

ARCADE

ALEX



CHAPTER 10

BY
RISHO



ARCADE ALEX

CHAPTER 10

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
RISIKO

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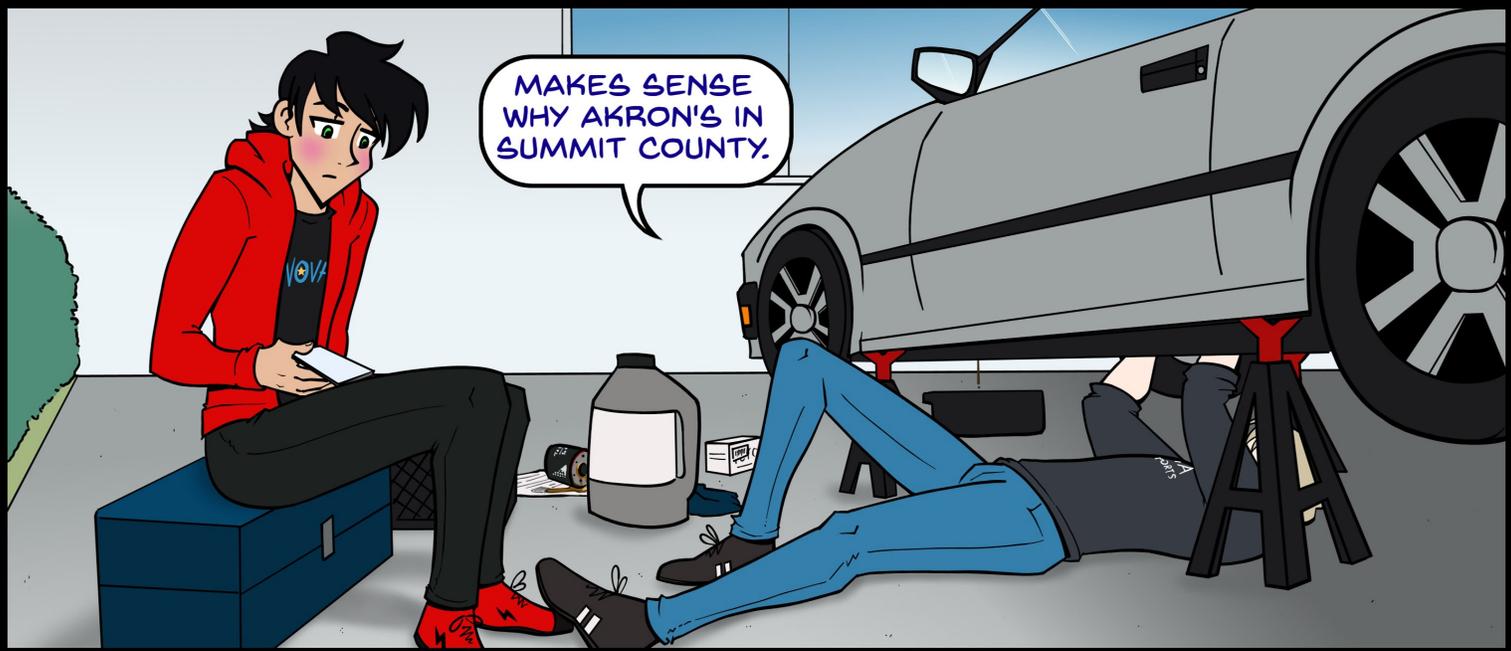
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HUH, LOOKS LIKE THE NAME AKRON CAME FROM GREEK.

IT MEANS "SUMMIT" OR "HIGH PLACE" ...



MAKES SENSE WHY AKRON'S IN SUMMIT COUNTY.



IT LOOKS LIKE THERE COULD BE SOME COOL STUFF TO DO.



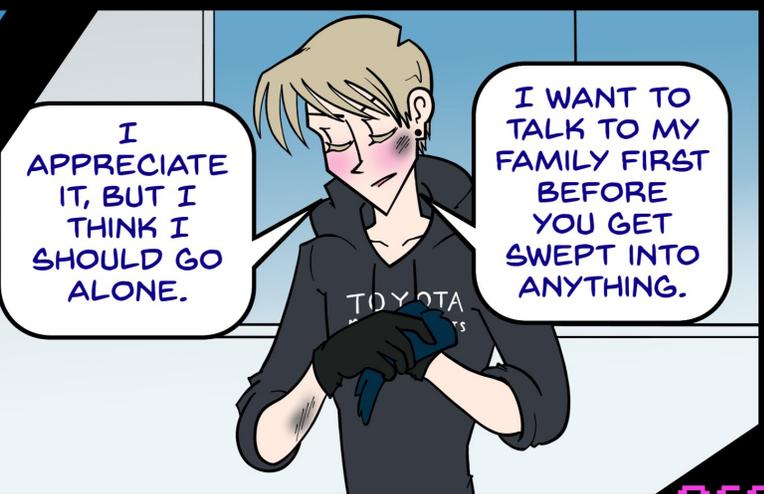
YEAH, IF YOU LIKE THE BURBS.



I COULD COME WITH YOU.

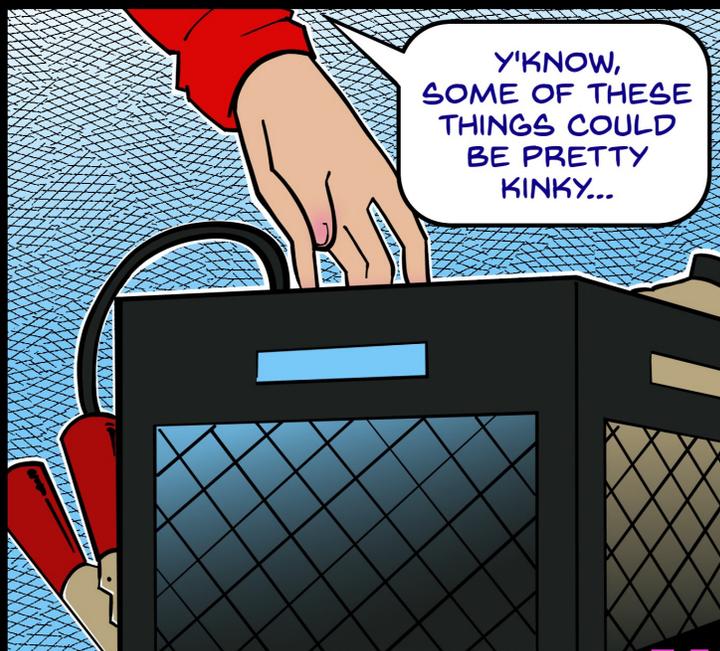
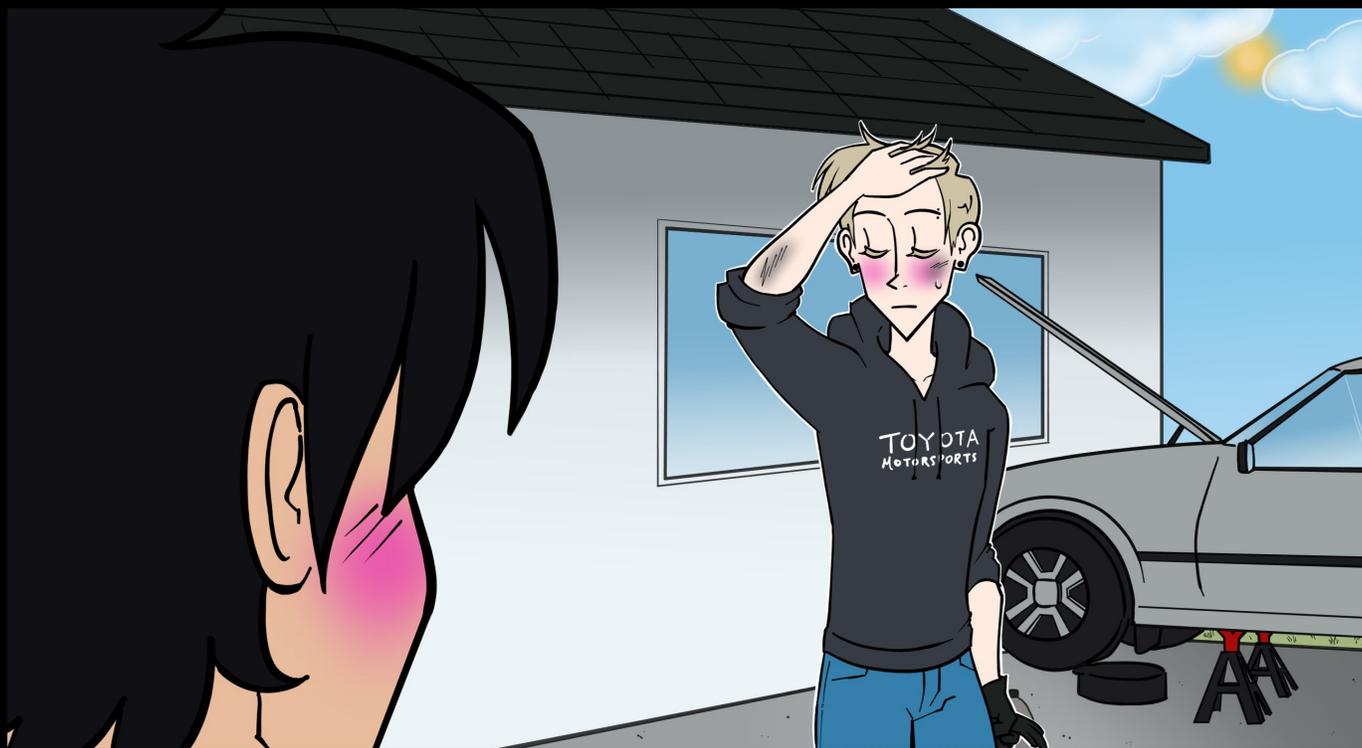
I DON'T MIND STAYING IN A HOTEL WHILE YOU'RE WITH YOUR FAMILY.

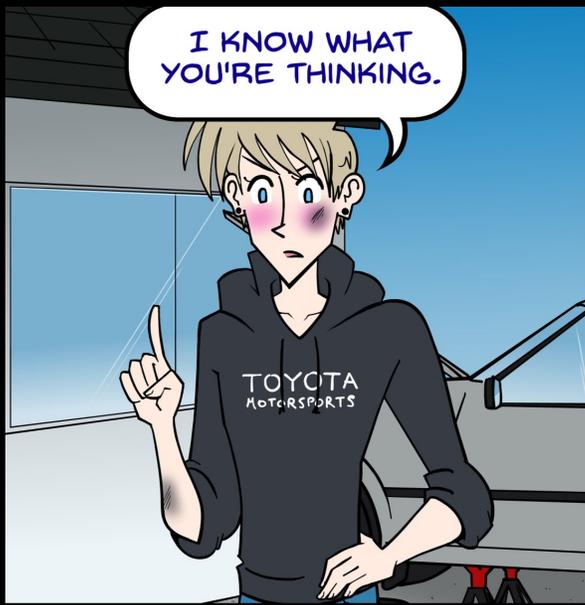
YOU KNOW, FOR MORAL SUPPORT.



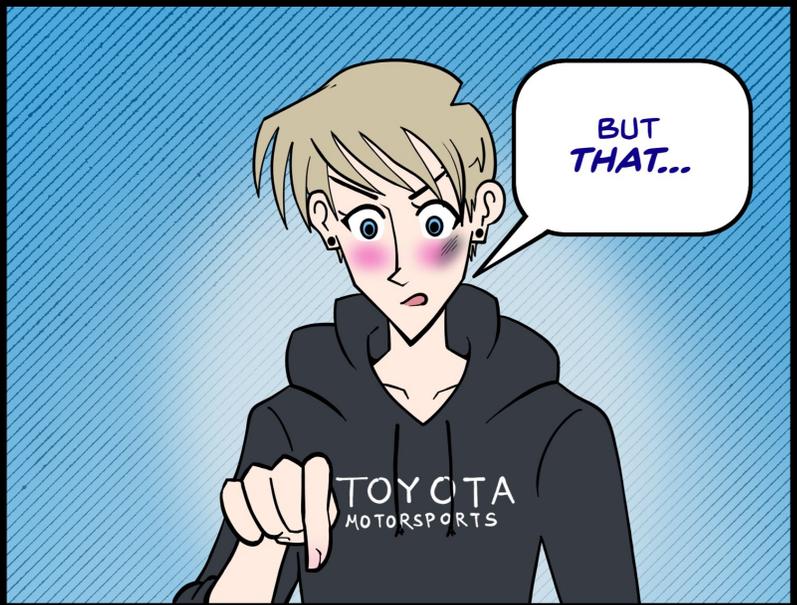
I APPRECIATE IT, BUT I THINK I SHOULD GO ALONE.

I WANT TO TALK TO MY FAMILY FIRST BEFORE YOU GET SWEEPED INTO ANYTHING.





I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING.



BUT THAT...



...IS NOT GOING ON MY DICK, AND THOSE...



...ARE NOT GOING ON MY NIPPLES.

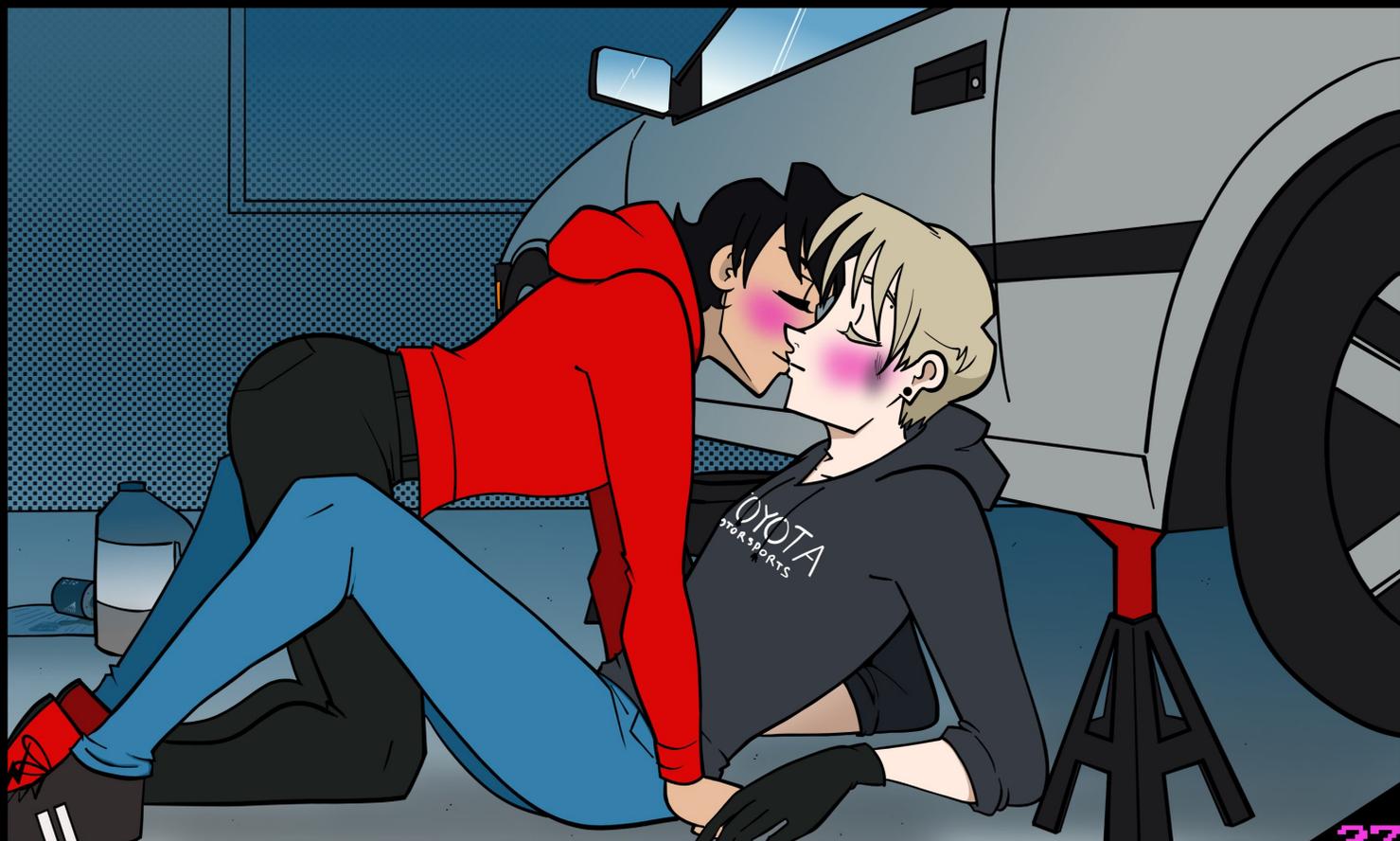
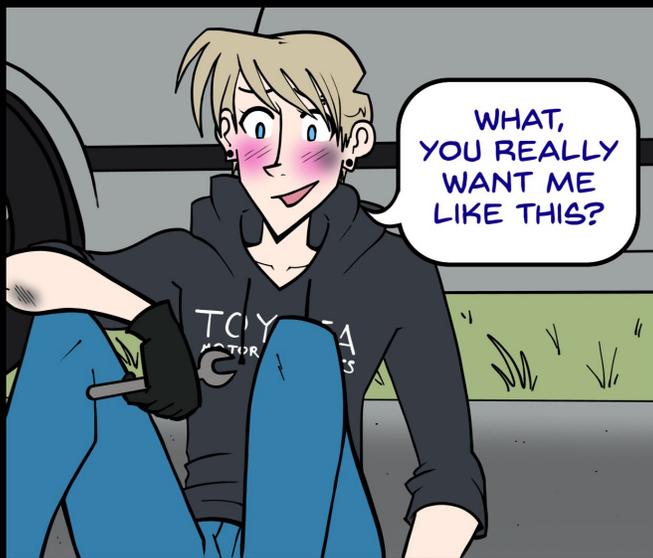
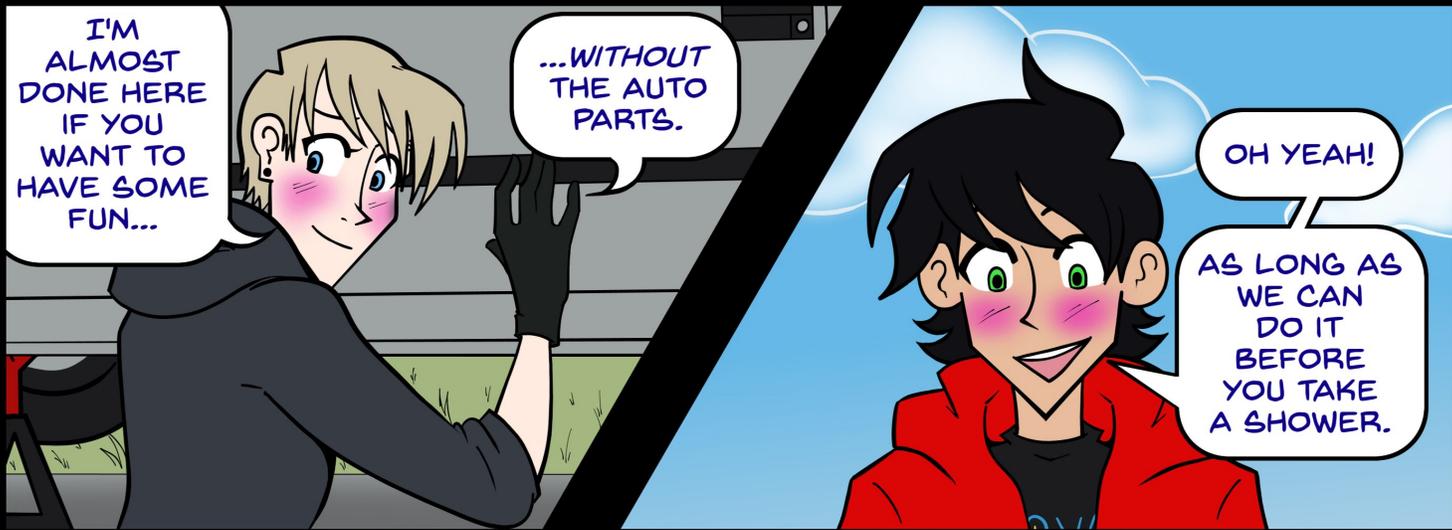


I'M NOT FREAKY ENOUGH FOR THAT.

