

The Golden Hour

NIKI SMITH

4.99 U.S.
1.99 CAN.

golden hour:

A photography term for the period of daytime shortly after sunrise or before sunset, during which daylight is redder and softer than when the sun is higher in the sky.



A story of healing, friendship, self-discovery, and hope.

Struggling with anxiety after witnessing a harrowing instance of gun violence, Manuel Soto uses photography to cope, finding anchors to keep him grounded—first through his cell phone and eventually with his very own camera. His days are a lonely, latchkey monotony until he's teamed with his classmates Sebastian and Caysha for a group project.

Sebastian lives on a grass-fed cattle farm outside town, and Manuel finds solace in the open fields and the antics of the newborn calf Sebastian is hand-raising. As Manuel aids his new friends in their preparations for the local county fair, he learns to open up, confronts his deepest fears, and even finds first love.

*The
Golden
Hour*

NIKI SMITH

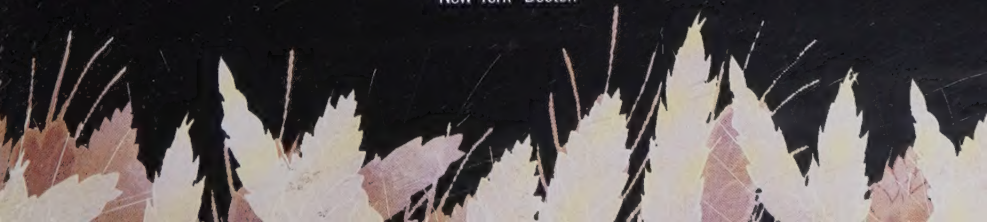
Smith, Niki,
The golden hour /
2021.
33305250378514
sa 12/07/21

The Golden Hour

NIKI SMITH



Little, Brown and Company
New York Boston



About This Book

This book was edited by Rachel Poloski and designed by Ching N. Chan. The production was supervised by Bernadette Flinn, and the production editor was Lindsay Walter-Greaney. The text was set in Sketchnote, and the display type is RestlessSoul.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2021 by Niki Smith

Cover illustration copyright © 2021 by Niki Smith. Cover design by Ching N. Chan.
Cover copyright © 2021 by Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Interior Photo Credits: Page 113, 244 © Daguerre, L. (1838). *Boulevard du Temple* [Photograph].
• Page 137, 244 © Lange, D. (1936). *Migrant Mother* [Photograph]. Library of Congress.
• Page 137, 244 © Unknown. (1943). *Speed graphic camera used at Naval Air Station, Kodiak, Alaska* [Photograph]. National Archives. • Page 137, 244 © Weegee. (1940). *Heat Wave at Coney Island* [Photograph]. Getty Images, Brooklyn, NY. • Pages 138, 139, 244 © Adams, A. (1942). *The Tetons and the Snake River* [Photograph]. National Archives.

Hachette Book Group supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact permissions@hbgusa.com. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Little, Brown and Company
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104
Visit us at LBYR.com

First Edition: October 2021

Little, Brown and Company is a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc.
The Little, Brown name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Smith, Niki, author, illustrator.
Title: The golden hour / Niki Smith.

Description: First edition. | New York : Little, Brown and Company, 2021. | Summary: After witnessing a violent attack at school, Manuel struggles with anxiety but his cell phone camera helps him find anchors when he dissociates, and an unexpected friendship opens up new possibilities.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020005070 | ISBN 9780316540377 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780316540339 (paperback) | ISBN 9780316540315 (ebook) | ISBN 9780316540353 (ebook other)

Subjects: LCSH: Graphic novels. | CYAC: Graphic novels. | Anxiety—Fiction. | Friendship—Fiction. | Photography—Fiction. | Gays—Fiction. | Schools—Fiction. | 4-H clubs—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.L.S6425 Gol 2021 | DDC [Fic]—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020005070>

ISBNs: 978-0-316-54037-7 (hardcover), 978-0-316-54033-9 (pbk.),
978-0-316-54031-5 (ebook), 978-0-316-54034-6 (ebook), 978-0-316-54036-0 (ebook)

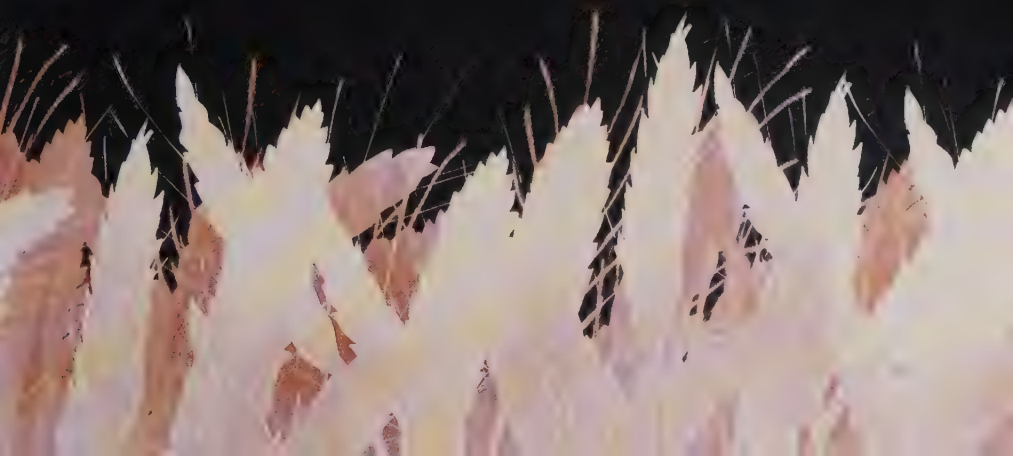
PRINTED IN CHINA

1010

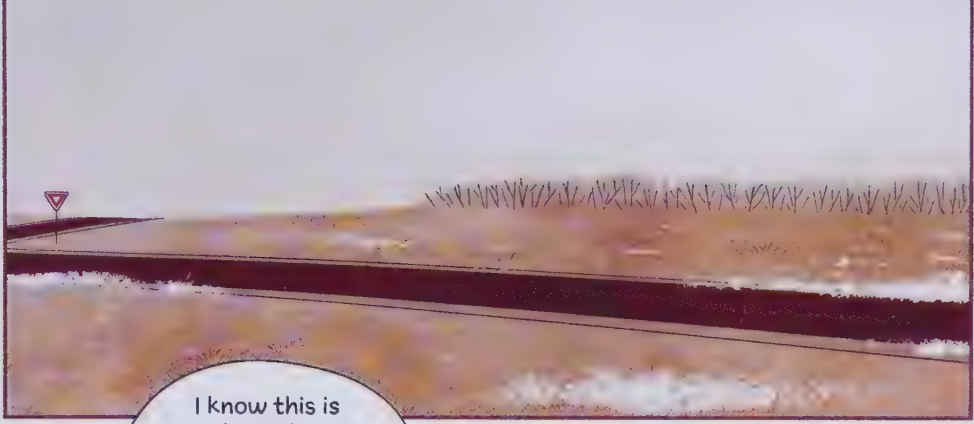
Hardcover: 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Paperback: 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To all the teachers who believed in me.

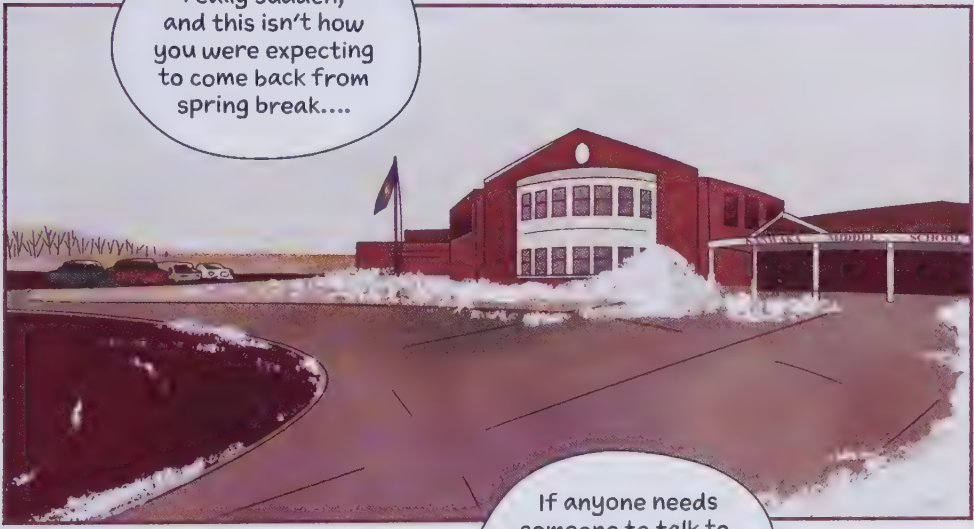
chapter one







I know this is really sudden, and this isn't how you were expecting to come back from spring break....

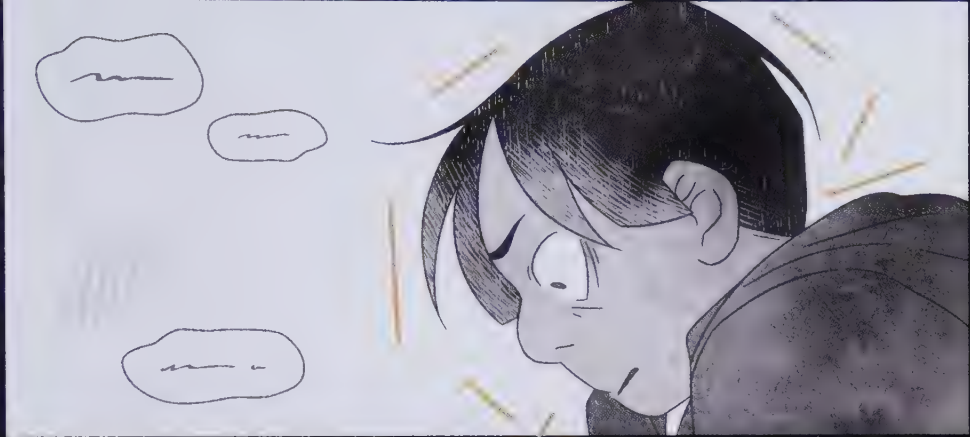


If anyone needs someone to talk to, you can stop by the guidance counselor's offices anytime.



Your teachers will be happy to write you a hall pass.







Manuel?

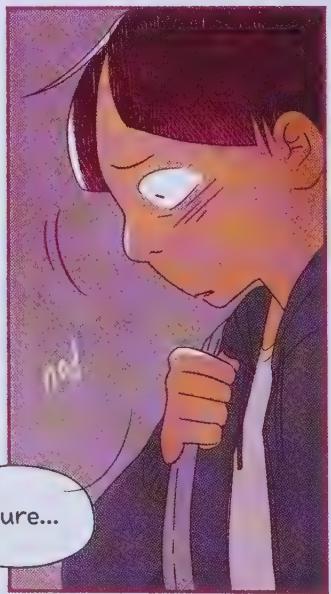


Manuel?



I'd like you to go sit with Sebastian and Caysha.

Can you do that for me?

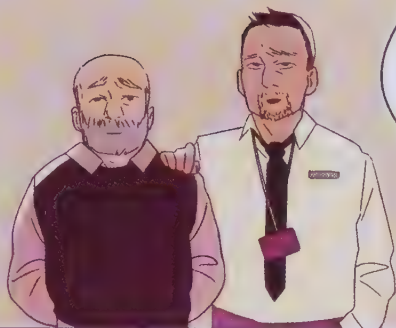


Sure...



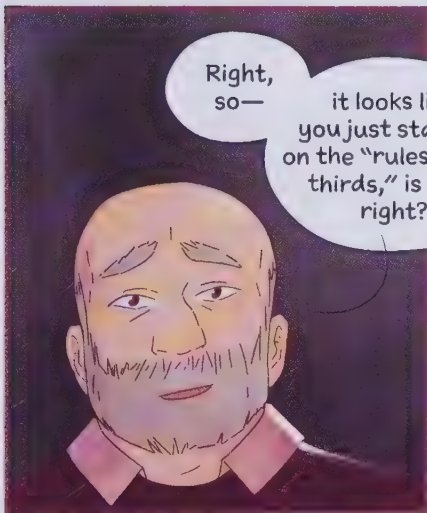
Earth to Manuel...

What's with him?



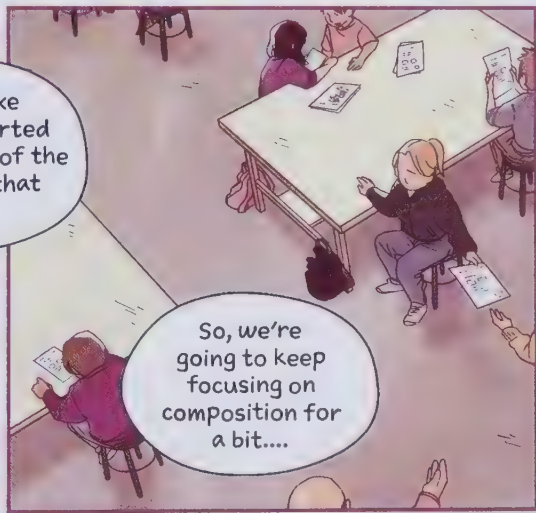
So, in the meantime, we'll have the class spend the next few weeks on group projects.

Mr. Pyrell will be continuing as your sub for now, and we'll see how things go, okay?



Right, so—

it looks like you just started on the "rules of the thirds," is that right?



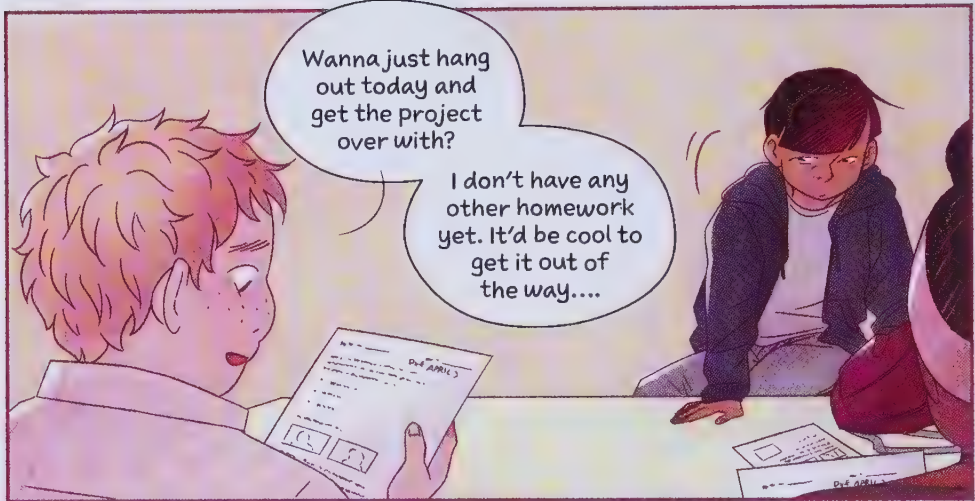
So, we're going to keep focusing on composition for a bit....



Hey! Manuel, right? Caysha.

Hey, yeah...

Sebastian.



Wanna just hang out today and get the project over with?

I don't have any other homework yet. It'd be cool to get it out of the way....



NONE? I have, like, three books I have to bring home! Algebra is brutal!

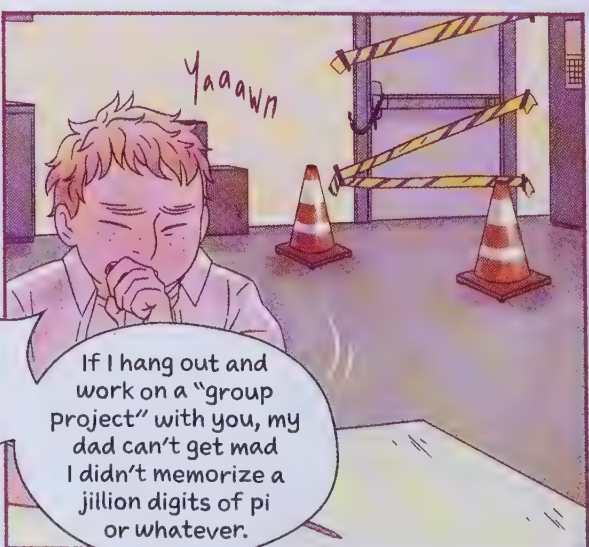
Okay, scrap that idea—



...



No! No, I love it!



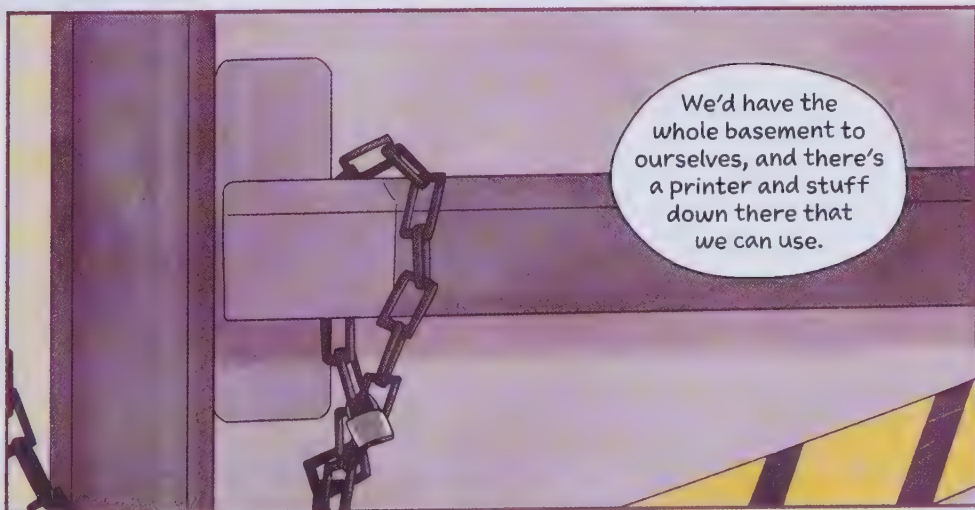
If I hang out and work on a "group project" with you, my dad can't get mad I didn't memorize a jillion digits of pi or whatever.



Sorry, I was up early....



Anyway—
yeah, we can
hang out at my
place, if you
guys want.



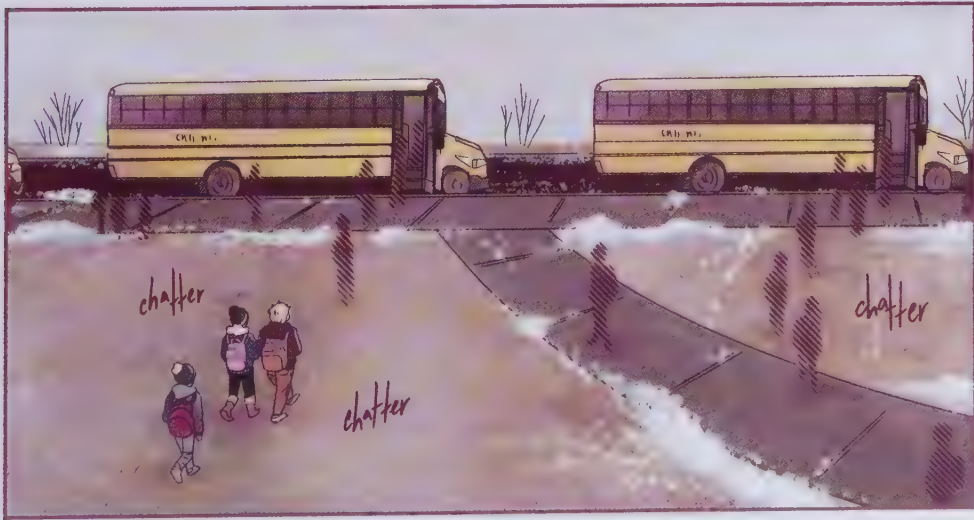
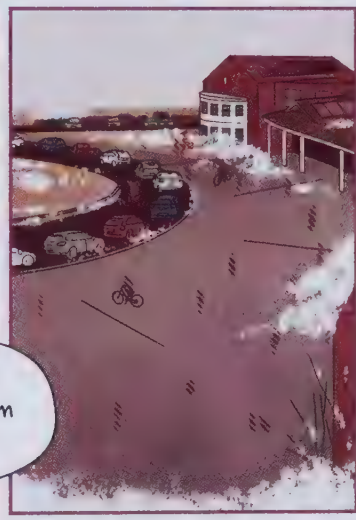
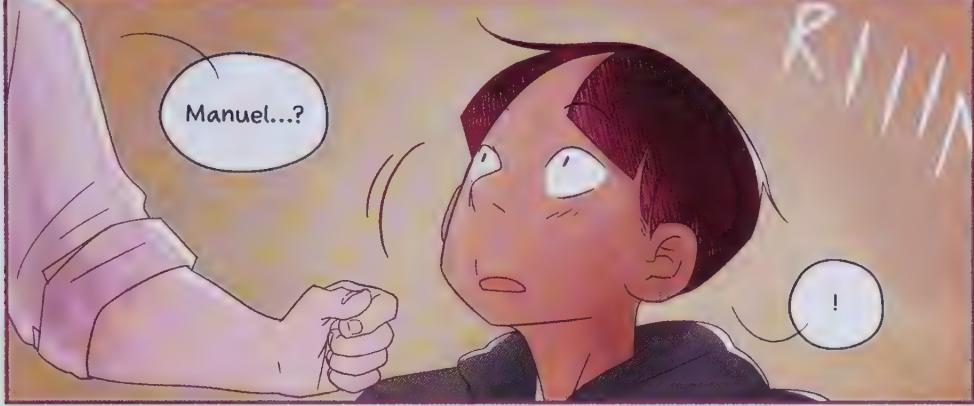
We'd have the
whole basement to
ourselves, and there's
a printer and stuff
down there that
we can use.

Yeah!

EXIT

I can text my grandma. She can pick me up tonight.

I'm sure she'll be cool with it—







And you make sure your mama knows where to pick you up!



Sorry, I should've thought of that. You want me to pull up the address?

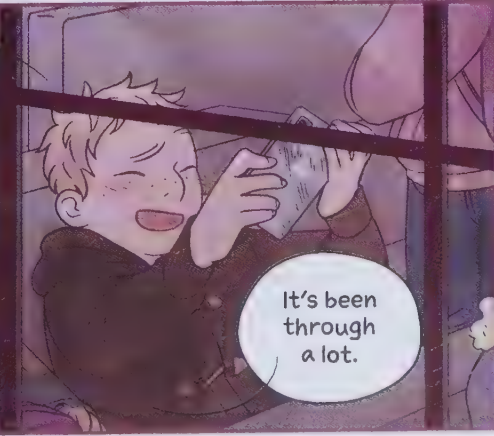
Here, you can take the window.



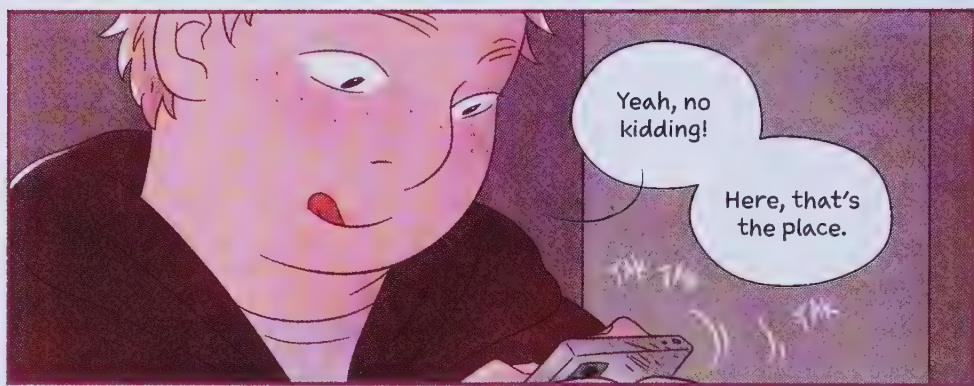
Oh— yeah, cool, thanks. Just stick it in my phone.



Jeez, man! What did you do to this case?



It's been through a lot.

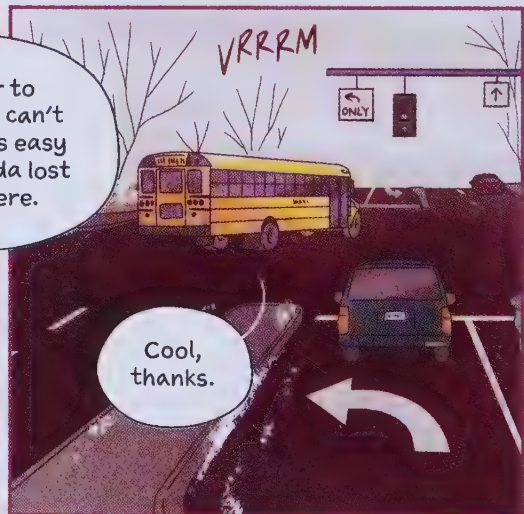


Yeah, no kidding!

Here, that's the place.



Tell her to call if she can't find it. It's easy to get kinda lost out there.

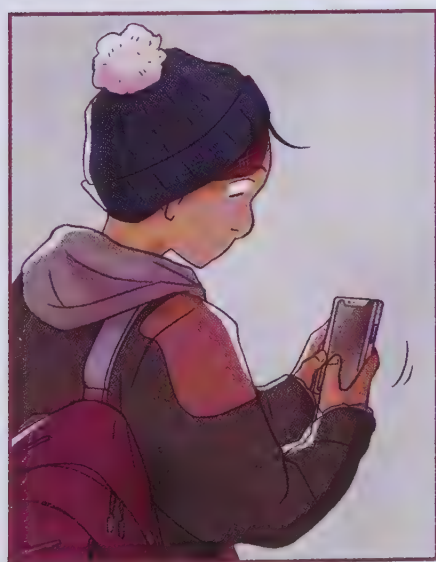
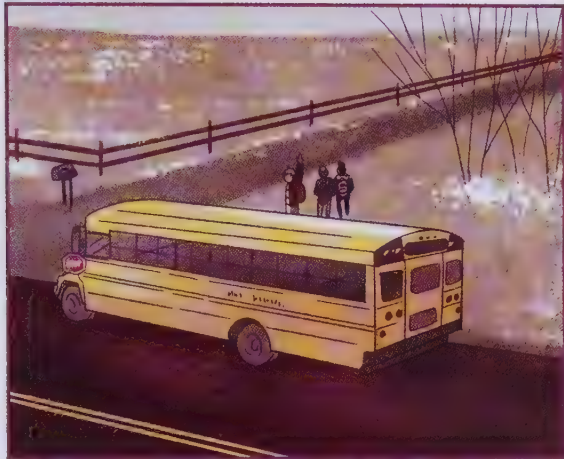


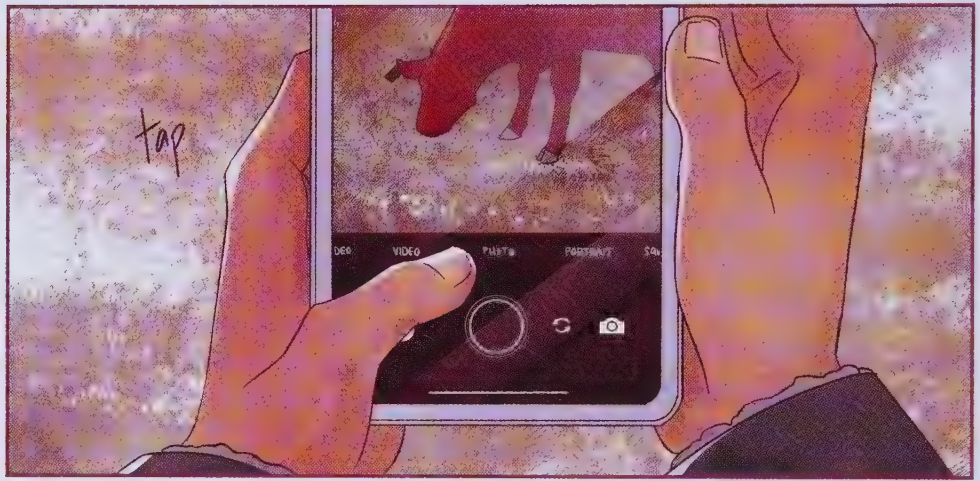
Cool, thanks.

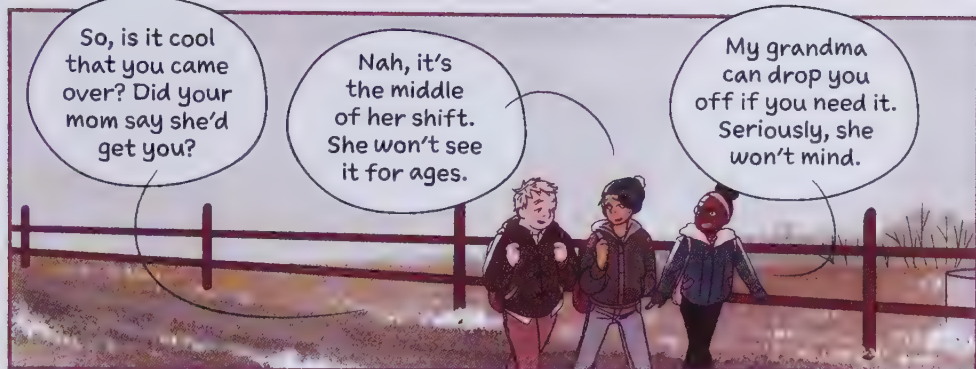












So, is it cool that you came over? Did your mom say she'd get you?

Nah, it's the middle of her shift. She won't see it for ages.

My grandma can drop you off if you need it. Seriously, she won't mind.



Did you guys finally get your Wi-Fi fixed? My phone doesn't get any service out here—

Yeah, I kinda noticed that.... How do you survive?

It's not that bad!



It's worse than at my grandma's place!

She's closer to town!



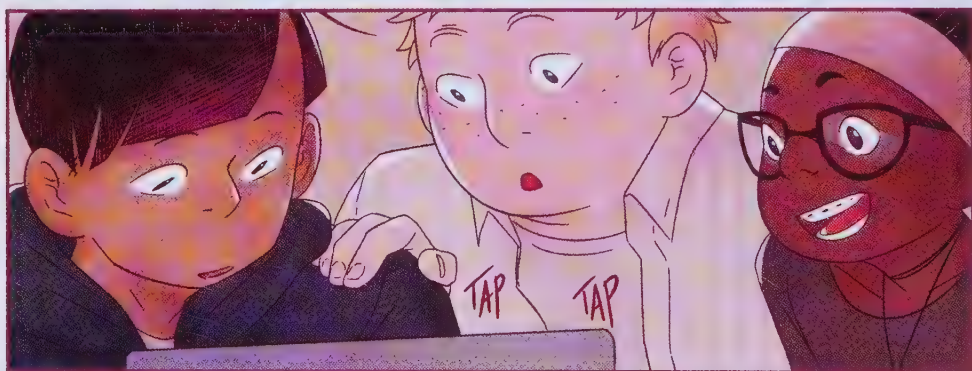
Well, is it fixed or not?

