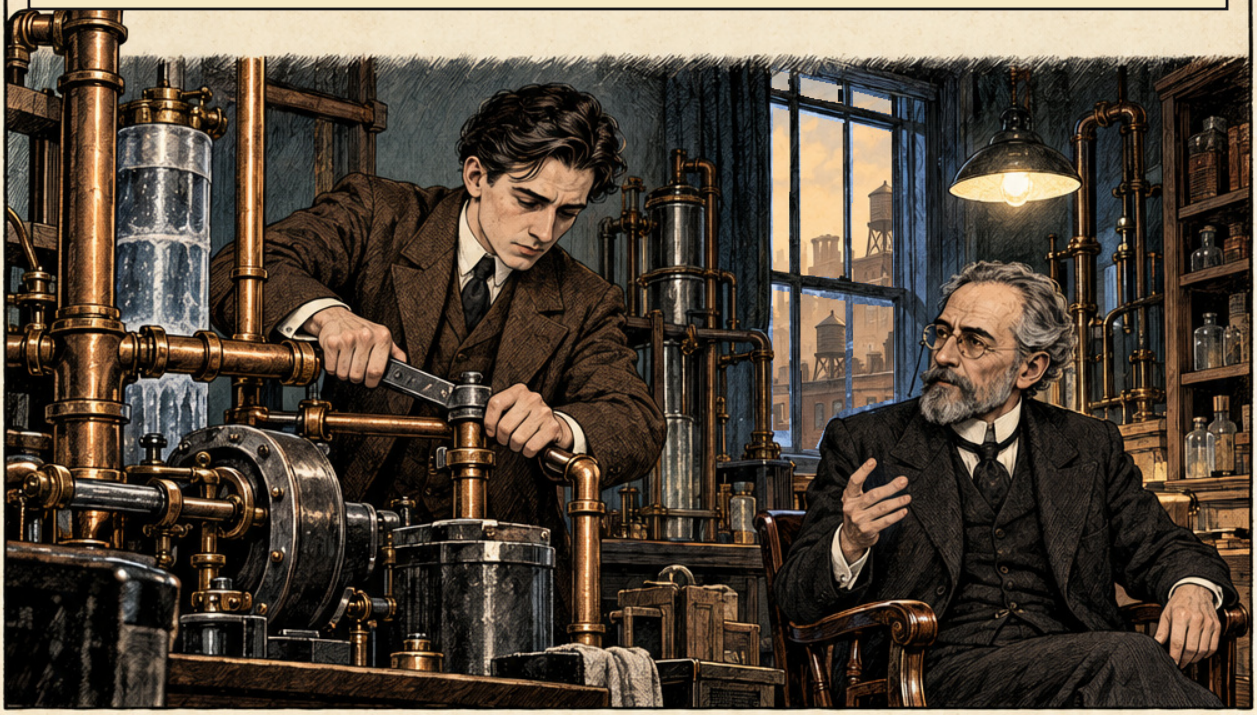

MY CONDITION DEMANDS EXACT COLD. A PROLONGED RISE IN TEMPERATURE COULD KILL ME.
...THE FRIGIDITY OF HIS HABITATION—SOME 55 OR 56 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT—WAS MAINTAINED BY AN ABSORPTION SYSTEM OF AMMONIA COOLING...


I WAS EVENTUALLY, I MAY ADD, ALMOST CURED OF MY DISEASE FOR ALL TIME BY HIS SKILFUL MINISTRATIONS.


EVEN OLD INCANTATIONS MAY STIR THE NERVOUS SYSTEM IN WAYS WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
DR. TORRES OF VALENCIA HELPED ME THROUGH MY GREAT ILLNESS, EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO.
HIS METHODS WERE EXTRAORDINARY. HE SAVED ME... BUT THE STRAIN KILLED HIM.


THE LIVID ASPECT OF HIS COUNTENANCE WAS INTENSIFIED, HIS VOICE BECAME MORE HOLLOW AND INDISTINCT...
...HIS ROOM SMELLED LIKE THE VAULT OF A SEPULCHRED PHARAOH IN THE VALLEY OF KINGS.
COLDER. WE MUST MAKE IT COLDER.