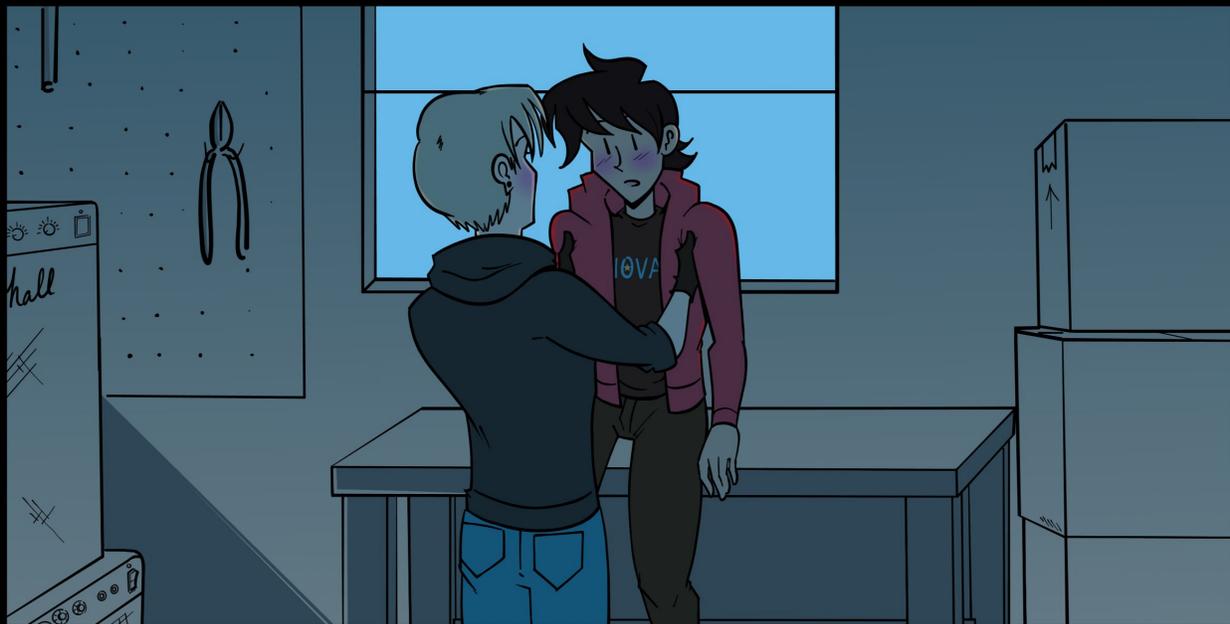


THEY DON'T HAVE TO GO ON YOUR NIPPLES! THEY COULD GO ON YOUR--

STOP.







YOU SHOULD LEAVE YOUR GLOVES ON.

YEAH?

BUT I DON'T WANT TO GET YOU DIRTY...



I GUESS THAT MEANS I SHOULD JUST USE MY MOUTH...



I WAS GONNA SAY, YOU CAN GET ME AS DIRTY AS YOU WANT, BUT...

THAT'S A GOOD IDEA, T-- OH!



AAH... KAZ!





FUCK...

YOU SMELL SO HOT!

SORRY I'M KINDA SWEATY ...

MAN, WHAT DID I JUST SAY?



YOU SMELL AMAZING.

I'M SURE YOU TASTE AMAZING TOO.



AAH...!

ALEX!

THAT'S SO GOOD...



YOU'RE DRIPPING LIKE CRAZY...



YOU'RE SO HOT TO TEASE ...

YOU'RE THROBBING. YOU WANT ME TO HURRY UP AND MAKE YOU CUM?



FUCK, ALEX--! YES!!

HUFF

HUFF

I KNOW YOU CAN BEG BETTER THAN THAT.

HAH...

AH

ALEX...! PLEASE!

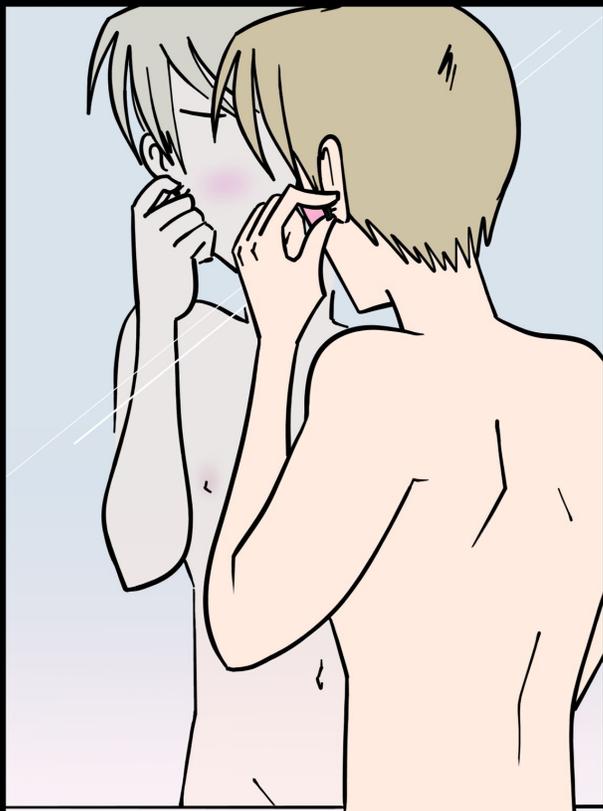
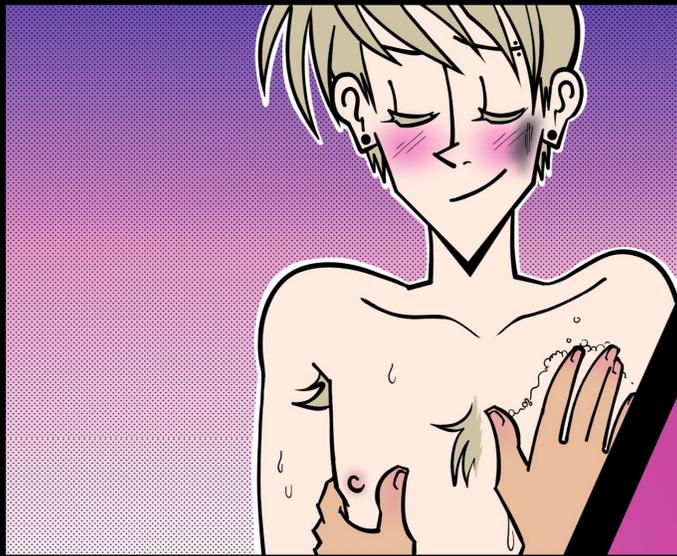
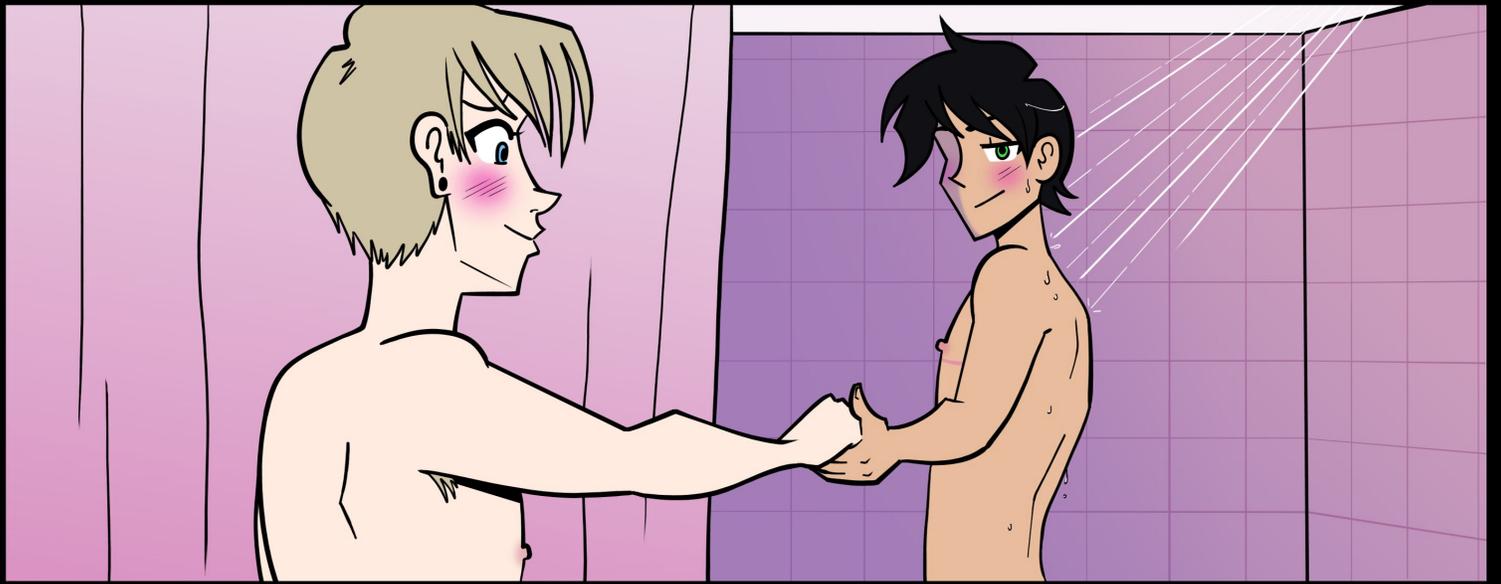


MMM... MM-HMM!

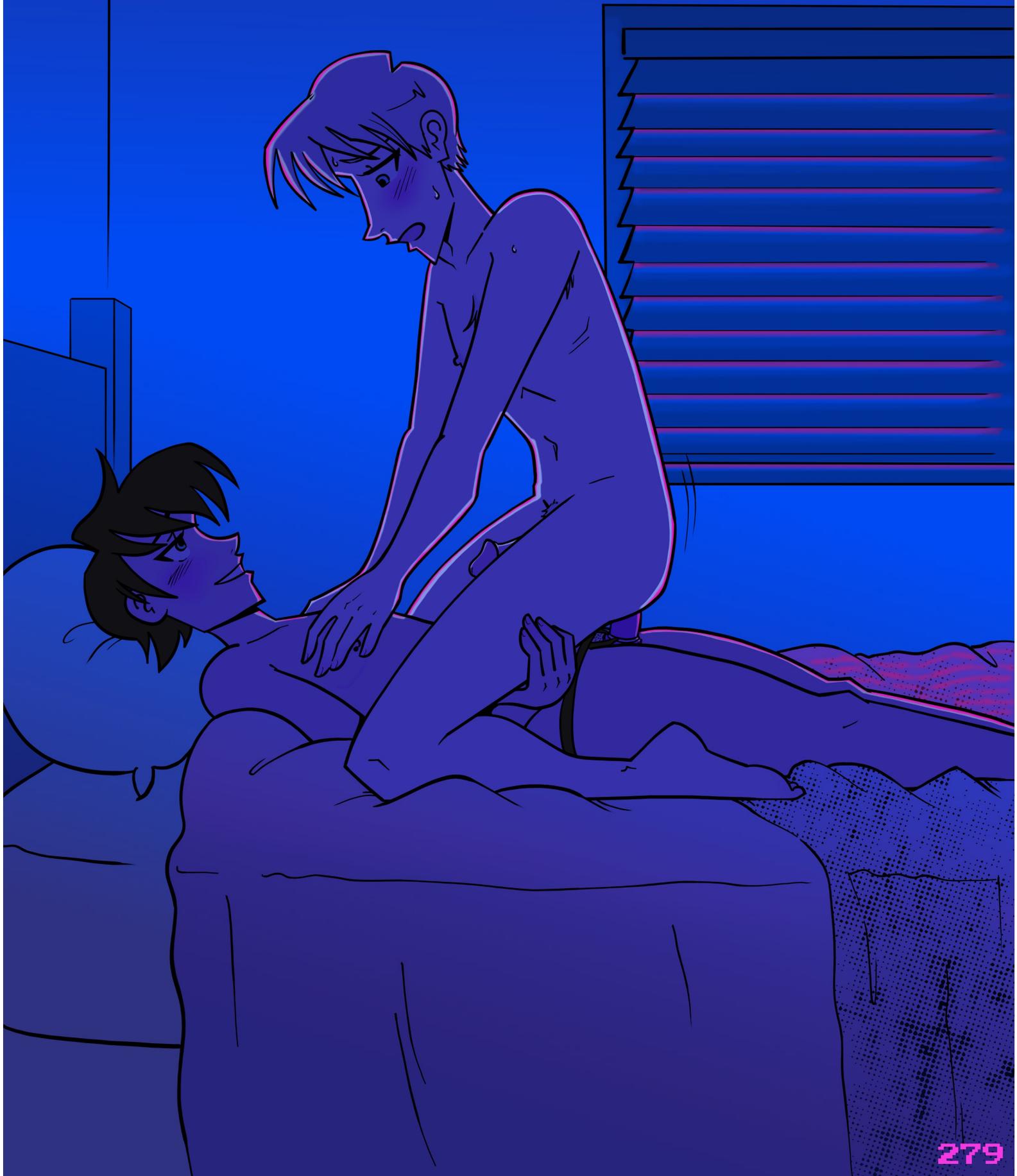


OH KAZ! ❤️

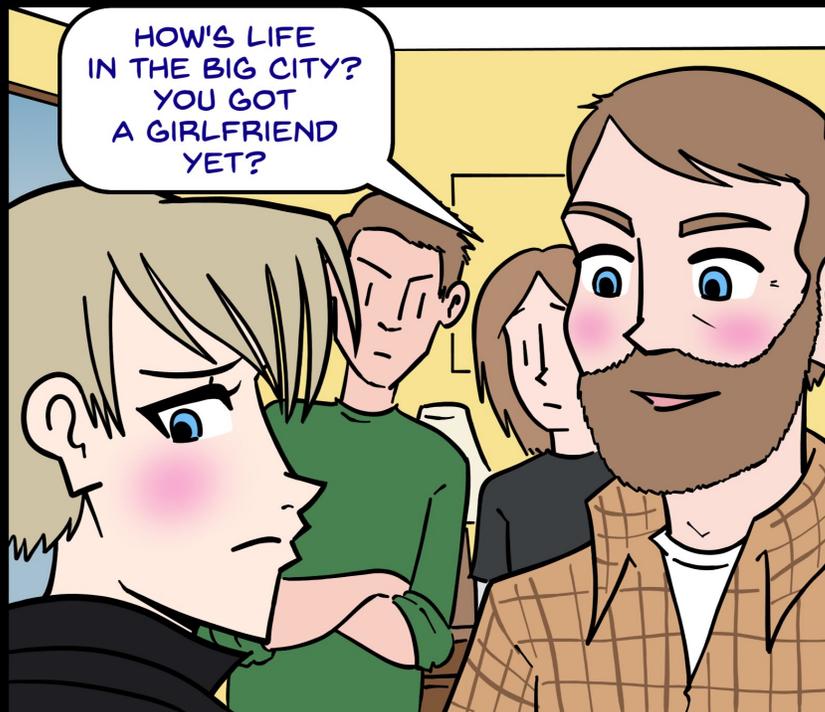
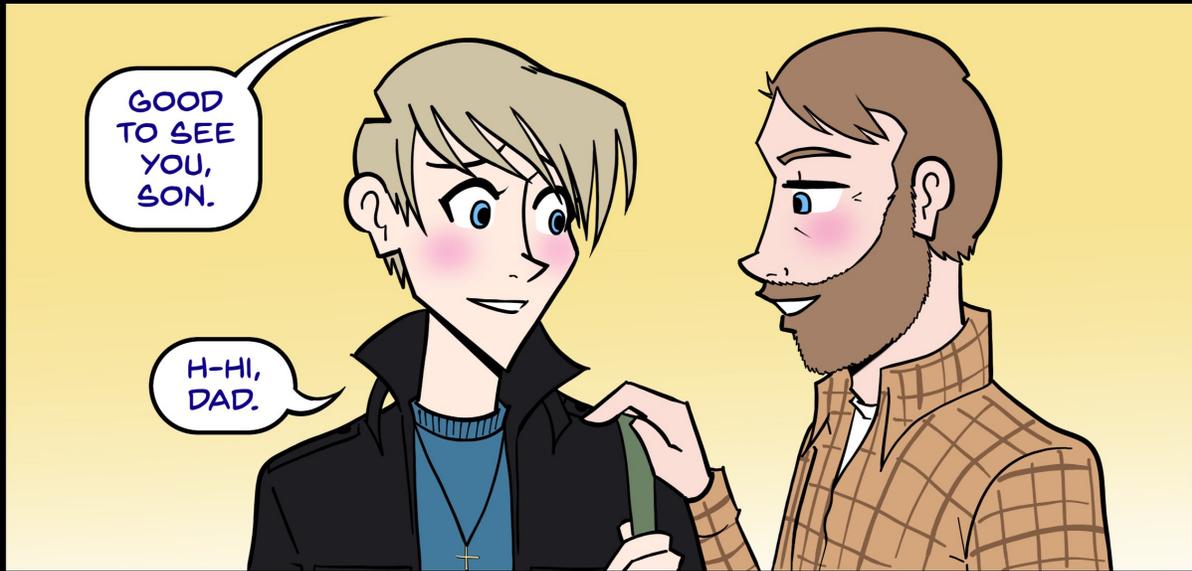
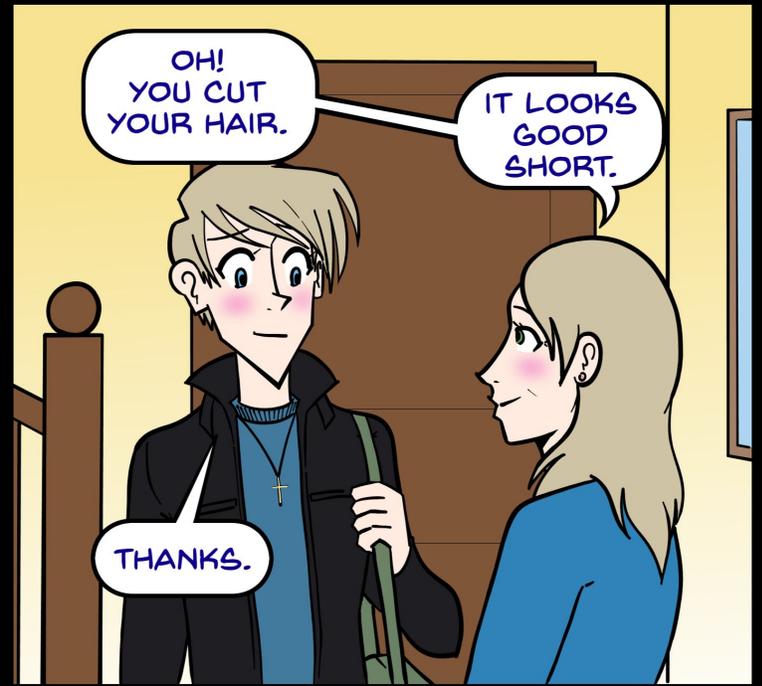
AAAH ALEX!

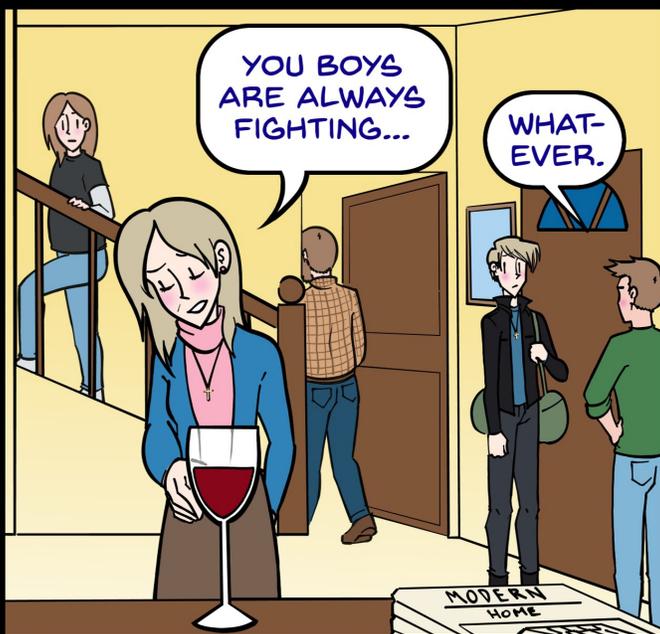
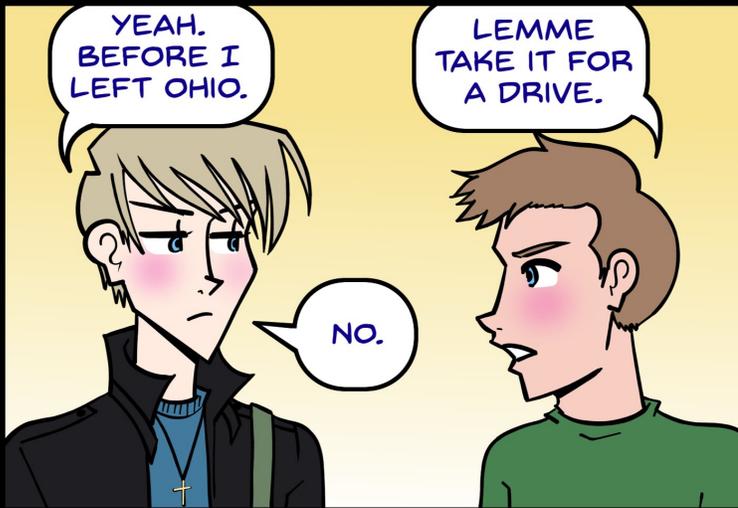
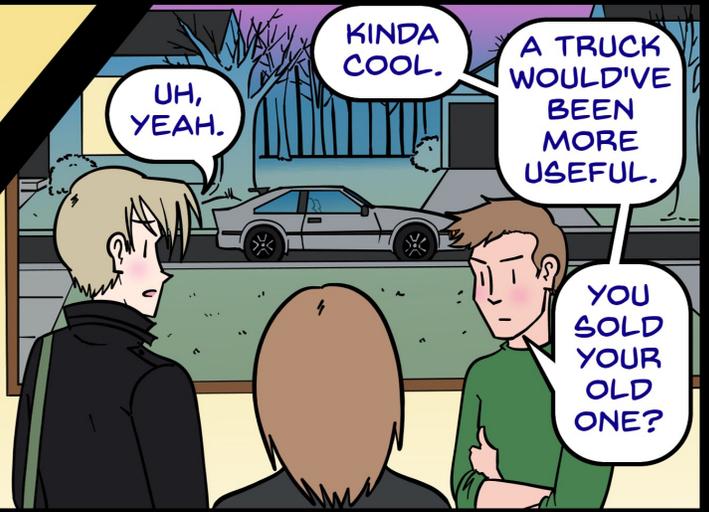














THERE WAS SOMETHING
SIMULTANEOUSLY
COMFORTING AND UNEASY
ABOUT BEING IN MY
CHILDHOOD BEDROOM
AGAIN.