Umm...



I can take a look at the router if you want....

Can you do that?

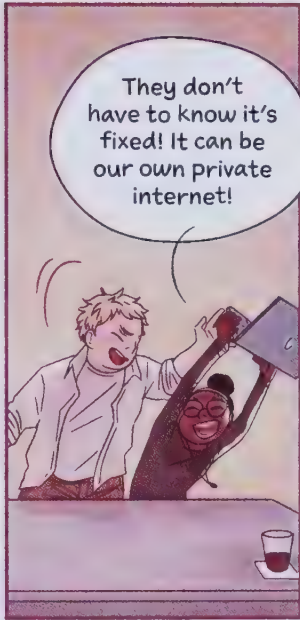




CAYSHA, NO!
Don't you dare—
my parents use
the Wi-Fi, too!

hahaha ha

#\$*%&@!#



They don't
have to know it's
fixed! It can be
our own private
internet!



How'd you
figure out what
was wrong?

shrug

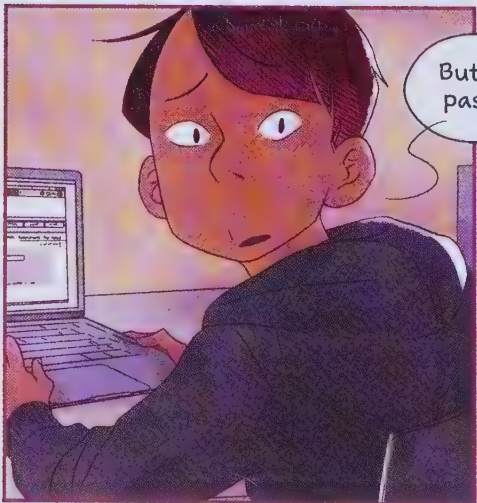
I mean...
just googling,
I guess...?

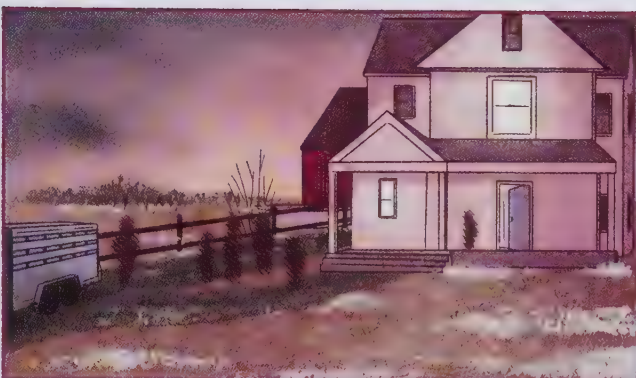
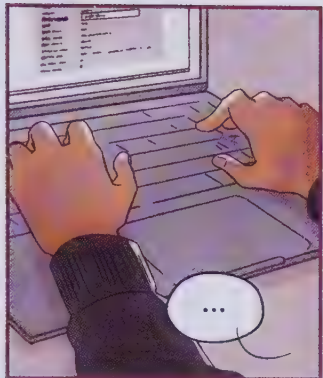
Sebastian!
You three still
down there?

haha
ha



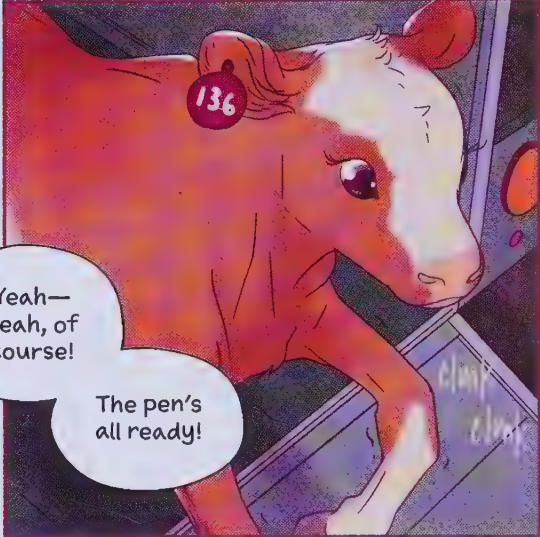
C'mon!
She's here.







Yeah—
yeah, of
course!



The pen's
all ready!



Lemme just
go lay down
some new
straw—



Come
with me!





Can you fill that bucket?

There's a sink on the wall—



It's supposed to go below freezing tonight—

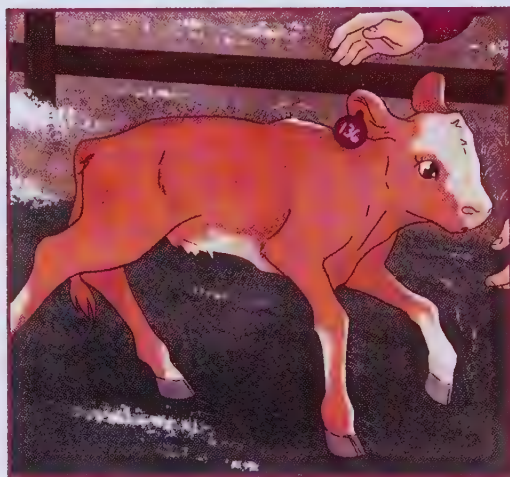
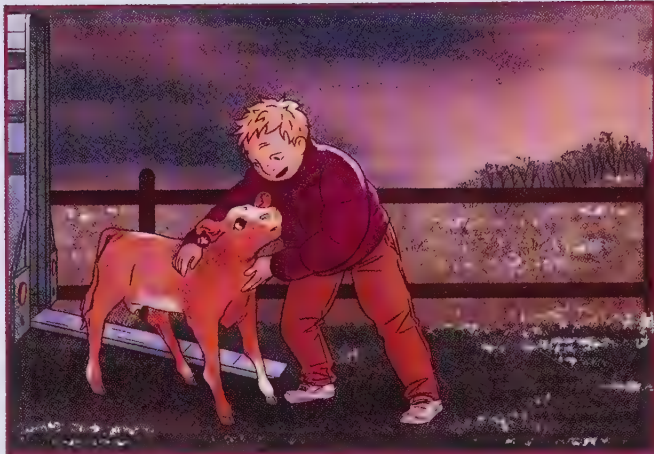
herd's got their own barn out in the pasture, but she'll be okay in here....



Like this?

Yeah! Yeah, perfect—





Aw, she'll be all right! You're just used to those big Anguses of yours.

ha ha ha



Thanks for bringing her over, Mark. Sebastian's been looking forward to getting a calf for months.

Of course, of course! Her momma wasn't too willing to let her nurse, and I'd heard you were lookin'— seems like she'll do just fine here.



Oh! You've got the farm near my grandma's—

The one with the red mailbox!

right right

Ah, that's right! You're the Millers' girl, aren't you? I remember you from a few years back— Yeesh, it really been that long?

ha ha ha

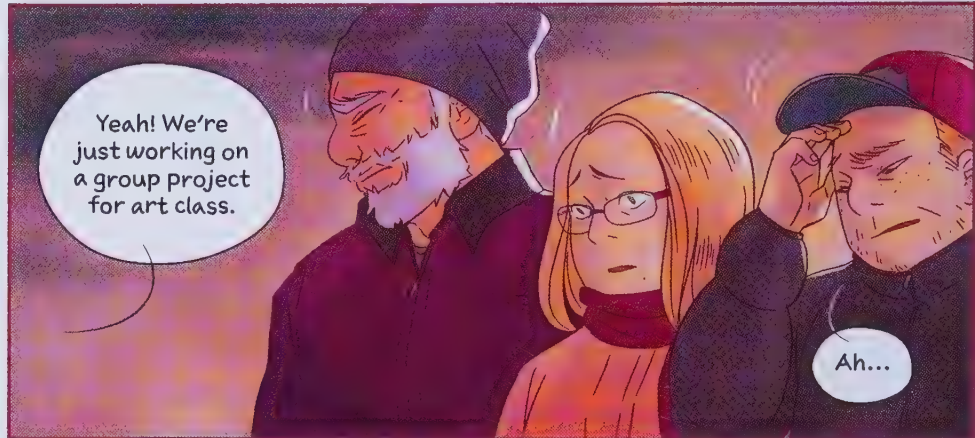


You three been keeping out of trouble?

chatter

chatter





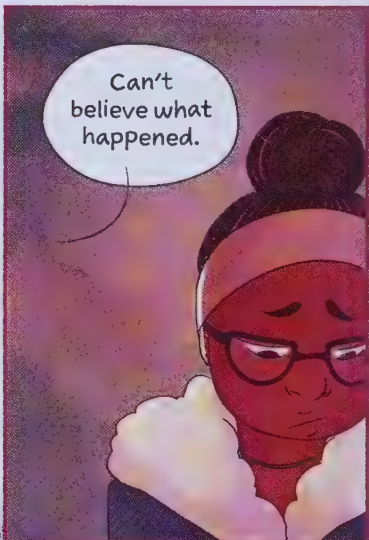
Yeah! We're just working on a group project for art class.

Ah...



That poor woman.

That's right. I s'pose you've got a substitute now, huh?



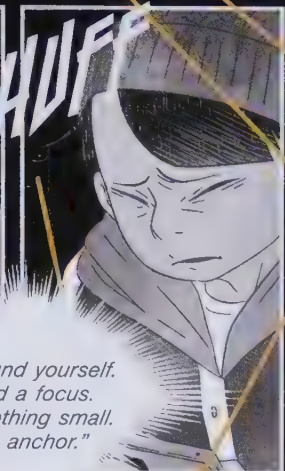
Can't believe what happened.



We're praying for her....



Thank God school was out for the day.



*"Ground yourself.
Find a focus.
Something small.
An anchor."*



*"When the world
feels unstable,
find an anchor."*





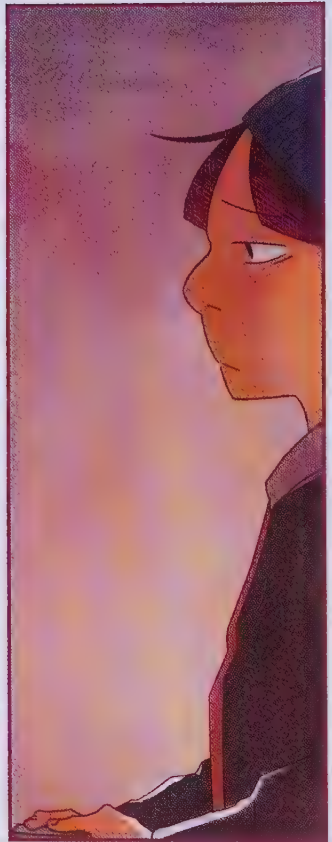
PHOTO


PHOTO

VIDEO

100%









Trust me,
I get it.

They're gonna
be talking
politics for
forever.




...You mind
if we go help
Sebastian
instead?



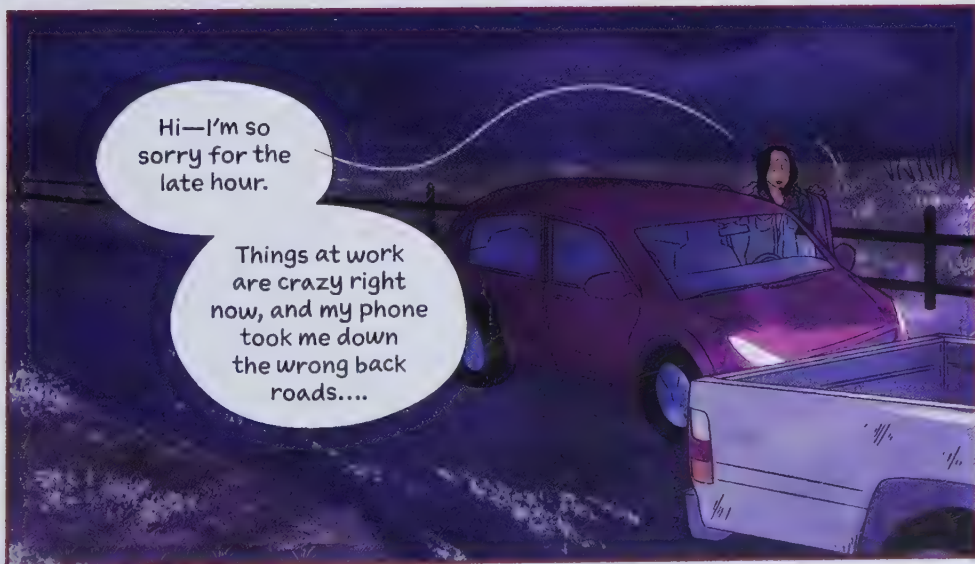
But you're
the newbie, so
you get to be on
manure duty.

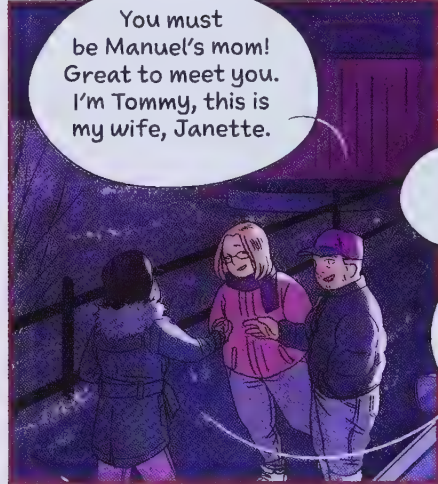
Whaaaaat?



C'mon! We
can see her
get her first
bottle!





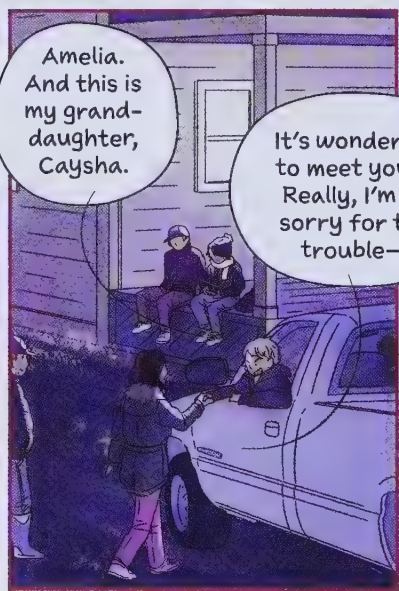


You must be Manuel's mom! Great to meet you. I'm Tommy, this is my wife, Janette.



Sofia Soto.

Thank you so much for taking care of him tonight. I know things are hectic with them back in school now—



Amelia. And this is my granddaughter, Caysha.

It's wonderful to meet you— Really, I'm so sorry for the trouble—



No problem at all!

Manuel's welcome to spend his afternoons here anytime.

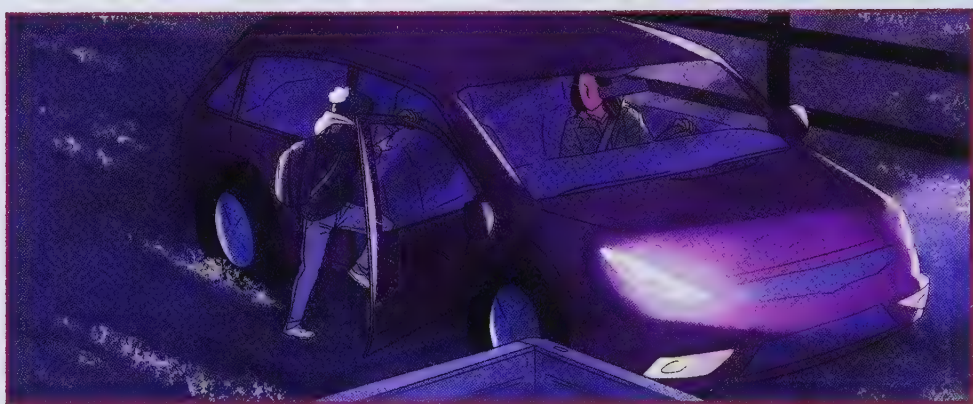



I wouldn't want to impose like that—

No, no. Don't worry about it.

One more face isn't any trouble. Caysha tags along with us to go to Ag-Club all the time.







Well...
it's okay.


ruffle



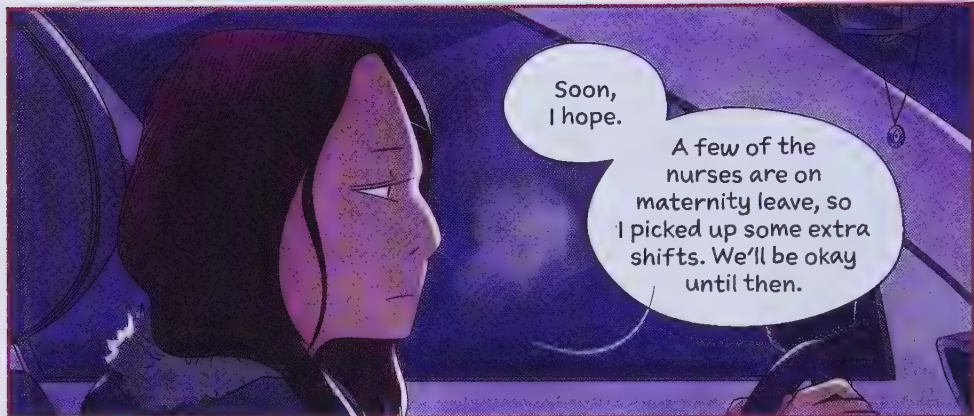
Mã...?



Mm?



When're you
gonna get the
heat fixed in
here?



Soon,
I hope.

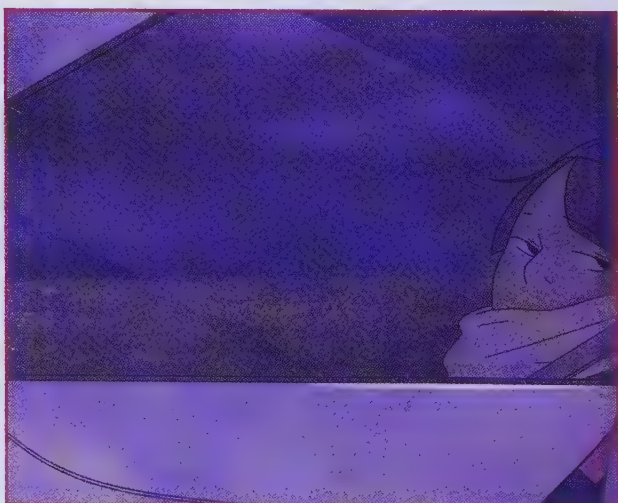
A few of the
nurses are on
maternity leave, so
I picked up some extra
shifts. We'll be okay
until then.



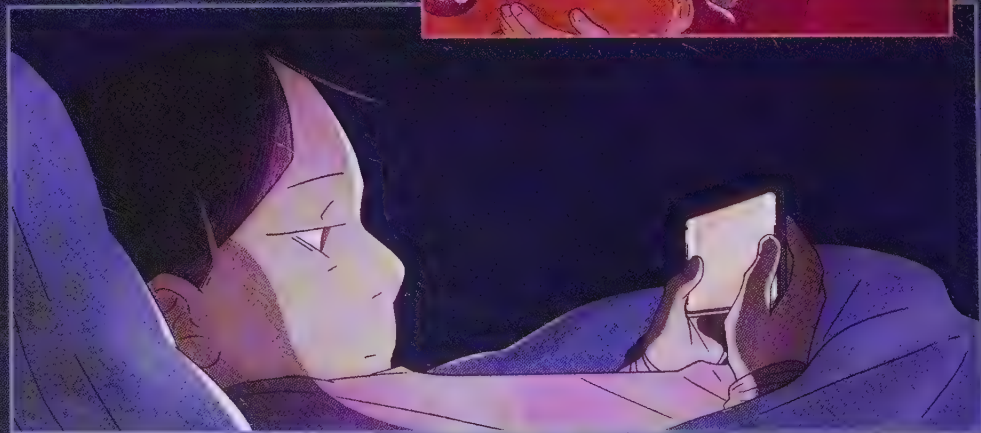
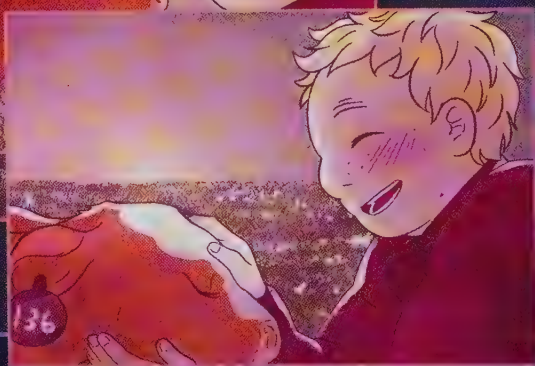
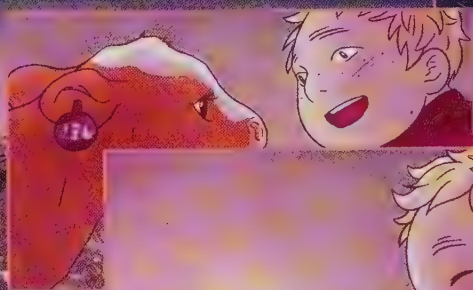
And, Manu,
mi vida, what
have I told you
about shoes on
my dashboard?



Sí, Mā.

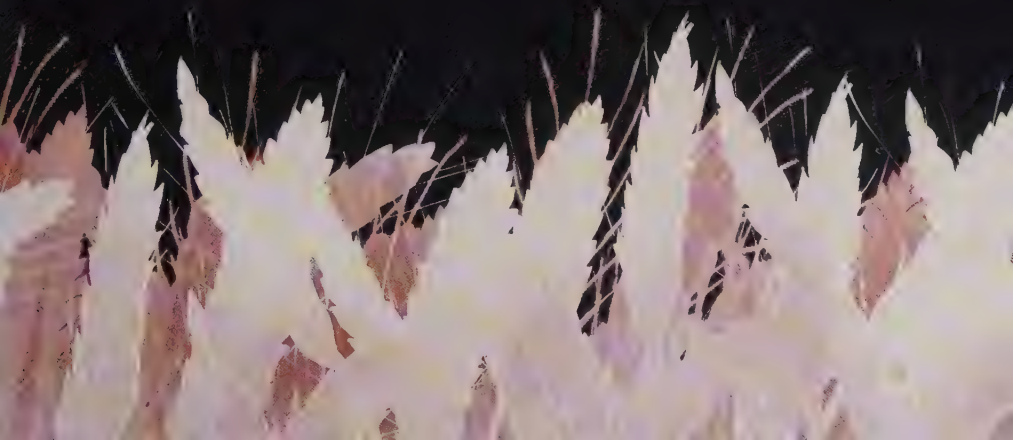




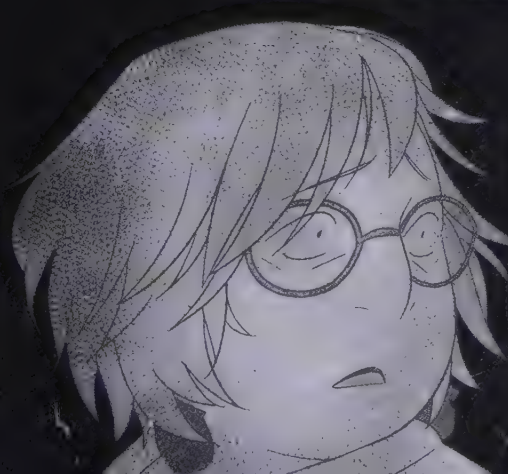





chapter two



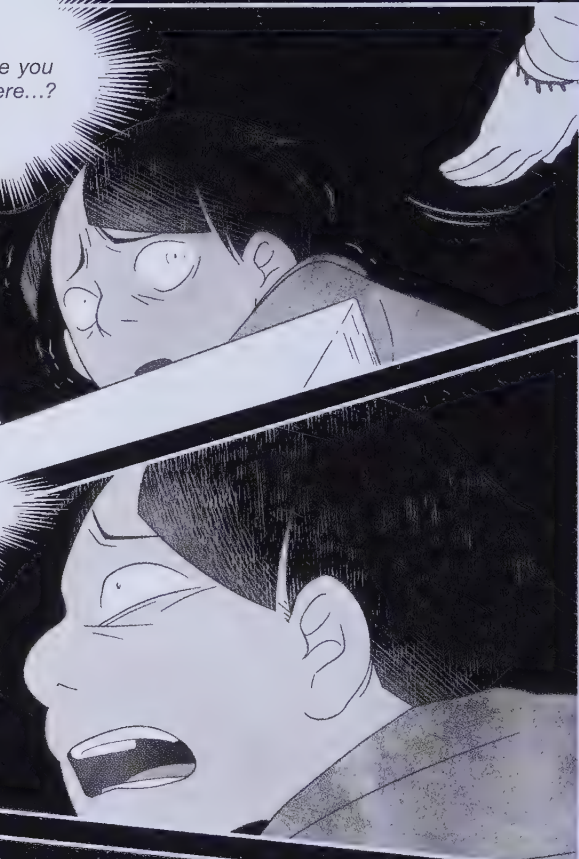




Trent—




What are you
doing here...?



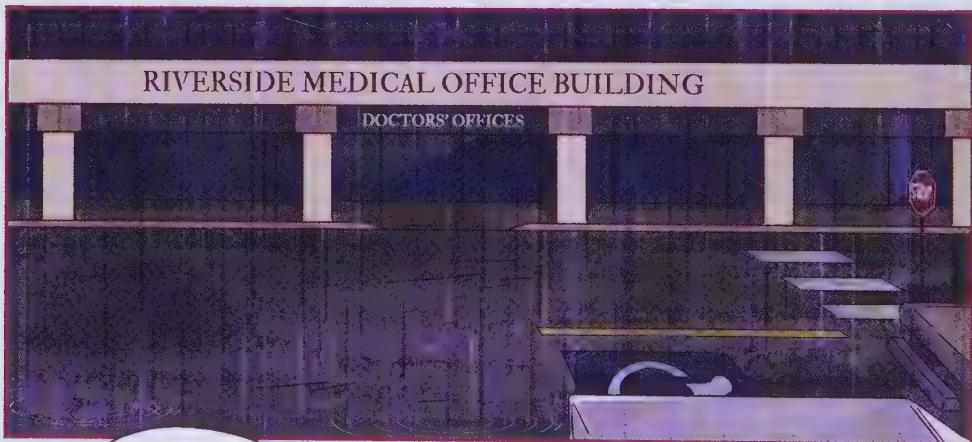
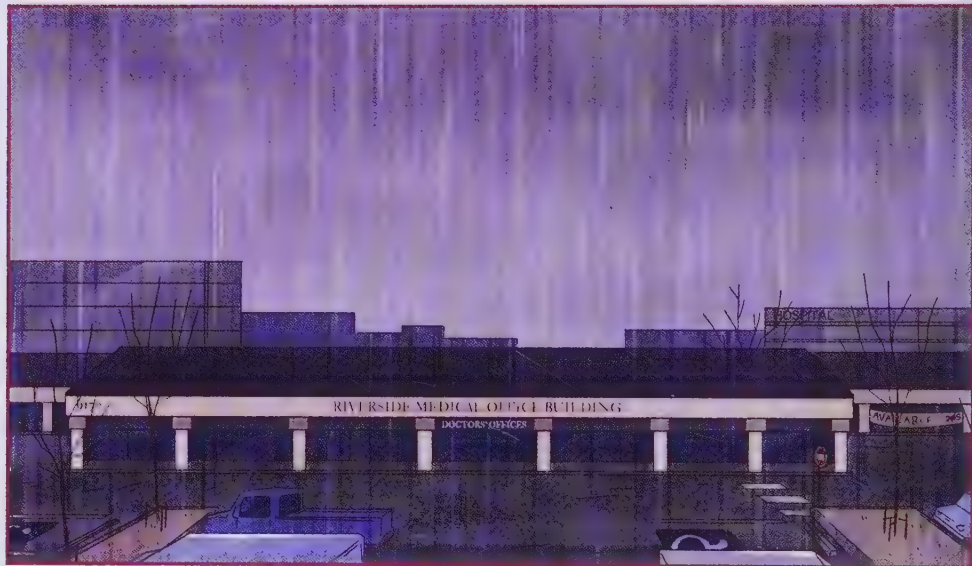
What are
you—

CRACK

CRACK



CRACK



How have
you been doing,
Manuel?



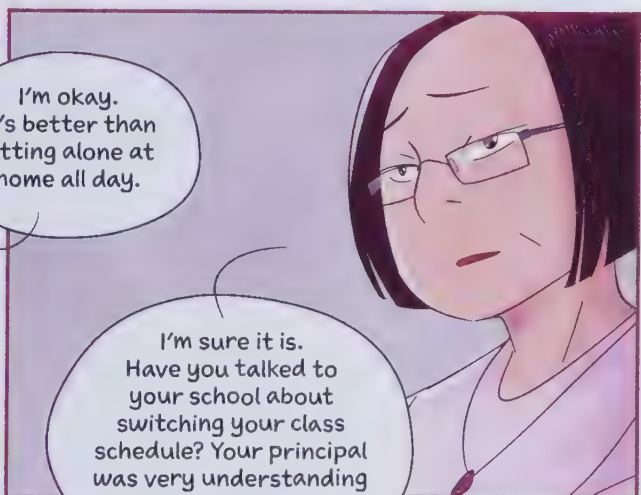


Are you doing all right, being back at school so soon?

Your mom wasn't sure if you'd want to take a few weeks off....



I'm okay. It's better than sitting alone at home all day.



I'm sure it is. Have you talked to your school about switching your class schedule? Your principal was very understanding when we spoke—



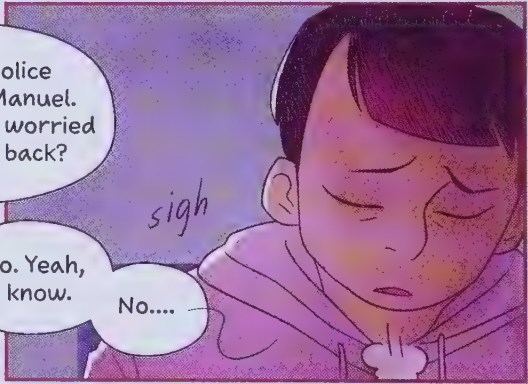
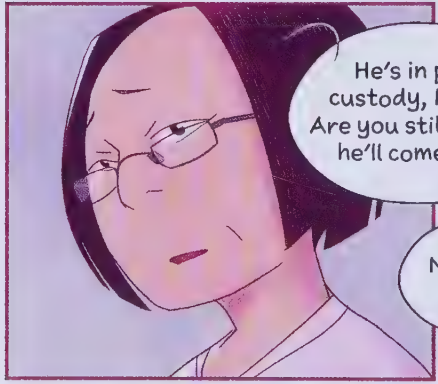
No—I—I like art class.

I don't want to switch out.