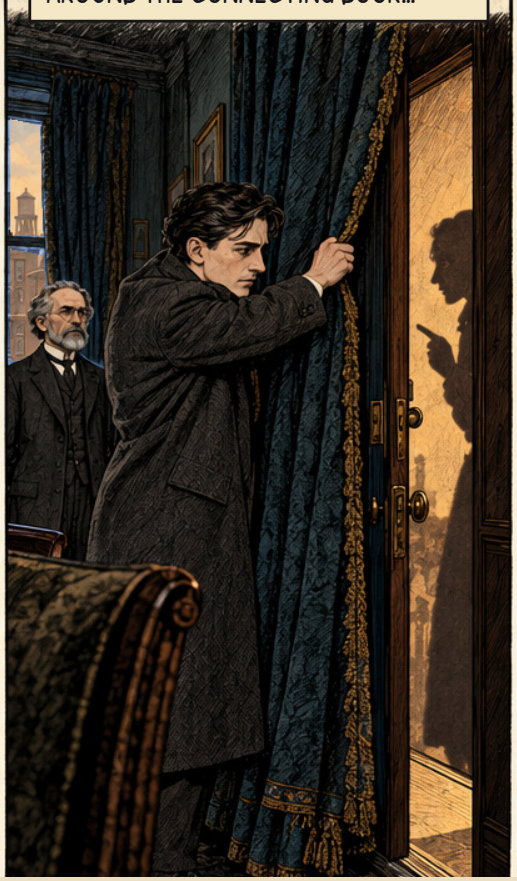
...WITH MY AID HE AMPLIFIED THE AMMONIA PIPING OF HIS ROOM... TILL HE COULD KEEP THE TEMPERATURE AS LOW AS 34° OR 40° AND FINALLY EVEN 28°...