IT WAS FULL
OF MEMORIES,
THE FAMILIAR
SMELL OF
HOME.



IT WAS MY
RETREAT
AWAY FROM
IT ALL.





BUT IF YOU NEED
A RETREAT,
IT'S BECAUSE
THERE'S SOMETHING
YOU'RE RETREATING
FROM.

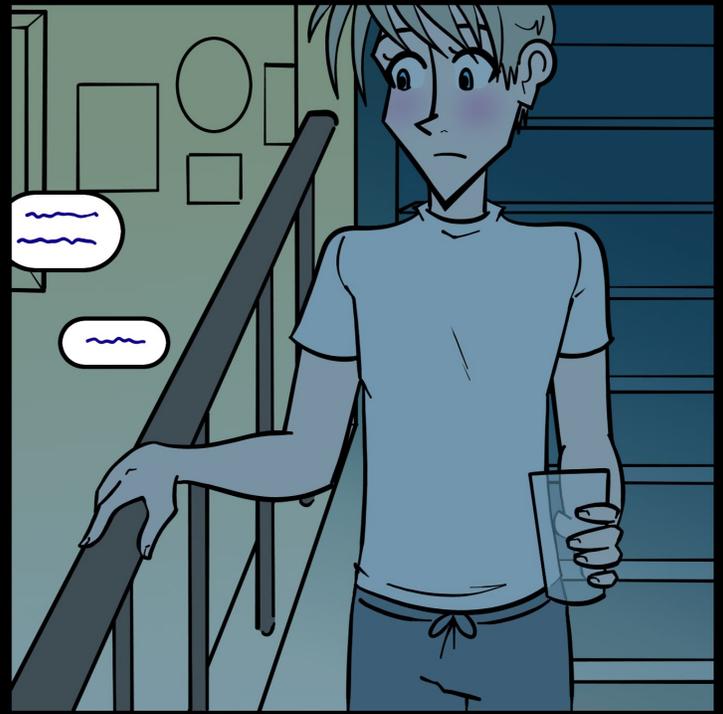


BACK THEN,
I THOUGHT
THERE WAS
NO WAY
TO ESCAPE.



IT WAS
STRANGE NOW
BEING IN
THE SAME
ROOM...

...AND KNOWING
THAT THERE WAS
A WHOLE WORLD
OUT THERE,
OUTSIDE OF
MY WINDOW.



IF THINGS
HAD BEEN
DIFFERENT
...

I DON'T
THINK HE
WOULD
HAVE
LEFT.



WHAT DO
YOU MEAN?

I DON'T THINK
HE EVER
REALLY
GOT OVER
CHRISSY.

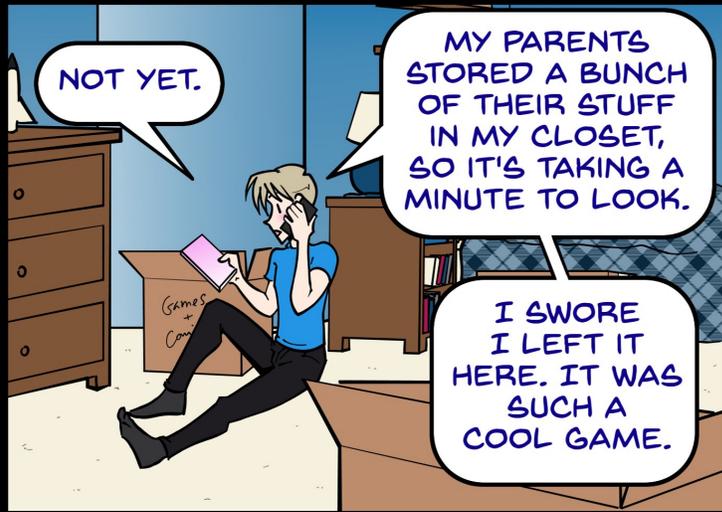


I WISH
HE WOULD
JUST
GIVE IT
ANOTHER
CHANCE.



HEY, REMEMBER THAT DREAM RUNNER GAME I TOLD YOU ABOUT?

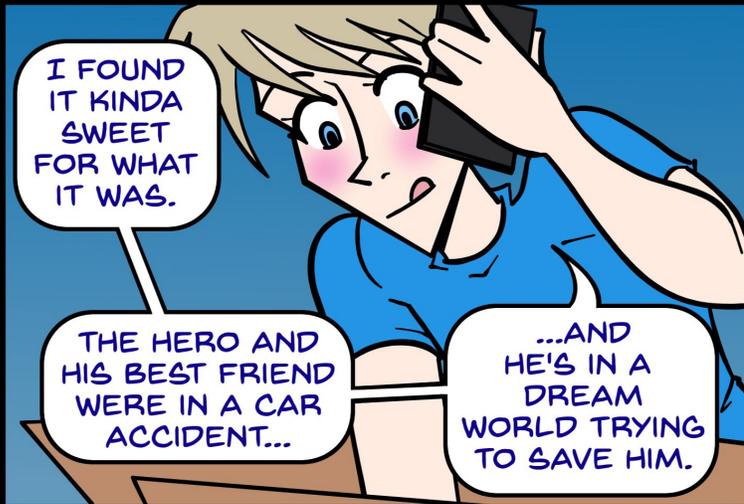
YEAH, DID YOU FIND IT?



NOT YET.

MY PARENTS STORED A BUNCH OF THEIR STUFF IN MY CLOSET, SO IT'S TAKING A MINUTE TO LOOK.

I SWORE I LEFT IT HERE. IT WAS SUCH A COOL GAME.



I FOUND IT KINDA SWEET FOR WHAT IT WAS.

THE HERO AND HIS BEST FRIEND WERE IN A CAR ACCIDENT...

...AND HE'S IN A DREAM WORLD TRYING TO SAVE HIM.



LIKE A COMA DREAM GAME? KINDA GRIM.

BUT COOL THAT HE WAS SAVING HIS FRIEND AND NOT THE PRINCESS OR SOMETHING.



EXACTLY.

IT FELT LIKE THERE WAS SOME SUBTEXT THERE...



IT WAS KINDA SPOOKY TOO.

IN THE FINAL LEVEL, YOU RACE ALONE.

THE CLOCK COUNTS DOWN, WHILE THE DREAM WORLD BREAKS DOWN AROUND YOU.



WHEN YOU LOSE, IT SAYS "GAME OVER, TIME TO WAKE UP" ...

BUT IF YOU HIT CONTINUE, IT SAYS "THE DREAM ISN'T OVER YET."

WHEN DID THIS COME OUT AGAIN?

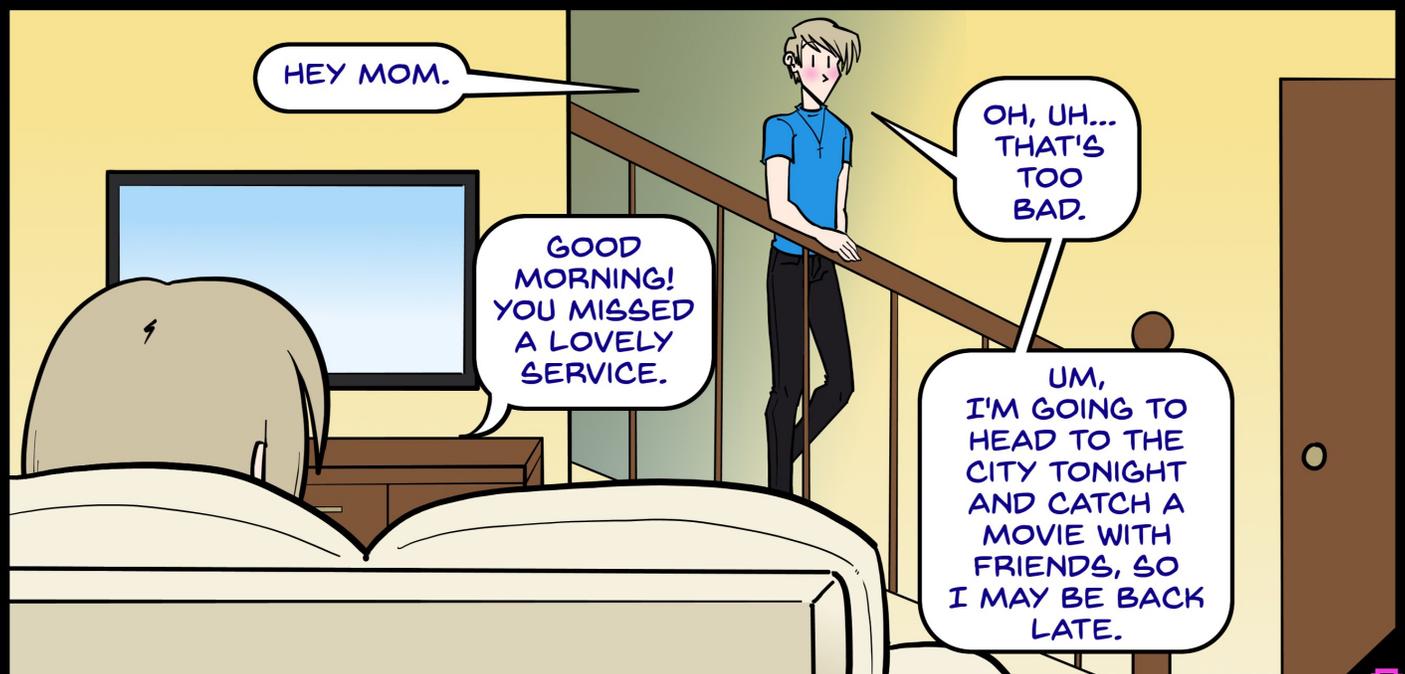
NONE OF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR.

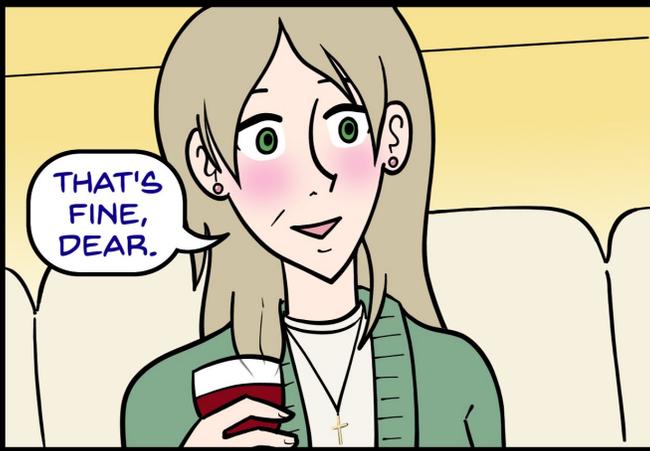


1999 OR SOMETHING?

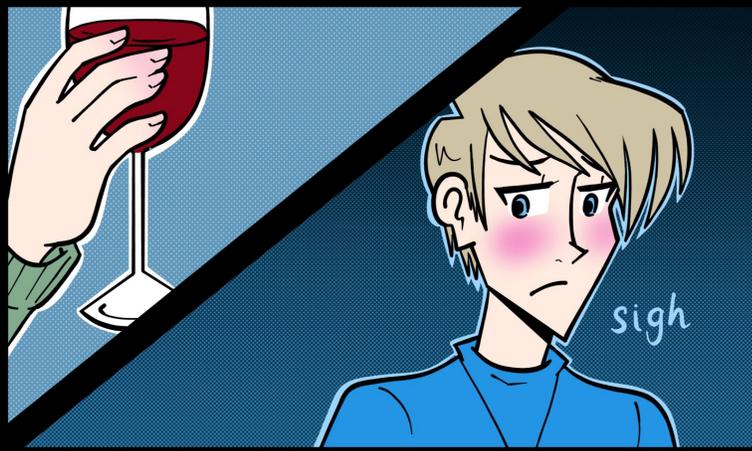
NO LUCK, I CAN'T FIND IT HERE EITHER.

MAYBE IT'S BACK AT MY PLACE? I HOPE I DIDN'T LOSE IT IN THE MOVE.





THAT'S FINE, DEAR.



sigh



ARE YOU GOING TO SEE CHRISSEY?

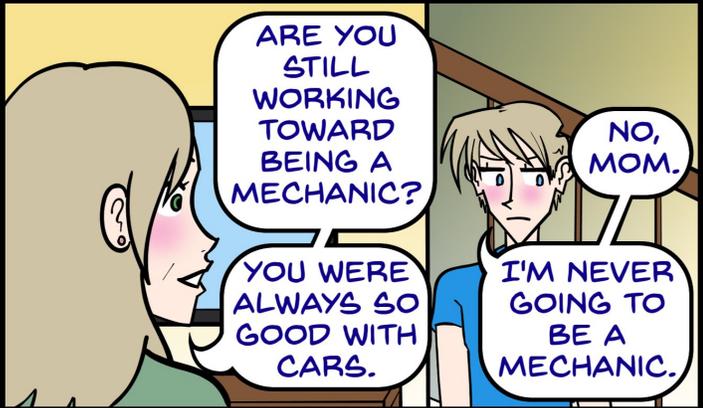
WHAT? NO.



I HOPE NOT GOING TO COLLEGE DIDN'T GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRISSEY AND ERIC...

I'M SORRY WE NEEDED THE MONEY FOR YOUR FATHER'S BUSINESS.

IT'S FINE.

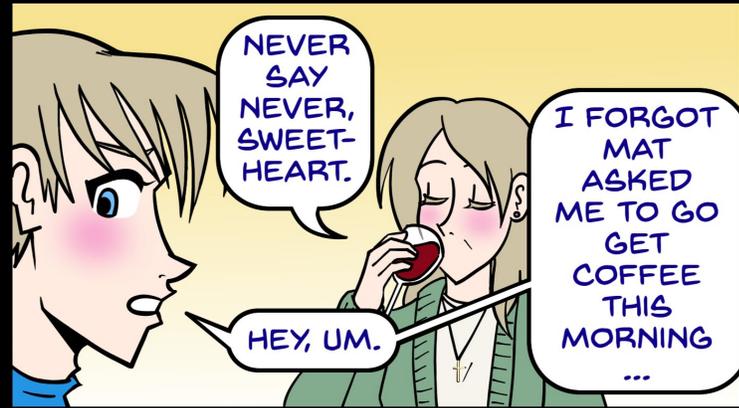


ARE YOU STILL WORKING TOWARD BEING A MECHANIC?

NO, MOM.

YOU WERE ALWAYS SO GOOD WITH CARS.

I'M NEVER GOING TO BE A MECHANIC.



NEVER SAY NEVER, SWEET-HEART.

I FORGOT MAT ASKED ME TO GO GET COFFEE THIS MORNING ...

HEY, UM.



HEY DUDE.

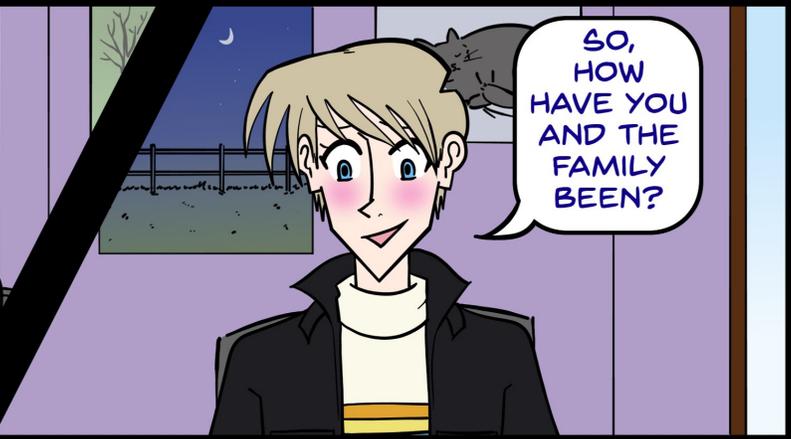
OH! HEY KAZ.

YOU WANT TO GRAB COFFEE WITH YOUR BRO?

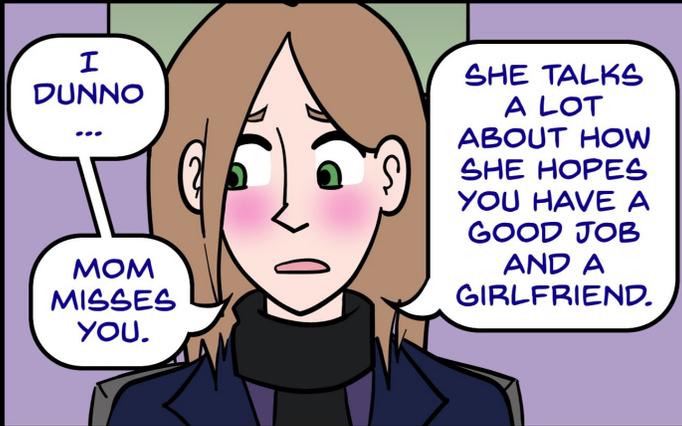


HERE YOU GO.

THANKS.



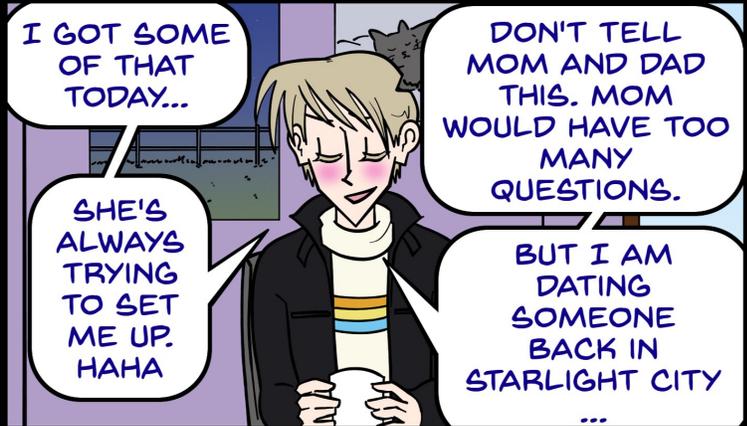
SO, HOW HAVE YOU AND THE FAMILY BEEN?



I DUNNO ...

MOM MISSES YOU.

SHE TALKS A LOT ABOUT HOW SHE HOPES YOU HAVE A GOOD JOB AND A GIRLFRIEND.

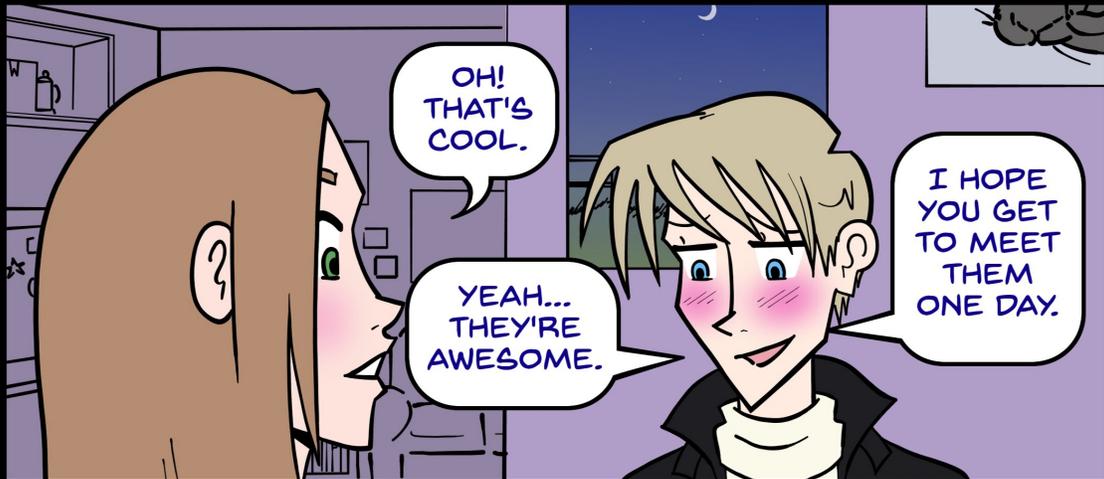


I GOT SOME OF THAT TODAY...

SHE'S ALWAYS TRYING TO SET ME UP. HAHA

DON'T TELL MOM AND DAD THIS. MOM WOULD HAVE TOO MANY QUESTIONS.

BUT I AM DATING SOMEONE BACK IN STARLIGHT CITY ...



