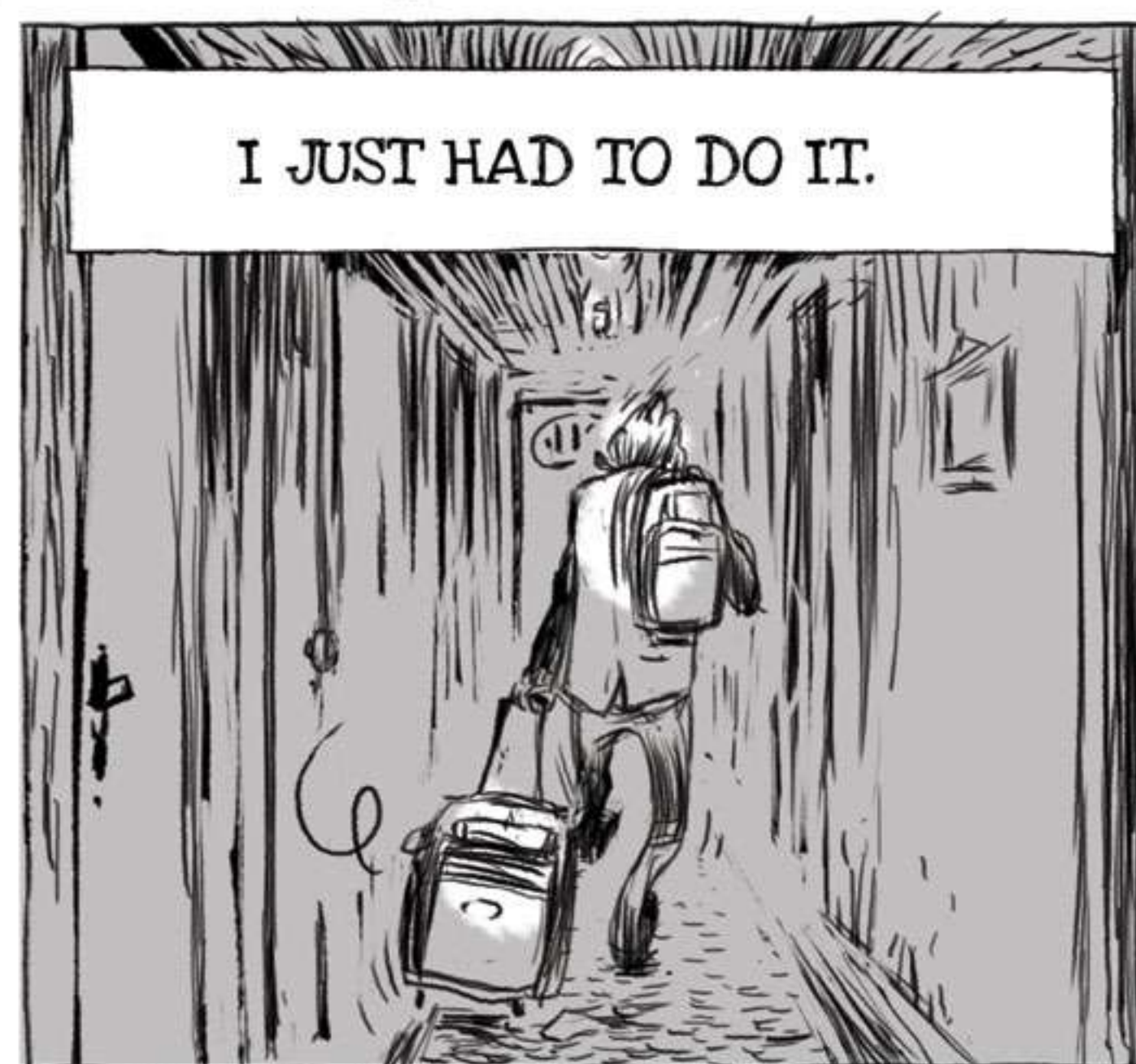


THE EMPEROR'S WINE

by ORIOL MALET





AS I GOT THERE WE WENT UP THE TERRACE, WITH A BOTTLE OF WINE AND SUSHI. THERE'S NO BETTER WAY FOR TREATING JET LAG. MARION WAS LETTING ME STAY AT HER PLACE. SHE DIDN'T KNOW IT, BUT SHE WAS BEING PART OF MY CRAZINESS, AND THAT DESERVED AT LEAST AN EXPLANATION, AND A TASTING.