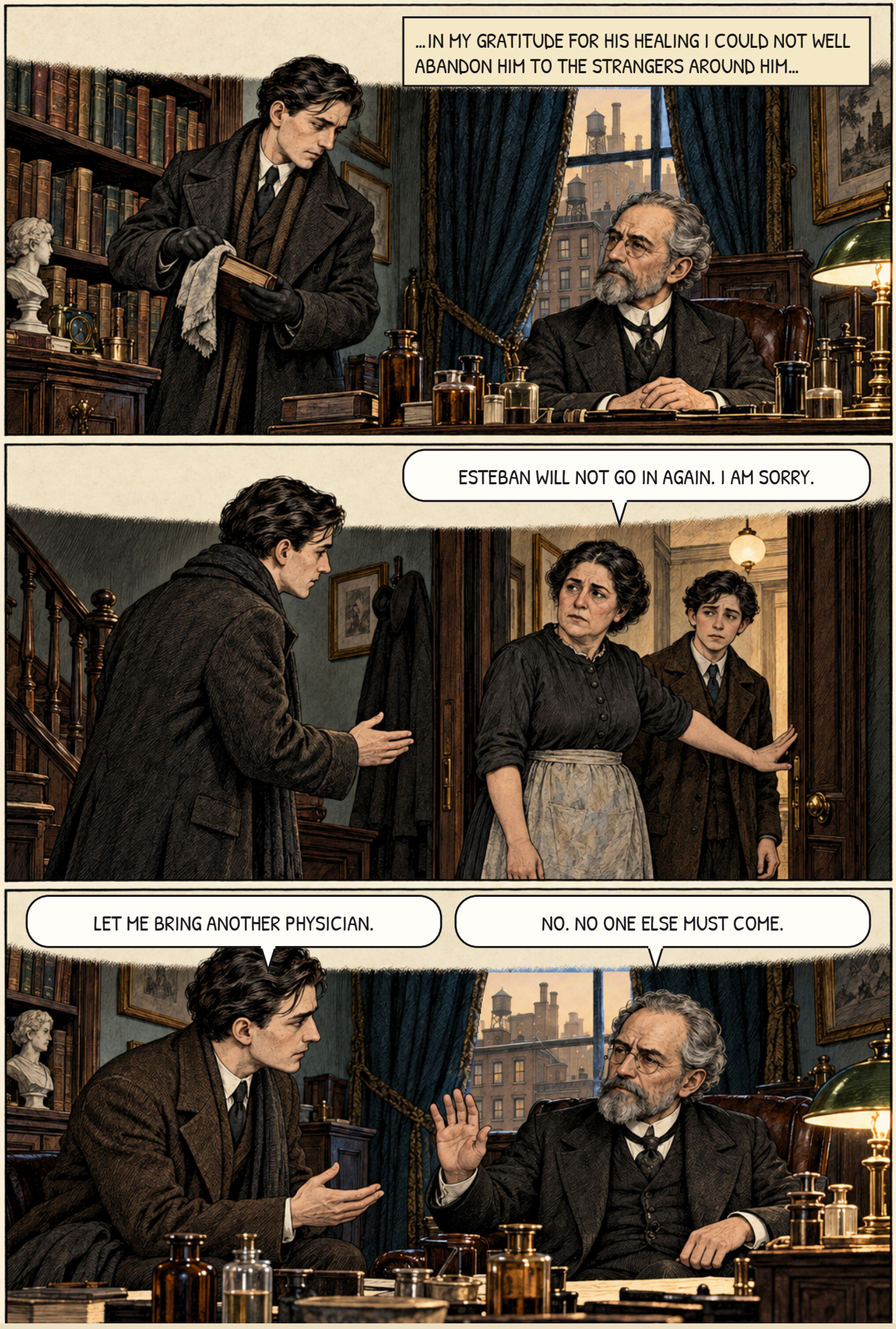


...THE BATHROOM AND LABORATORY, OF COURSE, BEING LESS CHILLED, IN ORDER THAT WATER MIGHT NOT FREEZE...



THE TENANT ADJOINING HIM COMPLAINED OF THE ICY AIR FROM AROUND THE CONNECTING DOOR...




...IN MY GRATITUDE FOR HIS HEALING I COULD NOT WELL ABANDON HIM TO THE STRANGERS AROUND HIM...
ESTEBAN WILL NOT GO IN AGAIN. I AM SORRY.
LET ME BRING ANOTHER PHYSICIAN.
NO. NO ONE ELSE MUST COME.

THE PRETENCE OF EATING, ALWAYS CURIOUSLY LIKE A FORMALITY WITH HIM, HE VIRTUALLY ABANDONED...



ONE SEPTEMBER DAY AN UNEXPECTED GLIMPSE OF HIM INDUCED AN EPILEPTIC FIT IN A MAN WHO HAD COME TO REPAIR HIS ELECTRIC DESK LAMP...



...A FIT FOR WHICH HE PRESCRIBED EFFECTIVELY WHILST KEEPING HIMSELF WELL OUT OF SIGHT.




THEN, IN THE MIDDLE OF OCTOBER, THE HORROR OF HORRORS CAME WITH STUPEFYING SUDDENNESS. ONE NIGHT ABOUT ELEVEN THE PUMP OF THE REFRIGERATING MACHINE BROKE DOWN...
...WITHIN THREE HOURS THE PROCESS OF AMMONIA COOLING BECAME IMPOSSIBLE.
IT NEEDS A NEW PISTON. I CANNOT GET ONE UNTIL MORNING.


...ONCE A SPASM CAUSED HIM TO CLAP HIS HANDS TO HIS EYES AND RUSH INTO THE BATHROOM.
HE GROPED HIS WAY OUT WITH FACE TIGHTLY BANDAGED, AND I NEVER SAW HIS EYES AGAIN.
ICE. BRING ALL YOU CAN FIND. QUICKLY.
...AT ABOUT 5 A.M. THE DOCTOR RETIRED TO THE BATHROOM...


...ALL THE ICE I COULD OBTAIN AT ALL-NIGHT DRUG STORES AND CAFETERIAS.
...I COULD HEAR A RESTLESS SPLASHING WITHIN, AND A THICK VOICE CROAKING OUT THE ORDER...
MORE—MORE!
AT LENGTH A WARM DAY BROKE, AND THE SHOPS OPENED ONE BY ONE.


FETCH THE ICE WHILE I FIND THE PART. PLEASE.
MOTHER SAYS I MUST NOT.
FINALLY I HIRED A SEEDY-LOOKING LOAFER WHOM I ENCOUNTERED ON THE CORNER OF EIGHTH AVENUE...
KEEP TAKING ICE TO DR. MUÑOZ. I WILL BE BACK WITH THE MECHANICS.

...THE HOURS SLIPPING BY IN A BREATHLESS, FOODLESS ROUND OF VAIN TELEPHONING, AND A HECTIC QUEST FROM PLACE TO PLACE...