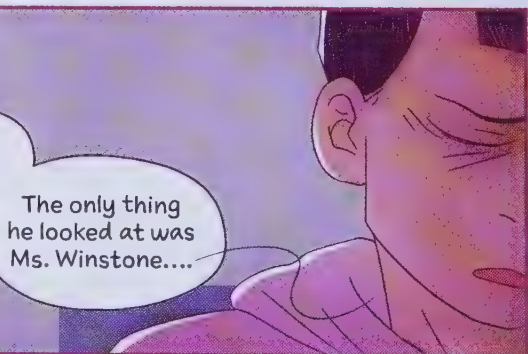
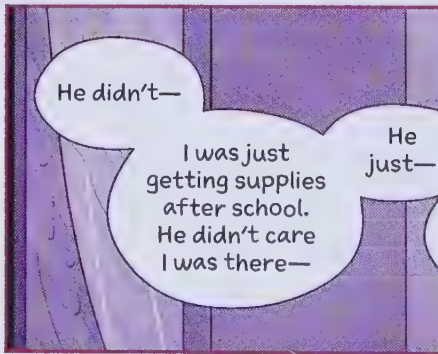
It's fine—
It's—

They chained
up the door to the
rear exit. It's all
blocked off and
stuff—



He's in police
custody, Manuel.
Are you still worried
he'll come back?

No. Yeah,
I know. No....

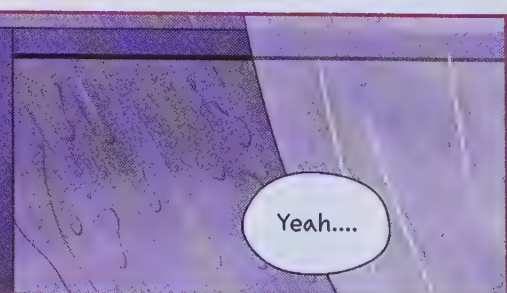
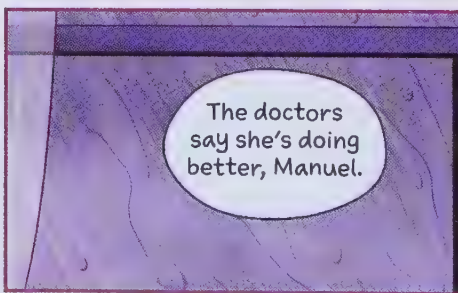


He didn't—

I was just
getting supplies
after school.
He didn't care
I was there—


He
just—

The only thing
he looked at was
Ms. Winstone....




The doctors
say she's doing
better, Manuel.

Yeah....




We talked about derealization episodes last time....




Are you still struggling with dissociating?

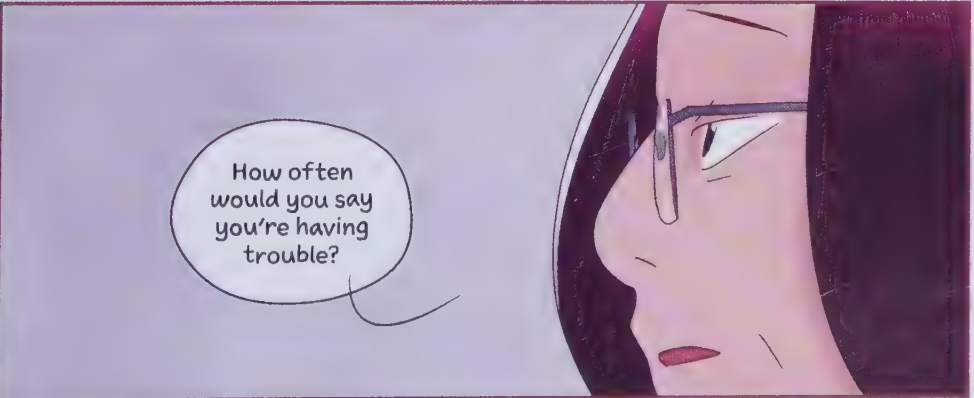
Has it been helpful to try and ground yourself, like we talked about?



Yeah, I've been...finding anchors, I guess, like you said.



The camera helps me focus.



How often would you say you're having trouble?

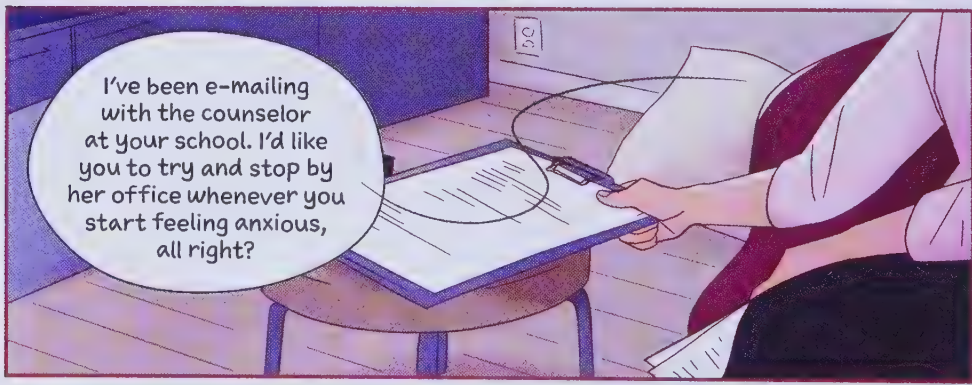


Every day?
A few times
a day...?



There's
nothing to be
ashamed of,
Manuel. You're
doing great.

I just want
to make sure
that being back
at school isn't too
overwhelming for
you right now.
Okay?

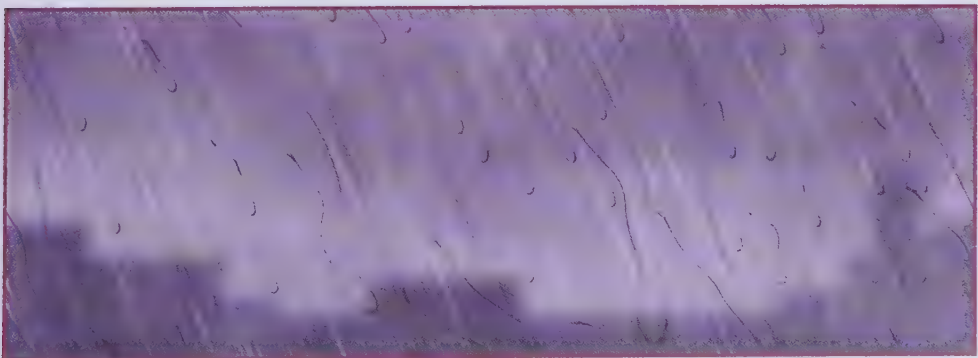


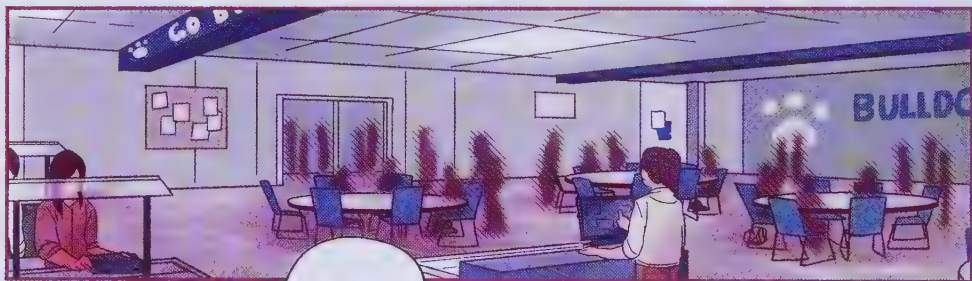
I've been e-mailing
with the counselor
at your school. I'd like
you to try and stop by
her office whenever you
start feeling anxious,
all right?



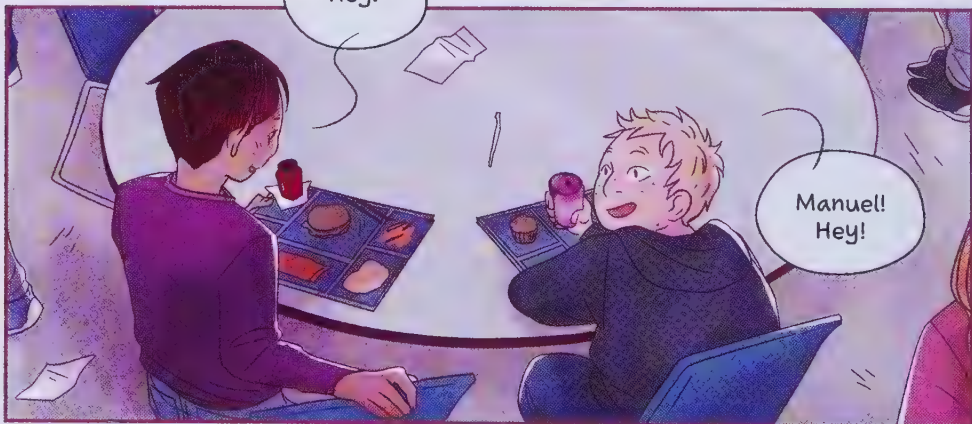
You won't
get in trouble if
you need to leave
class, and none of
the other students
need to know if
you don't want
them to.

You can
talk about
it in your
own time.





Hey.



Manuel!
Hey!



Ah! **HEY!** You weren't here yesterday!

Yeah, uh— Sorry, I had a doctor's appointment—



Yeah, no, of course. It's just—Caysha said you finished setting up the Wi-Fi?

ha ha

ha



You didn't tell us the password. We spent all weekend trying to get it to work!

I didn't have your number. I couldn't text you or anything—

Crap, sorry... Gimme yours—



Here—it's c0w_d00d, but with zeros instead of Os....

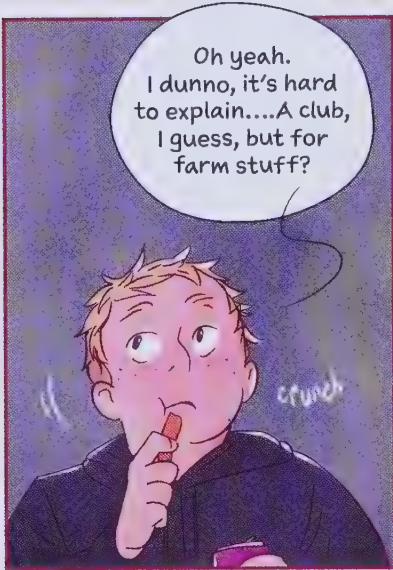
cough cough

You good? That why you were at the doctor?



Nah, that was...just... same old stuff.

Hey, you promised you'd explain Ag-Club to me.



Oh yeah.
I dunno, it's hard
to explain....A club,
I guess, but for
farm stuff?



Why's Caysha
part of it? She
lives in town
like me.

Because
fancy
chickens!



Her
grandparents
still have a farm a
couple miles from
our place.

This year
she's raising the
fanciest, weirdest
chickens you've
ever seen.

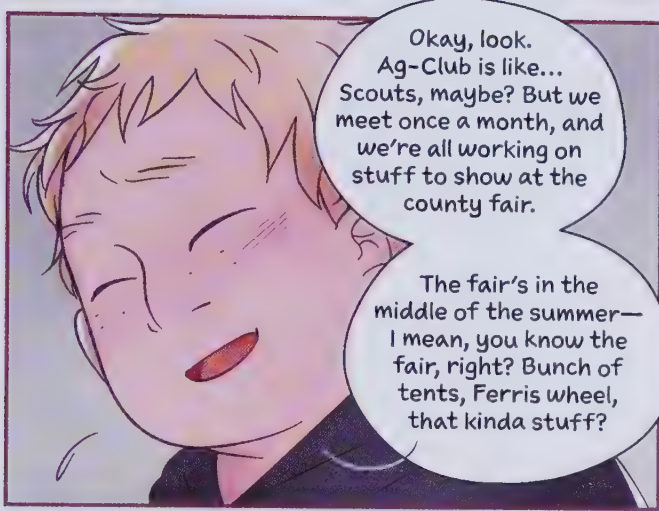
...Why?



Same reason
I'm raising
Daisy!



Sebastian...
I have no idea
why you're
raising Daisy.



Okay, look. Ag-Club is like... Scouts, maybe? But we meet once a month, and we're all working on stuff to show at the county fair.

The fair's in the middle of the summer— I mean, you know the fair, right? Bunch of tents, Ferris wheel, that kinda stuff?



I know what the county fair is.



Well, the part that *isn't* roller coasters? That's us. Ag-Club, I mean. It's, I dunno, a competition, I guess.

You get awards for the biggest pumpkin and champion goats and all that stuff.



I guess it sounds kinda dumb when I put it like that, huh?



hah
I played a video game like that last summer.

There's a video game about growing pumpkins?

What kind of cave have you been living in, dude? There are games about everything.

But please tell me you don't have to fatten Daisy up like some kind of weird squash.

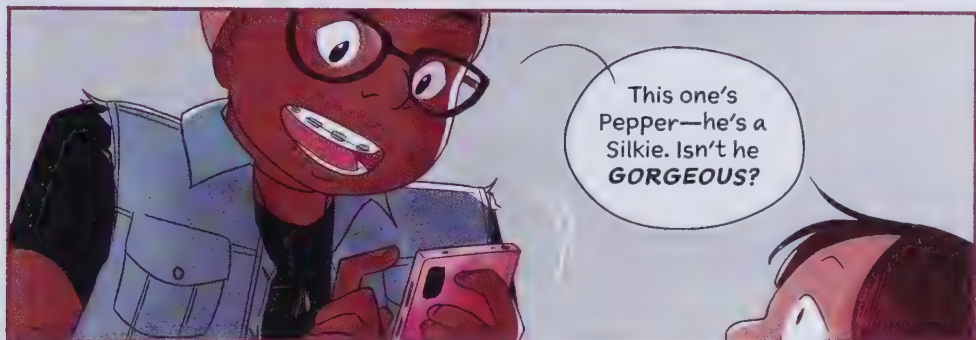
No! We'll be part of the livestock show. Like...for Daisy, I have to show her, walk her around in front of the judges.

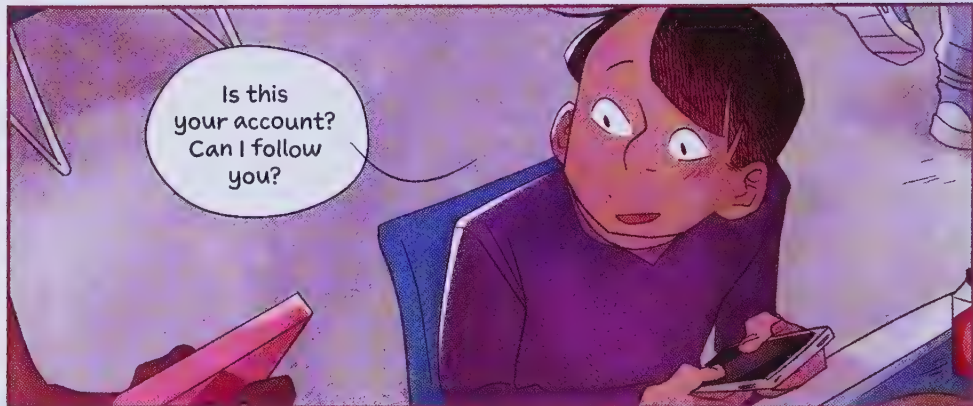
Show how I've raised her and that she's well-behaved and healthy and stuff.

And Caysha shows... chickens.

She totally does.

Cayshaaa!





Is this your account?
Can I follow you?



Yeah,
of course! I'll
add you back.
My mom makes me
keep my account
private.

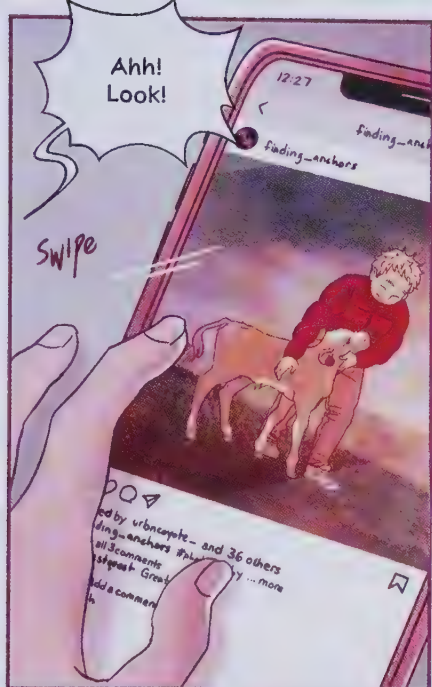


Manuel...
did you take
these? They're
amazing.

I want
to see!



Whoa...
These are
seriously
good....



Ahh!
Look!

Swipe

posted by urbncafe... and 36 others
Fading_anchors
3 comments
Great
add a comment



Oh my God,
it's me!

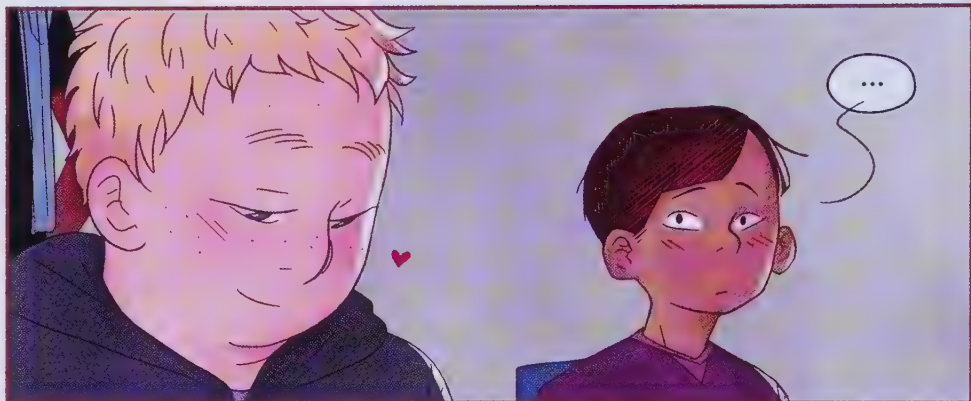
I'm sorry,
I didn't—
I should've asked—
If it was okay,
I mean—
I'm sorry—



No, no, it's
cool, it's an
awesome shot!
When did you
even take this?

Man, look at
Daisy....It's been,
what, four days?
She's already put
on five pounds,
y'know. Just wait
till you see her...







Yeah, sure, of course. I mean, I can keep taking them, if you want....



OOOH!
Are you gonna join Ag-Club, Manuel?

There's a ton of awards for art and photography and stuff! You could totally submit some of your photos!



huh??

Wh— what...? Me? I've never...

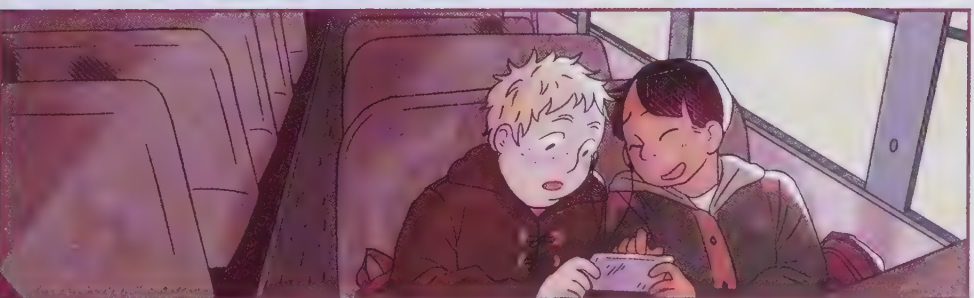
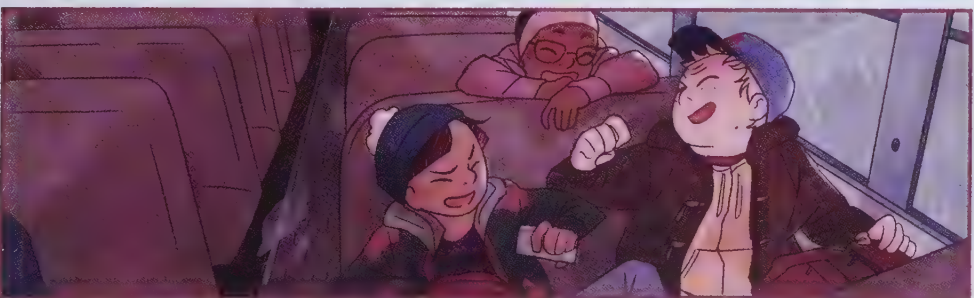
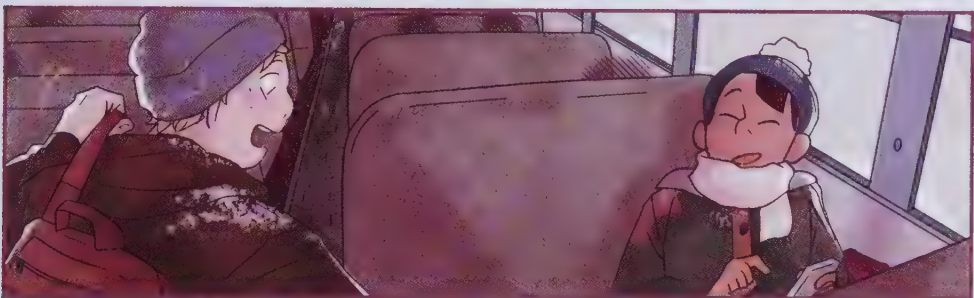
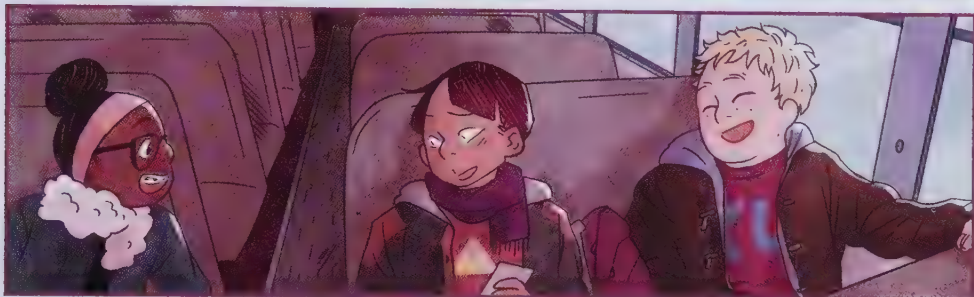
It's not hard. You just have to register and try to come to the meetings!



RIIIIIING

Ah...

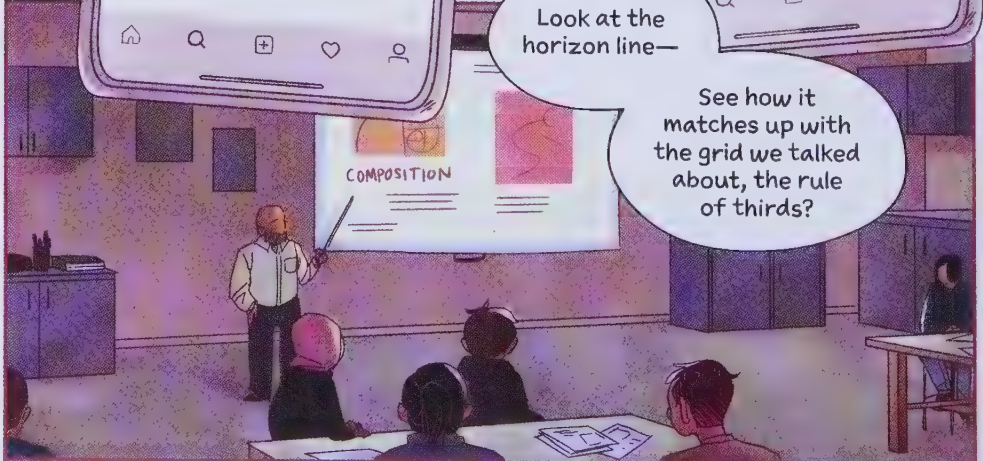






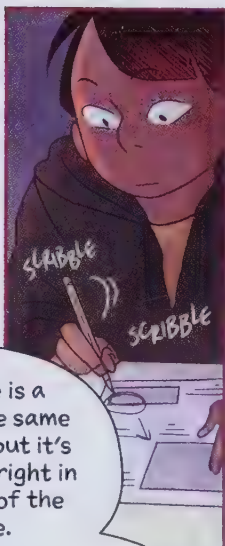
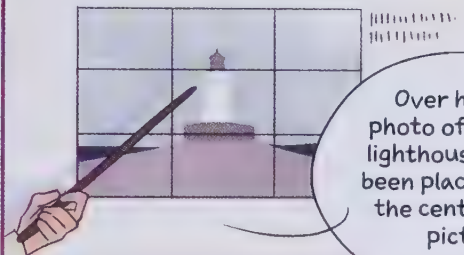
Look at the horizon line—

See how it matches up with the grid we talked about, the rule of thirds?

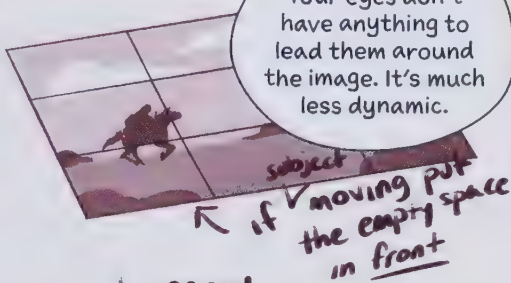
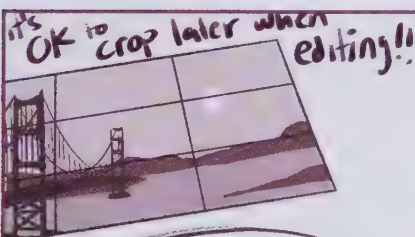


Consider where your focal point is.

Look how the artist placed the lighthouse at the intersection of those two lines, and how much more tension it brings to the composition.



Over here is a photo of the same lighthouse, but it's been placed right in the center of the picture.



Your eyes don't have anything to lead them around the image. It's much less dynamic.

OK to break rules & experiment

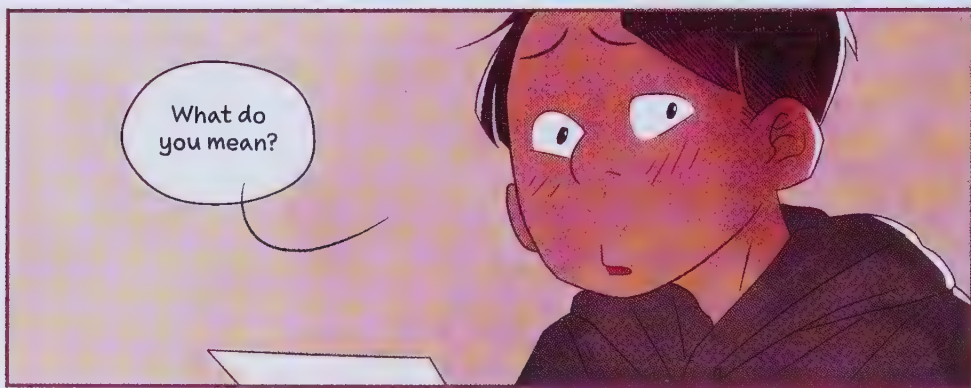
tension + energy vs symmetry + balance

Today, I want you to look through the magazines in front of you and try to find examples of all the different compositions we've been discussing.

Let me know if you have any problems. I'll be walking around to help out while you work!

How come you're already so good at this stuff?





What do you mean?



Just...art stuff!
I only signed up 'cause I didn't think there'd be that much homework....



There's no way your dad's gonna let you get away with that next year.

I know....!
Ughhh... Why can't he be chill like your parents...?




Hey! I do my homework!

Yeah, yeah, the golden boy, beloved by all.

I am not!

ha ha

shove



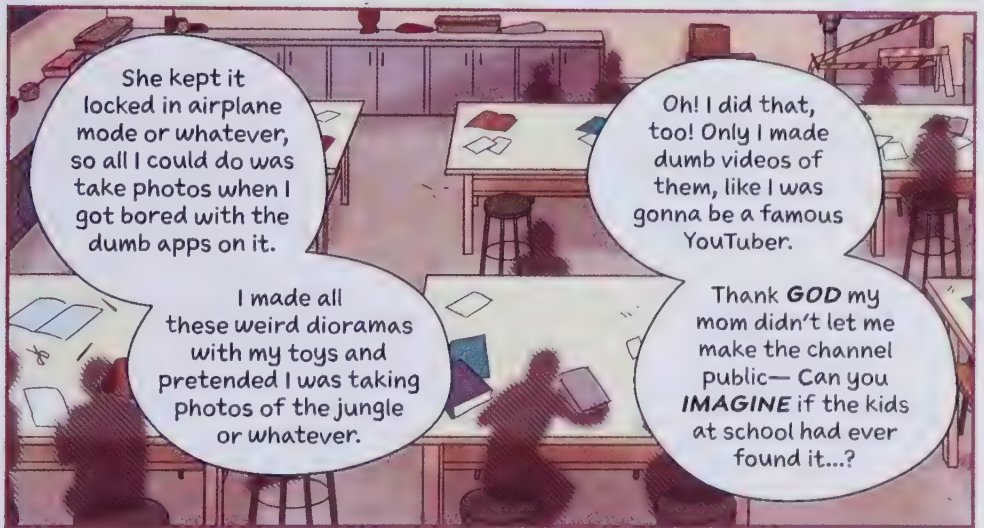
Your mom seems like she'd be way strict, too.

ha ha ha



The worst.

But...I dunno, I started doing photography 'cause she gave me her old phone when I was little...




She kept it locked in airplane mode or whatever, so all I could do was take photos when I got bored with the dumb apps on it.

Oh! I did that, too! Only I made dumb videos of them, like I was gonna be a famous YouTuber.


I made all these weird dioramas with my toys and pretended I was taking photos of the jungle or whatever.

Thank **GOD** my mom didn't let me make the channel public— Can you **IMAGINE** if the kids at school had ever found it...?



Your life would be **ooover**.