OK.

YOU DONT SHARE THE EMPEROR'S DESCRIPTIONS OR PUNCTUATIONS ABOUT WINES.

BUT, WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

THE EMPEROR IS A FRAUD!

THERE'S NOT EVEN ONE EVALUATION THAT MATCHES WITH MINE.

NOT EVEN ONE!



YOU MUST BE THE ONLY ONE THEN, BECAUSE FOR SOME REASON HE'S ENDED UP BEING THE MOST RENOWNED WORLDWIDE!

WELL, OK, WHY DON'T YOU TASTE AGAIN THE WINE I BROUGHT YOU. IT'S AN "EDU&COCA" 2006 VINTAGE, DO CATALUNYA.

MEANWHILE, LET ME READ YOU THE EMPEROR'S DESCRIPTION FROM A WHILE AGO.



OK, SPILL IT.

"THE EDU & COCA 2006 IT'S A SURPRISE FOR THOSE OF US WHO AREN'T USED TO CERTAIN GIFTS FOR DEMANDING PALATES".

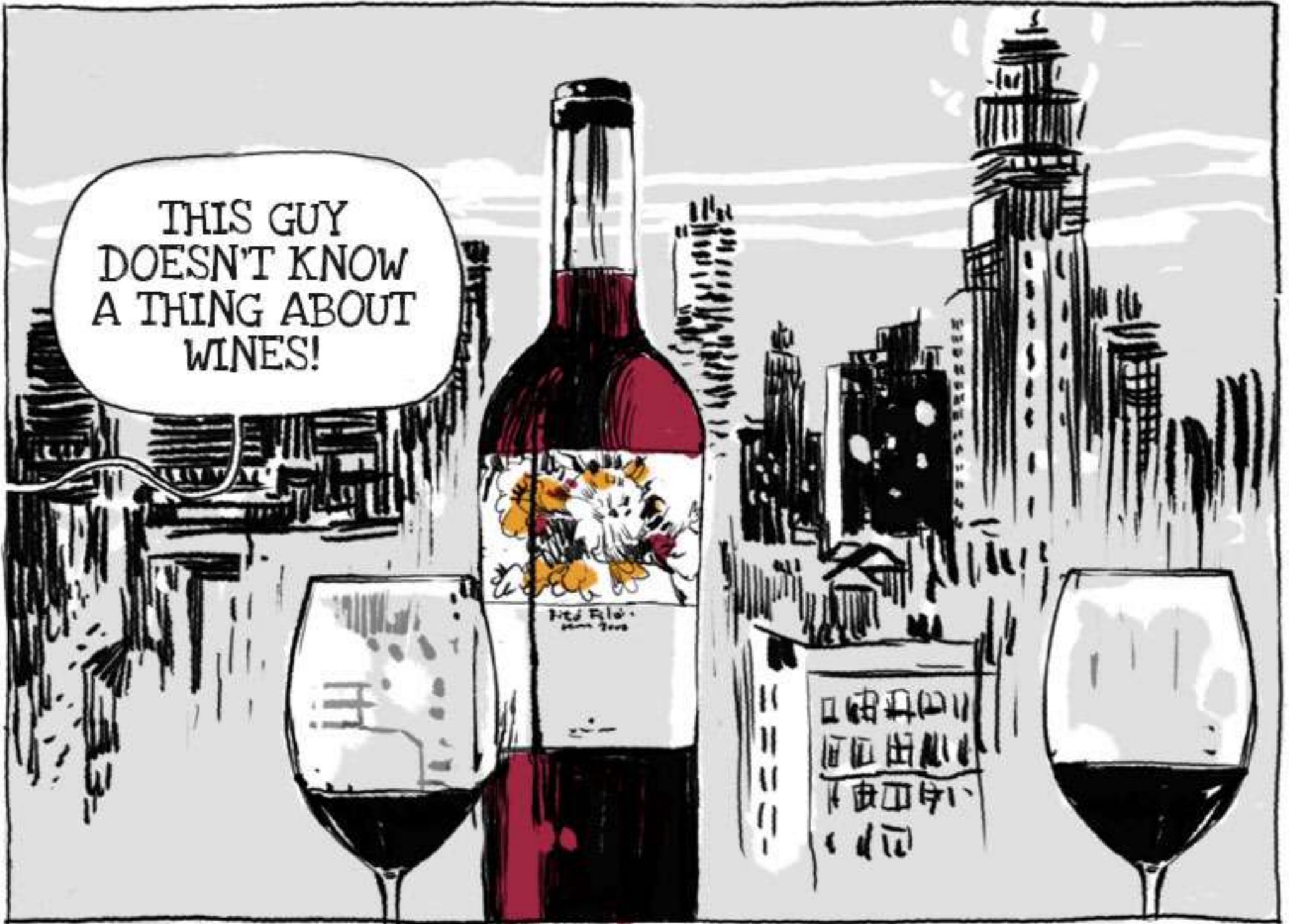
"IT'S A SUBLIMELY FRUITY AND SWEET WINE. YET, ITS STRONG AROMA BUT SPECIALLY ITS TANGY TASTE, WHICH ARE UNPLEASANT AT TIMES, MAKE IT CAPRICIOUSLY AGGRESSIVE".