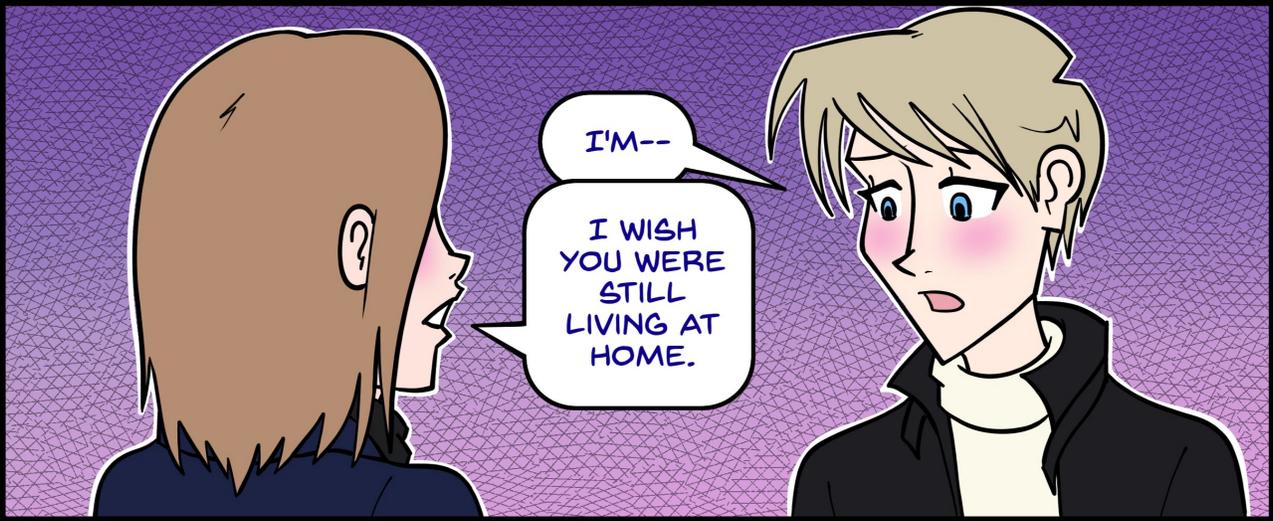
OH! THAT'S COOL.

YEAH... THEY'RE AWESOME.

I HOPE YOU GET TO MEET THEM ONE DAY.



LISTEN, UM...



I'M--

I WISH YOU WERE STILL LIVING AT HOME.



OH. I'M... I'M SORRY FOR NOT REALLY BEING IN TOUCH.



IT'S WHATEVER.



...I SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT SO SUDDENLY.



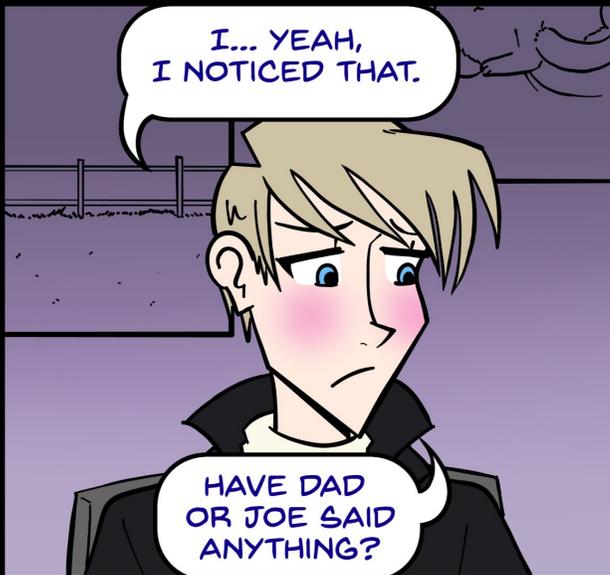
I MEAN... I GUESS I GET WHY YOU DID.

THINGS ARE KIND OF WEIRD.

IT'S COOL NOT HAVING JOE AROUND AS MUCH SINCE HE MOVED OUT, BUT DAD'S...

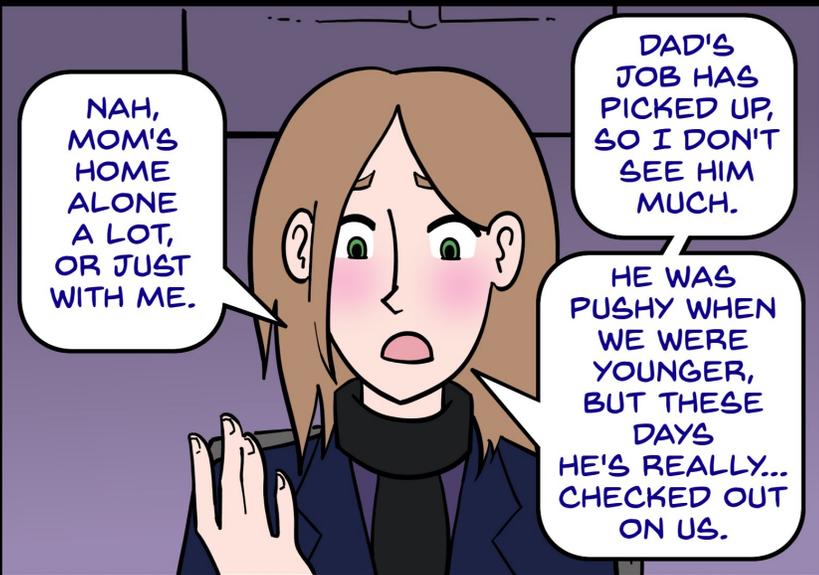
YOU KNOW, DAD.

AND MOM HAS BEEN DRINKING AGAIN.



I... YEAH, I NOTICED THAT.

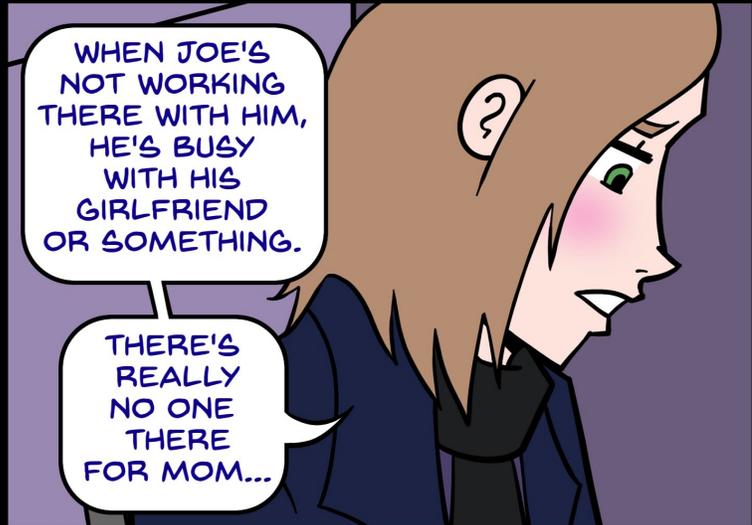
HAVE DAD OR JOE SAID ANYTHING?



NAH, MOM'S HOME ALONE A LOT, OR JUST WITH ME.

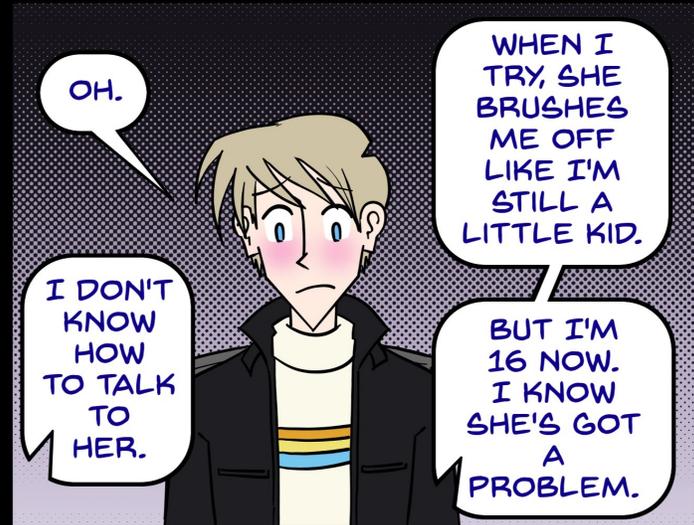
DAD'S JOB HAS PICKED UP, SO I DON'T SEE HIM MUCH.

HE WAS PUSHY WHEN WE WERE YOUNGER, BUT THESE DAYS HE'S REALLY... CHECKED OUT ON US.



WHEN JOE'S NOT WORKING THERE WITH HIM, HE'S BUSY WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND OR SOMETHING.

THERE'S REALLY NO ONE THERE FOR MOM...

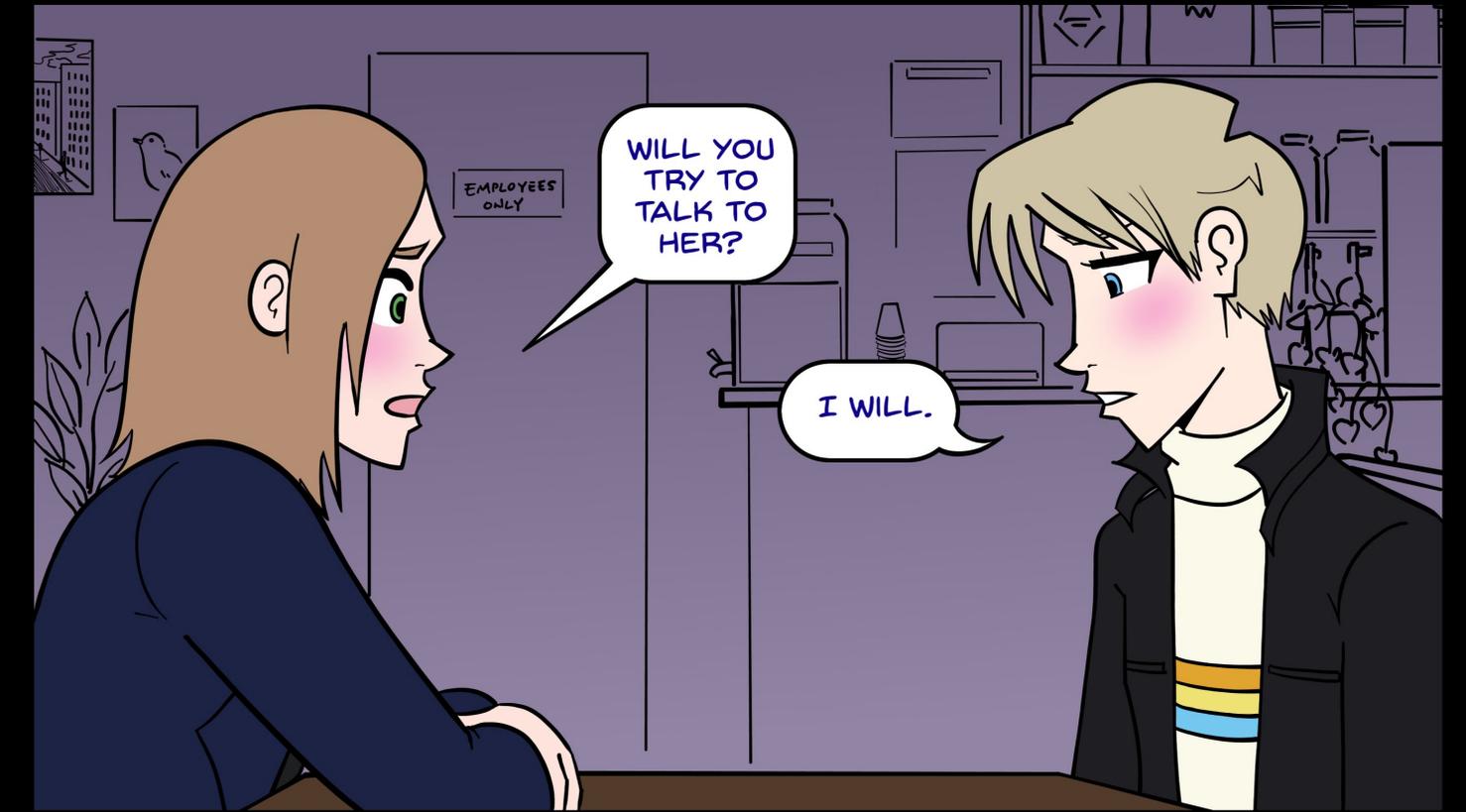


OH.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO HER.

WHEN I TRY, SHE BRUSHES ME OFF LIKE I'M STILL A LITTLE KID.

BUT I'M 16 NOW. I KNOW SHE'S GOT A PROBLEM.

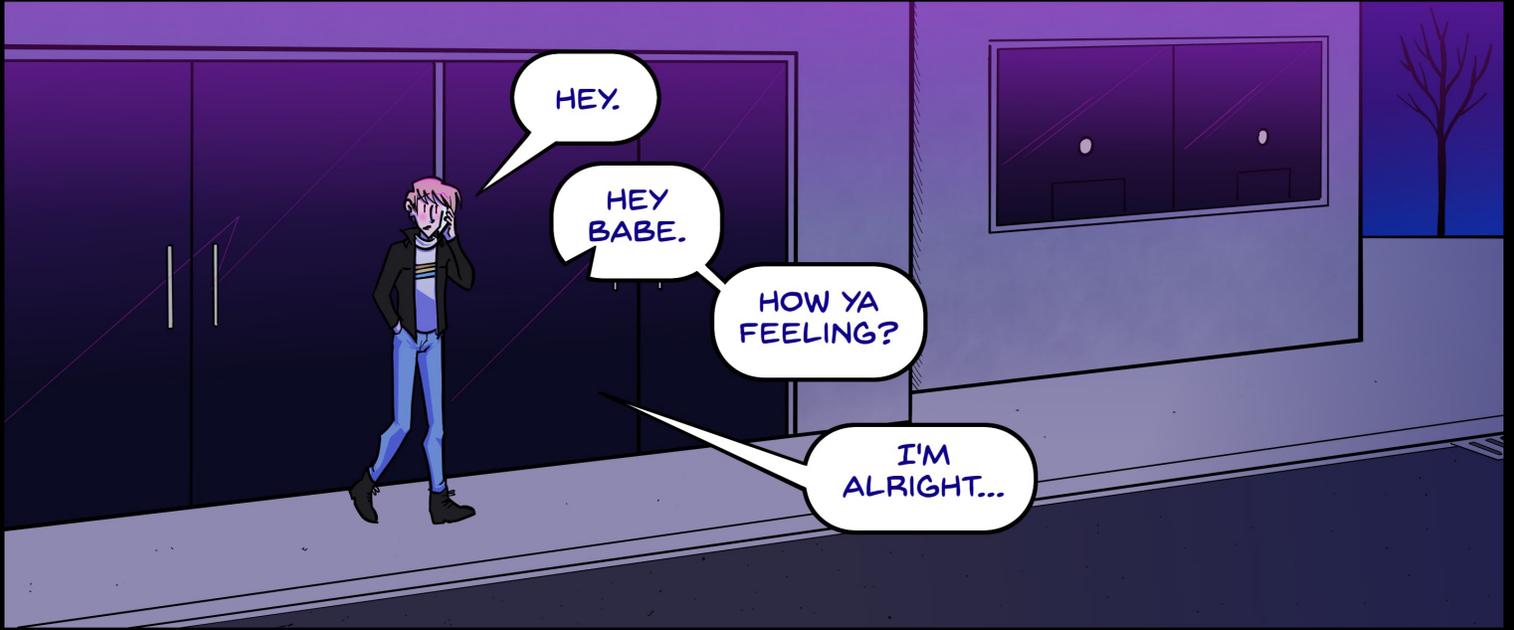


WILL YOU TRY TO TALK TO HER?

I WILL.









IS THERE ANYTHING THAT I CAN DO TO HELP?

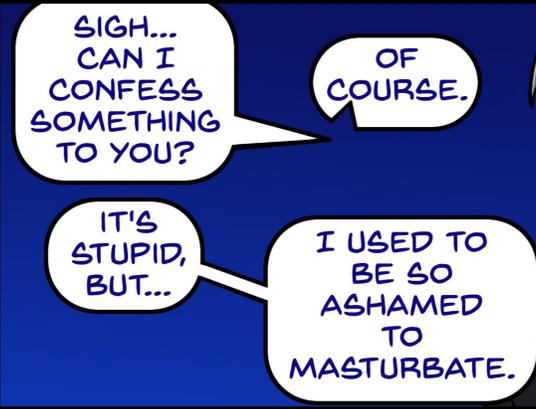
I HAVE NO IDEA.

EVEN JUST TO GET YOUR MIND OFF THINGS?



I KNOW SOMETHING THAT USUALLY WORKS...

DON'T TEMPT ME.



SIGH... CAN I CONFESS SOMETHING TO YOU?

OF COURSE.

IT'S STUPID, BUT...

I USED TO BE SO ASHAMED TO MASTURBATE.

IT FELT LIKE DOING SOMETHING WRONG.

I USED TO TELL MYSELF, THIS IS THE LAST TIME. I WON'T DO IT AGAIN.

BUT, OF COURSE, IT DIDN'T REALLY WORK.



IT WASN'T UNTIL I MOVED TO STARLIGHT CITY THAT I FELT FREE.

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT IS.

THERE'S NO SHAME IN THAT.

IT FINALLY FELT LIKE.. I DUNNO... A WAY TO LOVE MYSELF.



ANYWAY, SO BECAUSE OF THAT, I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING...

THOSE WEIRD FEELINGS ARE SOMEHOW STILL THERE.

FUCK IT. YOU'RE ALONE, RIGHT?

SHOW YOUR OLD CITY HOW MUCH YOU LOVE YOURSELF NOW.

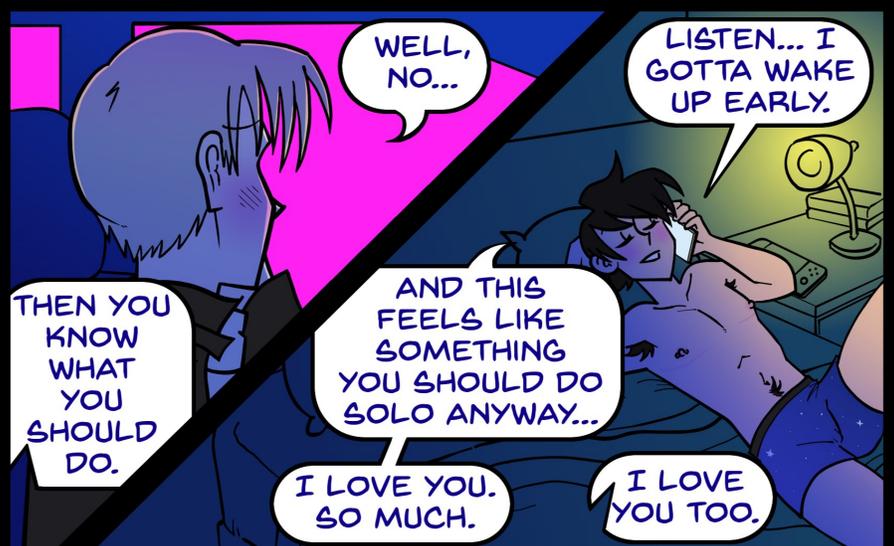


WHAT?? HERE?

I'M STILL IN THE THEATER PARKING LOT!

AND? THE FIRST TIME WE FUCKED WAS IN YOUR CAR!

IT'S 1 AM. DON'T TELL ME IT'S STILL BUSY.



WELL, NO...

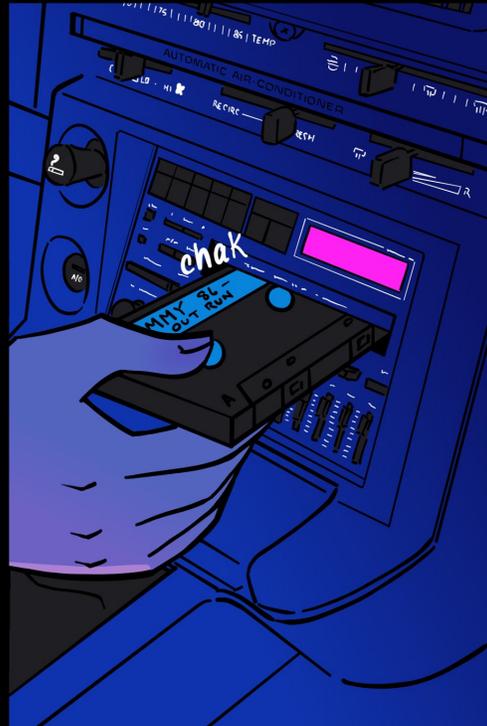
THEN YOU KNOW WHAT YOU SHOULD DO.

AND THIS FEELS LIKE SOMETHING YOU SHOULD DO SOLO ANYWAY...

I LOVE YOU. SO MUCH.

LISTEN... I GOTTA WAKE UP EARLY.

I LOVE YOU TOO.



I THOUGHT OF ALEX THERE, URGING ME ON...

WHISPERING INSTRUCTIONS IN MY EAR. "TOUCH YOURSELF FOR ME..."