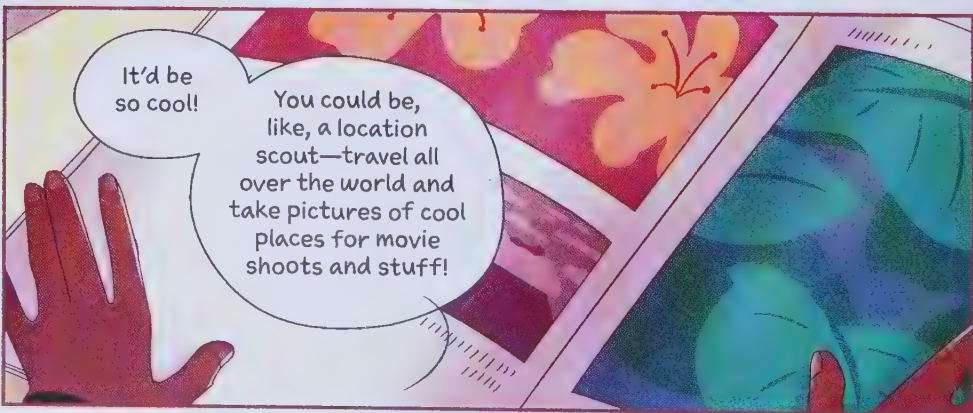
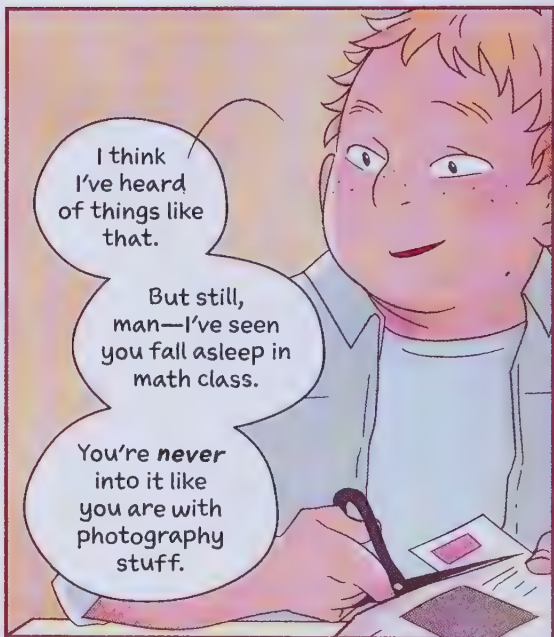
ha ha



And I guess when you're... y'know, anxious or something...

...you're supposed to ground yourself.

Like...find an "anchor" and focus on it and stuff.





If you go to New York and take photos of all the models, promise you'll take me with you.

We visited my brother at his college. It *stinks* there.
The sewers and the subway and everything just smell like pee.



psh!
'Cause it smells *way* better on a cattle farm!

I'm with Sebastian. I like it here better.

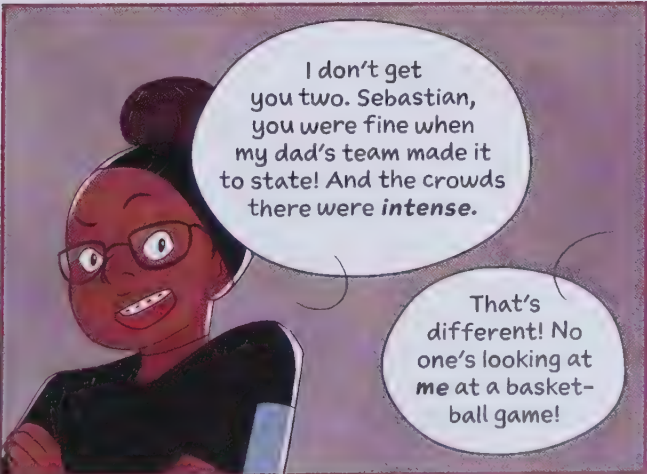


Crowds make me anxious, remember?



unugh...

Sooo many peoople.

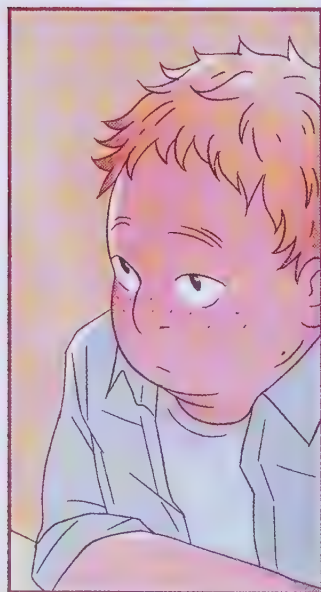
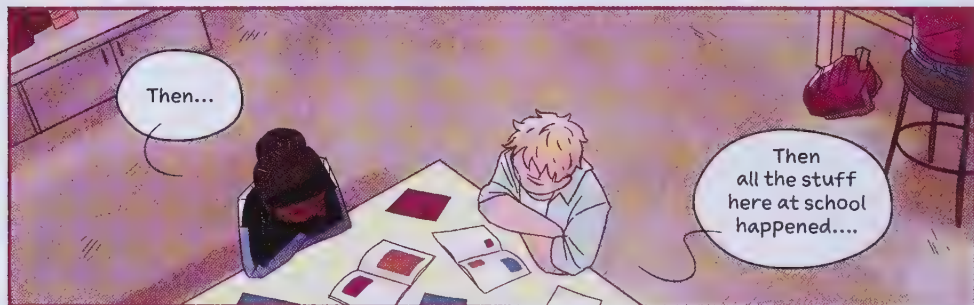
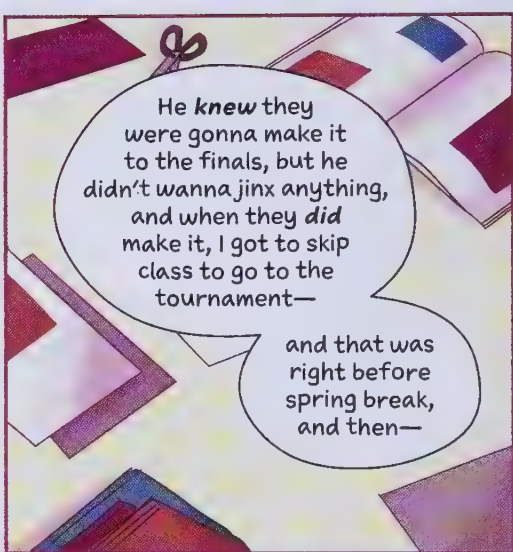


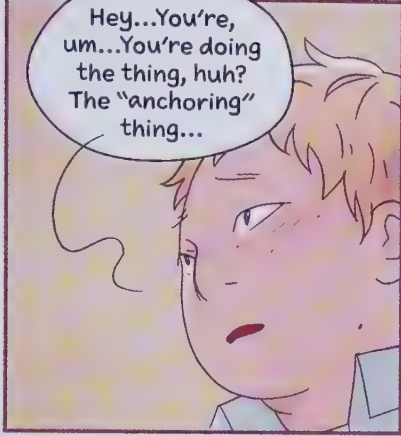
I don't get you two. Sebastian, you were fine when my dad's team made it to state! And the crowds there were *intense*.

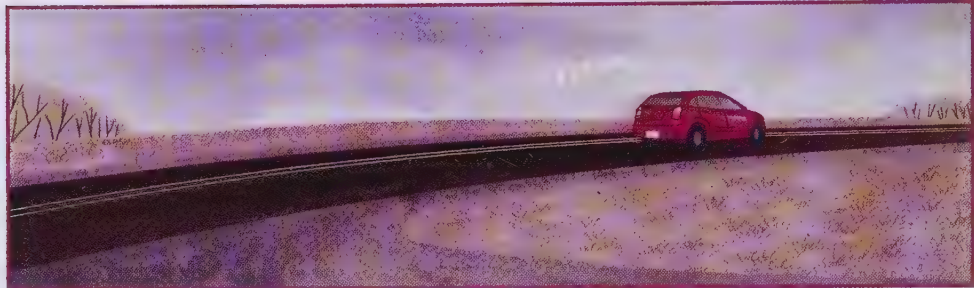
That's different! No one's looking at *me* at a basketball game!



Wait, your dad's the coach?!
Whoa—do you get to see all the games?







You'll text if you need anything, right?



I gave the hospital number to Sebastian's parents. They'll know how to reach me if they need to.

Your phone's charged? Do you need a cable? There's one in the glove box.... Bring it to your sleepover just in case—



Mã, I'm not a little kid. Stop calling it a "sleepover"!

We're just gonna hang out and play video games or whatever. You don't have to worry so much.



Is this even the right cable? I haven't had an Android in two years....

Oh, hey, fortune cookie.



Shoot, is it the wrong type?



Should we swing back home?

Má...
You're being weird again. We're almost there. I'll be okay.

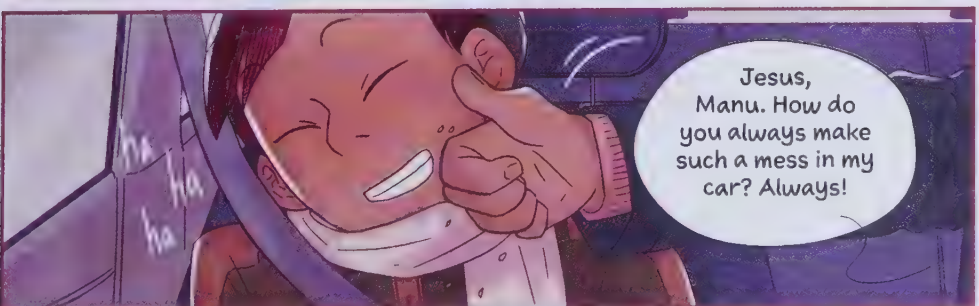


...

I know. Perdón.



pff



Jesus, Manu. How do you always make such a mess in my car? Always!



How stale was that thing, anyway? We haven't picked up Chinese in months....



Hey, man!

Hey!



Sebastian, hi! Tell your parents I'm sorry I couldn't come in to say hello, all right?

My shift's about to start, and I've got to get to the far side of town—

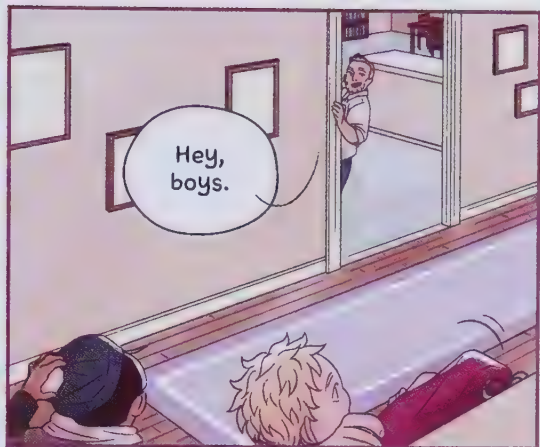
Okay, Mrs. Soto!

Hurry up, you're gonna be late!



Manuel!
I hope you took that fortune cookie wrapper with you! I don't want to find it on my back seat when I get home!

I got it, Mǎ! I'll see you tomorrow night!



Hey, boys.



Hi, Mr. Corbin.

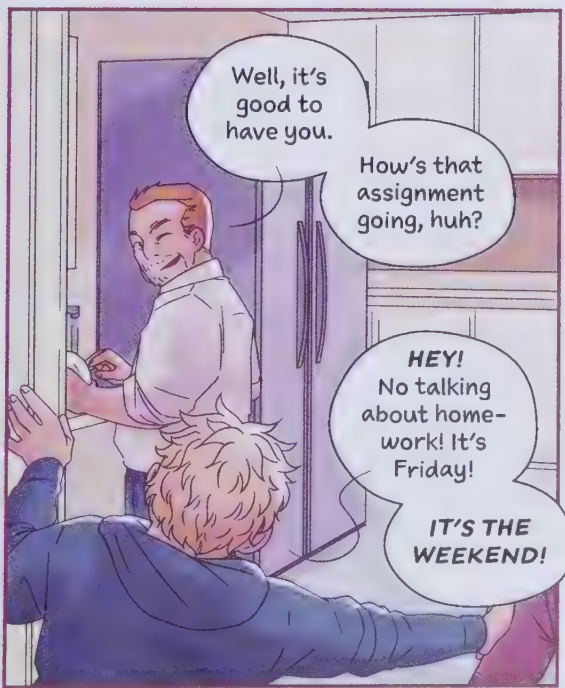
Hey, Dad!



I hear your mom's finally letting you spend the night.

She always so worried about what trouble you get up to?

Just lately, I guess...



Well, it's good to have you.

How's that assignment going, huh?


HEY!
No talking about homework! It's Friday!

IT'S THE WEEKEND!

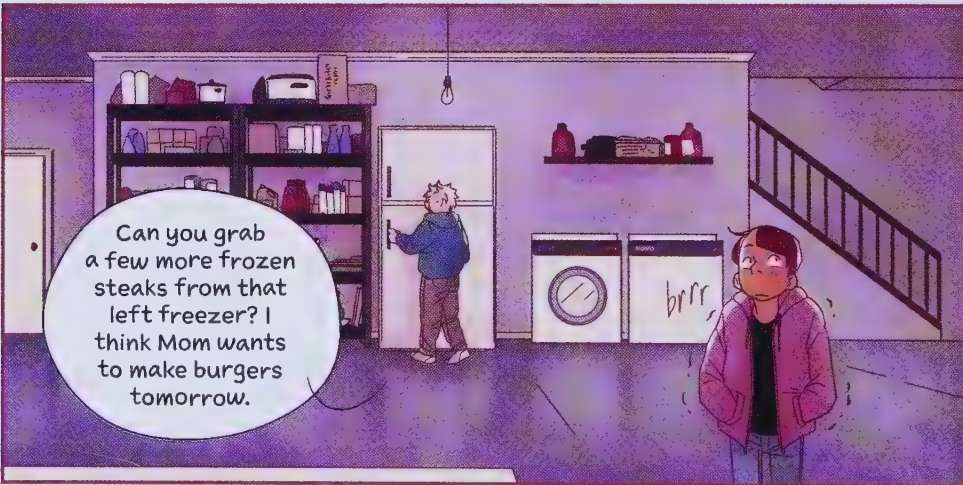


Fine,
fine.

Help me out
and grab a few
cuts of meat from
the fridge in the
basement.



They should be
thawed by now,
and I want to get
the marinade
started.



Can you grab
a few more frozen
steaks from that
left freezer? I
think Mom wants
to make burgers
tomorrow.

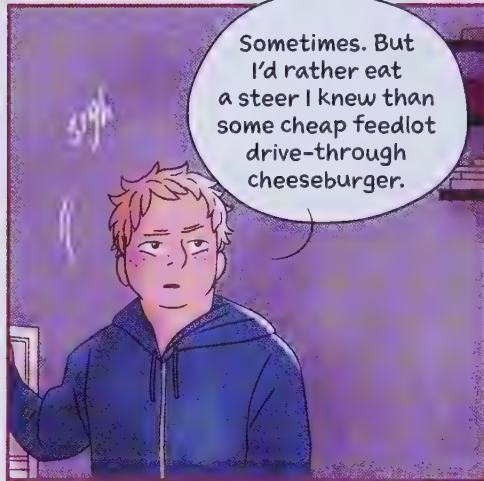


This
one?

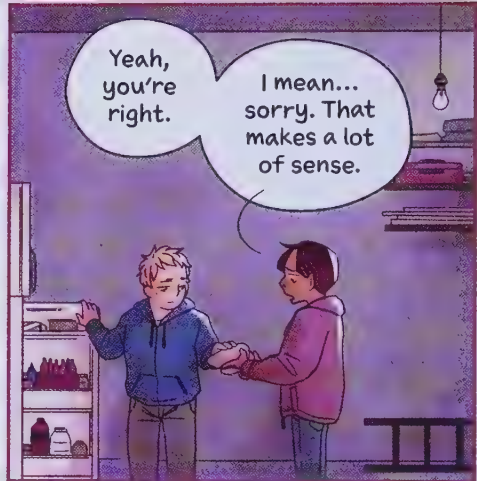


Sebastian...





Sometimes. But I'd rather eat a steer I knew than some cheap feedlot drive-through cheeseburger.



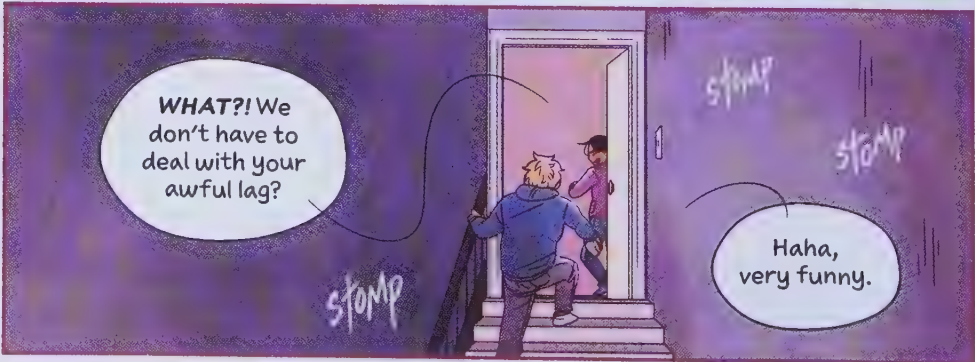
Yeah, you're right.

I mean... sorry. That makes a lot of sense.



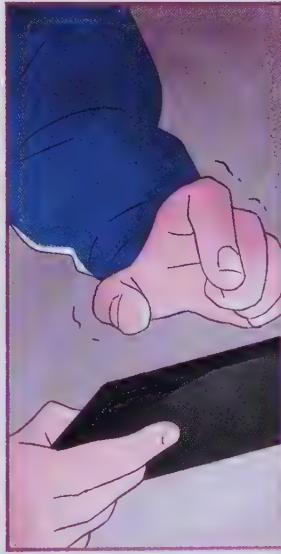
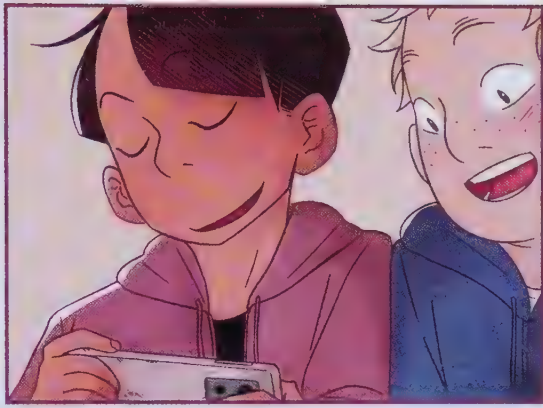
Hey—we've got time to play a couple rounds before dinner, right? You would not believe this sick new costume I unlocked....

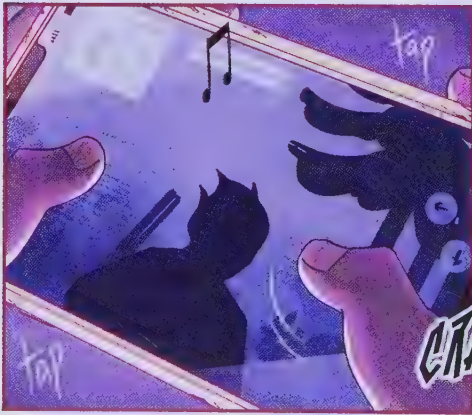
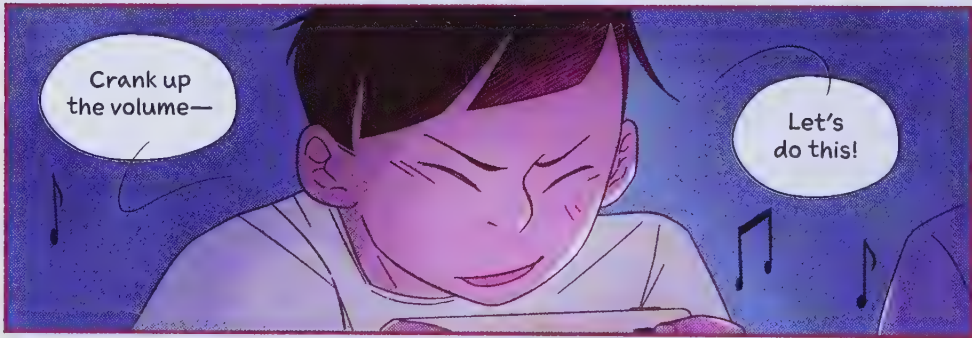
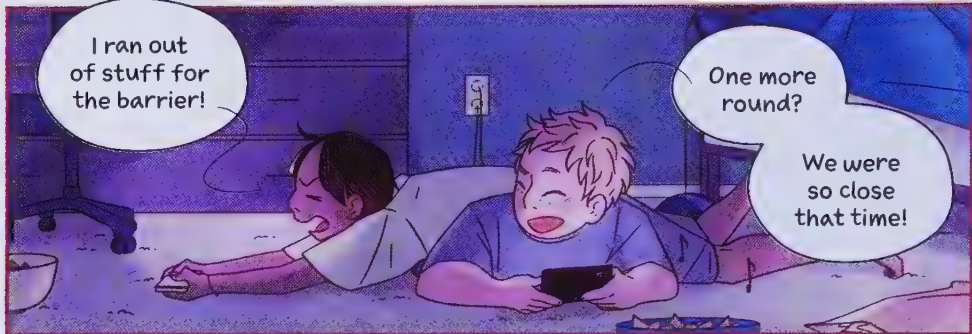
Oh yeah, I wanted to tell you! I found this corner of the living room that gets, like, crazy-boosted Wi-Fi?



WHAT?! We don't have to deal with your awful lag?

Haha, very funny.

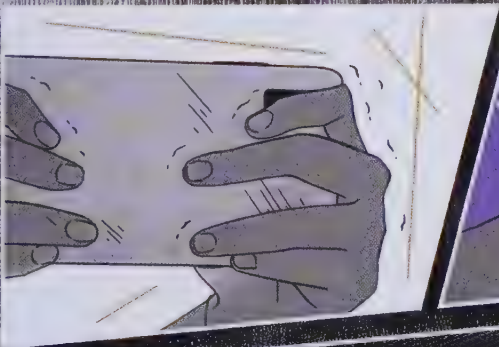






CRACK


CRACK



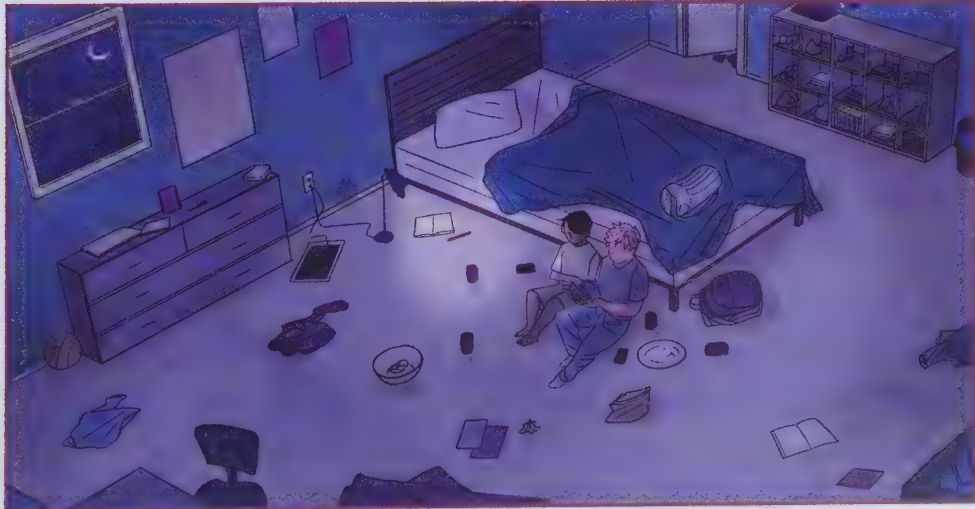
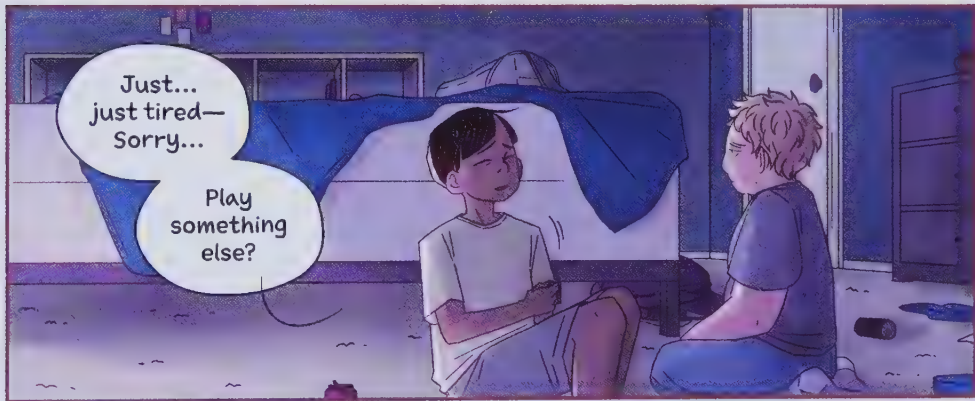
003 SNIPED BY signalSquatter
D_ ELIMINATED BY HEADSHOT
420 ELIMINATED BY A RIFLE

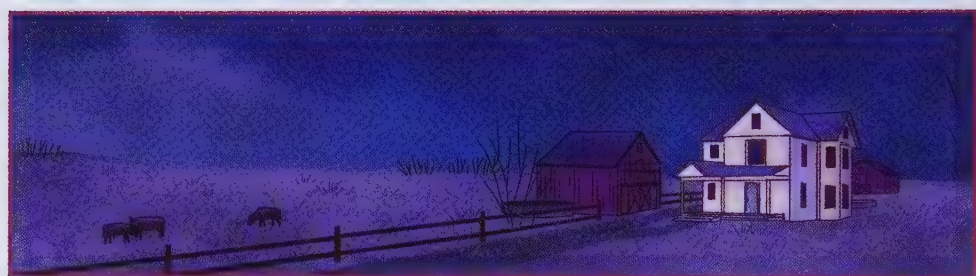
CRACK



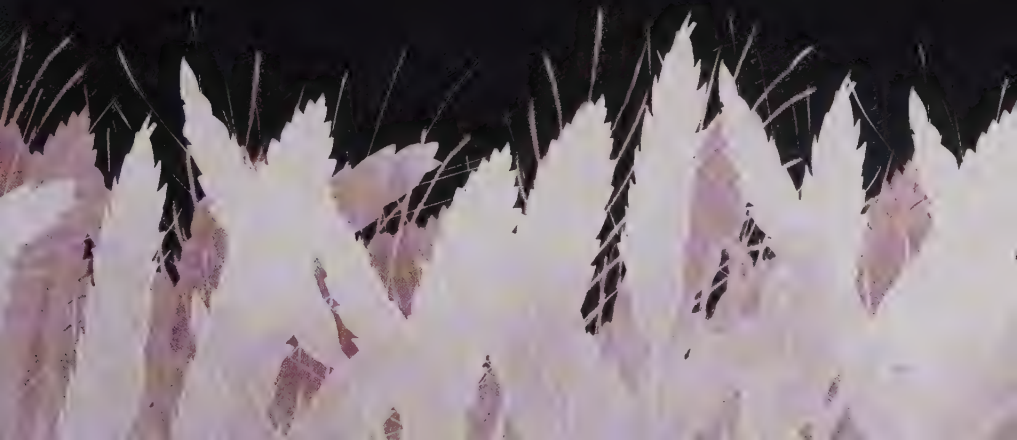


Manuel?





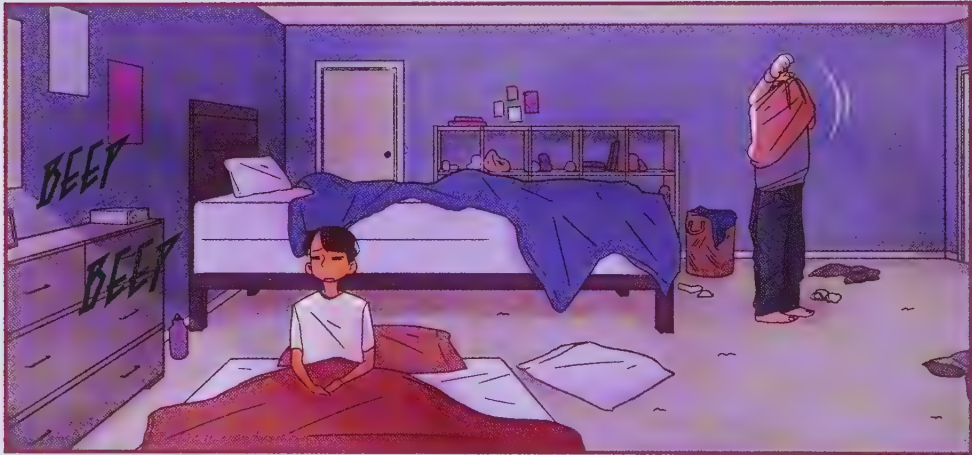
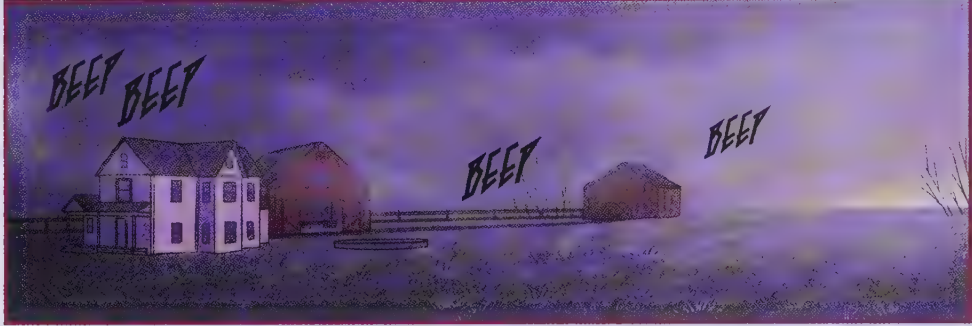
chapter three







BEEP BEEP



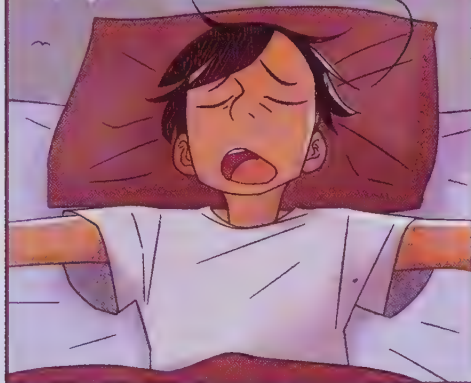
...but it's the weekend...



Hurry it up, Manuel. Daisy's hungry.

It's not
faaaaair, you'll
always pick Daisy
over **m**eee....

FLOP



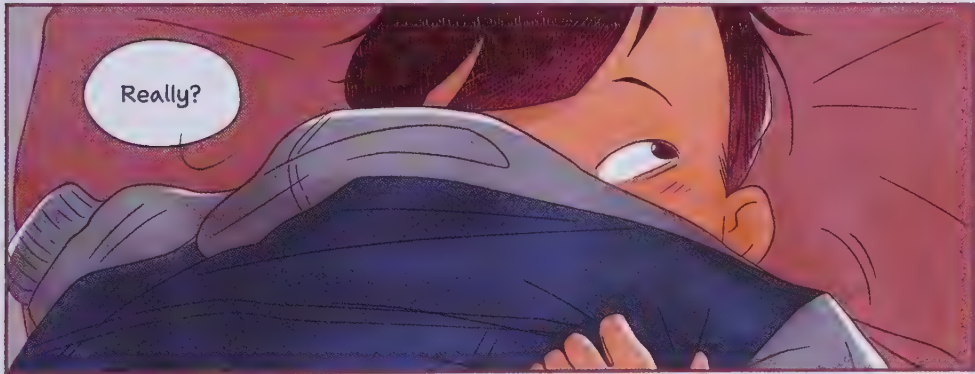
That's not
true. You're
both my
favorites.