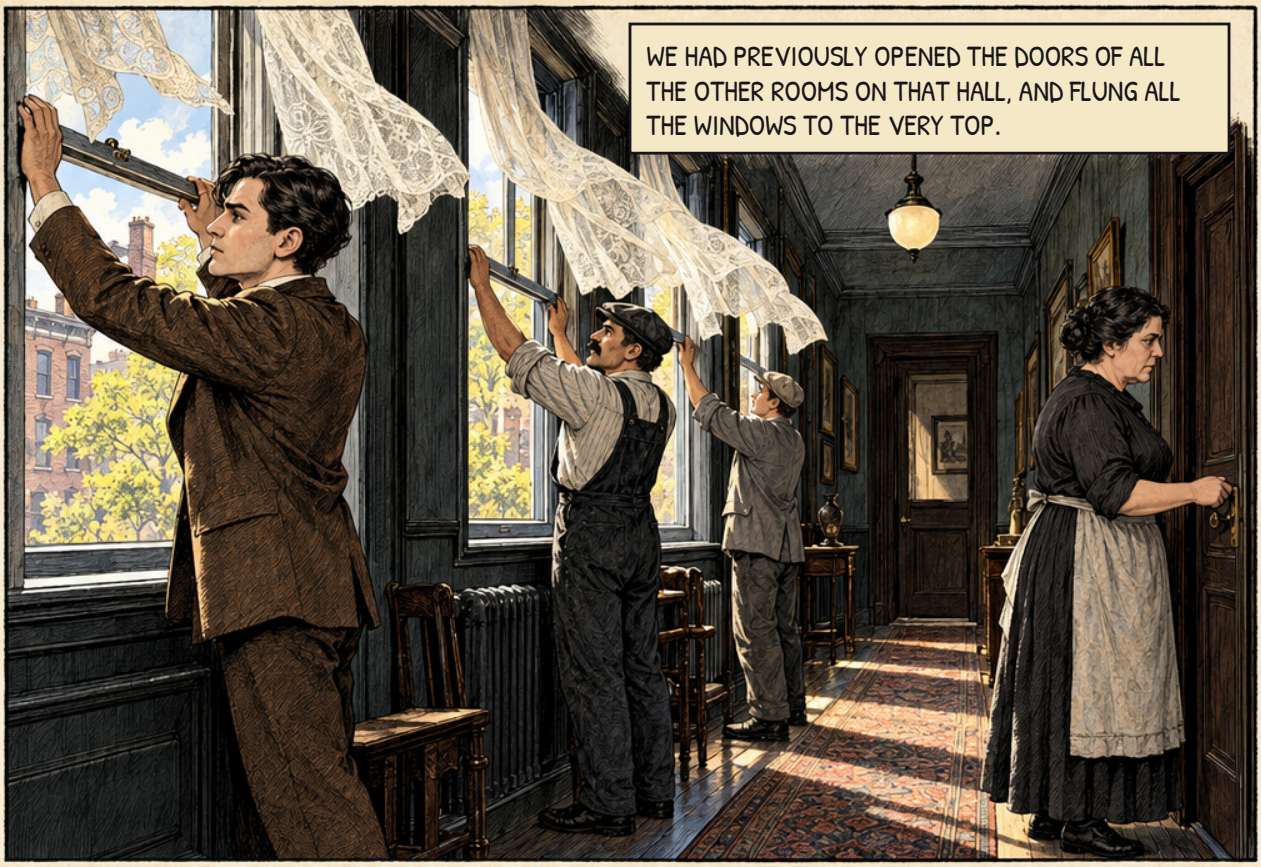
ABOUT NOON I ENCOUNTERED A SUITABLE SUPPLY HOUSE FAR DOWNTOWN...