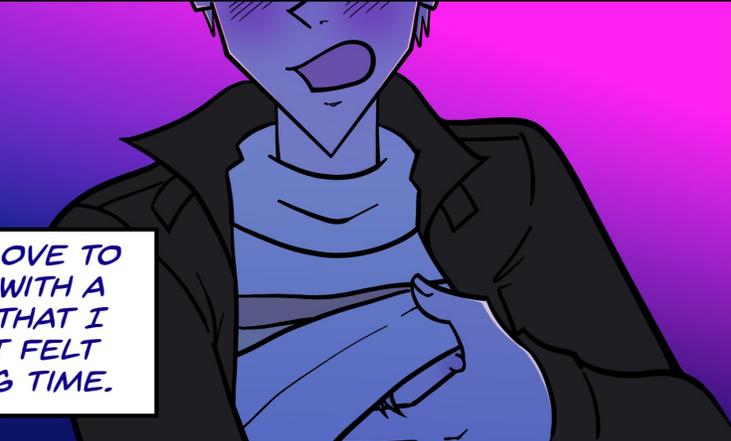
IT FELT SO GOOD. LIKE A REFUSAL OF THE LIFE THAT HAD ONCE MADE ME FEEL SO GUILTY.

I FELT HEAT EMANATING FROM ME IN THE OHIO WINTER, LIKE THE NEON FROM THE SIGN...





I WAS TOO
TURNED ON TO
FEEL GUILTY,
OR FOOLISH,
OR AFRAID.



I MADE LOVE TO
MYSELF WITH A
FRENZY THAT I
HAD NOT FELT
IN A LONG TIME.

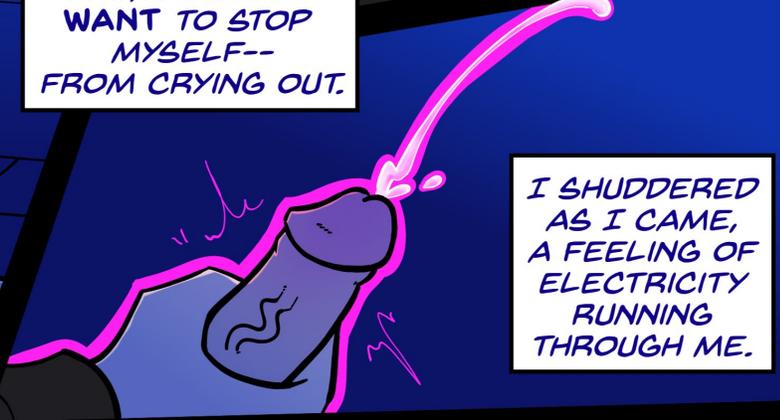


I FELT
MY PULSE
RISING
AS I GOT
CLOSER.

IT FELT
SO
PERFECT
TO
STROKE
MYSELF...



I COULDN'T STOP
MYSELF --
NO, I DIDN'T
WANT TO STOP
MYSELF--
FROM CRYING OUT.



I SHUDDERED
AS I CAME,
A FEELING OF
ELECTRICITY
RUNNING
THROUGH ME.



ALEX WAS RIGHT.
THAT WAS WHAT
I NEEDED.

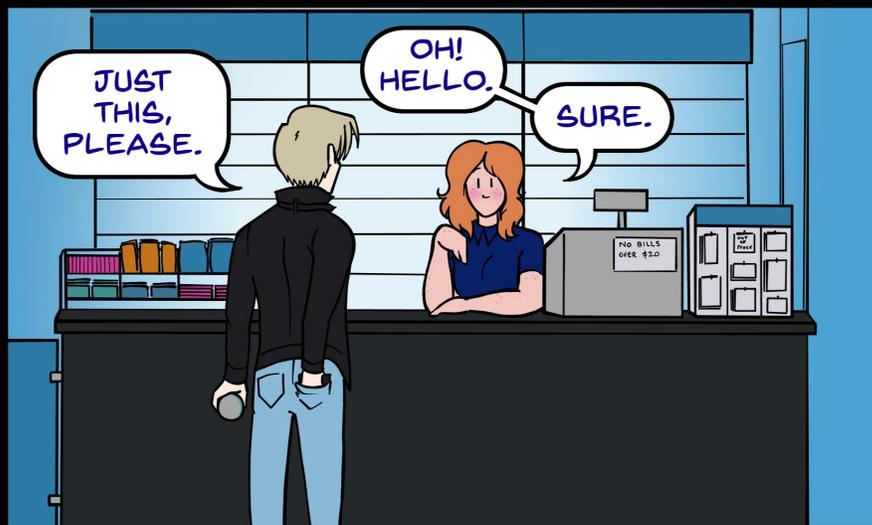


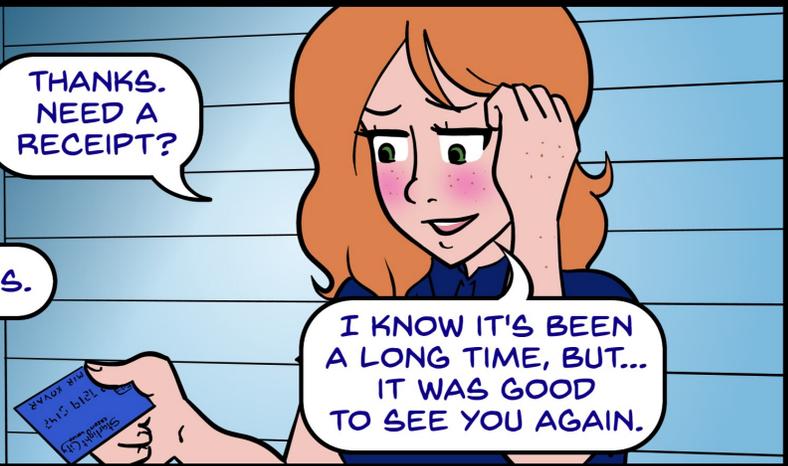
I BLUSHED
WHEN
I SAW WHAT A
MESS I MADE.

BUT A
MESS CAN
BE
CLEANED
UP...



I BEGAN
TO LAUGH.
AND LAUGH.
AND LAUGH.







WHY IS MOM MAKING ME BE HERE ALL DAY ON CHRISTMAS?

EMILY WANTS ME TO COME OVER.

IT'S CHRISTMAS. YOUR MOTHER WANTS THE WHOLE FAMILY HERE TO CELEBRATE.

IT'S NOT FAIR! I'M AN ADULT. I HAVE PLACES TO BE TOO.



I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU DO, BUT THIS IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR MOTHER, SO YOU'LL BE HERE.

WHY DOES SHE CARE? WE DO THIS EVERY YEAR.

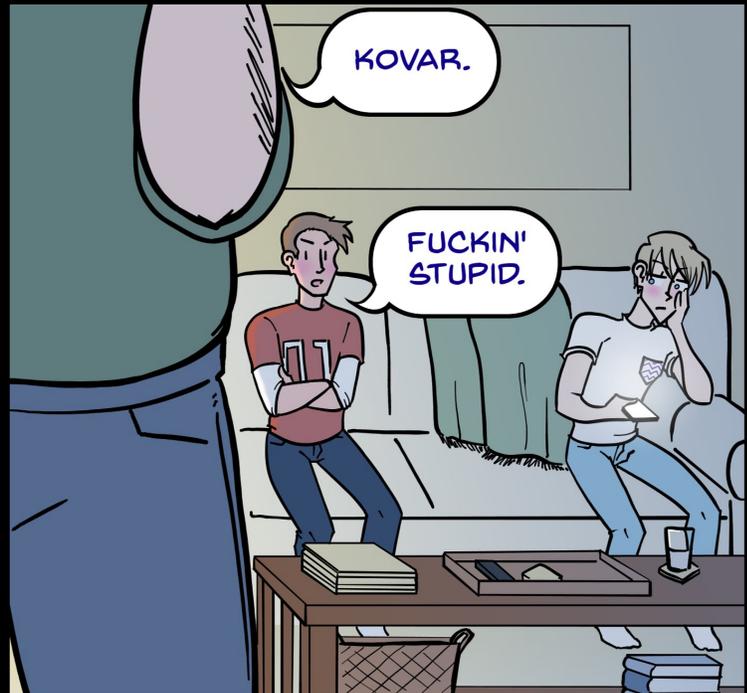
BECAUSE WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD EVERY YEAR.



I'M NOT ARGUING WITH YOU ABOUT THIS.

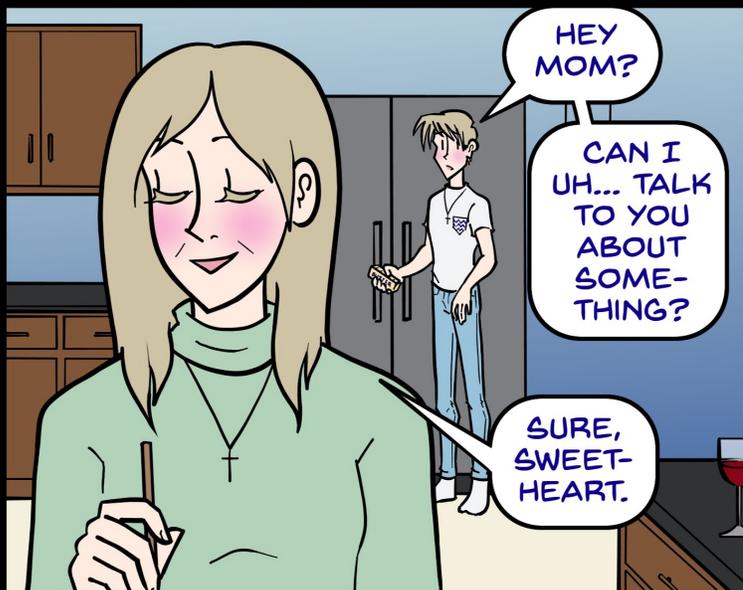
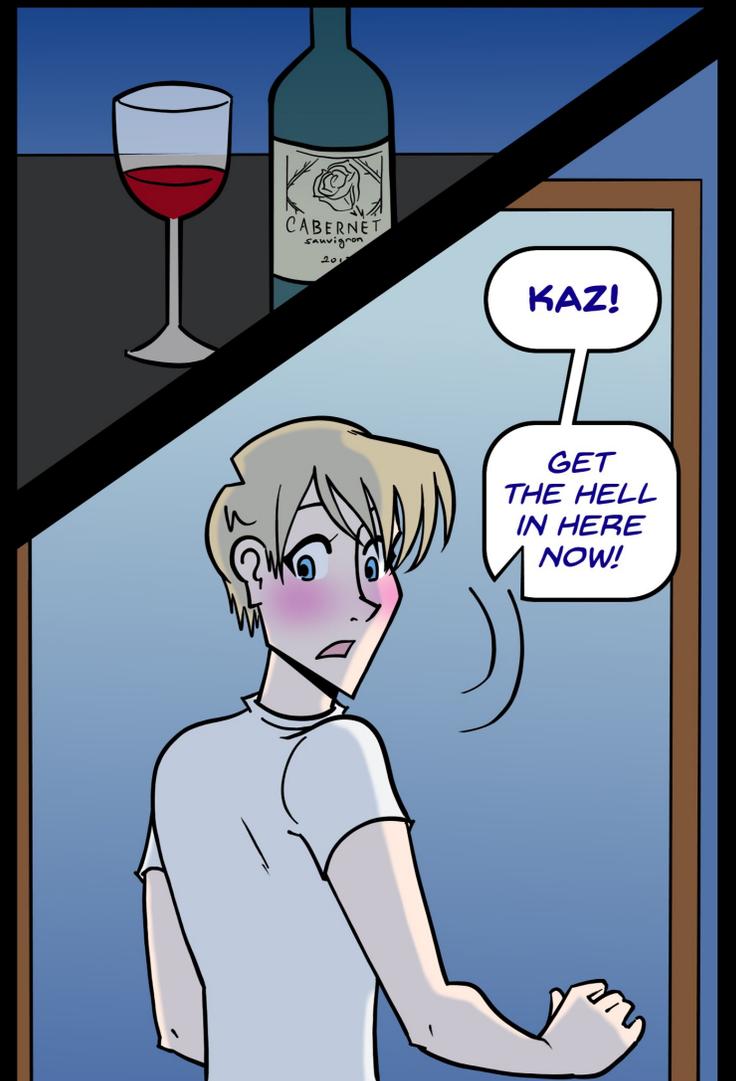
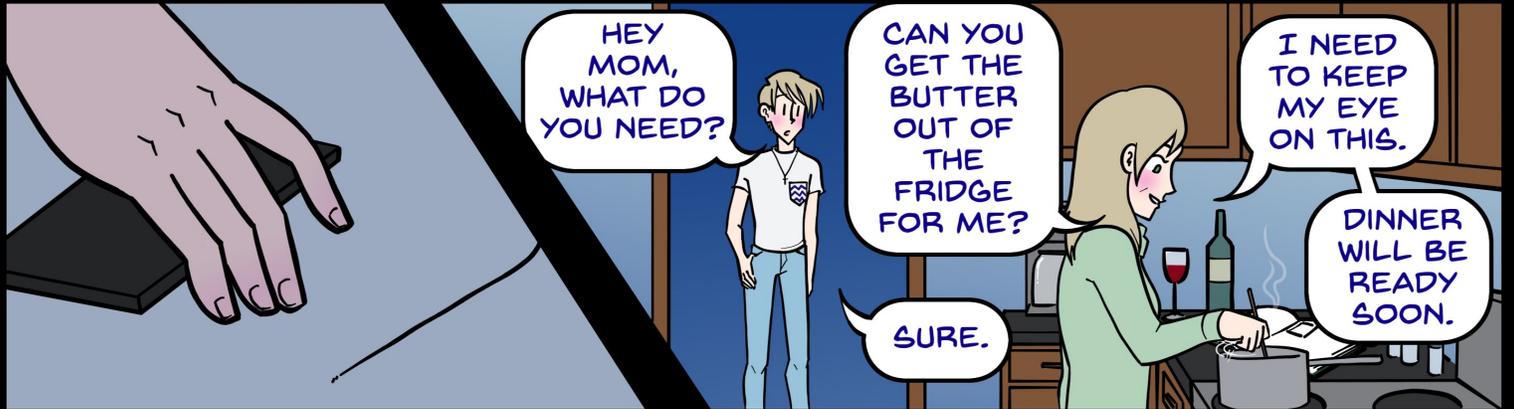
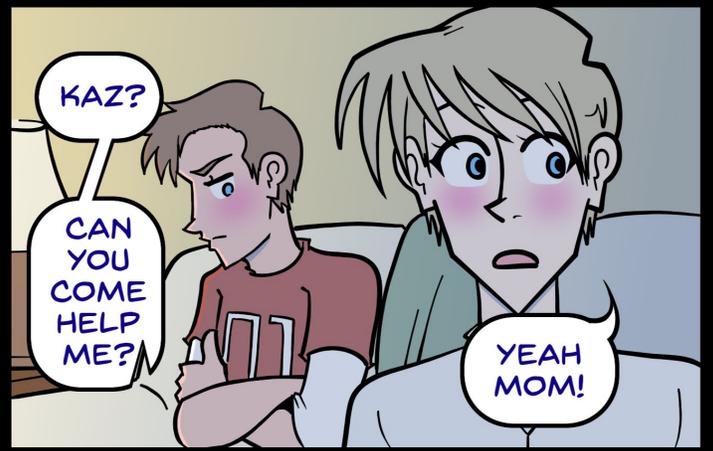
BUT--

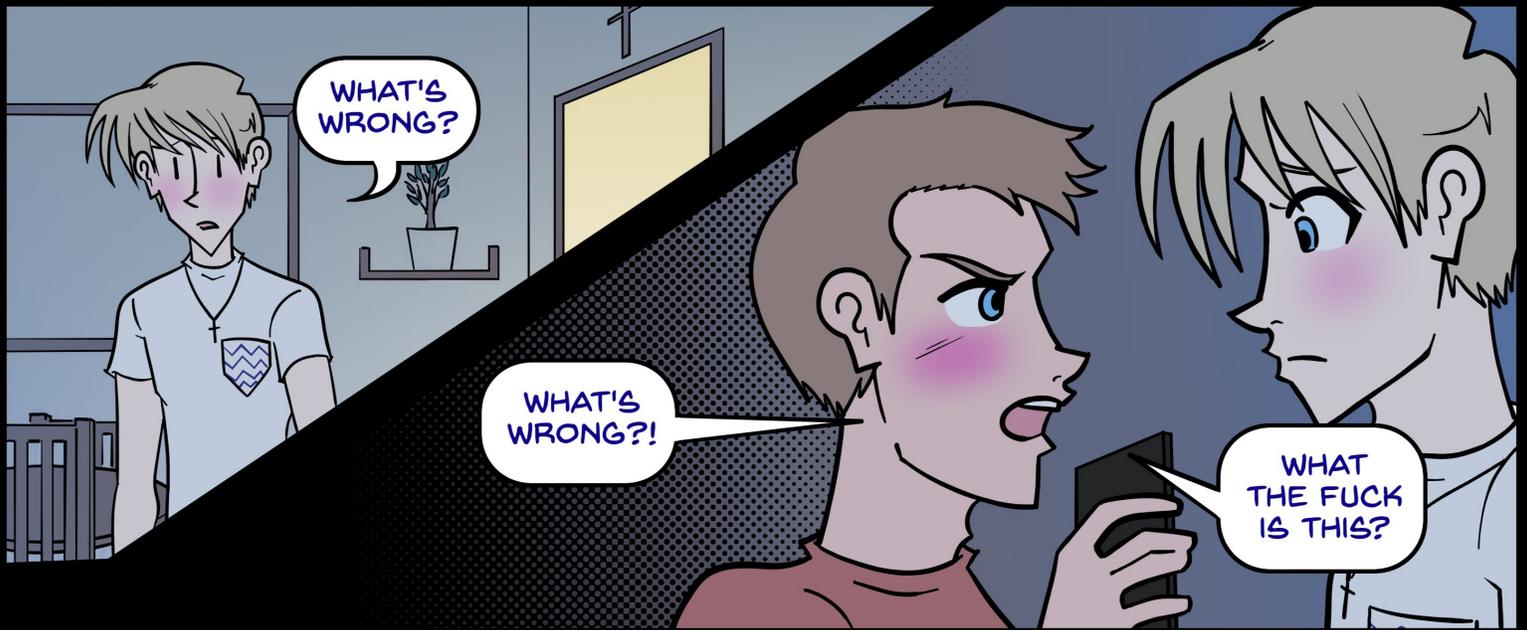
SHIT. THIS GUY AGAIN. I HAVE TO TAKE THIS.



KOVAR.

FUCKIN' STUPID.





WHAT'S WRONG?

WHAT'S WRONG?!

WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS?



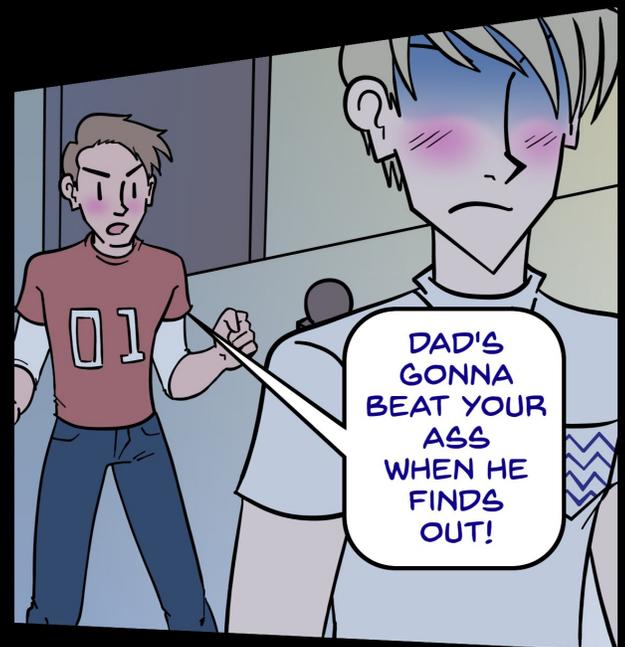
MY BROTHER'S A FUCKING FAGGOT!



JUST WAIT UNTIL I TELL DAD ABOUT THIS!