WAHUMP

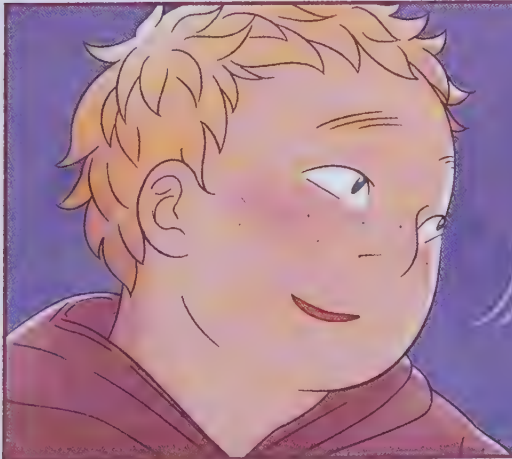
ha ha ha



Really?



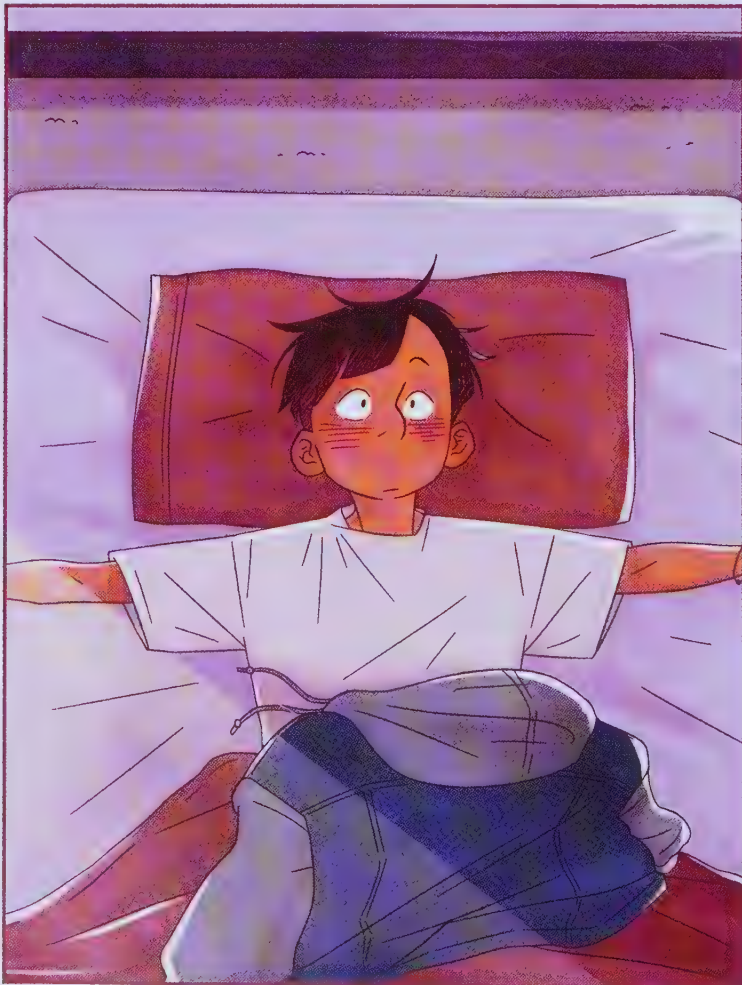
C'mon
already! I've
got chores
to do!





Just—I'll meet you downstairs, okay? Just lemme get changed.

Okay, okay.



Ah!



Sebastian!

Can I borrow some boots if we're going to the barn? My mom said if I get that crap on my shoes again, she's not gonna let me in her car.



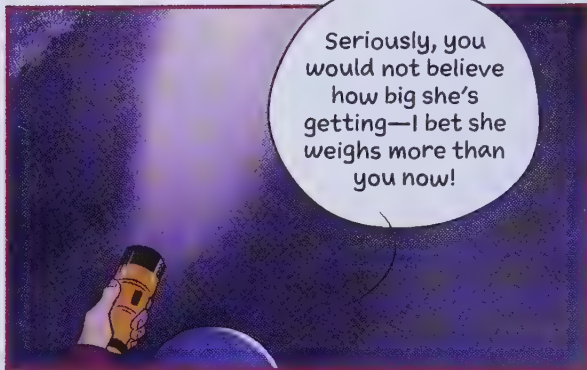
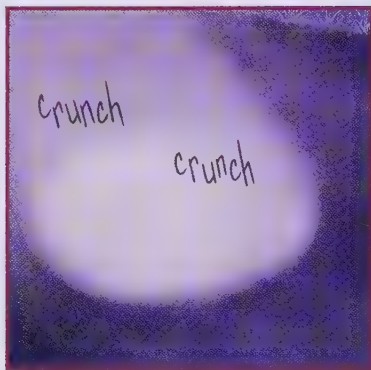
Y'all city folks sure are delicate, ain't ya?

Yeah, yeah, we've got some extras in the garage.



Thanks, man.







Easy, easy.
Gimme a minute,
I know you're
hungry.

That's
my hand,
silly!



nibble



So do you
just keep tons
of milk in a
fridge for her
or something?



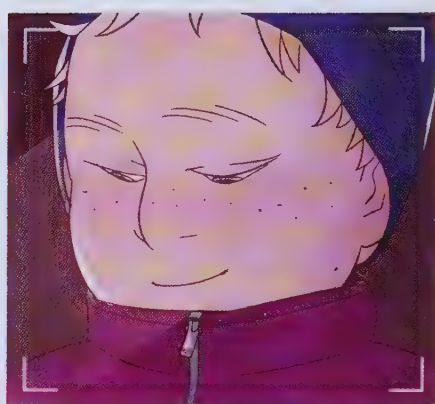
Nah...We
don't have dairy
cows, so she gets
this powdered milk
replacement stuff.
I don't think
she cares.



She **INSISTS**
on one thing,
though!



**A BIG, FAKE
NIPPLE!**



You don't **have** to live on a farm to join, y'know?

You're not gonna stand out or anything.



Definitely not a fan of standing out.

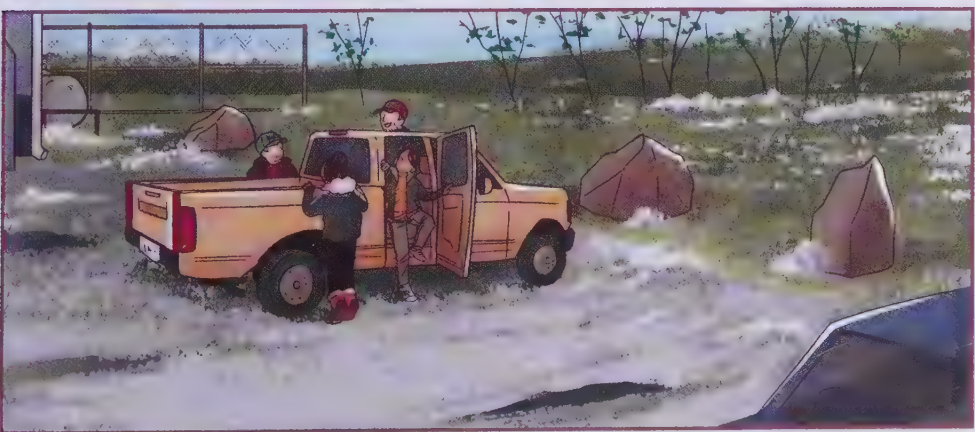
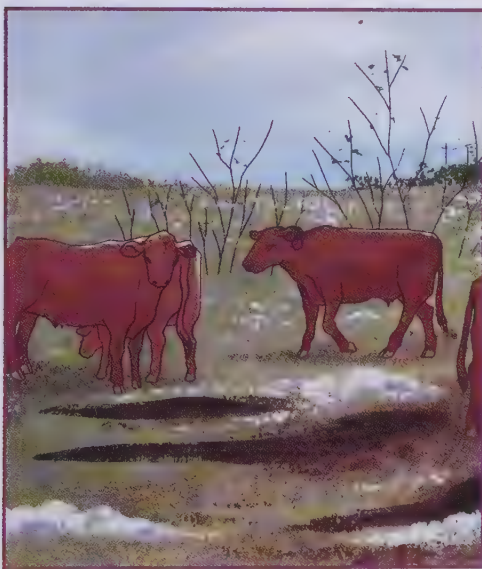


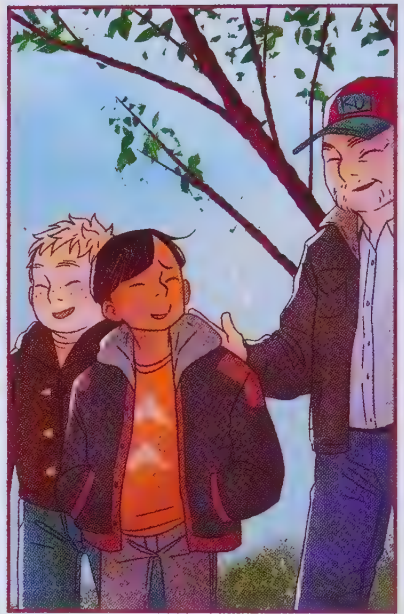
Didn't spring officially start, like...two weeks ago?



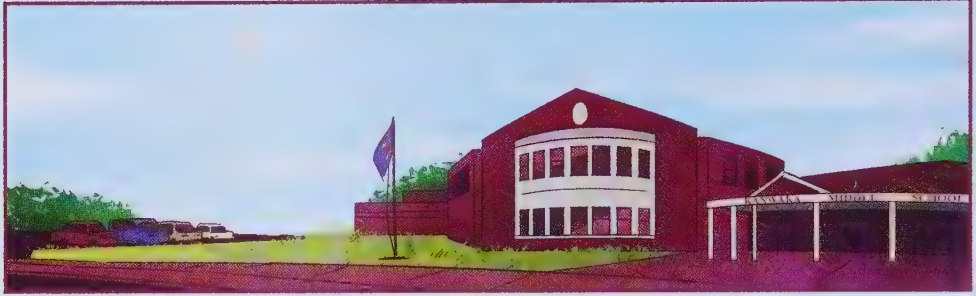
I'll believe it
when I see it.

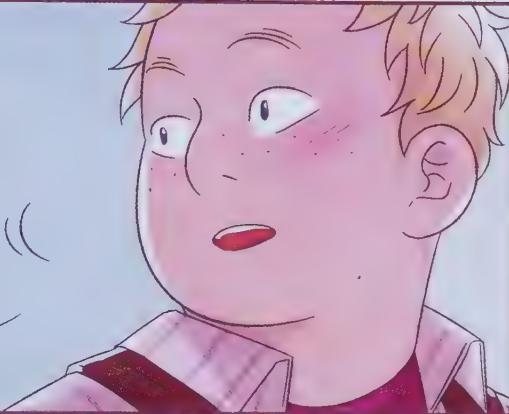














I can't find her anywhere.

She said she was gonna pick up my yearbook for me....




You still haven't seen it? Oh, man...

Hey! Oh, c'mon, it can't be that bad—



It's not that bad, is it? Seriously?

It's not that bad.

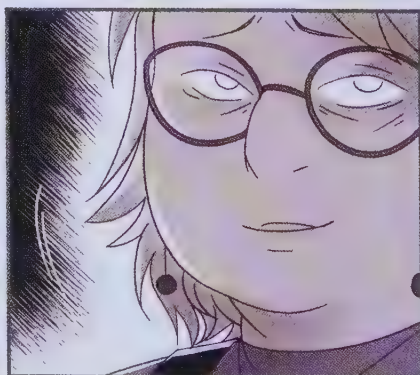
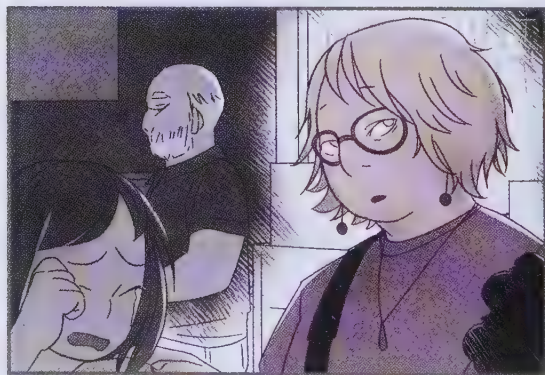


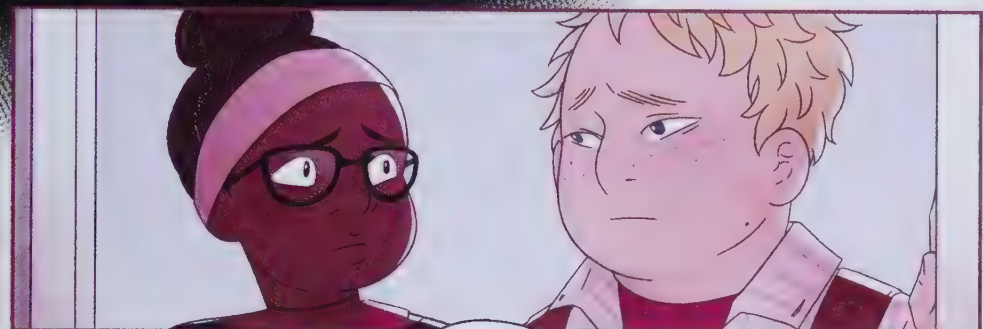
Aughh...This sucks....Maybe she's at her locker...?

Probably. She said she hadn't finished cleaning it out yet.







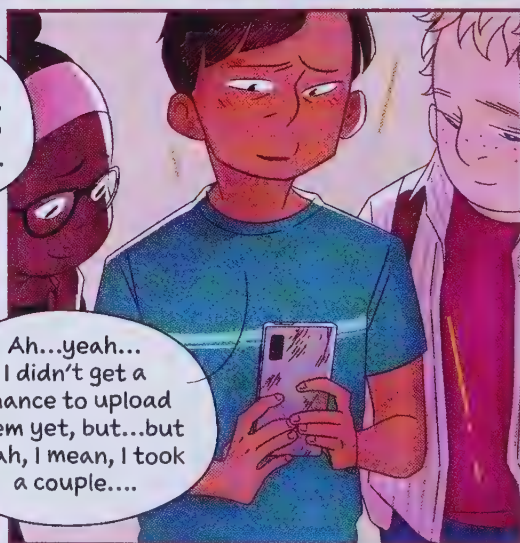


Are you...

I...I didn't realize.

I knew there was a student there. I know that's the only reason Ms. Winstone— she—





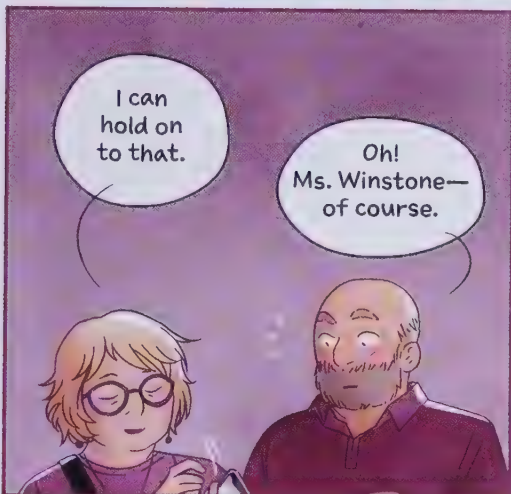


Mr. Pyrell!

Don't take his phone. We're not playing games—

It's art class! Manuel's an awesome photographer!

And he should also know the rules by now.



I can hold on to that.

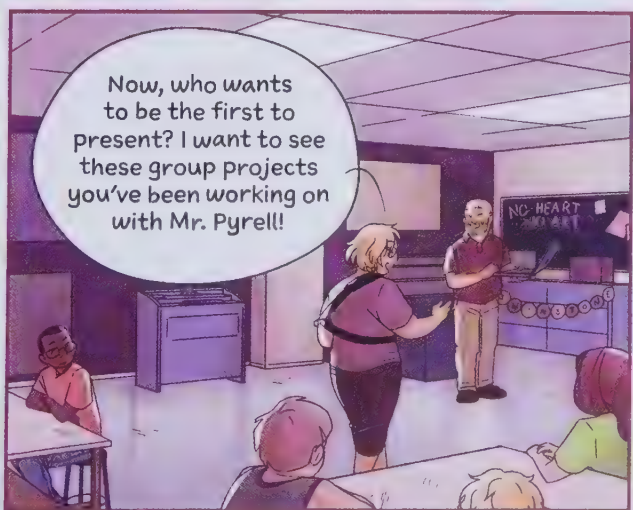
Oh! Ms. Winstone— of course.



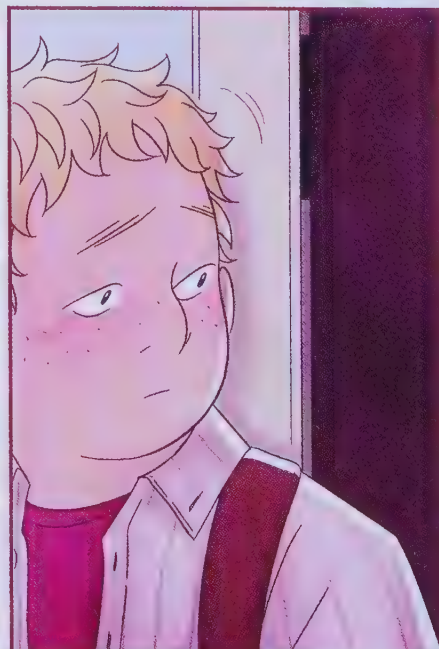
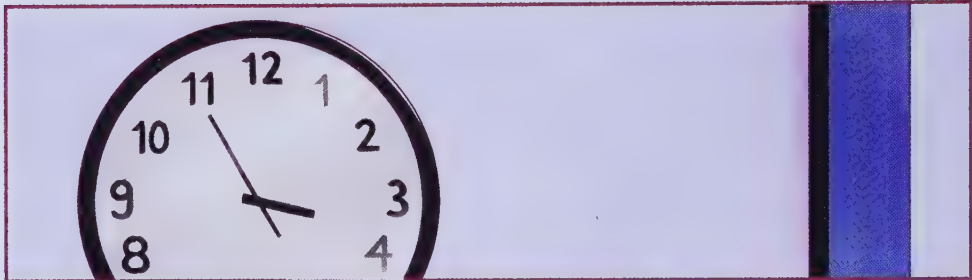
Manuel can pick it up from me at the end of the day, all right?

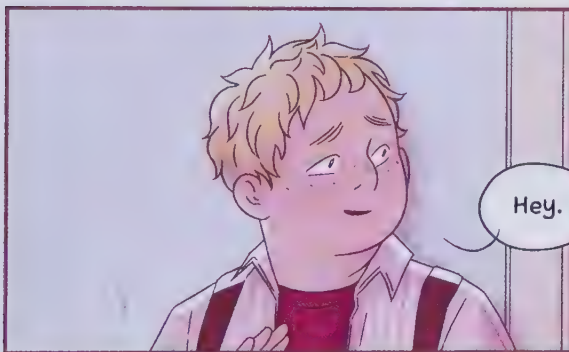
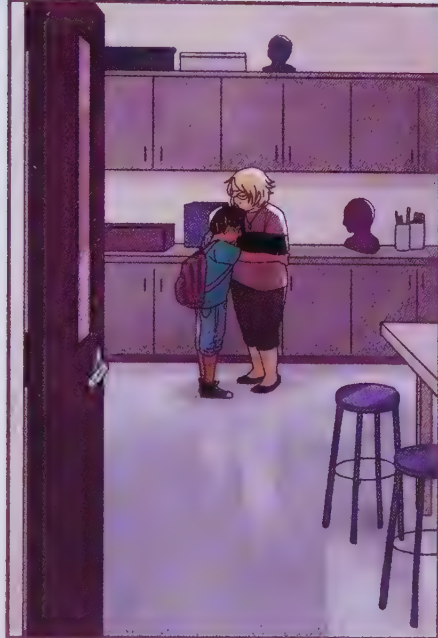


I'm glad to see you're still doing photography, Manuel.



Now, who wants to be the first to present? I want to see these group projects you've been working on with Mr. Pyrell!







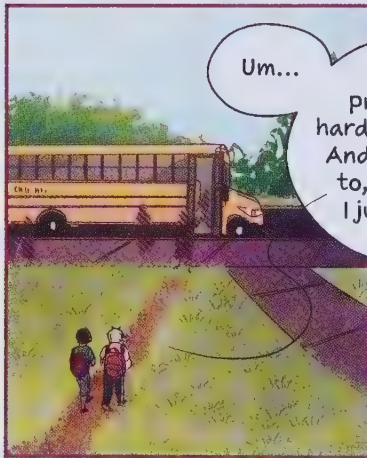
Sorry, I didn't mean to spy on you or anything, I was just...

I wasn't sure if... if you still felt like hanging out this weekend, or if...



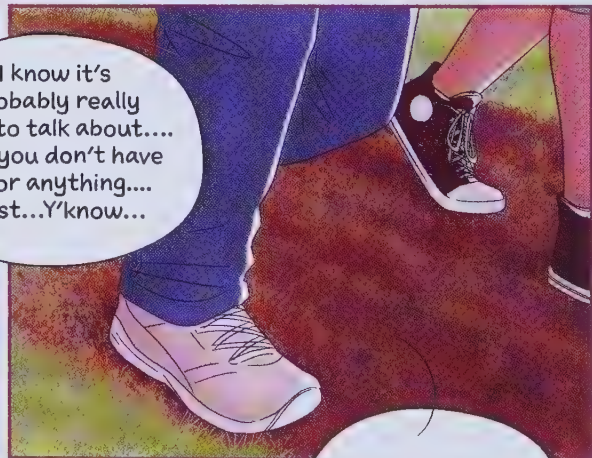
No! No, I want to—

Cool! Cool...



Um...

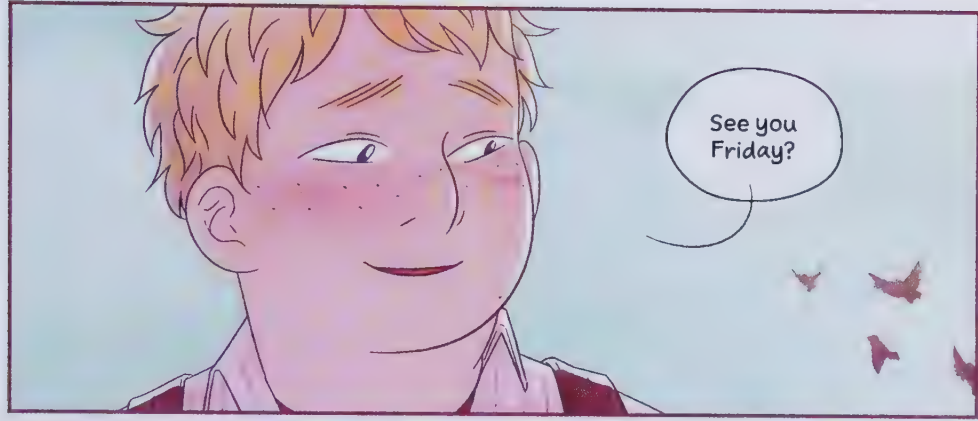
I know it's probably really hard to talk about.... And you don't have to, or anything.... I just...Y'know...



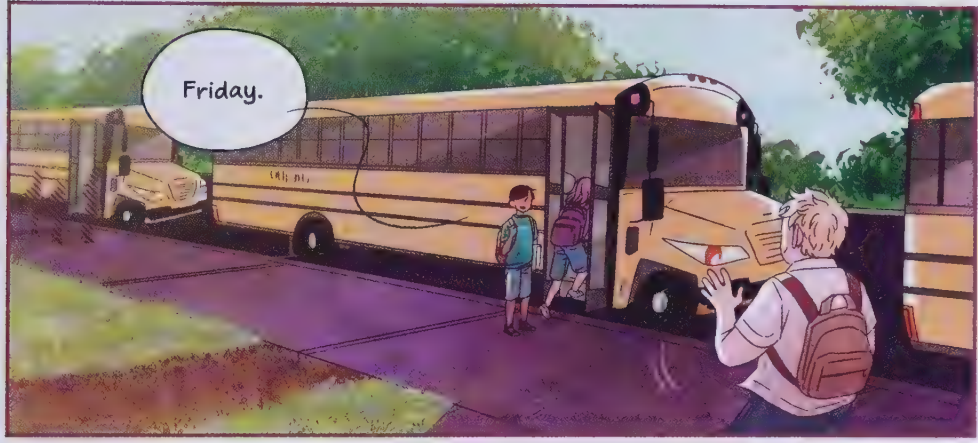
I just want you to know you can, if you want. I'll listen.



Yeah...Yeah, thanks.

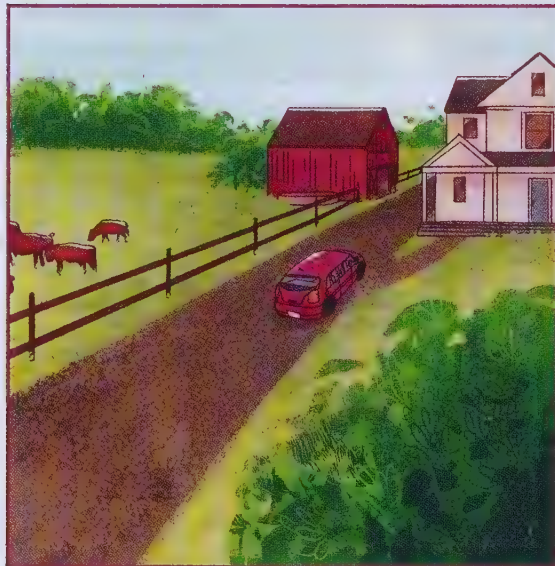
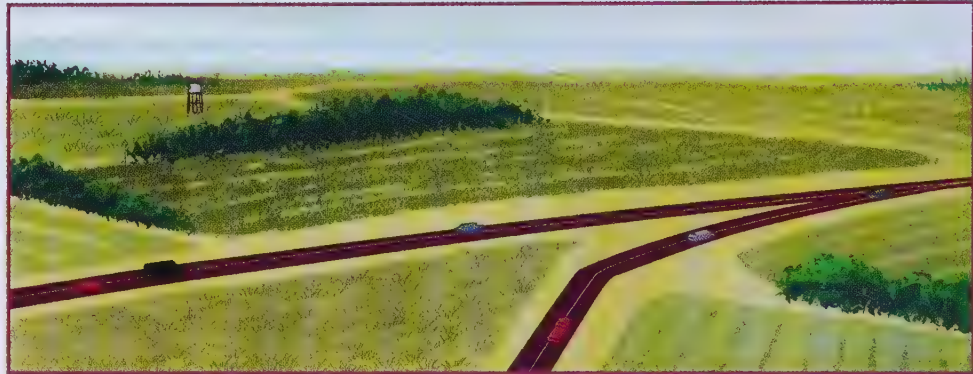


See you
Friday?



Friday.







Aw,
Daisy...!

She does
not
like
that thing.



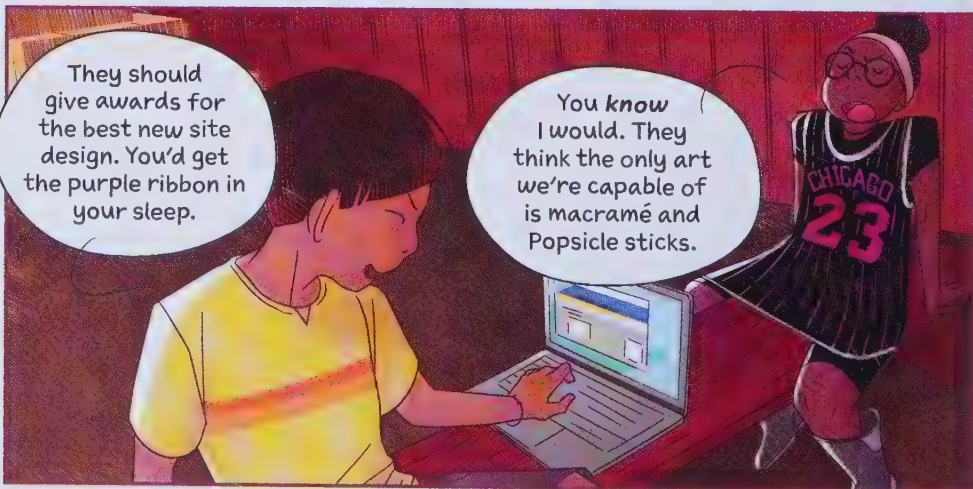
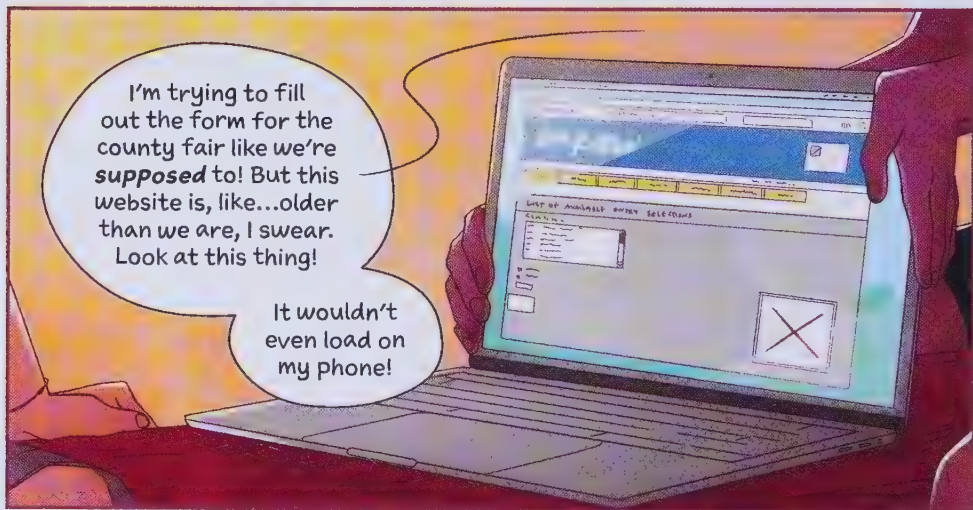
I know....

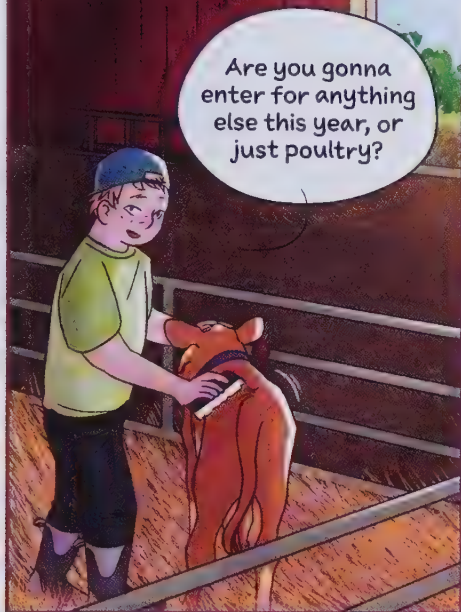


It sucks,
but she's gonna
have to get
used to it.