IT MANAGES TO BE A VALUABLE PARADOX ONLY AVAILABLE FOR A FEW: IT'S FRESH, FANCY AND THICK AT THE SAME TIME, BUT SHORT AND GENTLE".



...

SO?



THIS GUY DOESN'T KNOW A THING ABOUT WINES!



MARION! IS EVERYTHING OK?

YES, NO PROBLEM, I WAS JUST CALLING TO TELL YOU THAT YOUR LOFT IN BARCELONA IS SO COMFY.

ARE YOU ENJOYING YOUR TIME AT MY PLACE?

LISTEN... BE DISCREET, OKAY?

OH, AND HAVE YOU MOVED FORWARD IN YOUR RESEARCHES, "MR. POIROT"?

OF COURSE I HAD MOVED FORWARD! THE WINDOWS FROM THE EMPEROR'S APARTMENT AND MARION'S FACED TO THE SAME INNER PATIO. FROM THERE, I COULD STUDY ALL HIS MOVEMENTS.



THE EMPEROR DID THE SAME EVERYDAY.

HE HAD GUESTS EVERY NIGHT. AT A CERTAIN POINT, HE'D OPEN A BOTTLE, MAKE A TOAST,

BRING THE GLASS TO HIS LIPS, PRETEND TO SIP IT BUT DIDN'T DO IT.

HE THEN MADE UP AN EXCUSE, Poured THE GLASS INTO THE SINK AND TOOK A PILL FROM A MEDICINE I COULDN'T TELL. EVERY SINGLE NIGHT. WELL, EVERY NIGHT EXCEPT FOR THURSDAYS, WHEN HE'D DRESSED UP MORE THAN USUAL AND GO TO THE VILLAGE VANGUARD, TWO STREETS A LITTLE BIT FURTHER. ONCE THERE, FROM A PRIVILEGED TABLE, HE ENJOYED THE JAZZ CONCERTS, HIS TRULY PASSION.

THAT THURSDAY THOUGH, SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT



SO, YOU USED THE WINDOW TO SNEAK IN!

THE MISTAKE I NEEDED.

YOU COULD HAVE KILLED YOURSELF, YOUNG MAN. I KNEW BITTER CRITICS HATED ME, BUT THIS IS WAY TOO FAR!



SOMETIMES, THE LOVE FOR WHAT YOU ADORE IS WHAT MAKES YOU GO TOO FAR. AND I ADORE THE WORLD OF WINES.

WELL... I SEE. LISTEN, YOU KNOW THE BOTTLE YOU JUST OPENED IS WORTH MORE THAN WHAT YOU CAN EARN IN 20 YEARS AS A SOMMELIER, RIGHT?

YES, I CAN TELL THAT! BESIDES, YOU SET THE PRICE. HOWEVER, AS MUCH AS I TRY, I CAN'T QUITE FEEL THE "TOUCHES OF WHITE PEARL AND STAGNANT AIR FROM THE ADRIATIC" THAT YOU ASSURED TO TASTE.