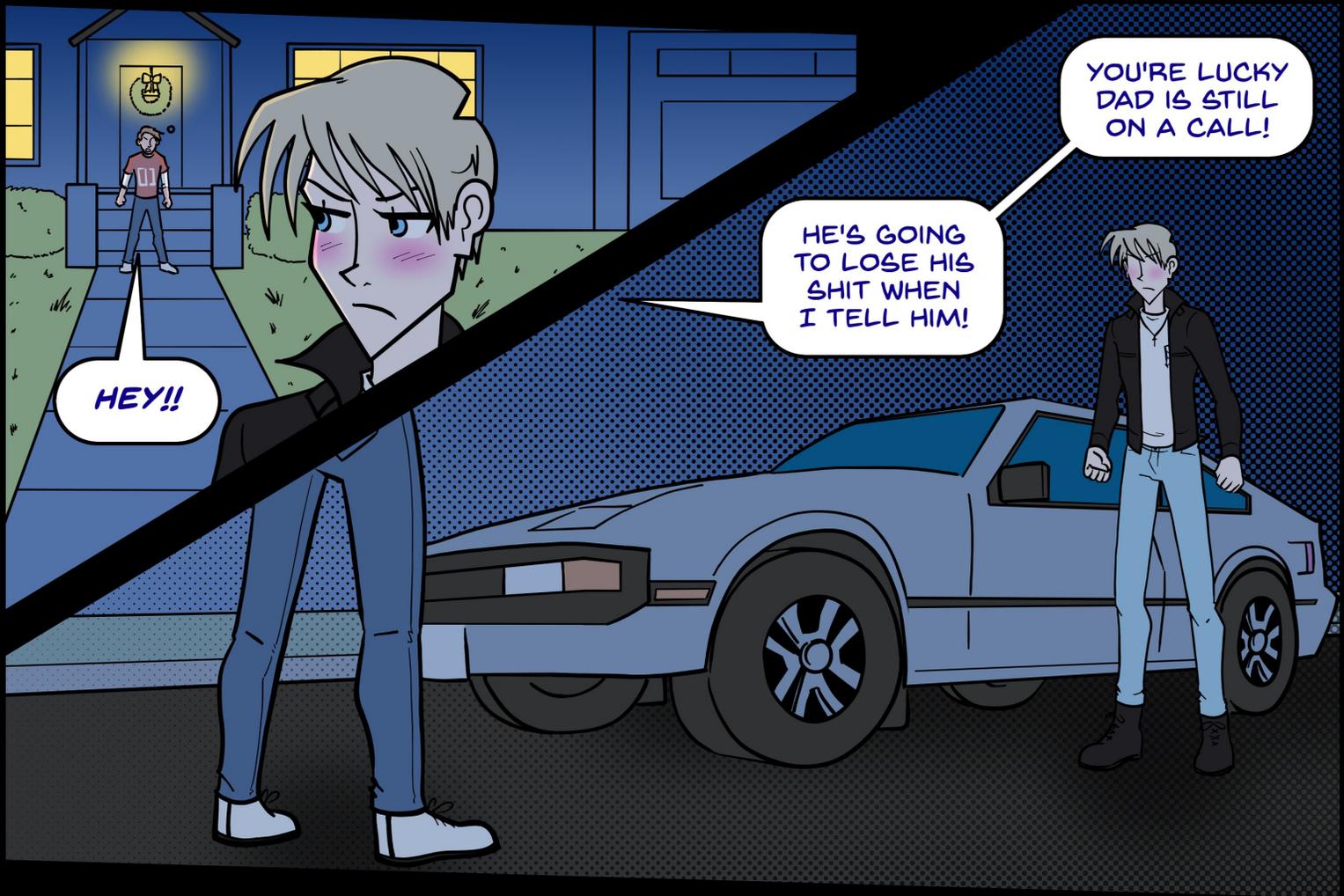


swipe



DAD'S GONNA BEAT YOUR ASS WHEN HE FINDS OUT!

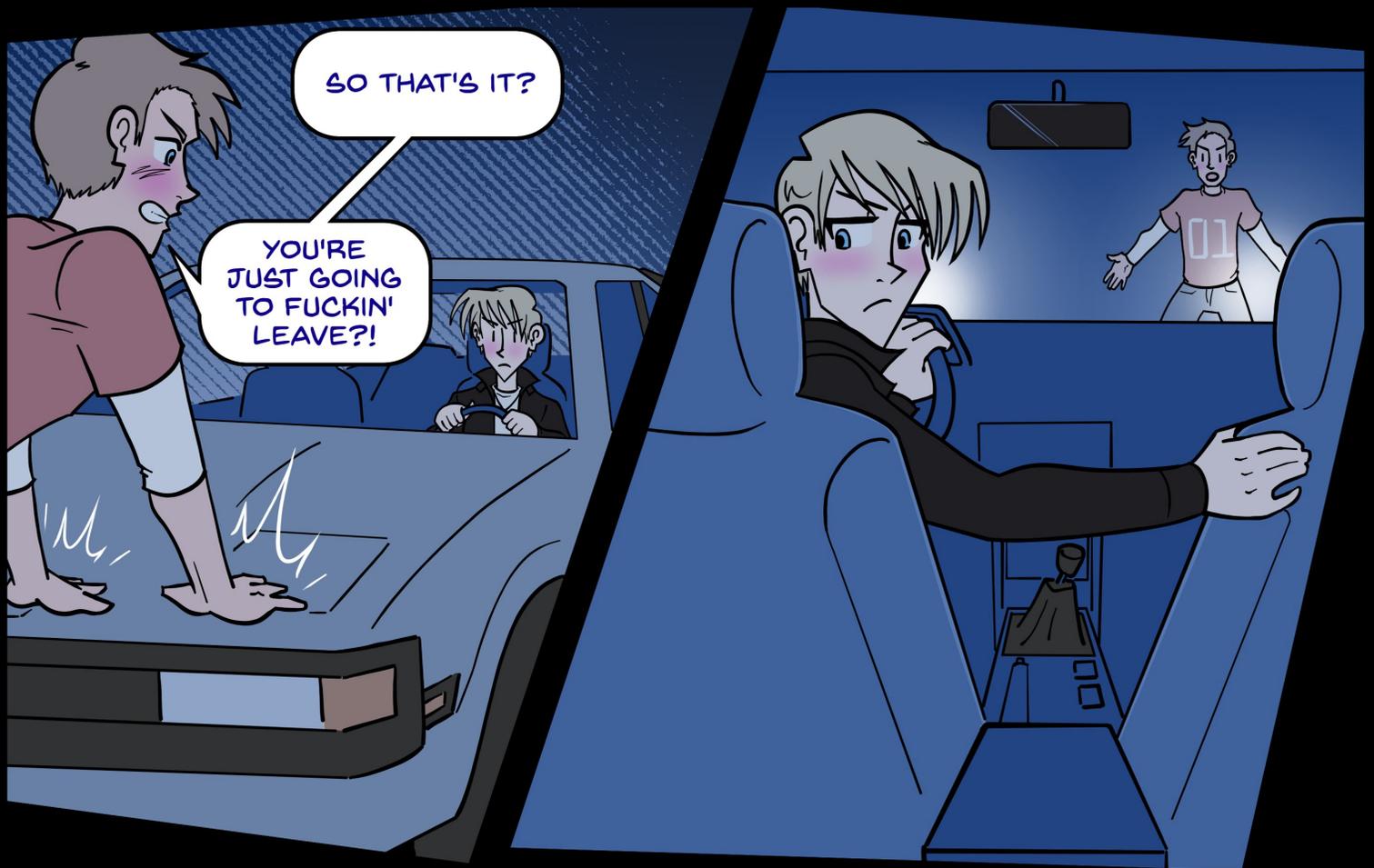




HEY!!

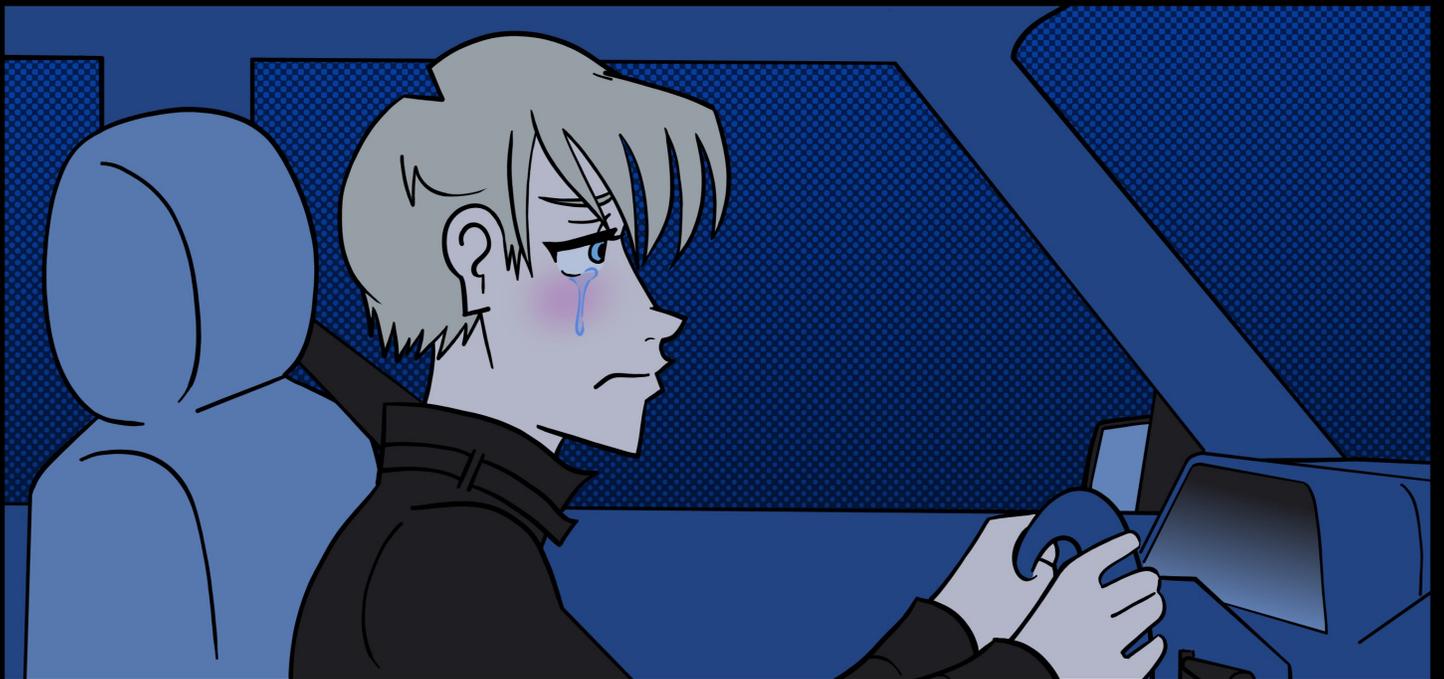
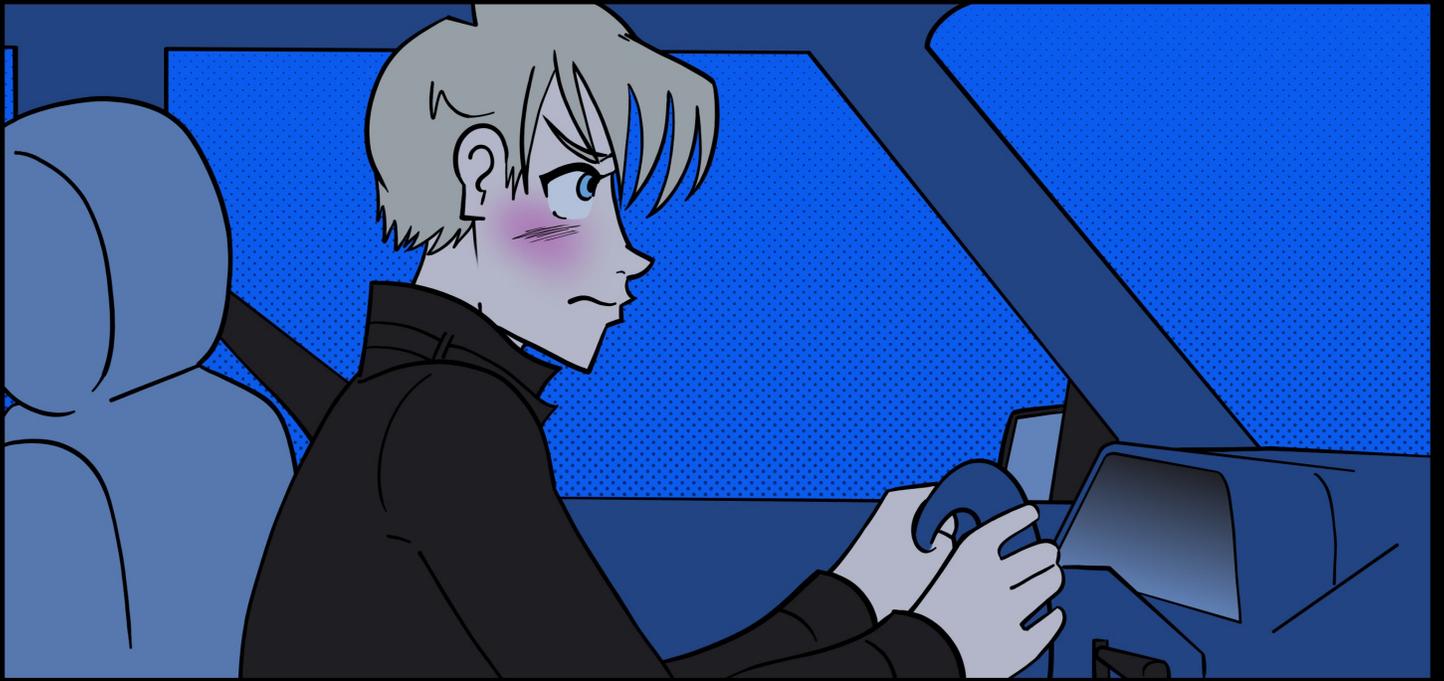
YOU'RE LUCKY DAD IS STILL ON A CALL!

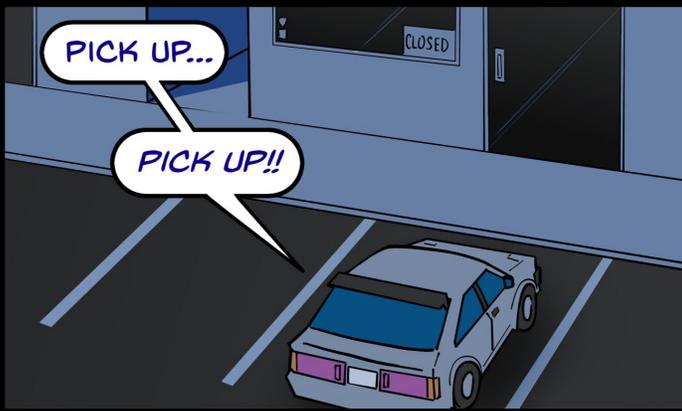
HE'S GOING TO LOSE HIS SHIT WHEN I TELL HIM!



SO THAT'S IT?

YOU'RE JUST GOING TO FUCKIN' LEAVE?!





PICK UP...

PICK UP!!



KAZ?

I LEFT. I'M COMING HOME.



ARE YOU OKAY? WHAT HAPPENED?

JOE SAW MY PHONE.

A PHOTO OF US KISSING.



HE WANTED TO TELL MY DAD. I DIDN'T WANT TO WAIT FOR THAT.

OH MY GOD, ARE YOU SAFE?

YEAH. I DROVE OFF. I'M IN A PARKING LOT A FEW MILES FROM THE HOUSE.



I'M COMING BACK HOME TONIGHT.

KAZ, STARLIGHT CITY IS GETTING A SNOWSTORM TONIGHT...

WITH THE WEATHER, IT'LL BE AN EIGHT HOUR DRIVE.

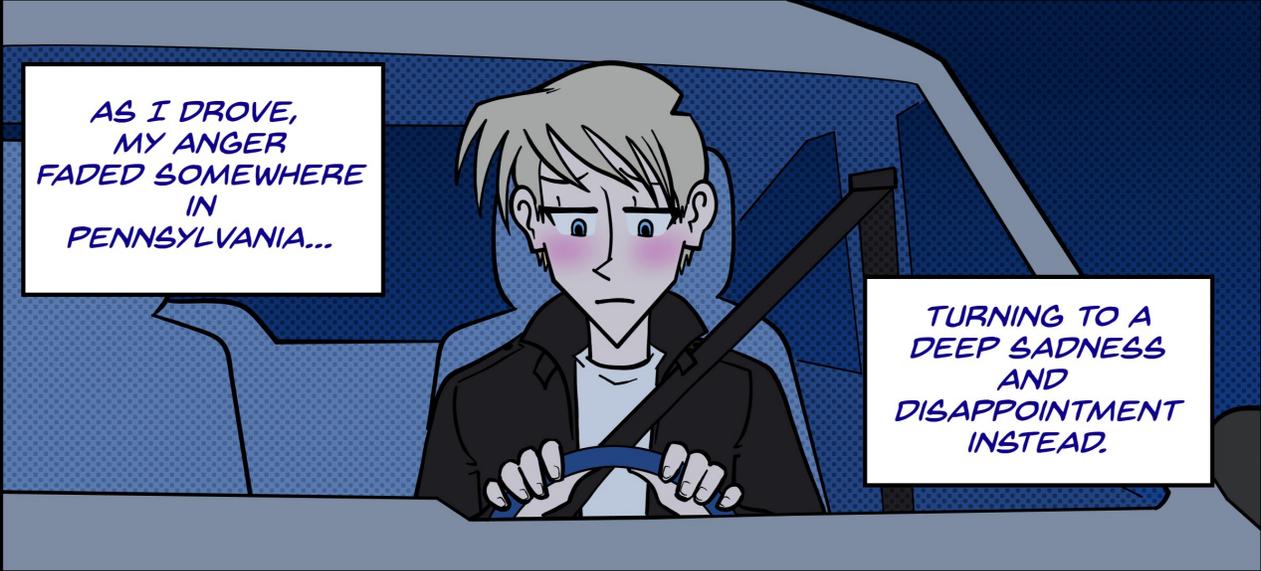


I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT!

IT MIGHT BE DANGEROUS! PLEASE, WILL YOU GET A HOTEL ROOM, JUST FOR TONIGHT?

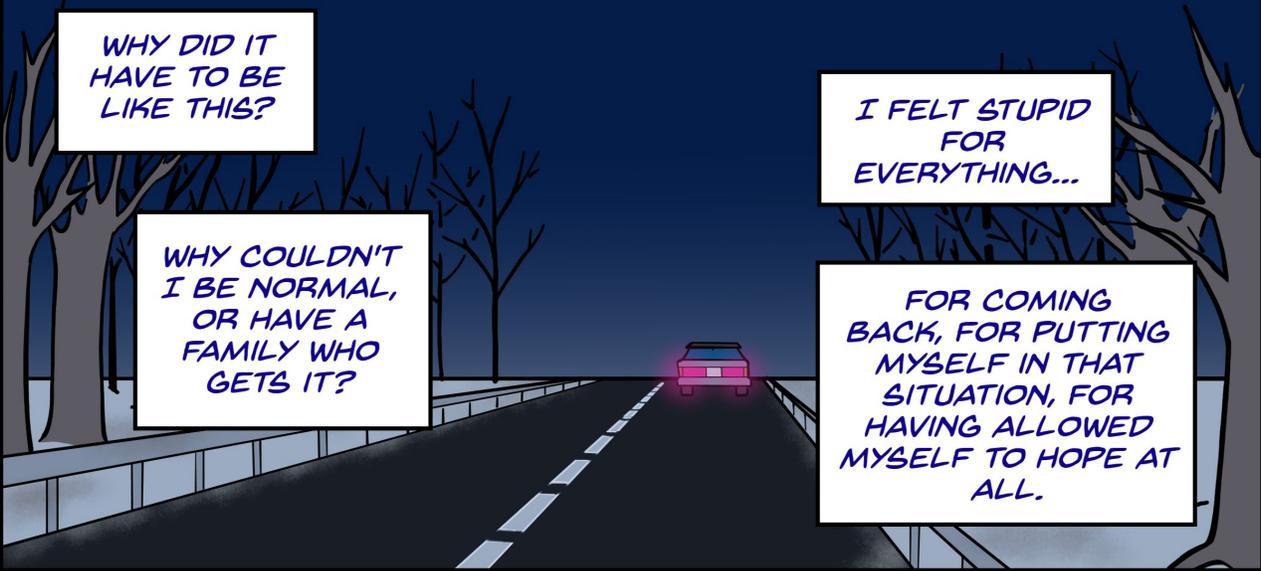
NO ALEX, I'M SORRY. I JUST WANT TO BE HOME.

OKAY... OKAY. JUST... DRIVE SAFE AND CALL ME TO UPDATE ME.



AS I DROVE,
MY ANGER
FADED SOMEWHERE
IN
PENNSYLVANIA...

TURNING TO A
DEEP SADNESS
AND
DISAPPOINTMENT
INSTEAD.



WHY DID IT
HAVE TO BE
LIKE THIS?

WHY COULDN'T
I BE NORMAL,
OR HAVE A
FAMILY WHO
GETS IT?

I FELT STUPID
FOR
EVERYTHING...

FOR COMING
BACK, FOR PUTTING
MYSELF IN THAT
SITUATION, FOR
HAVING ALLOWED
MYSELF TO HOPE AT
ALL.



I COULD'VE
BEEN SPENDING
THIS TIME WITH
PEOPLE WHO
ACTUALLY KNEW ME...

WHO CARED
ABOUT ME.

I FELT LIKE
I HAD
ABANDONED
THEM...

...AND
MYSELF.

SEVERAL HOURS
LATER, I FINALLY
CAME INTO VIEW
OF STARLIGHT
CITY.