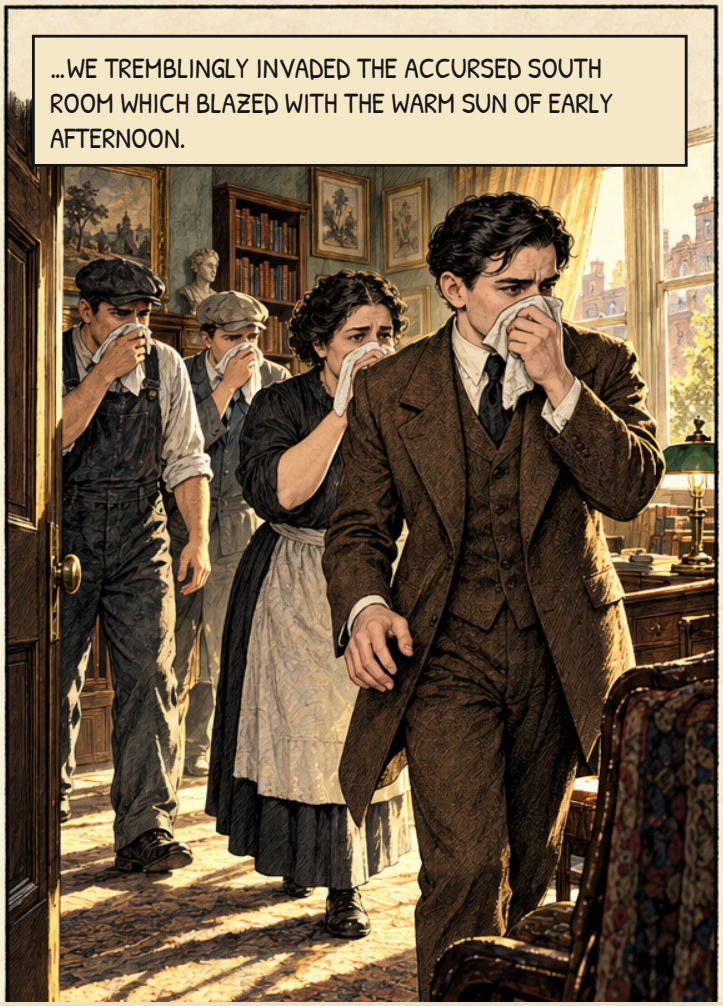
...AT APPROXIMATELY 1:30 P.M. ARRIVED AT MY BOARDING-PLACE WITH THE NECESSARY PARAPHERNALIA AND TWO STURDY AND INTELLIGENT MECHANICS.