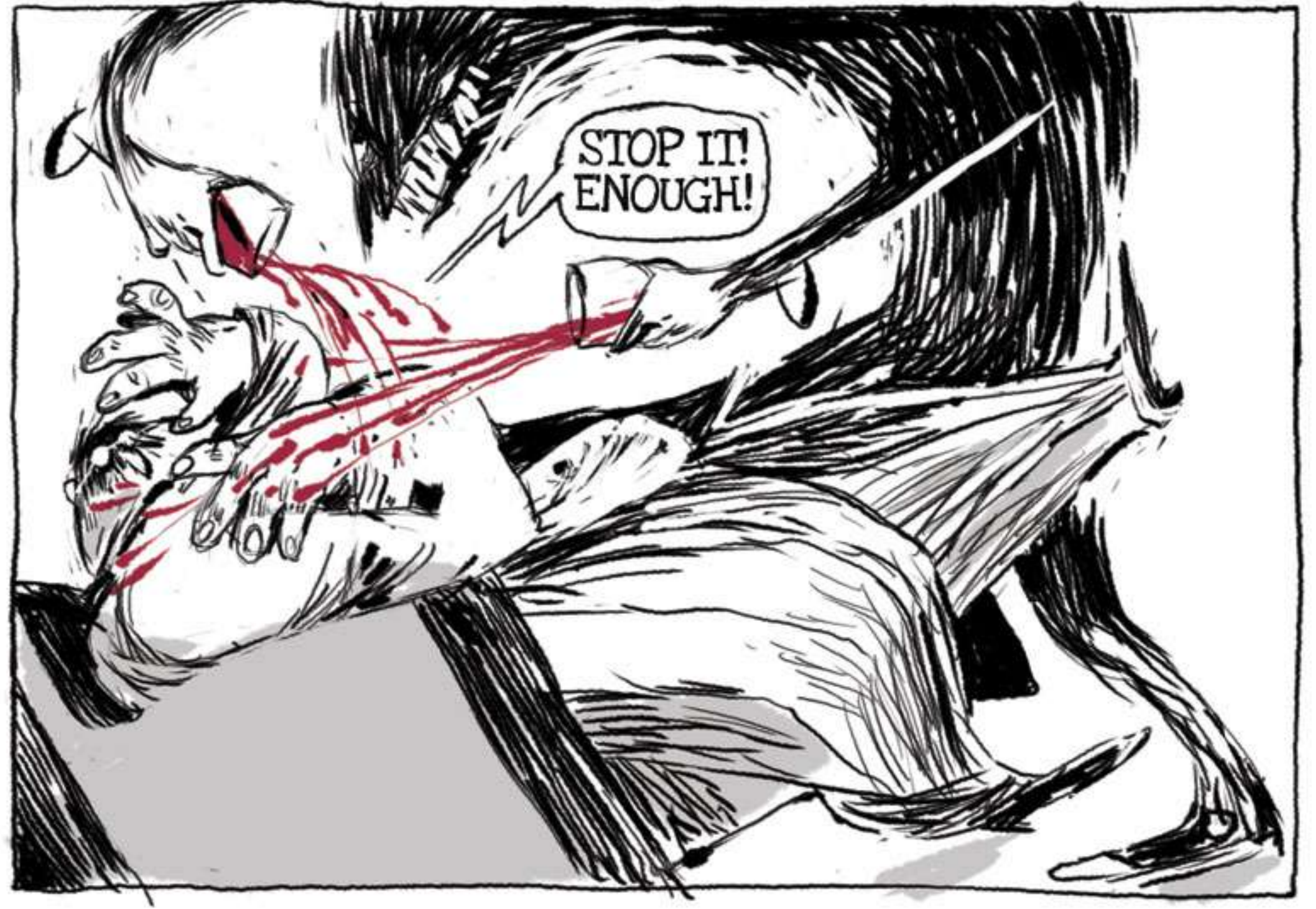


YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU DON'T KILL ME, I'LL GO TO THE COPS, DON'T YOU?

I ALREADY TOLD YOU I'M NOT HERE TO HURT YOU. I'M HERE TO NEGOTIATE. YOU WON'T GO TO THE COPS, I HAVE ENOUGH TO PROVE YOUR LIE, MISTER EMPEROR, I CAN CRUSH YOU. OR SHOULD I SAY MISTER TRICKSTER?

YOU DON'T HAVE ANY CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE ABOUT ME NOT LIKING WINE, AND MAKING EVERYTHING UP, AS YOU SAY I DO.

SO, YOU THEN DON'T HAVE ANY PROBLEM TO SHARE WITH ME A TASTE OF THIS WONDERFUL BLACK WINE I JUST OPENED UP...



STOP IT! ENOUGH!



WELL, WELL,

YOU DON'T WANNA DRINK IT...

OR YOU CAN'T?