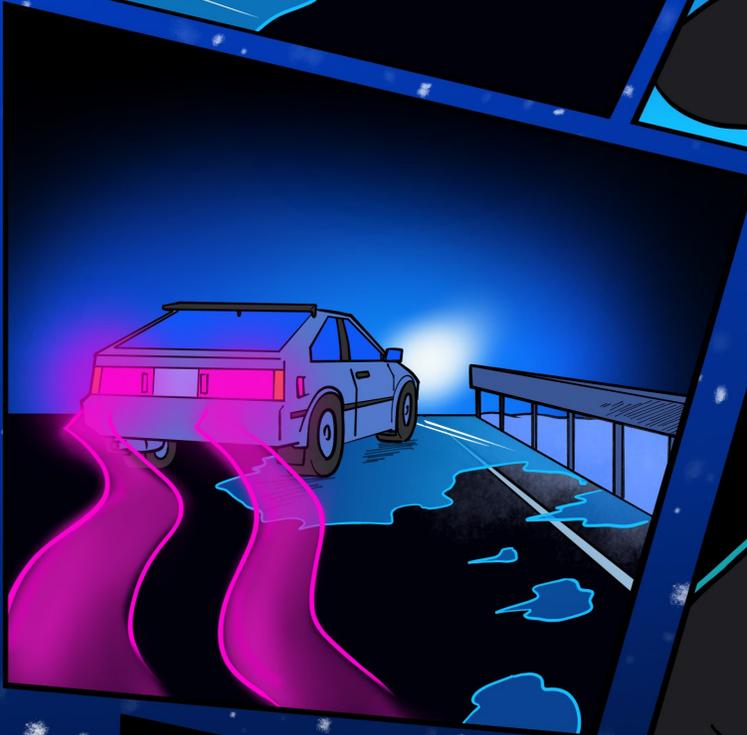
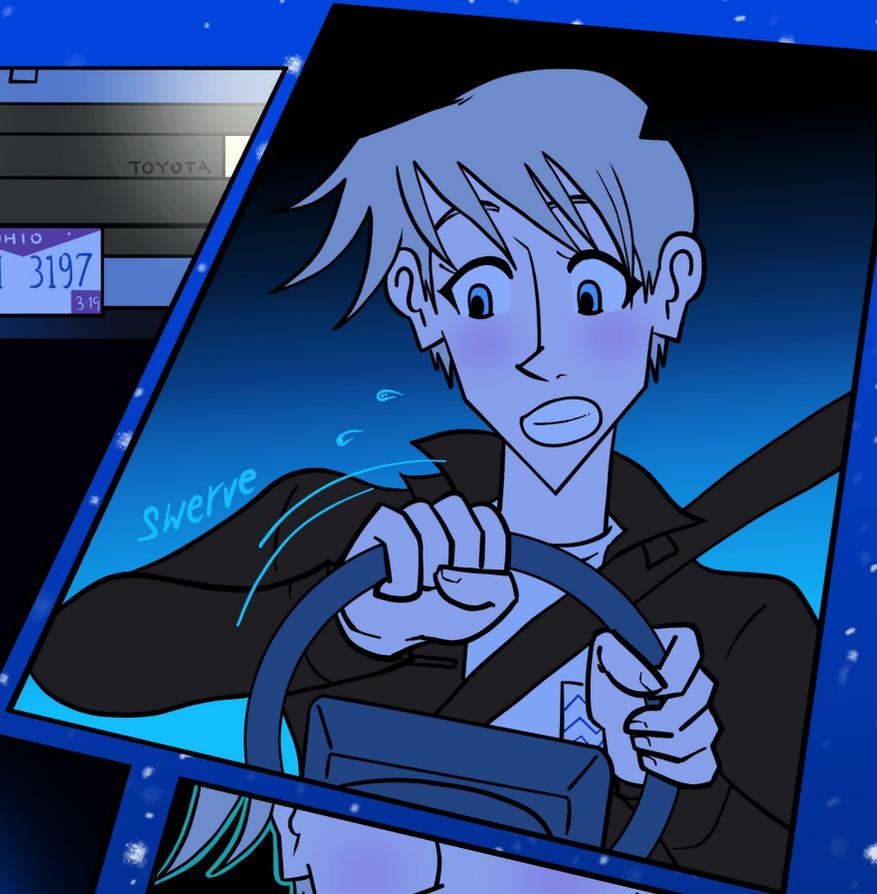
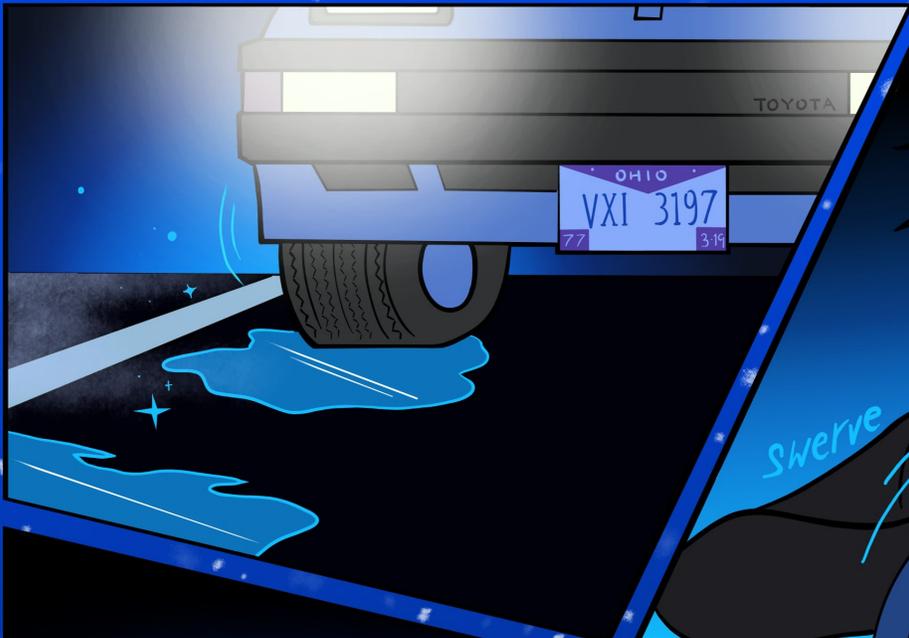


IN THE COLD,
THE BUILDINGS
GLOWED
BEAUTIFULLY
BELOW ME

...

...LIKE A CITY
CARVED FROM
CRYSTAL.



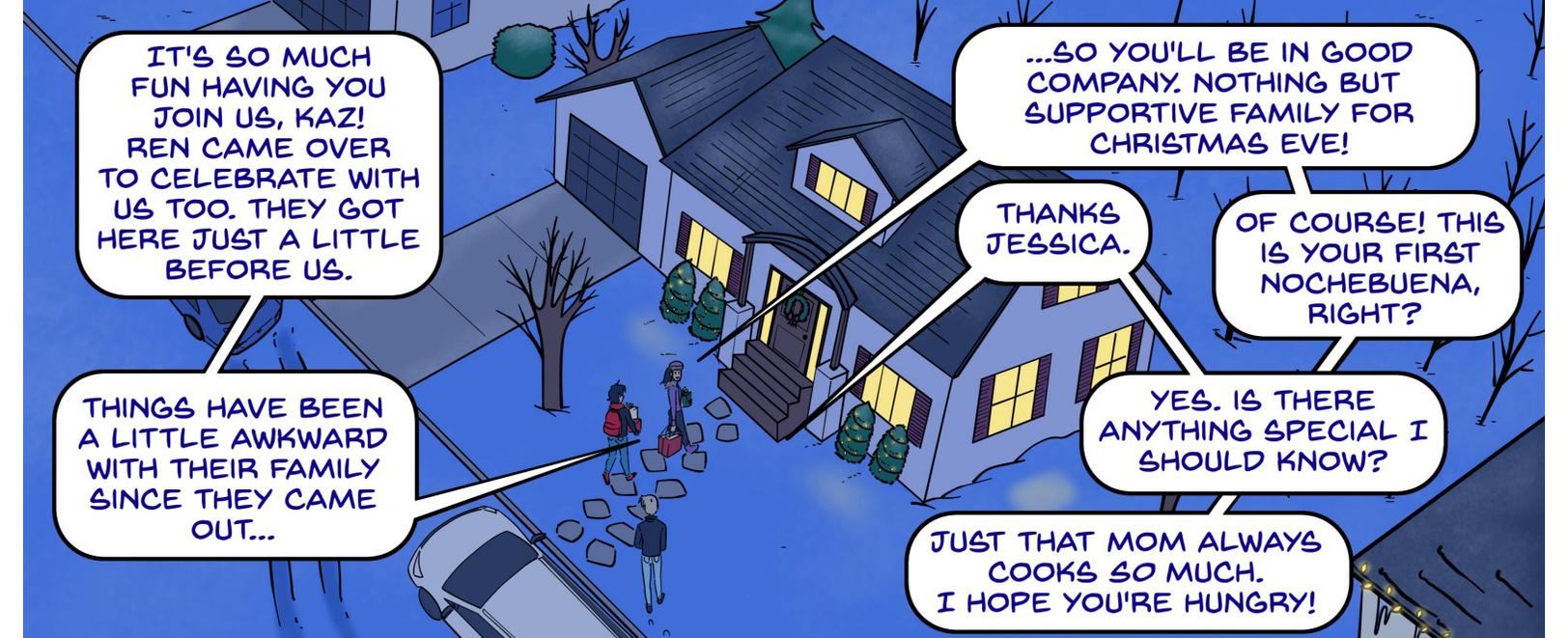












IT'S SO MUCH FUN HAVING YOU JOIN US, KAZ! REN CAME OVER TO CELEBRATE WITH US TOO. THEY GOT HERE JUST A LITTLE BEFORE US.

...SO YOU'LL BE IN GOOD COMPANY. NOTHING BUT SUPPORTIVE FAMILY FOR CHRISTMAS EVE!

THANKS JESSICA.

OF COURSE! THIS IS YOUR FIRST NOCHEBUENA, RIGHT?

THINGS HAVE BEEN A LITTLE AWKWARD WITH THEIR FAMILY SINCE THEY CAME OUT...

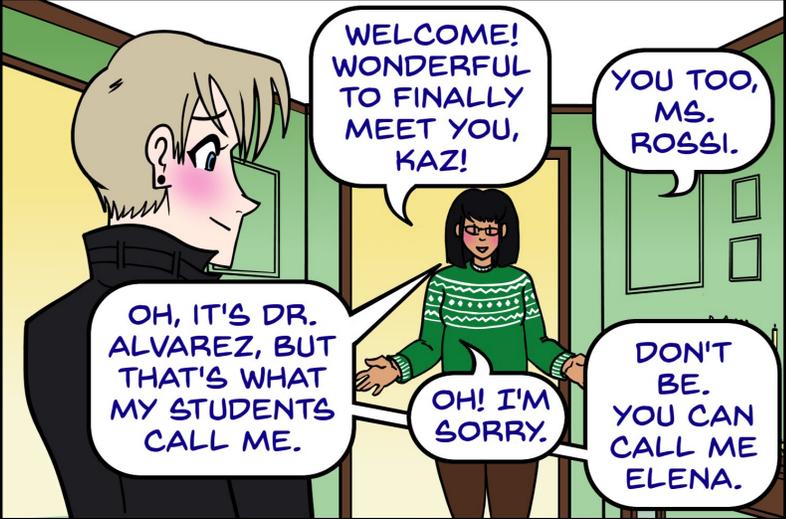
YES. IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL I SHOULD KNOW?

JUST THAT MOM ALWAYS COOKS SO MUCH. I HOPE YOU'RE HUNGRY!



HEY MAMI, WE'RE HERE!

WE BROUGHT KAZ!



WELCOME! WONDERFUL TO FINALLY MEET YOU, KAZ!

YOU TOO, MS. ROSSI.

OH, IT'S DR. ALVAREZ, BUT THAT'S WHAT MY STUDENTS CALL ME.

OH! I'M SORRY.

DON'T BE. YOU CAN CALL ME ELENA.



LET ME PUT DOWN THESE PRESENTS THEN JESS AND I CAN HELP IN THE KITCHEN.

THANK GOODNESS, MIJO, I'M SO BEHIND ON DINNER...

ALEX DIDN'T TELL ME MUCH, BUT I KNOW THINGS ARE HARD WITH YOUR FAMILY, HONEY.

IF YOU EVER NEED ANOTHER MOM, I'M HERE FOR YOU.

CAN I GRAB YOU A DRINK, BABE?

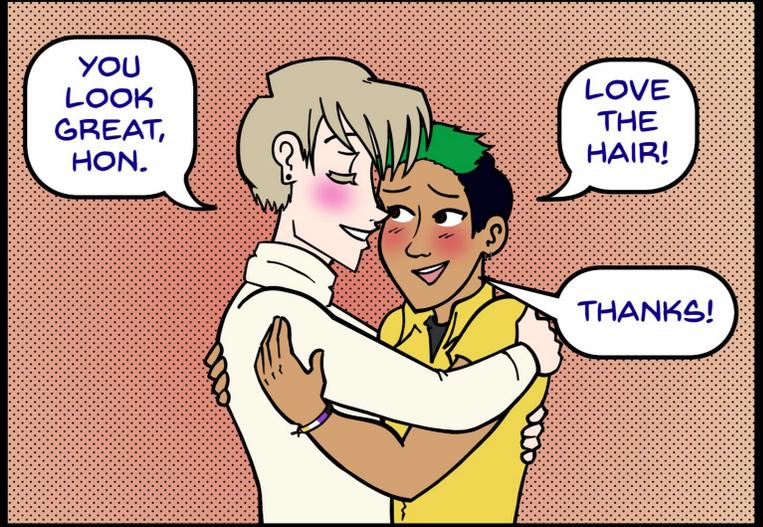
NO THANKS, NEED ANY HELP?

NAH, FEEL FREE TO RELAX WITH REN. JESS AND I GOT THIS. YOU'RE OUR GUESTS.



HEY REN!

KAZ!!



YOU LOOK GREAT, HON.

LOVE THE HAIR!

THANKS!



wag wag

OH, WHO'S THIS?

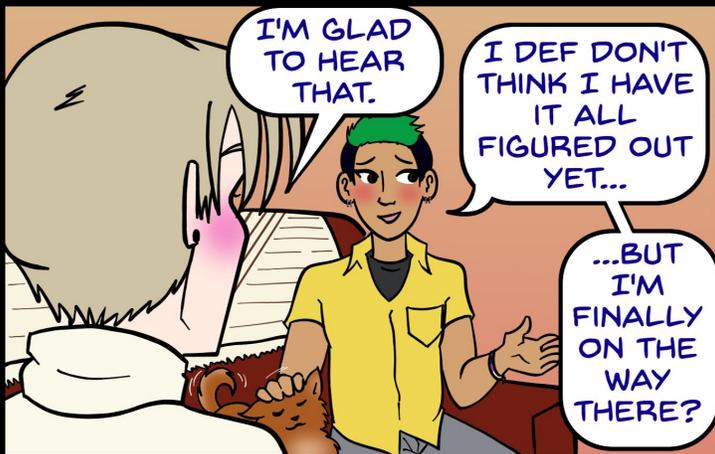
SHE'S COCO!
TOTAL SWEETHEART.
YOU CAN PET HER ALL DAY.



HOW HAVE YOU BEEN DOING?

THANK YOU AND ALEX AGAIN FOR LETTING ME VISIT. TALKING WITH HIM HELPED A LOT.

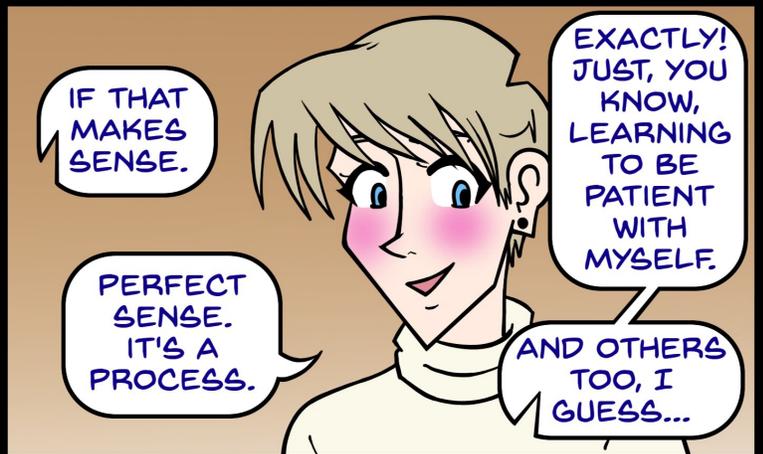
REALLY GREAT, OVERALL!



I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT.

I DEF DON'T THINK I HAVE IT ALL FIGURED OUT YET...

...BUT I'M FINALLY ON THE WAY THERE?

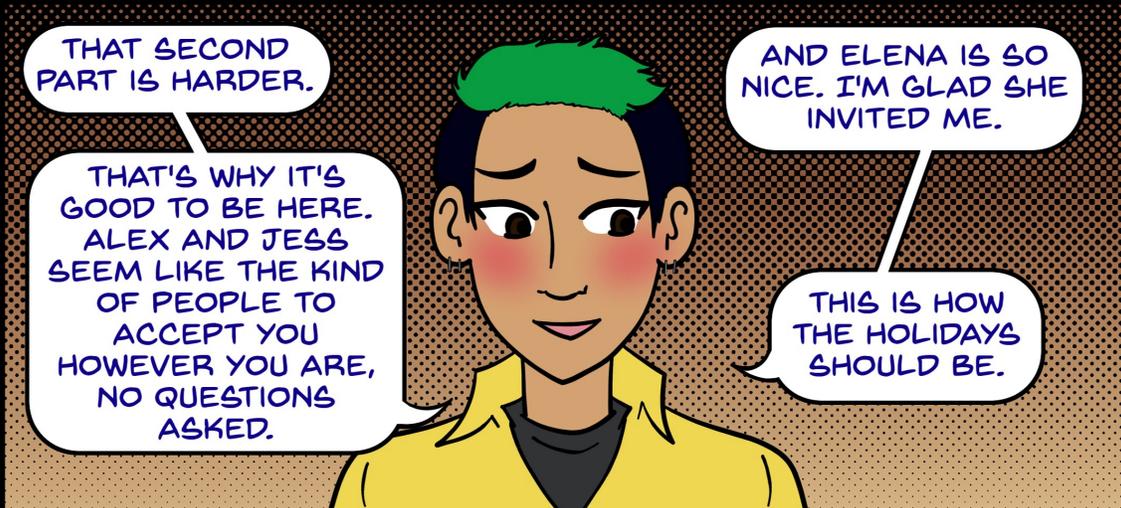


IF THAT MAKES SENSE.

EXACTLY! JUST, YOU KNOW, LEARNING TO BE PATIENT WITH MYSELF.

PERFECT SENSE. IT'S A PROCESS.

AND OTHERS TOO, I GUESS...



THAT SECOND PART IS HARDER.

THAT'S WHY IT'S GOOD TO BE HERE. ALEX AND JESS SEEM LIKE THE KIND OF PEOPLE TO ACCEPT YOU HOWEVER YOU ARE, NO QUESTIONS ASKED.

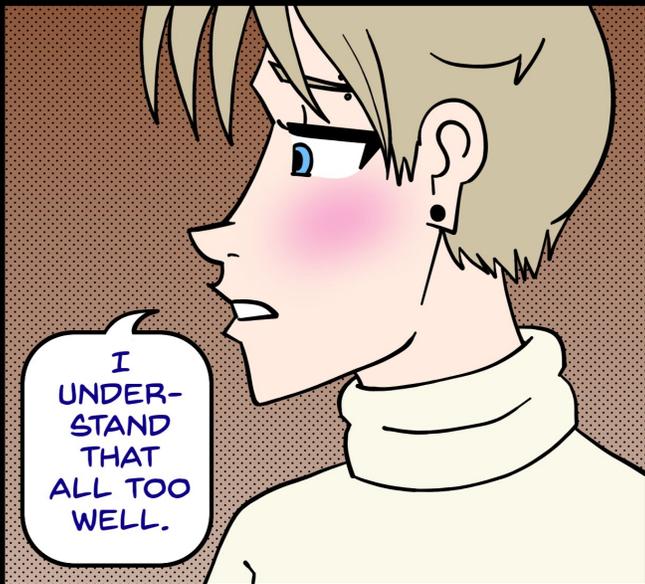
AND ELENA IS SO NICE. I'M GLAD SHE INVITED ME.

THIS IS HOW THE HOLIDAYS SHOULD BE.



I LOVE MY FAMILY, BUT... SOMETIMES IT FEELS IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPLAIN THINGS TO THEM.

I APPRECIATE BEING WITH YOU ALL HERE TONIGHT SO I COULD HAVE A BREAK FROM THAT.