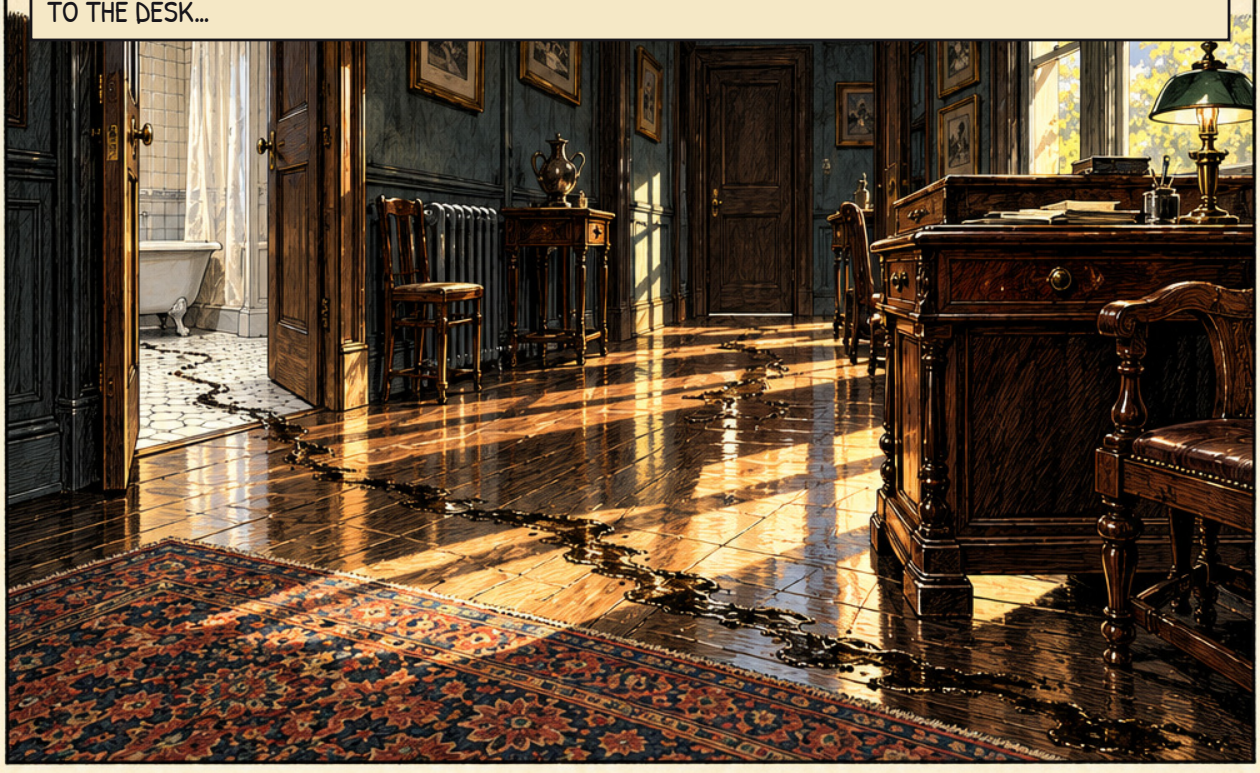

BLACK TERROR, HOWEVER, HAD PRECEDED ME.
THE MAN WITH THE ICE RAN AWAY SCREAMING. AFTER HIS SECOND DELIVERY.
THERE WAS NO SOUND WITHIN SAVE A NAMELESS SORT OF SLOW, THICK DRIPPING.


WE HAD PREVIOUSLY OPENED THE DOORS OF ALL THE OTHER ROOMS ON THAT HALL, AND FLUNG ALL THE WINDOWS TO THE VERY TOP.


...THE LANDLADY FOUND A WAY TO TURN THE KEY FROM THE OUTSIDE WITH SOME WIRE DEVICE.


...WE TREMBLINGLY INVADED THE ACCURSED SOUTH ROOM WHICH BLAZED WITH THE WARM SUN OF EARLY AFTERNOON.

A KIND OF DARK, SLIMY TRAIL LED FROM THE OPEN BATHROOM DOOR TO THE HALL DOOR, AND THENCE TO THE DESK...



SOMETHING WAS SCRAWLED THERE IN PENCIL IN AN AWFUL, BLIND HAND...



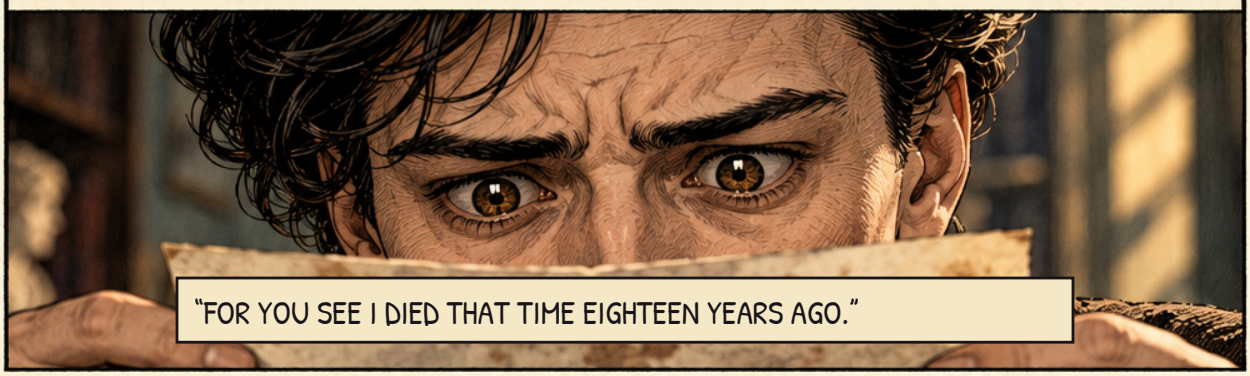
THEN THE TRAIL LED TO THE COUCH AND ENDED UNUTTERABLY. WHAT WAS, OR HAD BEEN, ON THE COUCH I CANNOT AND DARE NOT SAY HERE.



"THE END... IS HERE. NO MORE ICE—THE MAN LOOKED AND RAN AWAY. WARMER EVERY MINUTE, AND THE TISSUES CAN'T LAST."



"DR. TORRES KNEW, BUT THE SHOCK KILLED HIM... IT HAD TO BE DONE MY WAY—ARTIFICIAL PRESERVATION—"



WHETHER I BELIEVE THEM NOW I HONESTLY DO NOT KNOW. ...ALL THAT I CAN SAY IS THAT I HATE THE SMELL OF AMMONIA, AND GROW FAINT AT A DRAUGHT OF UNUSUALLY COOL AIR.