MAYBE ...

MAYBE THESE MEDICINES, STORED IN YOUR MEDICAL KIT, CAN PROVE THAT, INDEED, YOU DON'T DISLIKE IT, BUT YOU'VE BEEN ALWAYS ALLERGIC TO IT, RIGHT?



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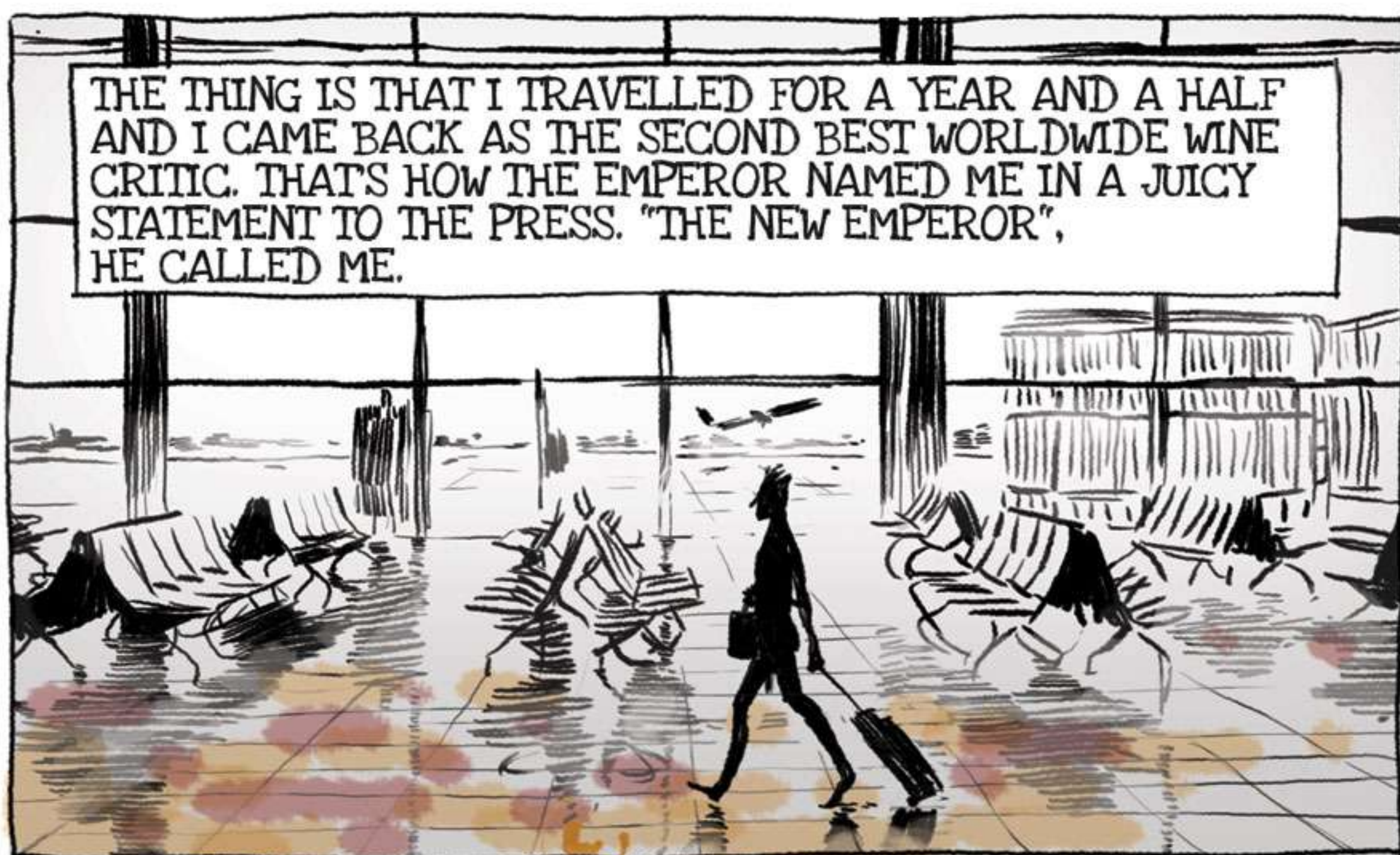
THOUGH SHE KEPT ASKING, I NEVER TOLD MARION WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW I MANAGED, IN A FEW DAYS, TO BECOME THE DECLARED SUCCESSOR OF MR. EMPEROR.