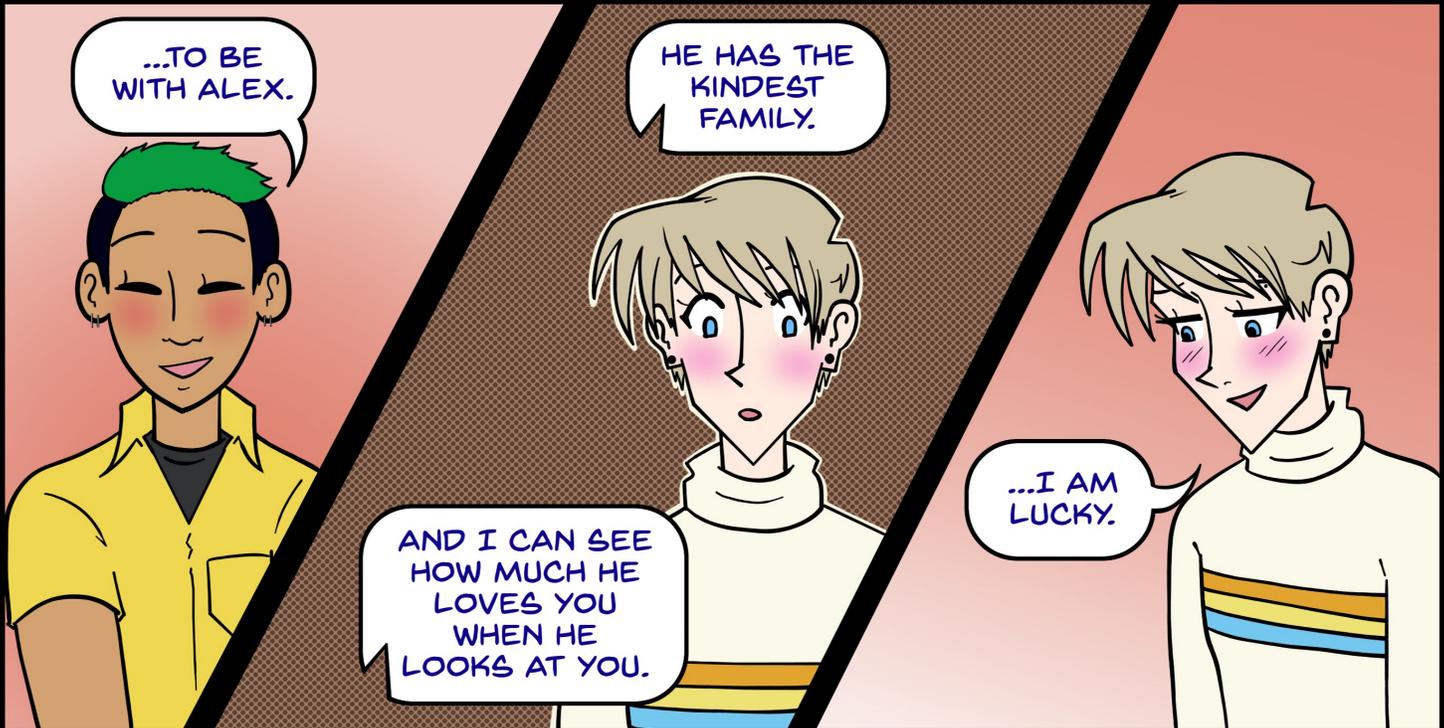


I UNDERSTAND THAT ALL TOO WELL.



YOU'RE REALLY LUCKY, YOU KNOW...

I DON'T FEEL...

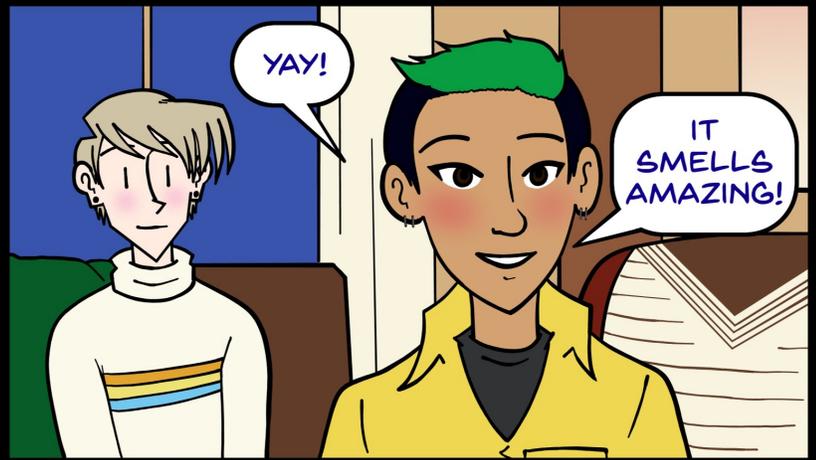


...TO BE WITH ALEX.

HE HAS THE KINDEST FAMILY.

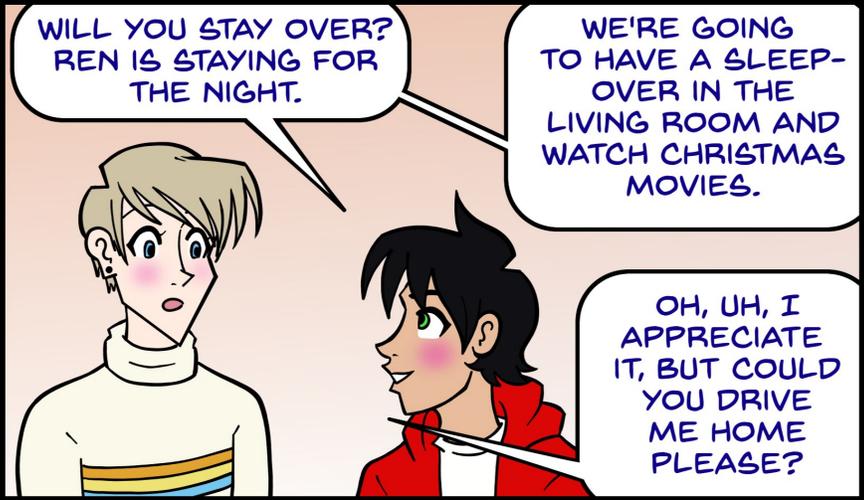
AND I CAN SEE HOW MUCH HE LOVES YOU WHEN HE LOOKS AT YOU.

...I AM LUCKY.





THANKS REN!



WILL YOU STAY OVER?
REN IS STAYING FOR
THE NIGHT.

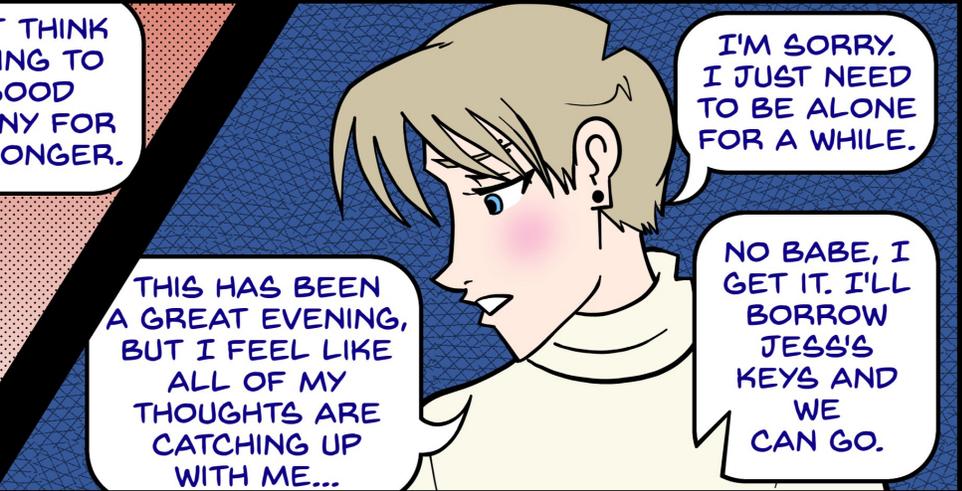
WE'RE GOING
TO HAVE A SLEEP-
OVER IN THE
LIVING ROOM AND
WATCH CHRISTMAS
MOVIES.

OH, UH, I
APPRECIATE
IT, BUT COULD
YOU DRIVE
ME HOME
PLEASE?



YOU
SURE?

I DON'T THINK
I'M GOING TO
BE GOOD
COMPANY FOR
MUCH LONGER.



THIS HAS BEEN
A GREAT EVENING,
BUT I FEEL LIKE
ALL OF MY
THOUGHTS ARE
CATCHING UP
WITH ME...

I'M SORRY.
I JUST NEED
TO BE ALONE
FOR A WHILE.

NO BABE, I
GET IT. I'LL
BORROW
JESS'S
KEYS AND
WE
CAN GO.



I'M GOING TO COME
OVER TOMORROW,
IF THAT'S OKAY?

I DON'T
WANT YOU
TO SPEND
CHRISTMAS
DAY ALONE.

SURE.
I'M LOOKING
FORWARD TO IT.

THANKS
HON.



MERRY
CHRISTMAS,
ALEX.

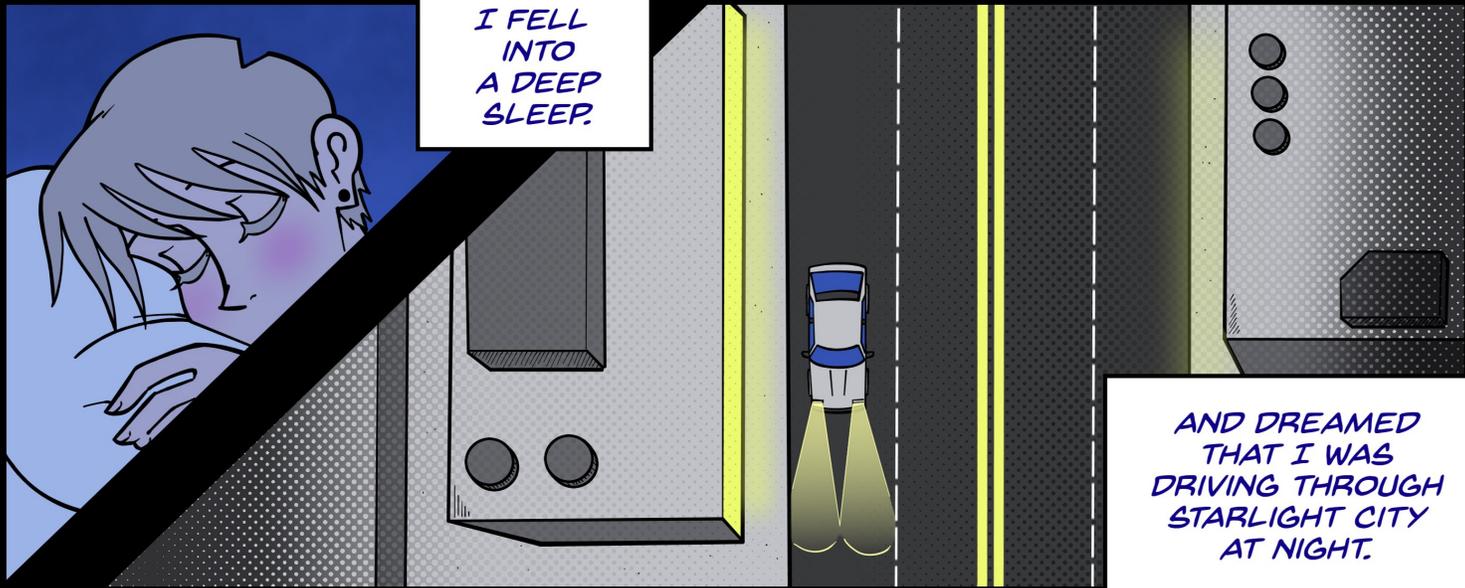
MERRY
CHRISTMAS.



THE HOUSE WAS
SILENT. RAHUL AND
JORDAN OUT WITH
THEIR FAMILIES OR
FRIENDS.

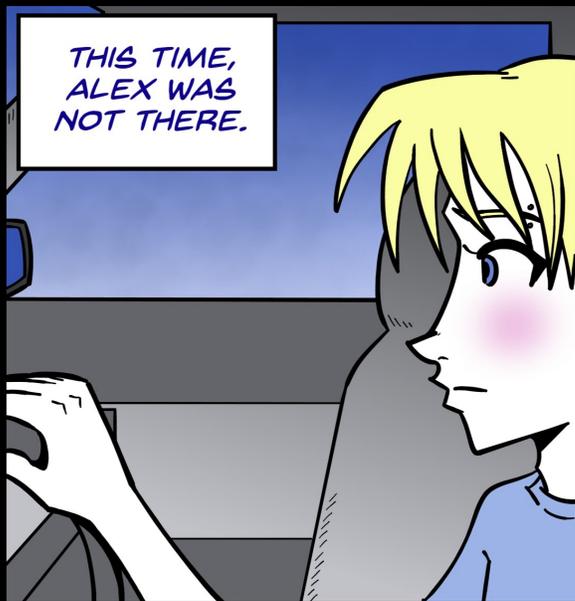
STILL, IT FELT
RIGHT TO BE
BACK HERE.

THIS WAS
MY HOME
NOW.

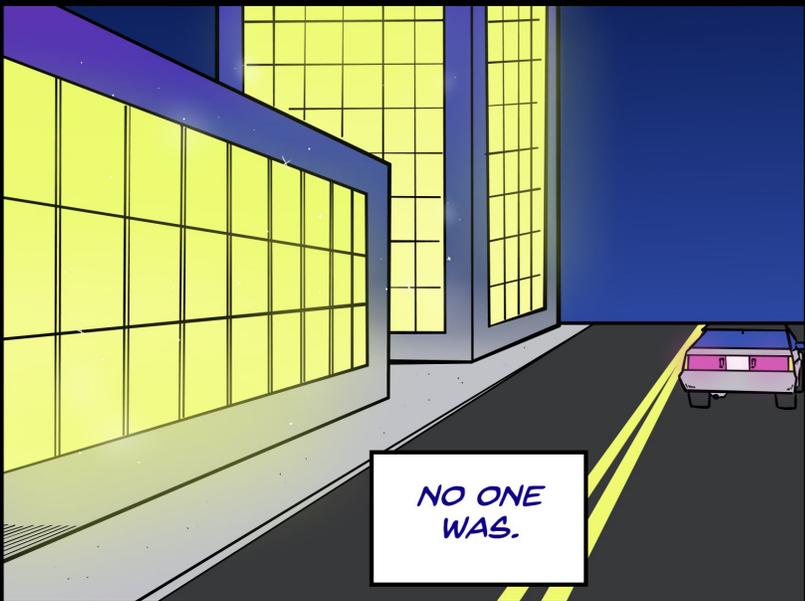


I FELL INTO A DEEP SLEEP.

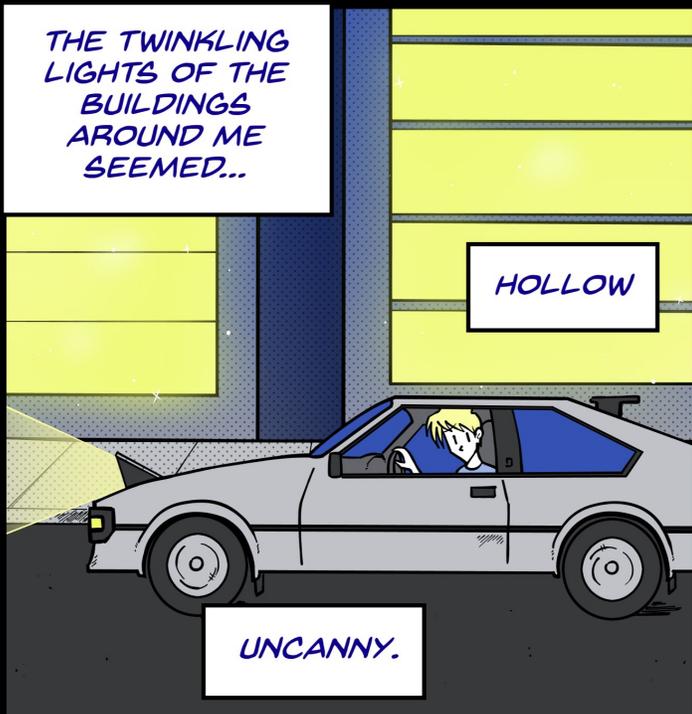
AND DREAMED THAT I WAS DRIVING THROUGH STARLIGHT CITY AT NIGHT.



THIS TIME, ALEX WAS NOT THERE.



NO ONE WAS.



THE TWINKLING LIGHTS OF THE BUILDINGS AROUND ME SEEMED...

HOLLOW

UNCANNY.



SHINING FACADES ILLUMINATED FOR NO ONE AT ALL.

I FELT AS IF
I WERE
SUPPOSED TO
MEET ALEX
SOMEWHERE.



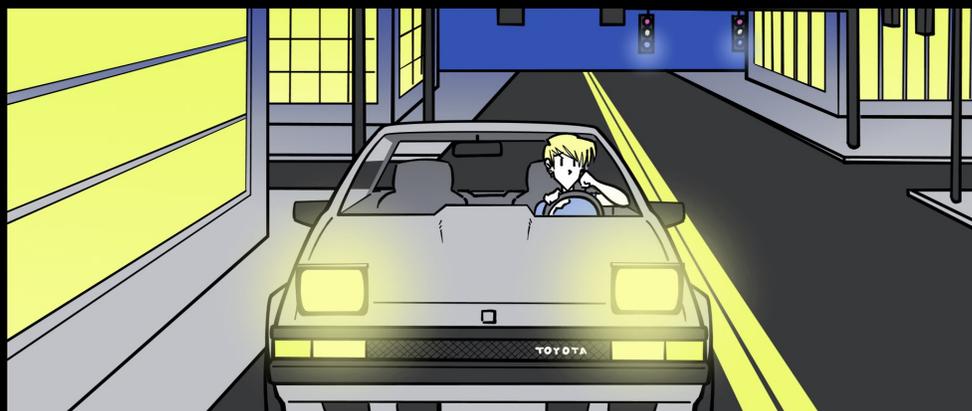
BUT
WHERE?



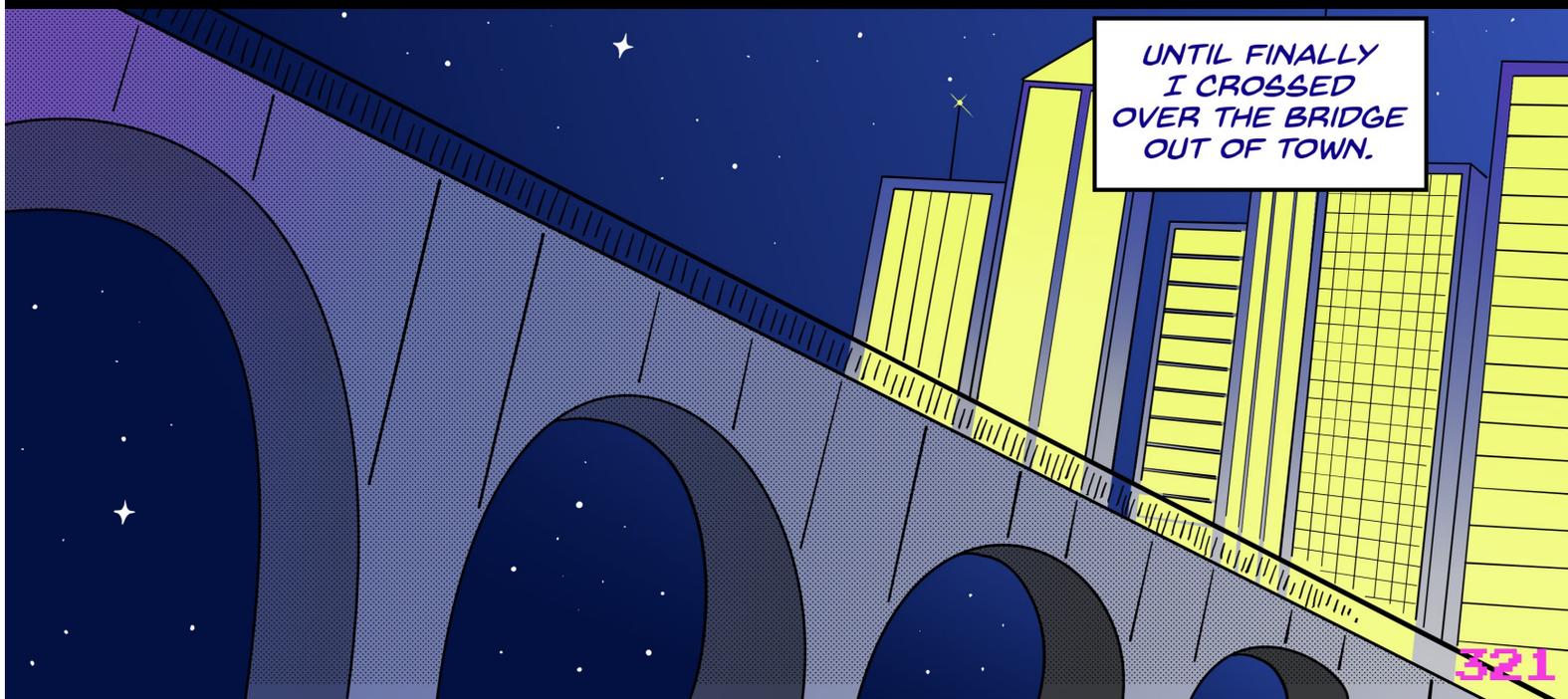
I COULDN'T
REMEMBER.



SO I
DROVE
AIMLESSLY.



UNTIL FINALLY
I CROSSED
OVER THE BRIDGE
OUT OF TOWN.



I EXITED
MY CAR...



AND LOOKED
BACK AT THE
GLOWING
LIGHTS.

BUT
THEN...



THEY
FLICKERED
OUT...

AND THE
CITY
DISAPPEARED.



AND
I
WOKE UP.