My poor spoiled
baby. Two hours of
halter time every
day—she's gonna
think I'm the meanest
parent ever....

Hey,
Manuel...

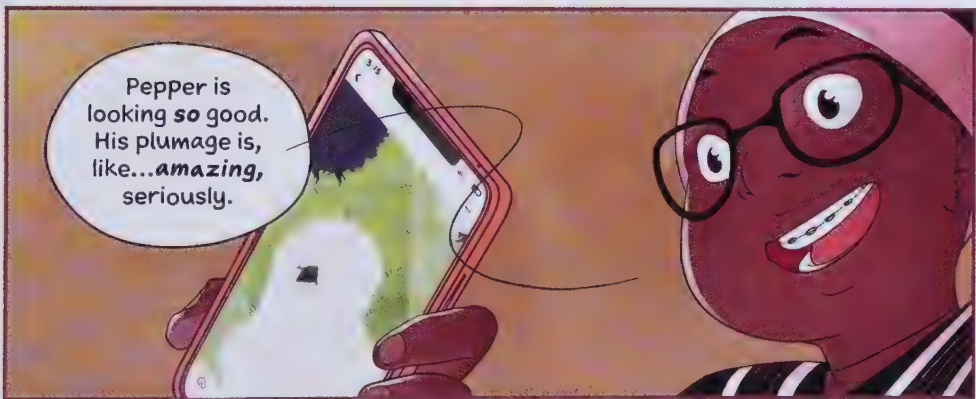




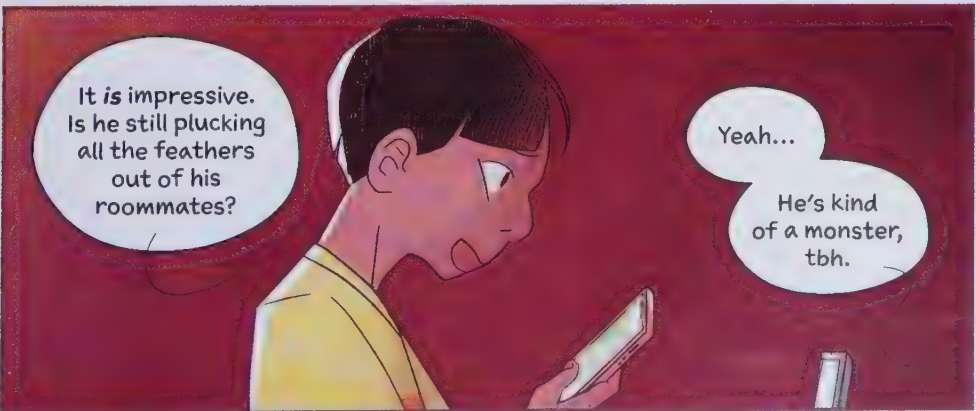
Are you gonna enter for anything else this year, or just poultry?



Just poultry! I can't chicken out now!



Pepper is looking *so* good. His plumage is, like...*amazing*, seriously.



It *is* impressive. Is he still plucking all the feathers out of his roommates?

Yeah...

He's kind of a monster, tbh.

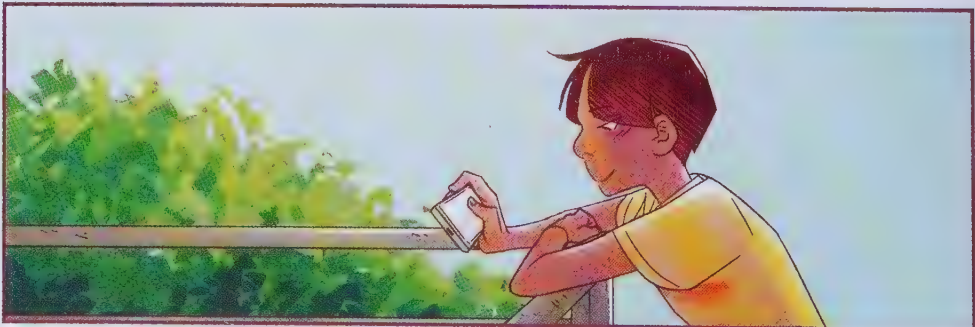
What about you? Just you and li'l Daisy?



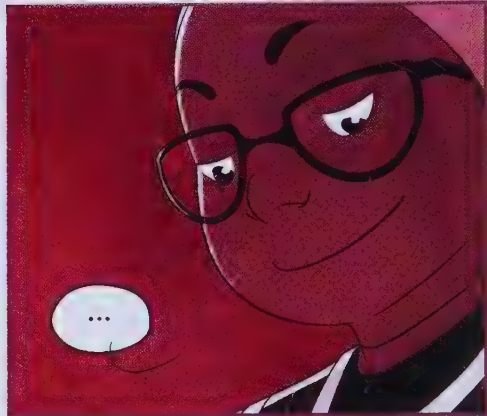
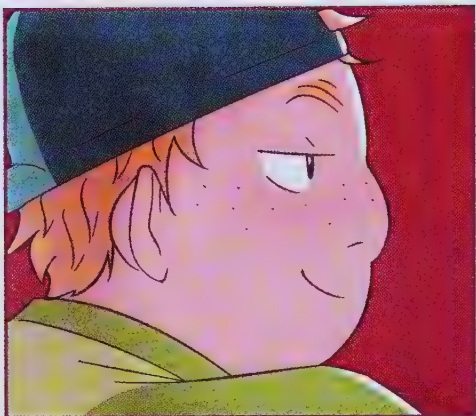
Little...Does this girl look little to you? She hit 300 pounds last week!



My beautiful, big, dumb baby.



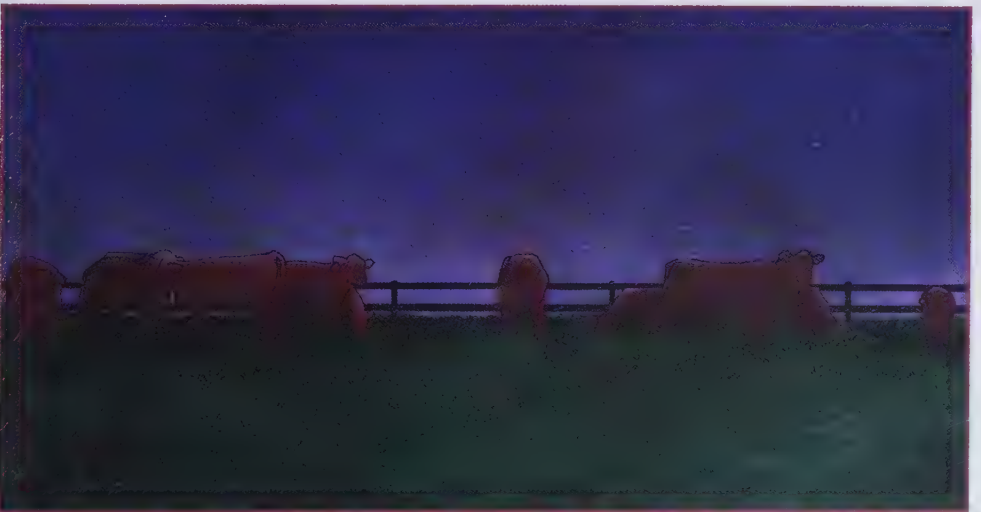
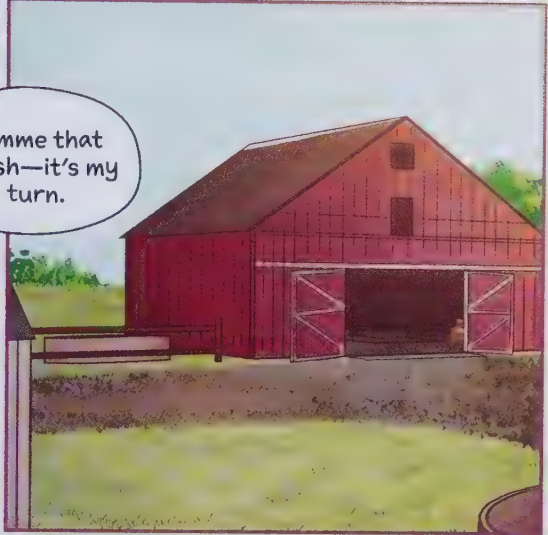






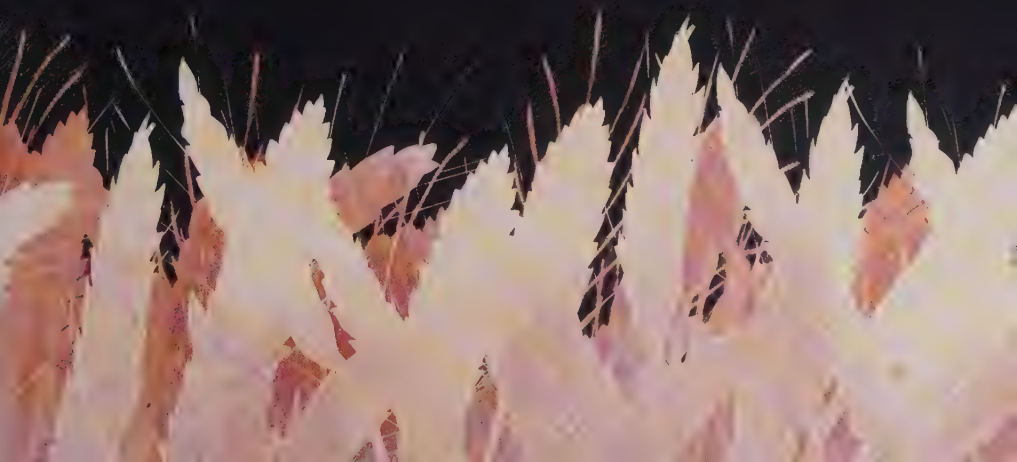
Not a chance.

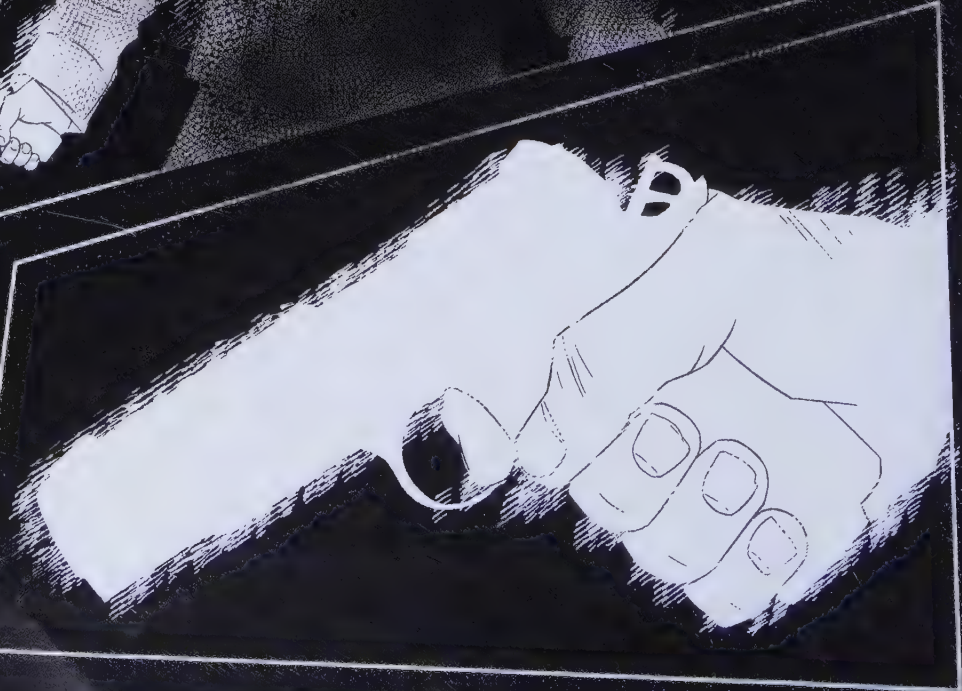
Gimme that brush—it's my turn.

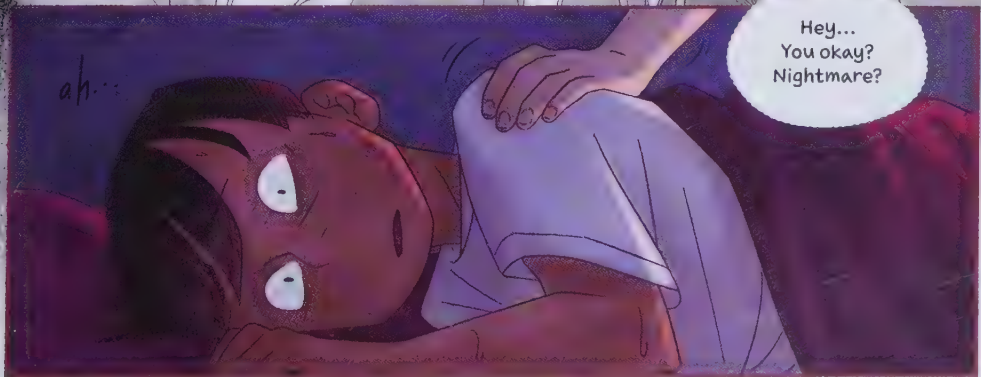




chapter four







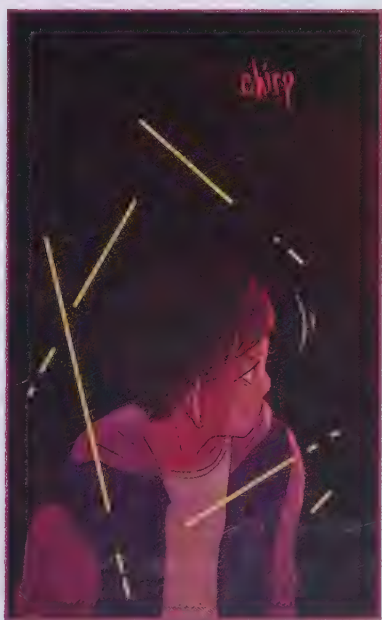
Ah...
Y-yeah...

Look, you
really don't
have to do the
barn chores. It
was a stupid
bet....

No—no.
I'm good.

What time
is it? I'll
go do it, I
promised—
I...

I need
some fresh
air anyway.









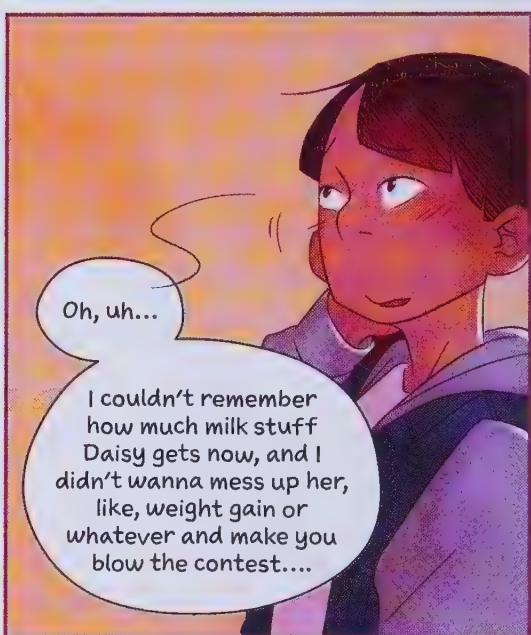




Hey, fair's fair. Caysha still asleep?

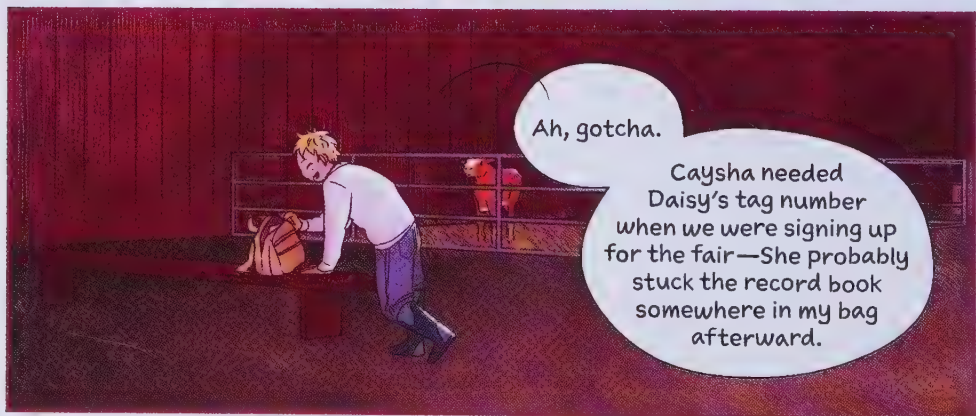
She gets out of bed for, like... breakfast, and that's it.

What're you looking for?



Oh, uh...

I couldn't remember how much milk stuff Daisy gets now, and I didn't wanna mess up her, like, weight gain or whatever and make you blow the contest....



Ah, gotcha.

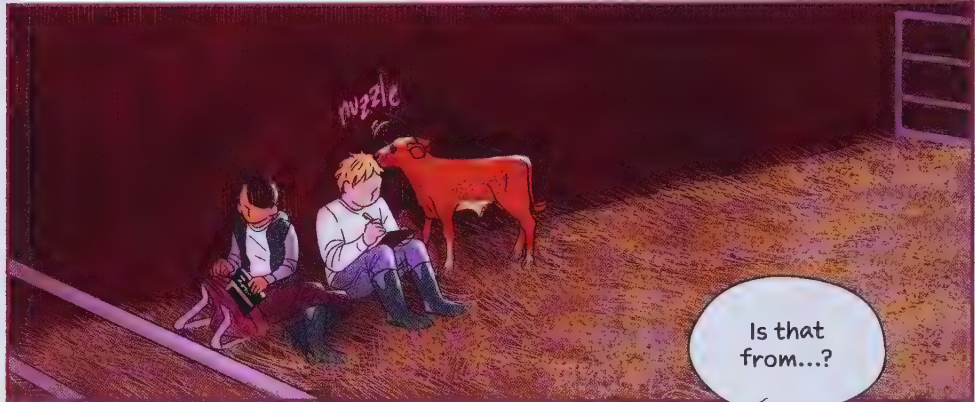
Caysha needed Daisy's tag number when we were signing up for the fair—She probably stuck the record book somewhere in my bag afterward.

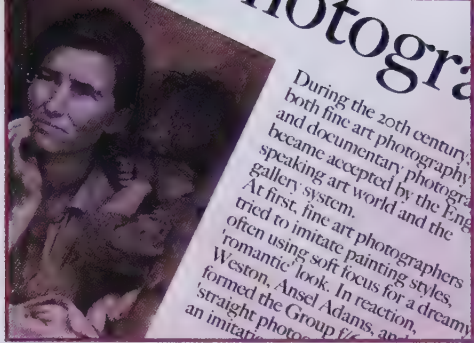


Lessee, two quarts...

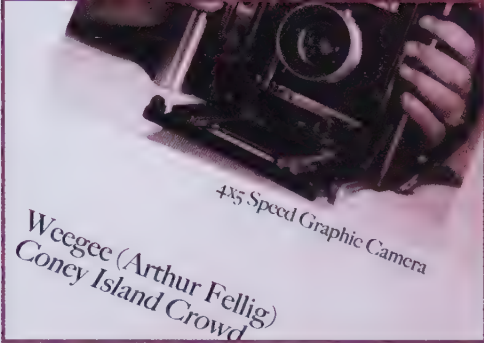
I'll get the powder. Can you run the sink till it's warm?







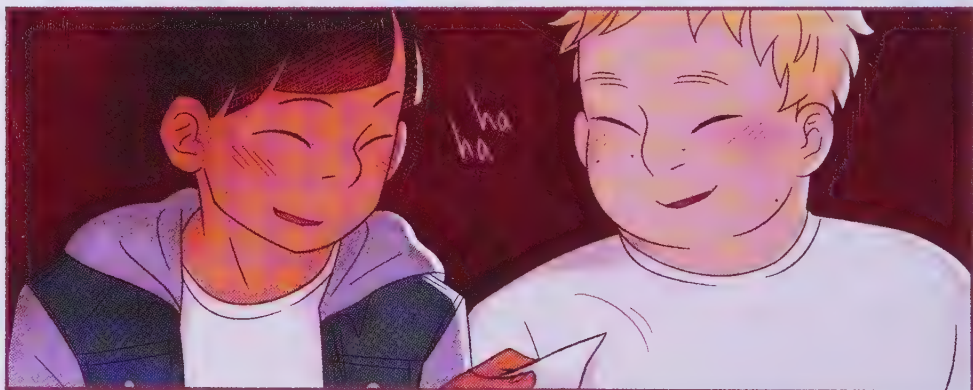
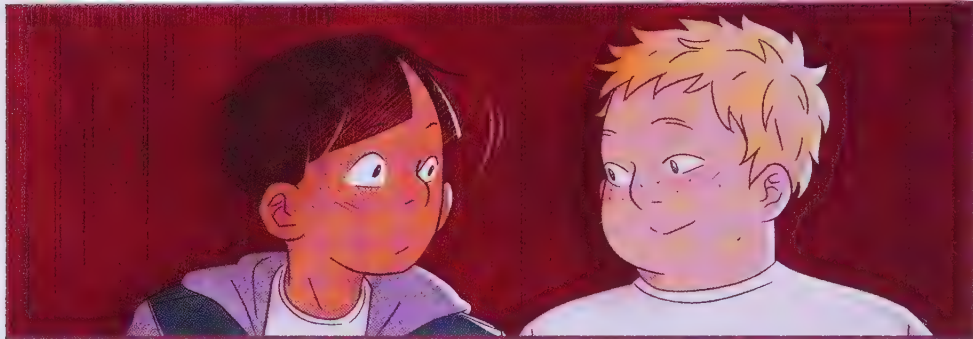
During the 20th century, both fine art photography and documentary photography became accepted by the English speaking art world and the gallery system. At first, fine art photographers tried to imitate painting styles, often using soft focus for a dreamy 'romantic' look. In reaction, Weston, Ansel Adams, and the Group f/64 formed the Group f/64, an imitative



4x5 Speed Graphic Camera

Weegee (Arthur Fellig)
Coney Island Crowd







I like this one.

Yeah...

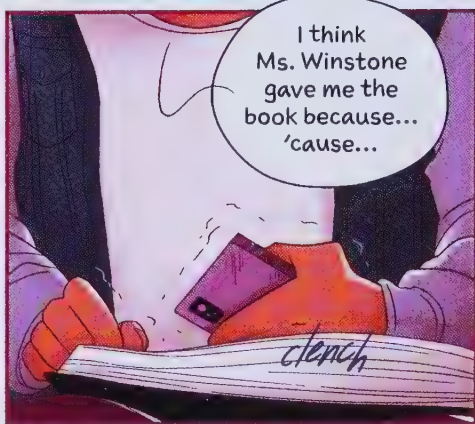


...

shff



I...



I think Ms. Winstone gave me the book because... 'cause...



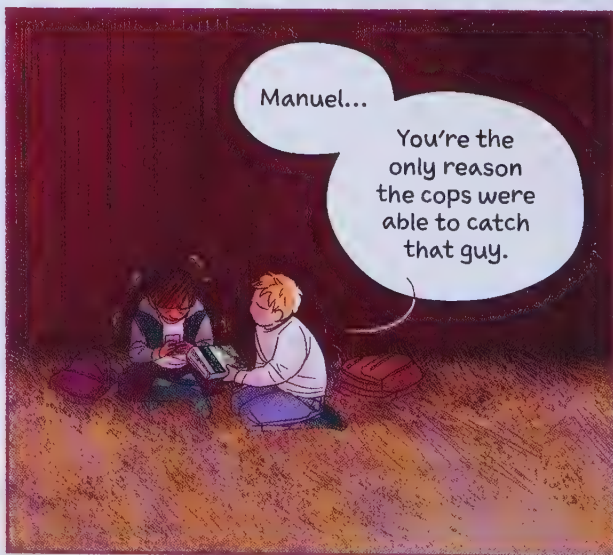
She wanted to say thanks, she said.



I didn't— I couldn't visit her when she was in the hospital. It was— She was there for two months and I couldn't—I couldn't face her—

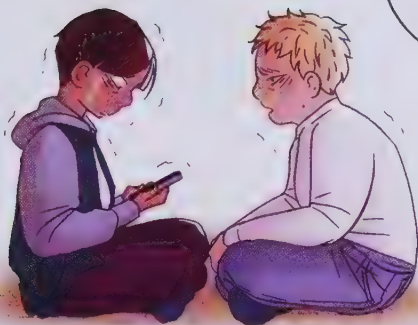


I didn't do anything worth thanking, Sebastian. All I did was run away.



Manuel...

You're the only reason the cops were able to catch that guy.



She's alive because you pulled that fire alarm.

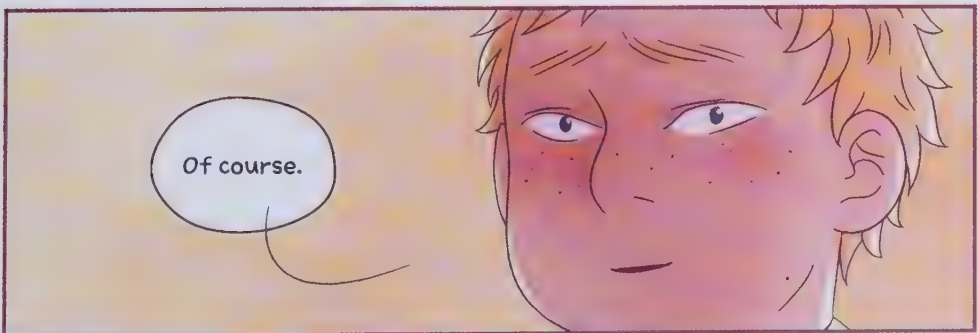
I think... I think that's incredible.



...



Thanks....



Of course.



Your phone case is so beat up—

It was gonna be for your birthday, sorry— it's not wrapped yet or anything—



A couple weeks ago— You were talking about—about photos being your anchors and stuff, right? So...I dunno, I hope it's okay?



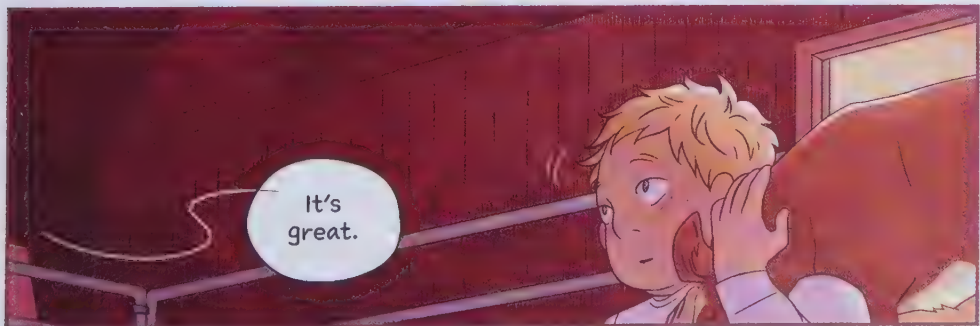
Y-yeah, it's—

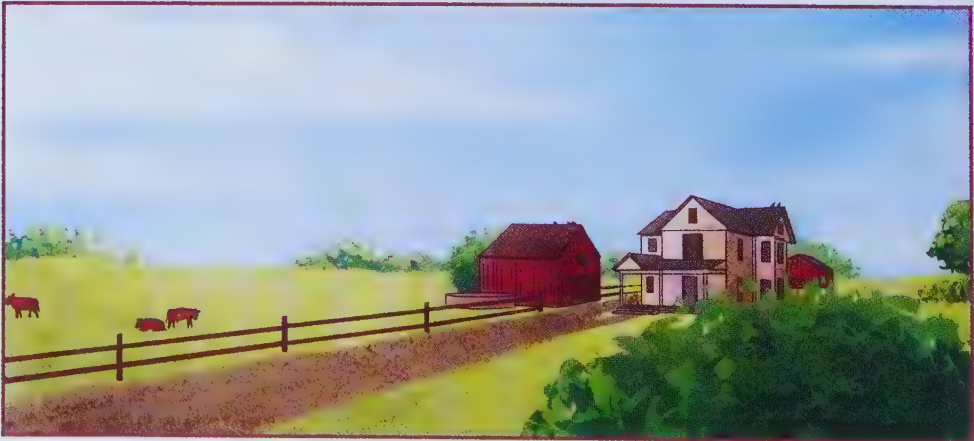
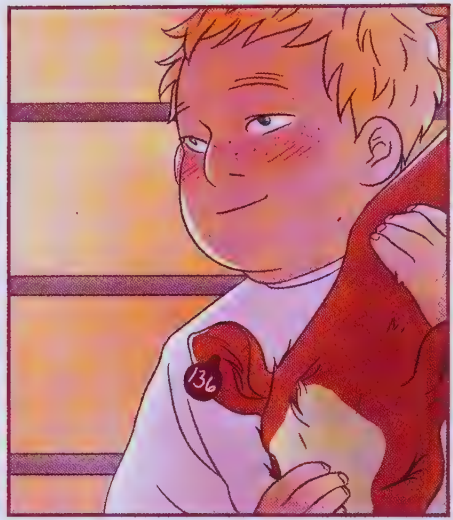


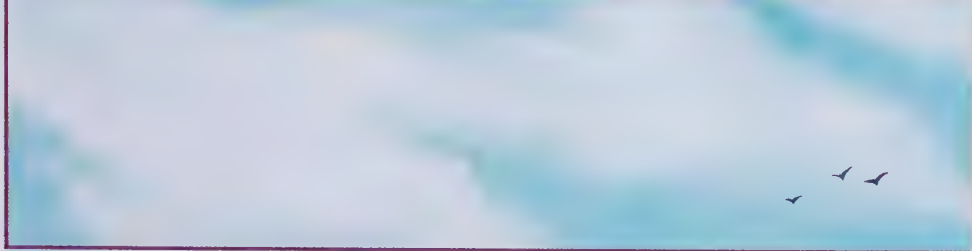
**DAISY!
HEY!**



It's great.