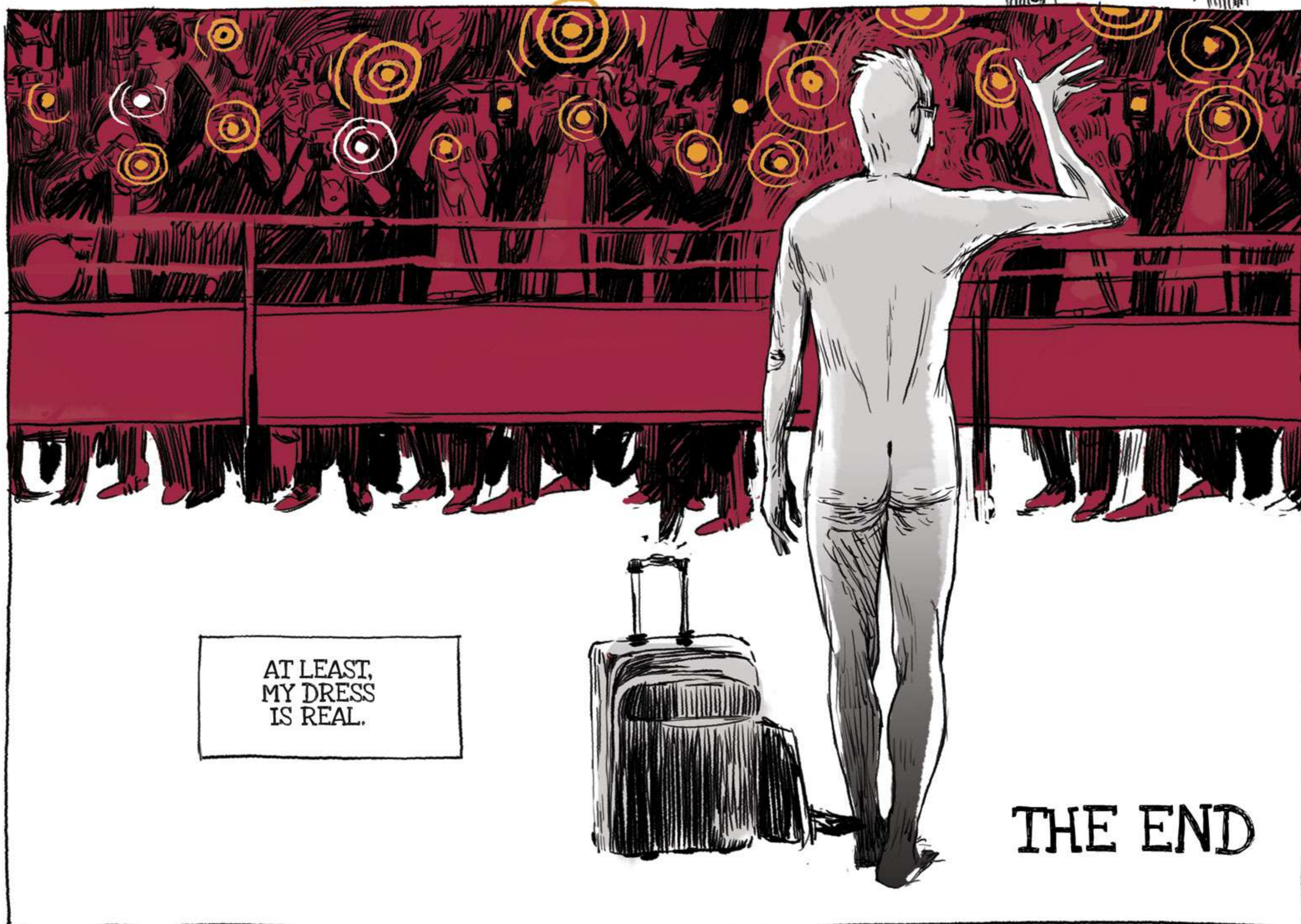
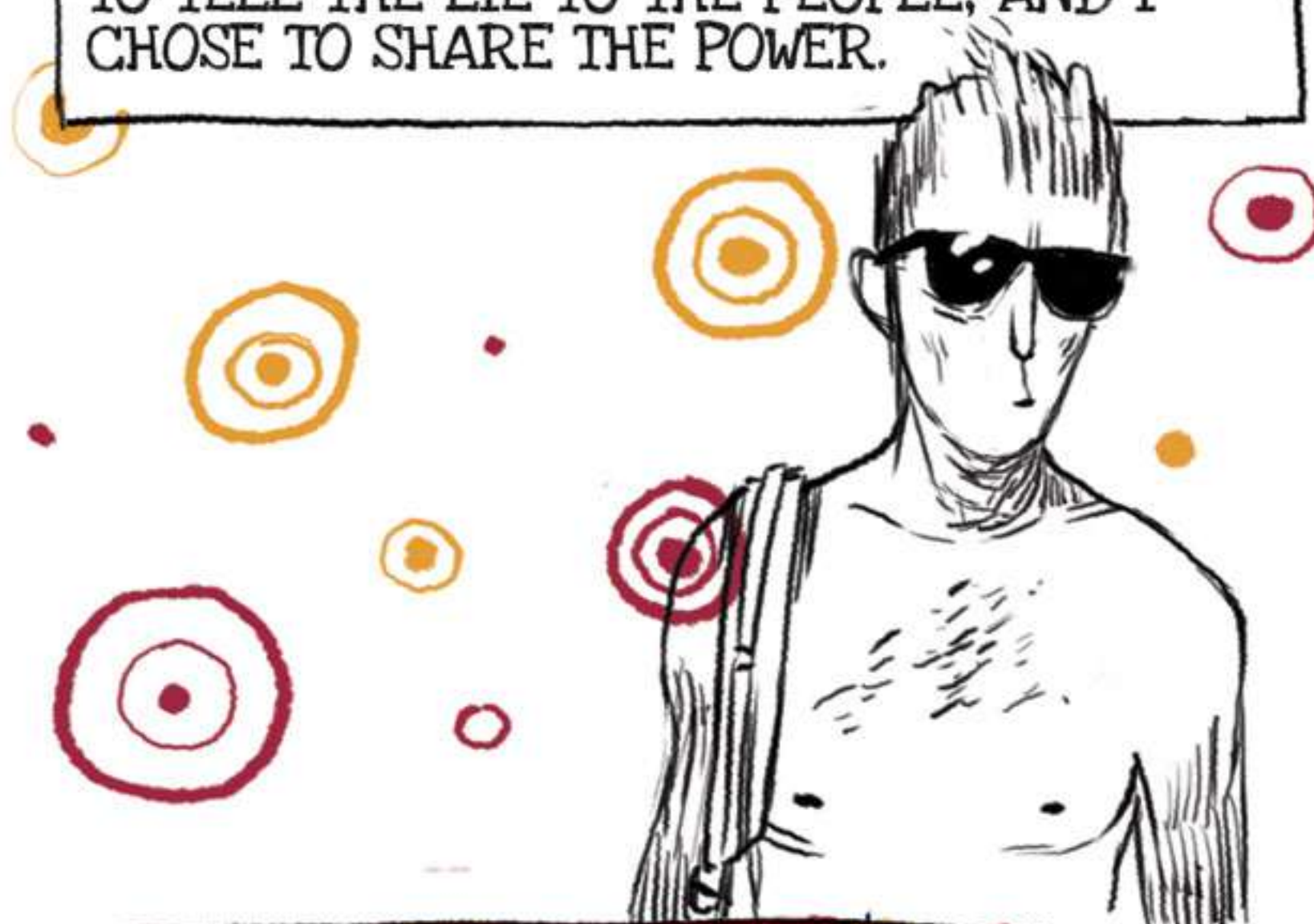
NEEDLES TO SAY, SHE WOULD HAVE NEVER APPROVED WHAT I DID WITH HER FLAT. ANYWAY, I LEFT TWO OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE BOTTLES FROM THE EMPEROR'S MUSEUM ON HER TABLE.



THE THING IS THAT I TRAVELLED FOR A YEAR AND A HALF AND I CAME BACK AS THE SECOND BEST WORLDWIDE WINE CRITIC. THAT'S HOW THE EMPEROR NAMED ME IN A JUICY STATEMENT TO THE PRESS. "THE NEW EMPEROR", HE CALLED ME.



I WAS FEELING NOW AS THE KID IN THE TALE, BUT IN THIS CASE I PREFERRED NOT TO TELL THE LIE TO THE PEOPLE, AND I CHOSE TO SHARE THE POWER.



AT LEAST, MY DRESS IS REAL.

THE END