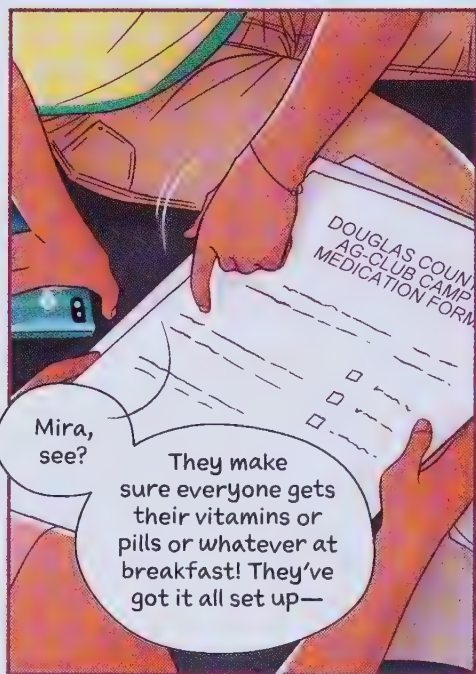




I don't know, mijo....
Four days is a long time.

Pleeease, Mǎ,
I never get to go to camp! It's not like we're going to New York or something. We'd just take a bus for a few hours—





Mira,
see?

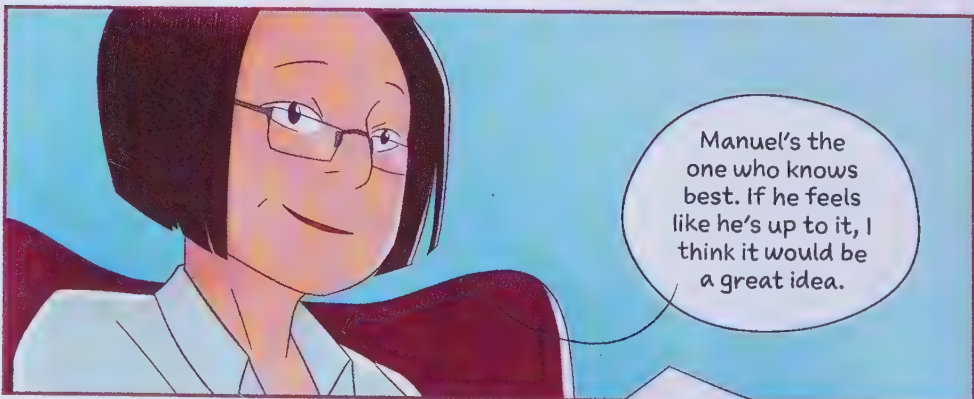
They make
sure everyone gets
their vitamins or
pills or whatever at
breakfast! They've
got it all set up—



and there's
a nurse, and if I
really need to come
home, I can just
call you—



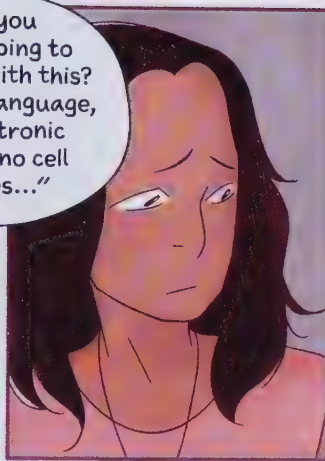
Is he really
up to this? I
thought routine
was best—



Manuel's the
one who knows
best. If he feels
like he's up to it, I
think it would be
a great idea.



Are you really going to be okay with this? "No foul language, no electronic games, no cell phones..."



They'd make an exception, right?



We can certainly ask, but...you'll need to be prepared for them to say no, Manuel.



¡Mamá, díles!

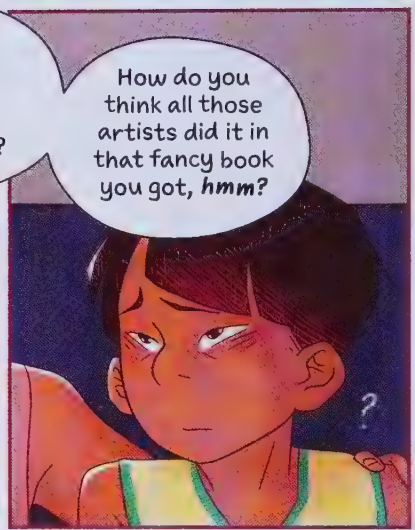
I'm not gonna text or play games or anything! I just want to take photos!



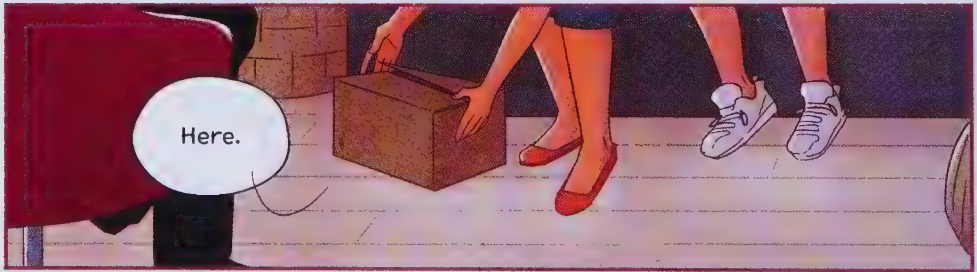
Hey, mijo, it's okay.



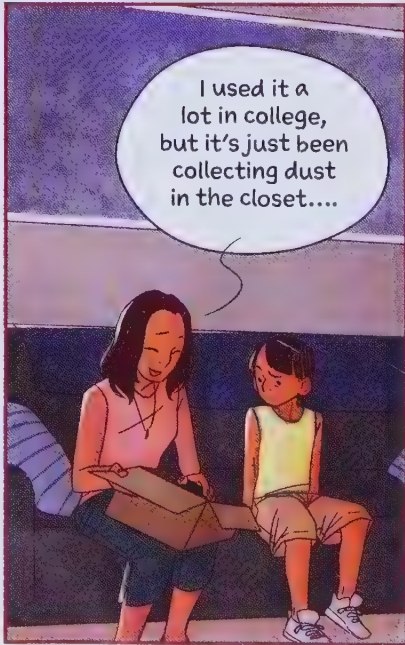
You know we used to take photographs *before* cell phones, right?



How do you think all those artists did it in that fancy book you got, *hmm?*



Here.



I used it a lot in college, but it's just been collecting dust in the closet....



Your mother and I have been talking. Photography seems to really be helping you cope, and it's been wonderful to see you try new things.

What do you think about giving something like this a go, instead of your cell phone?

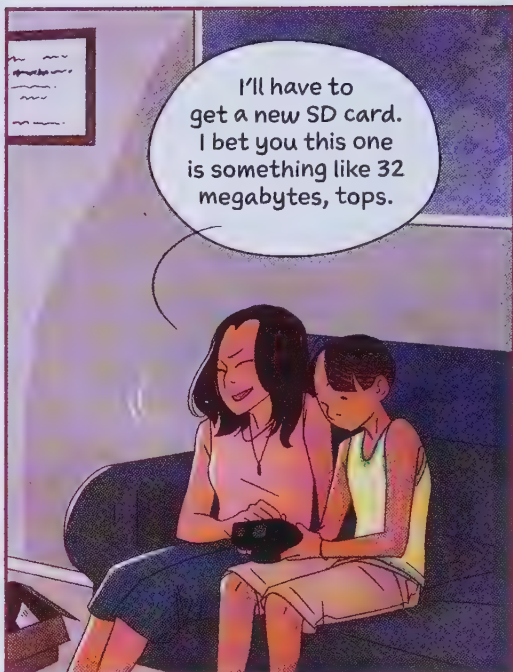


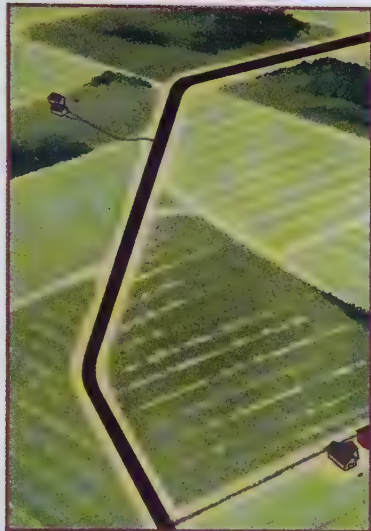
How does it work...?



Look, see?

It's still digital—it's got a screen here, so you can still use it to find your anchors when you need to ground yourself.





See, and this part controls the shutter speed, and this button's, like...ISO or something?

Uh-huh...
What the heck is an ISO?

Dunno!



Bet you can find a manual or something online. It doesn't look *that* old.

This thing's from when my mom was in college! It's practically an *antique*.

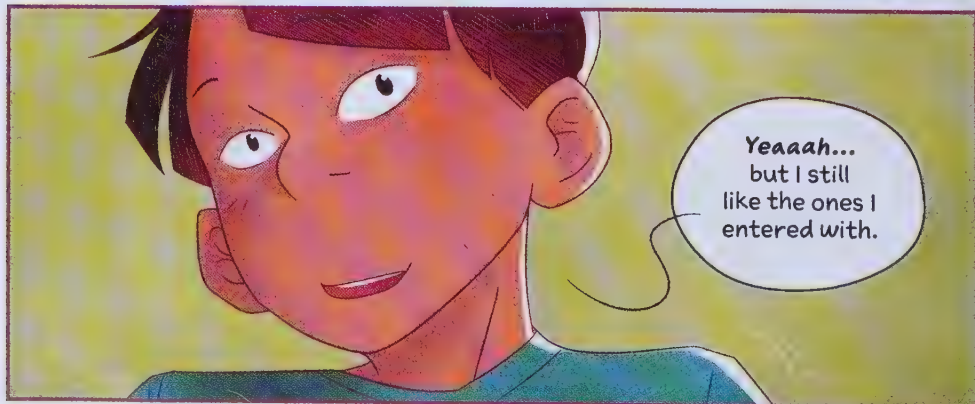


So, like, I can't apply filters or anything, but that's okay—



just means I've gotta take better pictures to start with. I'm gonna get *so* much better.

Too bad you didn't get it earlier. I bet your stuff for the county fair would've been *so* cool....



Yeaah... but I still like the ones I entered with.



You **BETTER**, they're **AMAZING!** You're gonna win the purple ribbon next week for **suuure**—and so am I and so is—



Nnnnngh.

Can we **not** talk about the fair...?

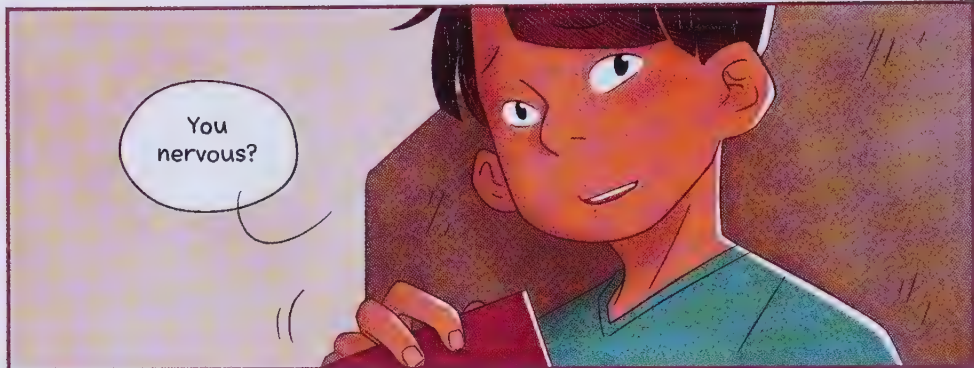


Thinking about it is making me nauseous....



I think you're just getting carsick, my dude.

bleh



You nervous?

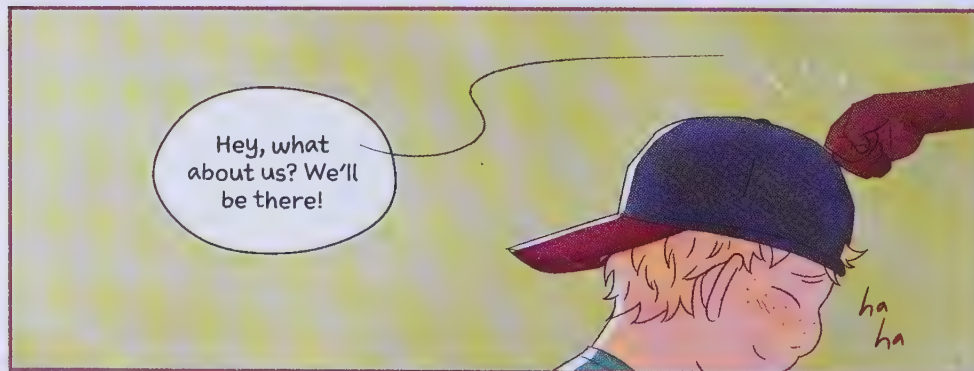


Yeah, I guess....

You guys don't have to go up and talk into a microphone about your stuff! I'm gonna be too old to do another bucket calf next year.



They're all gonna be staring at me instead of admiring Daisy. A huge giant arena full of strangers!



Hey, what about us? We'll be there!

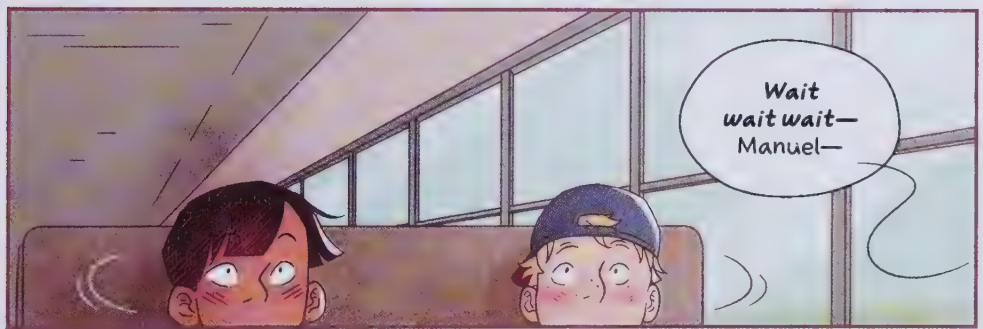
ha ha



Yeah! I'll be there for sure—promise. There's no way I'm not gonna be there rooting for you.



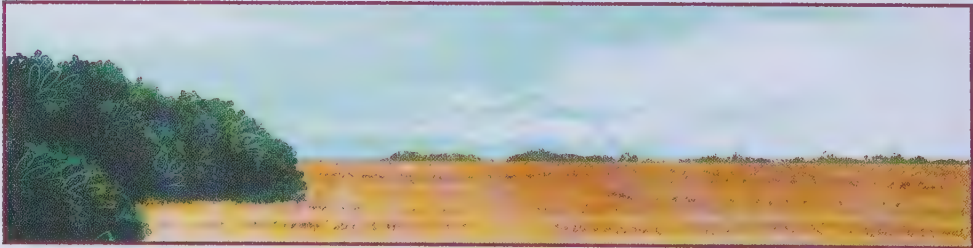
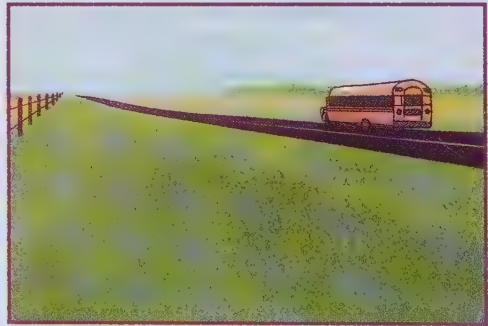
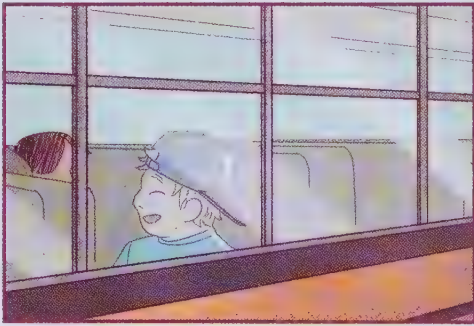
Thanks.



Wait wait wait—
Manuel—



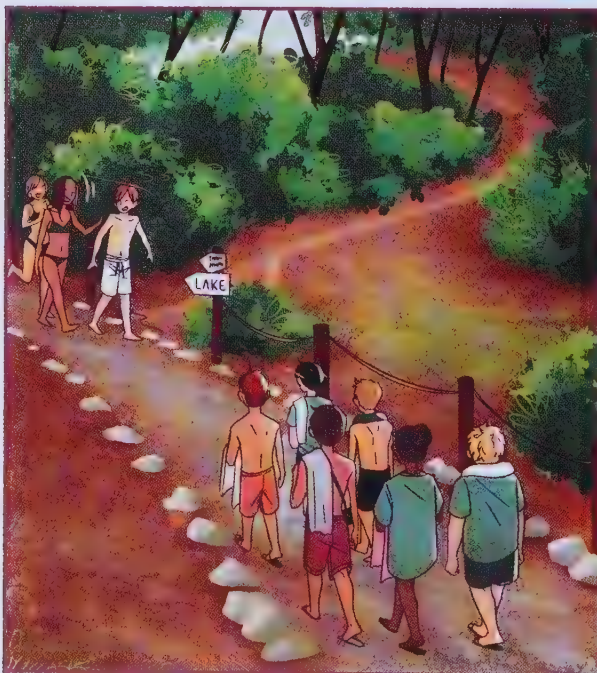
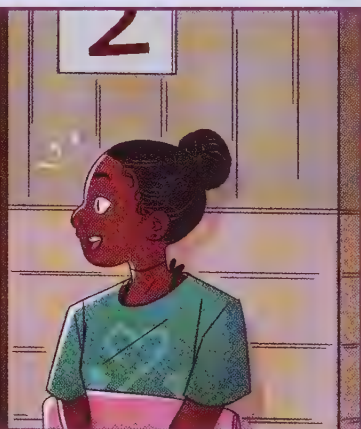
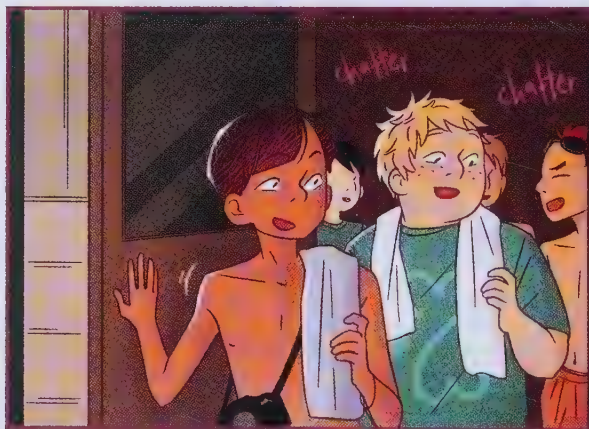
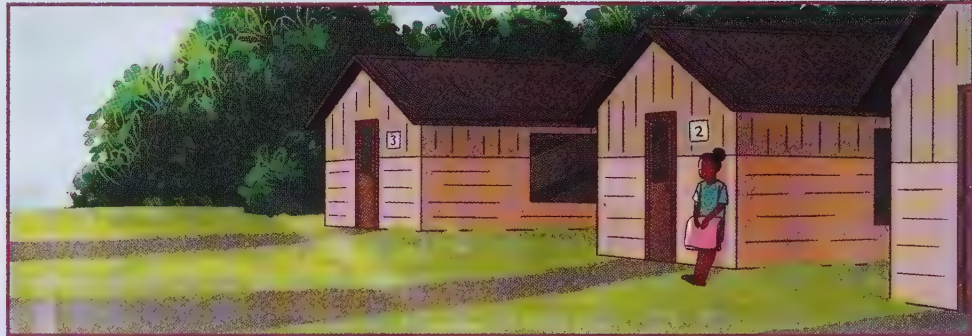
PLEASE tell me there's a way to take a selfie with this thing?!













Will they really let us?



Who cares? Let's try!

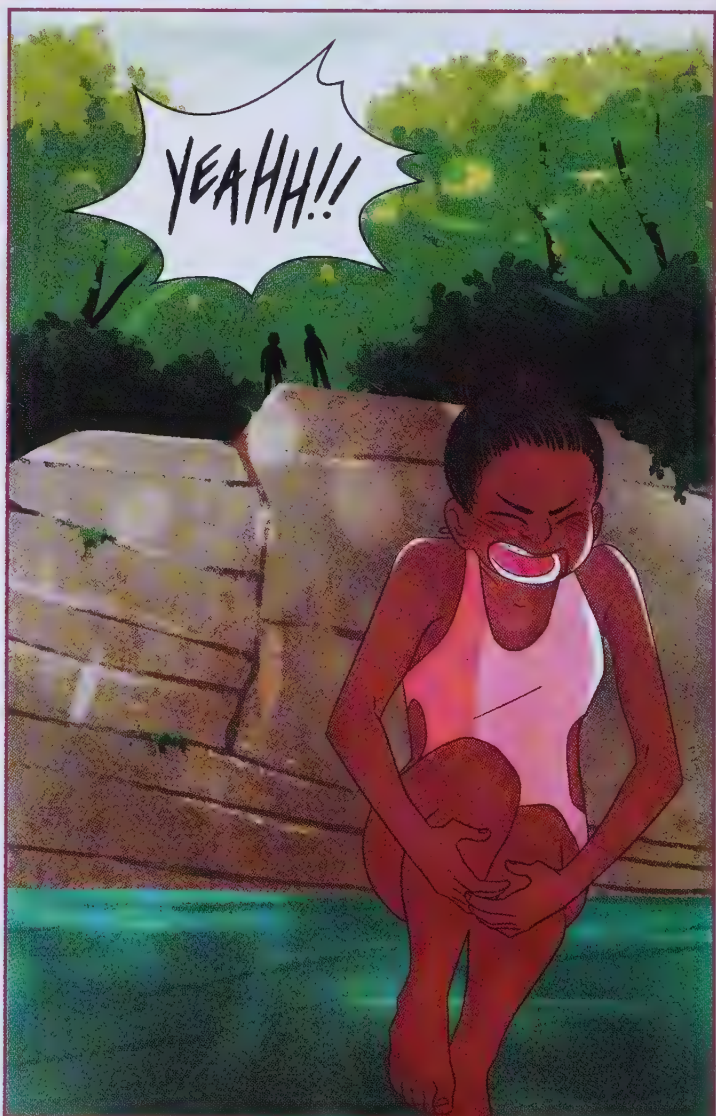
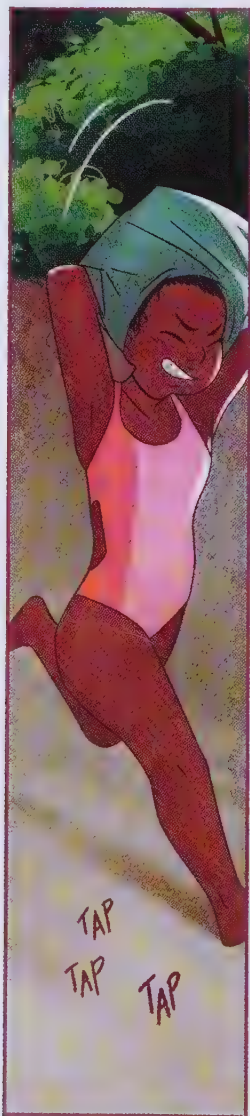


I saw some of the counselors jumping earlier!

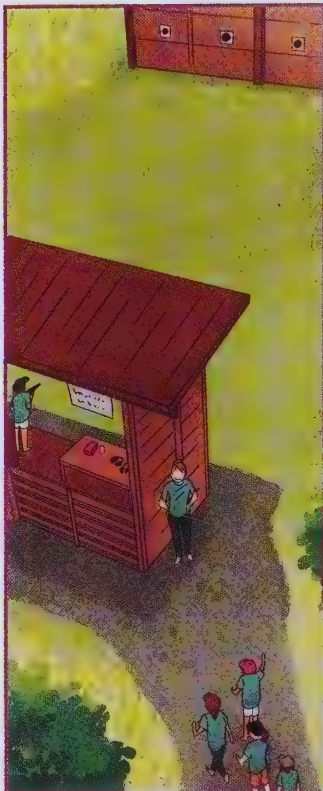


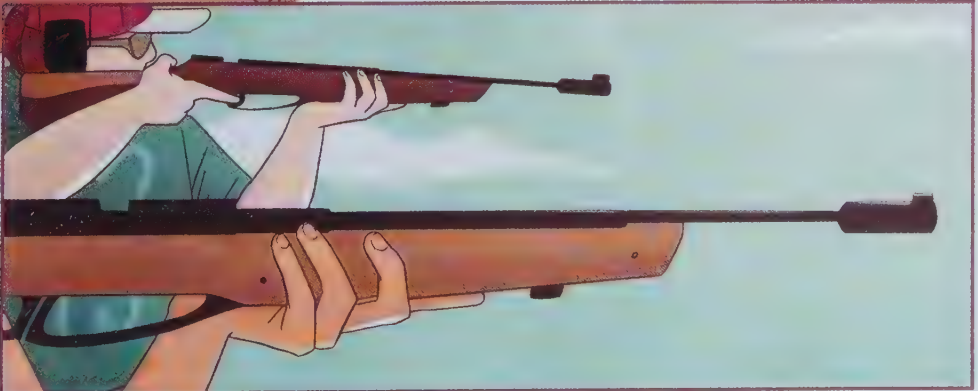
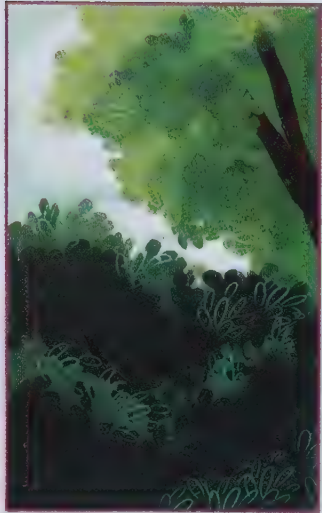
Be cool, or they'll definitely make us go back!





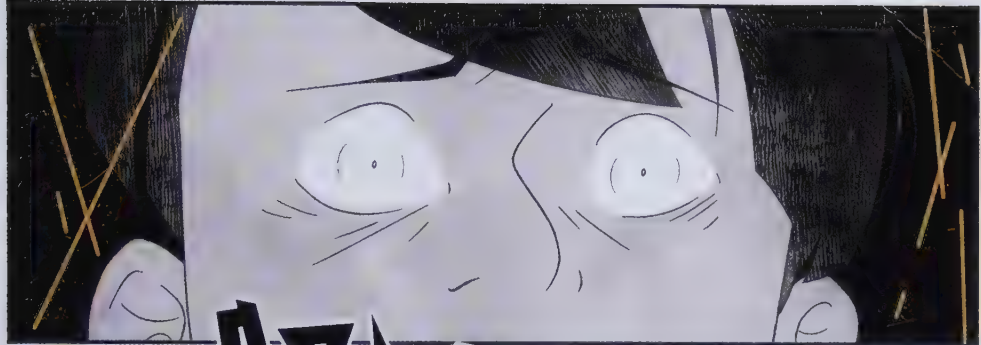






0101

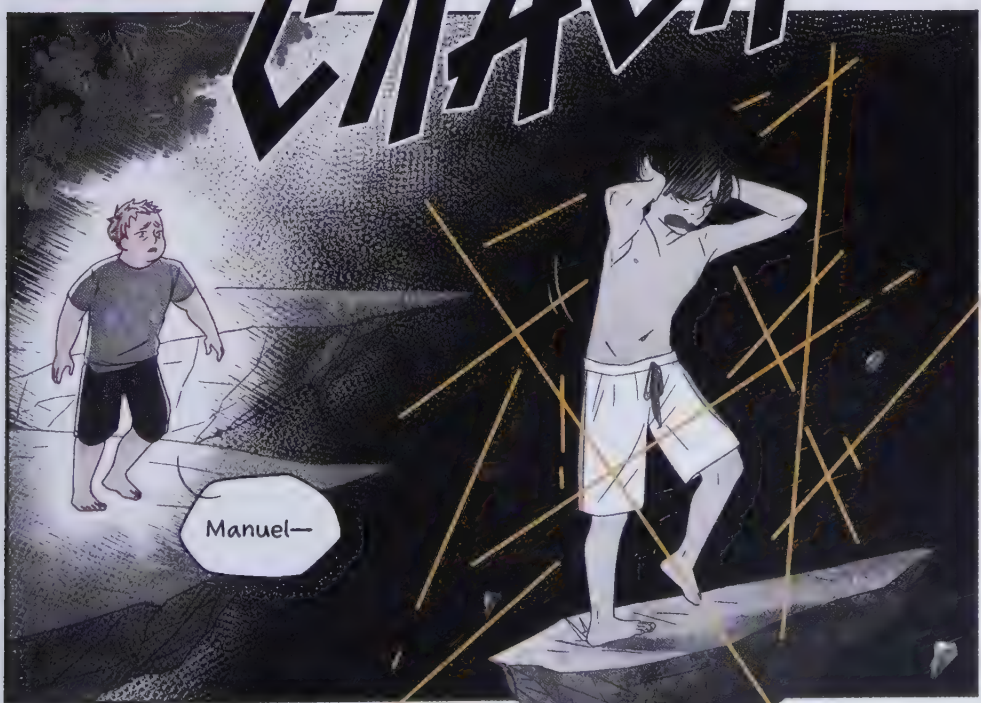




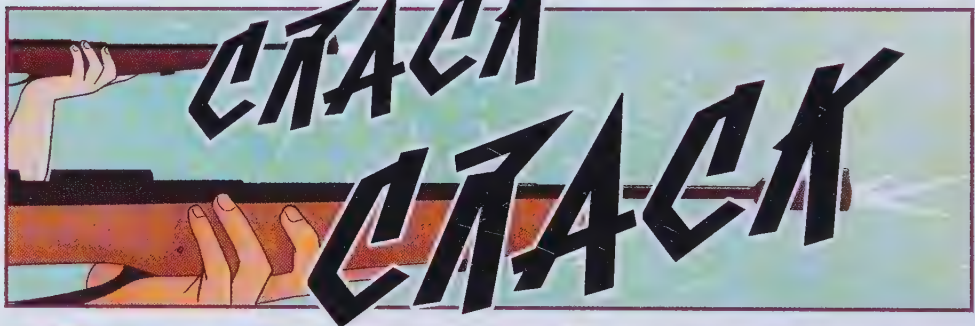
CRACK



CRACK



Manuel—

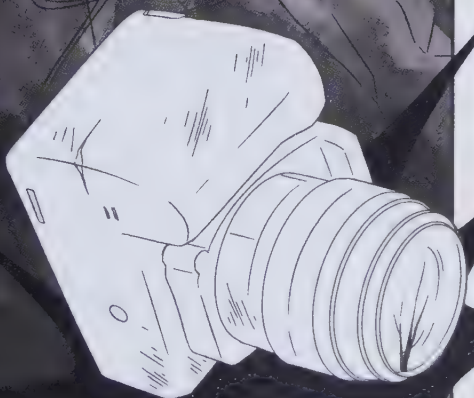


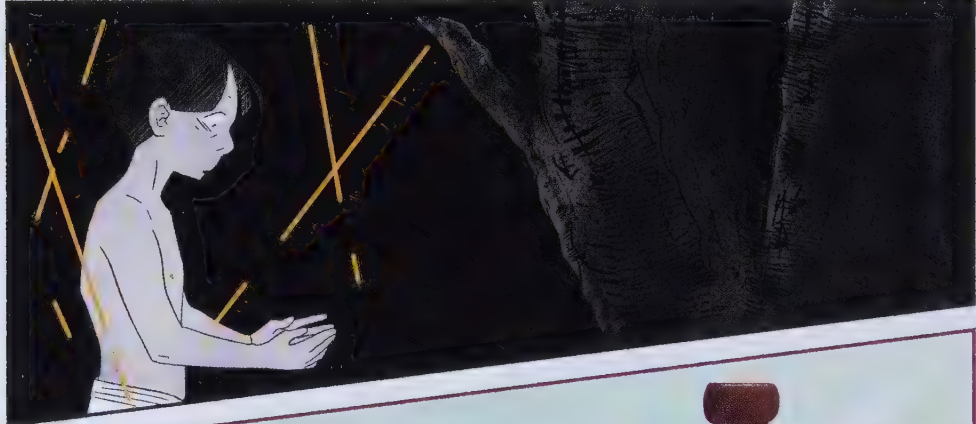
Ah!

CRACK



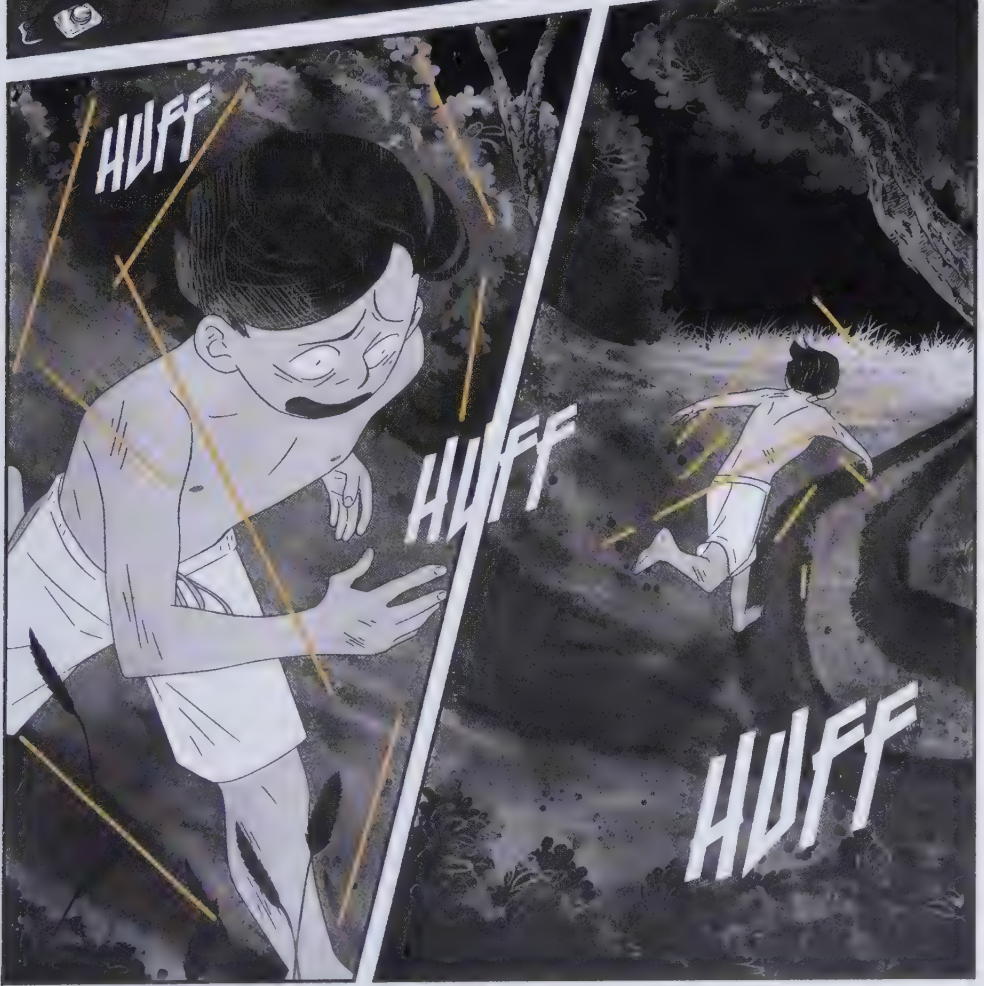
CRACK



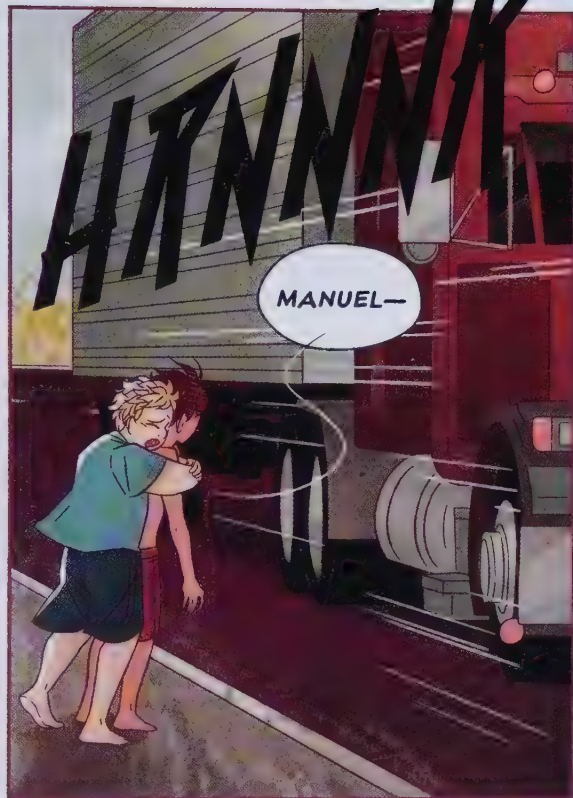




MANUEL—!







MANUEL—

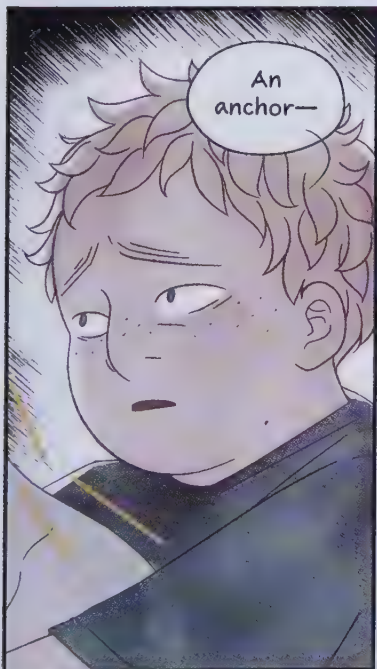


Hey—
it's okay—

Focus—

We'll—

we'll find
an anchor—

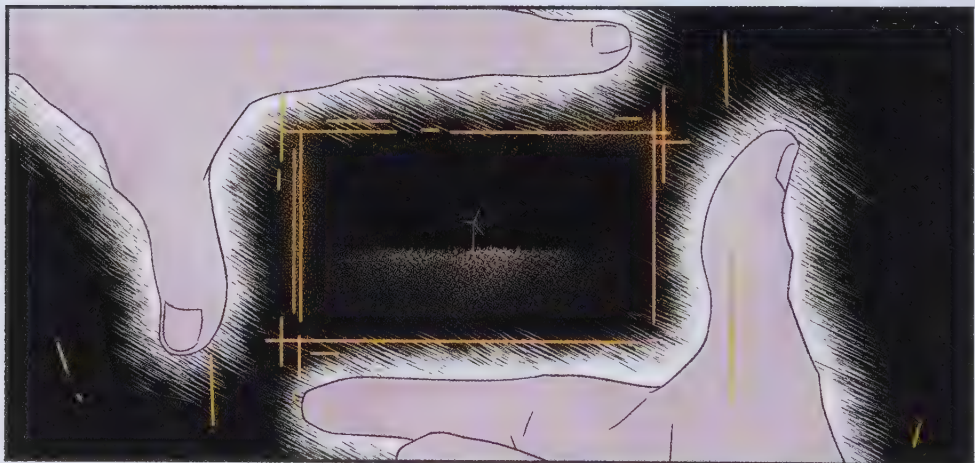
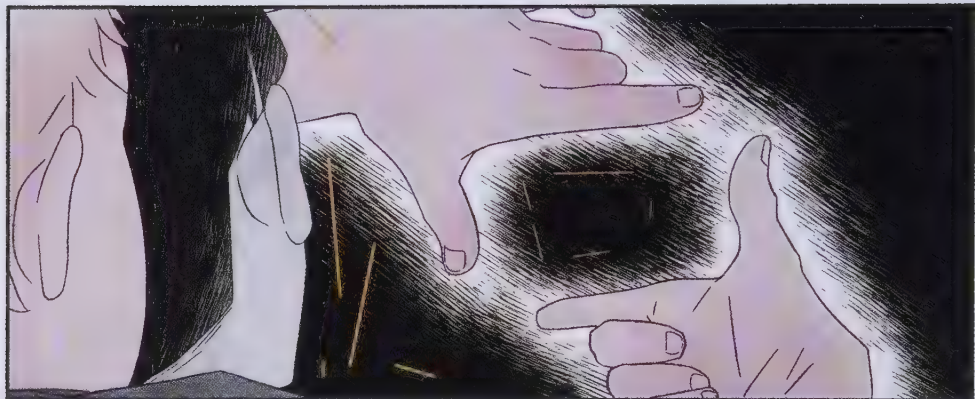


An
anchor—




Look—
look, you
see it?

Here—





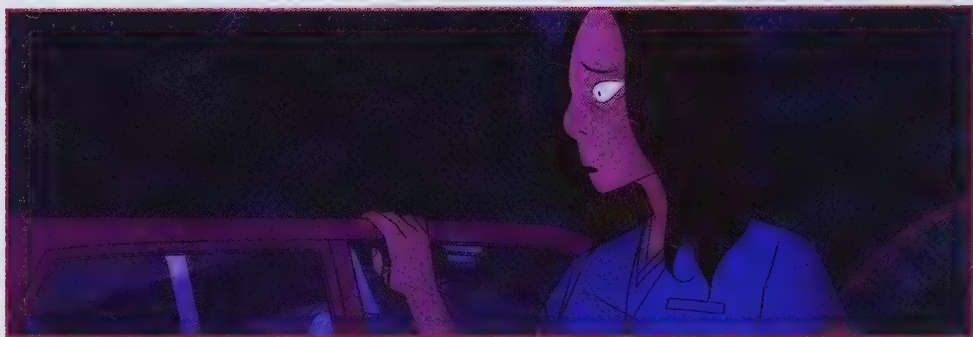


Sorry...









Where have you been? It's been hours!

Yes, they're here!

You can call off the search—



You can't leave camp like that!

What were you thinking?!

Your mother's been scared out of her mind!

Wait...



We...

We got
lost—

It's
not his
fault....



**MANUEL
GABRIEL SOTO
RUÍZ.**



Súbete
al carro.

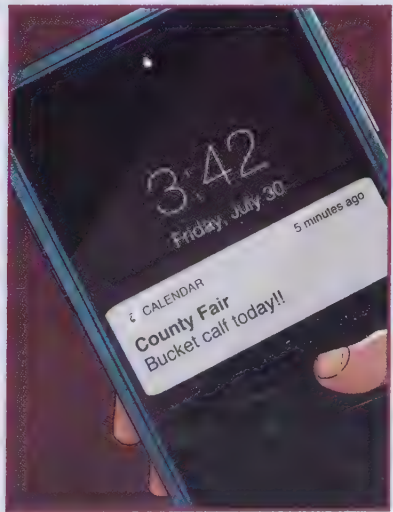
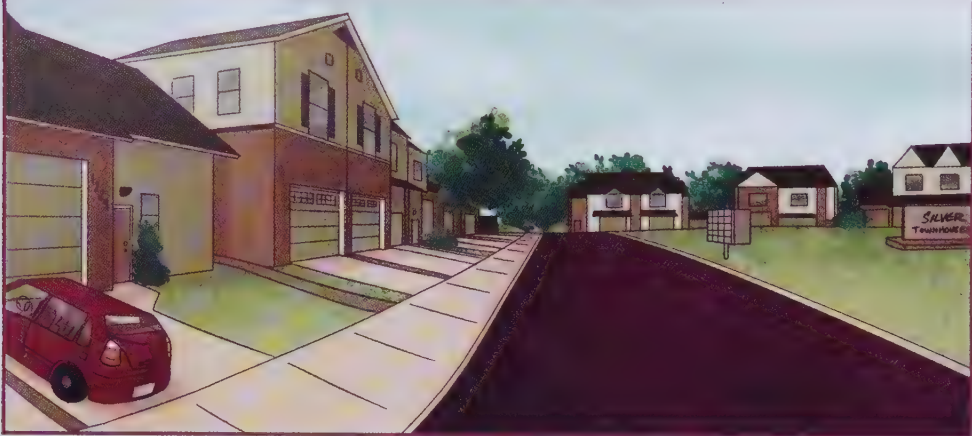
We're
going
home.

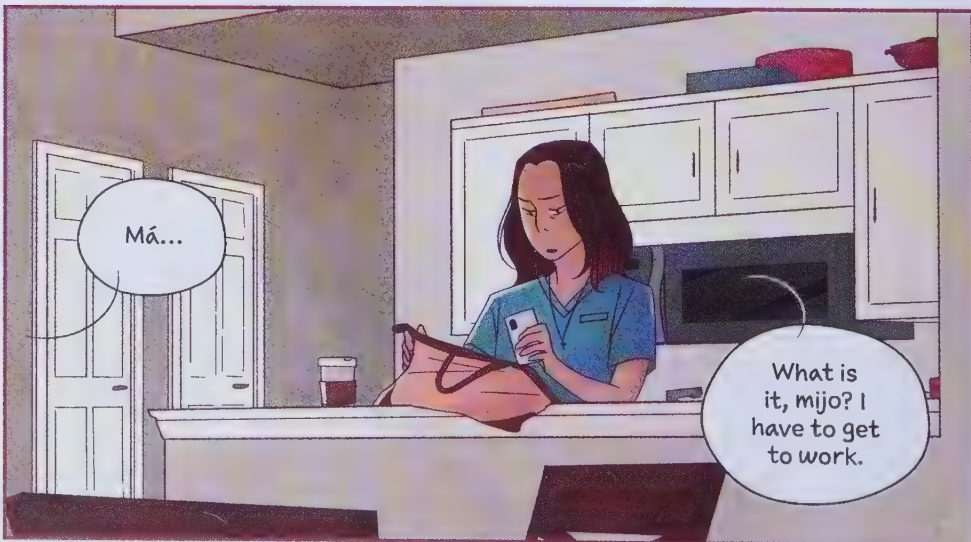
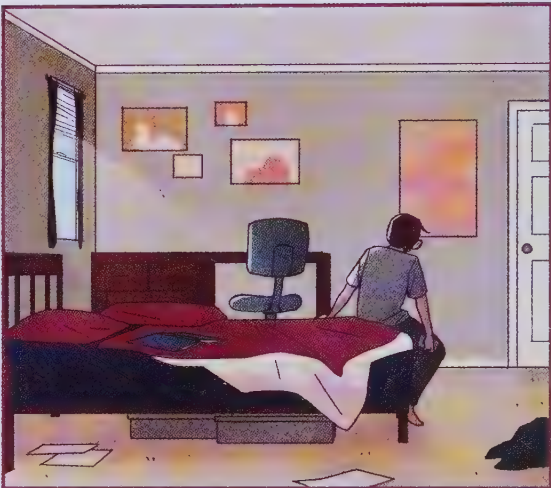


chapter five











Oh...
right. I
guess...



Just
tell me.

What
is it.



I just—

I was just
wondering...

fidget



You
already asked
this morning.
I'm not saying
it again. No
video games.

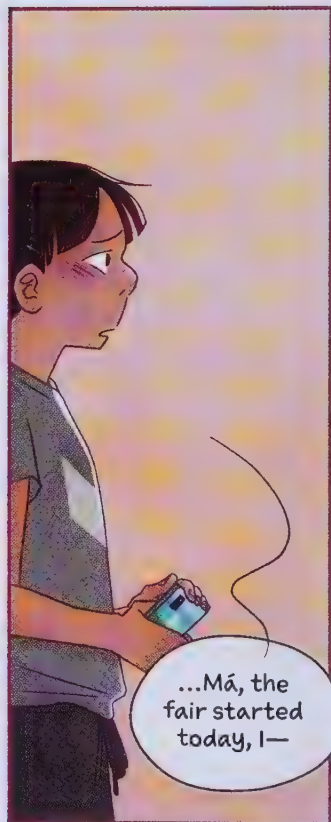


You're grounded.

No, I know, I'm not trying to—



I...



...Mã, the fair started today, I—



The fair?



Yeah, I—

What are you thinking, Manuel?

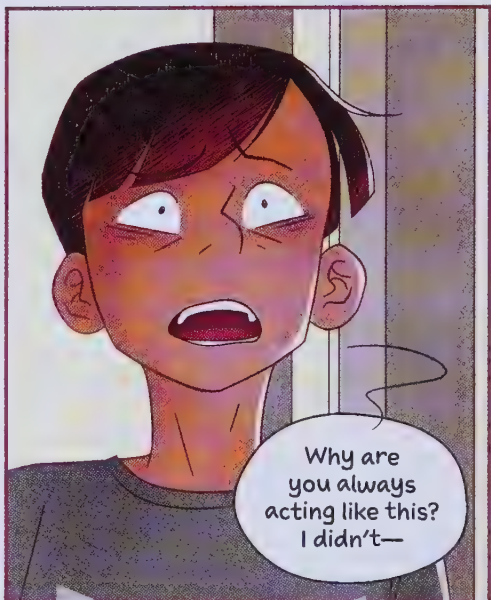


You think you can go ride roller coasters and eat cotton candy like nothing happened?!

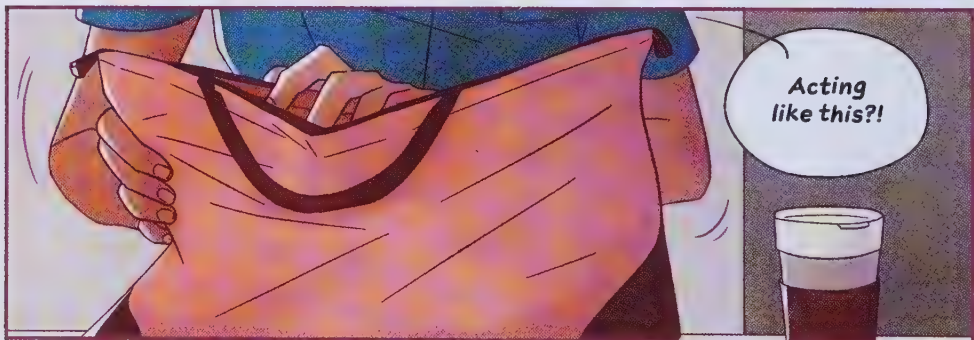


¿Qué?!

No...Mamá—
That's not
what I was—




Why are
you always
acting like this?
I didn't—



Acting
like this?!




You were
lost on the
highway for
four hours!



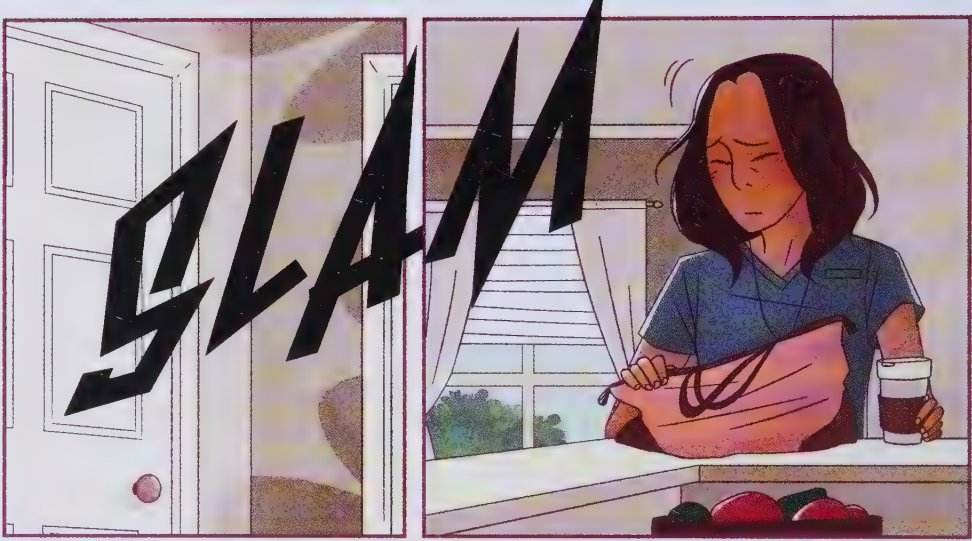
In the middle of nowhere!

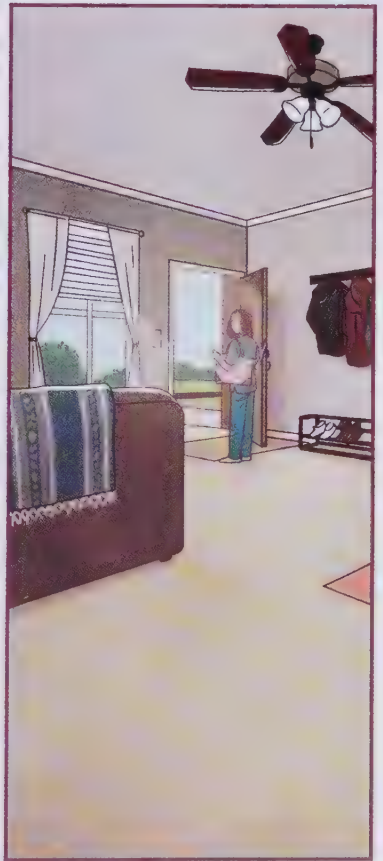


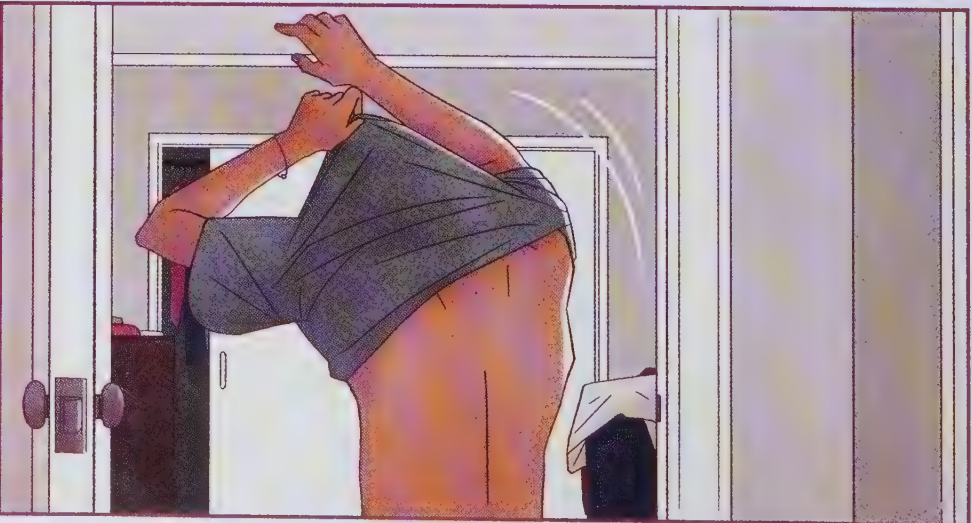
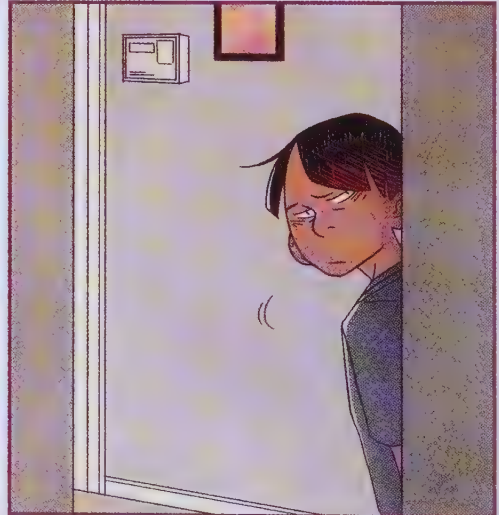
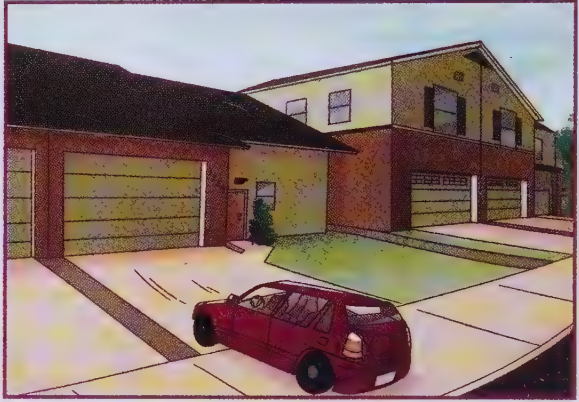
You put yourself in danger, Manuel!

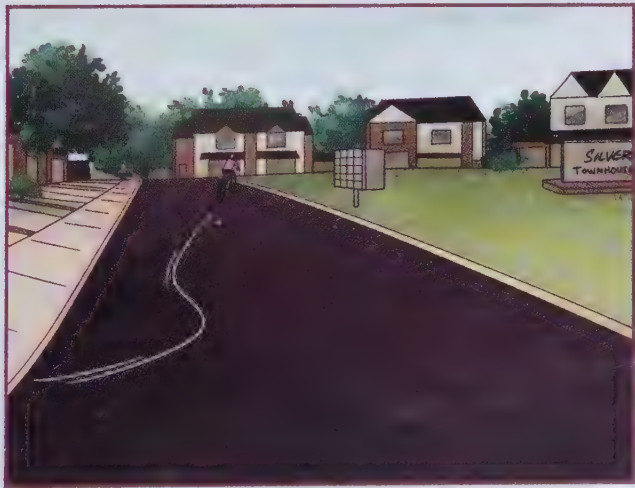
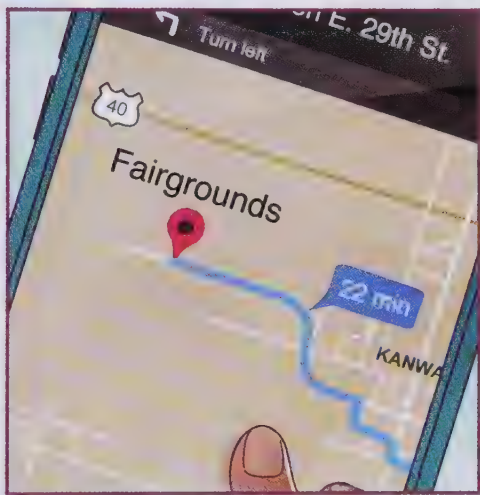
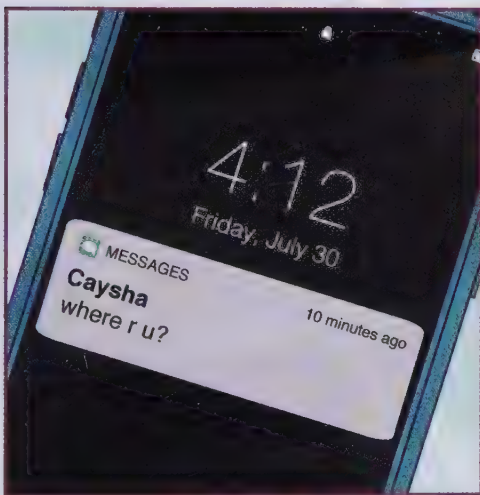


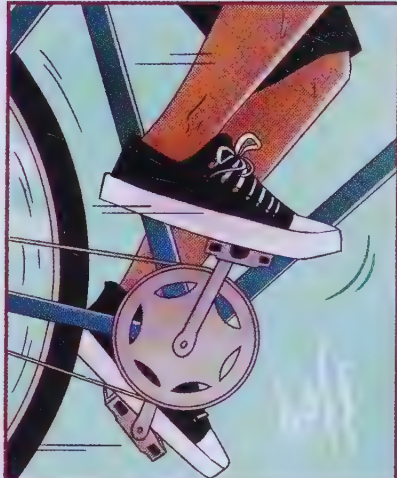
I didn't do it on purpose!

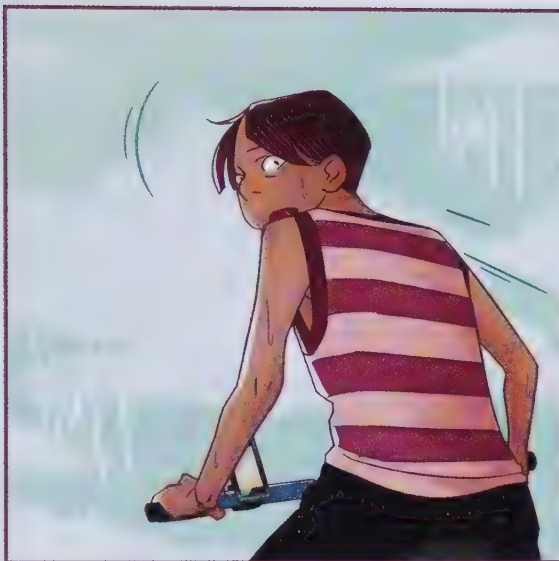












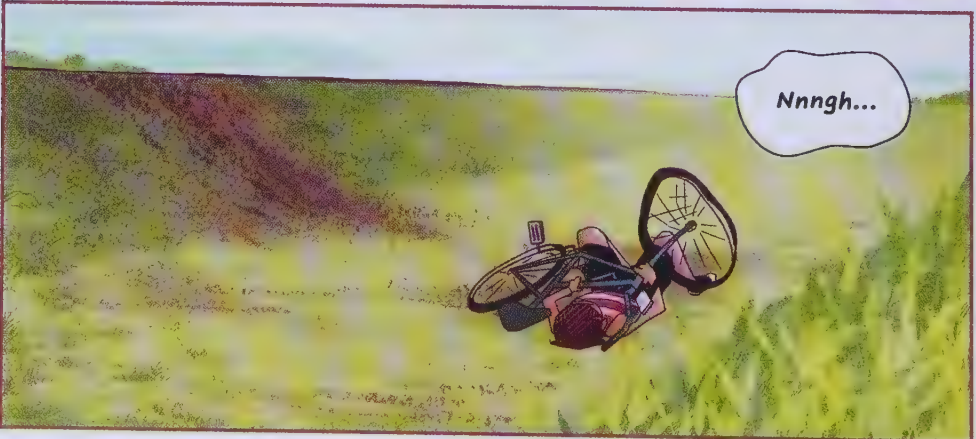
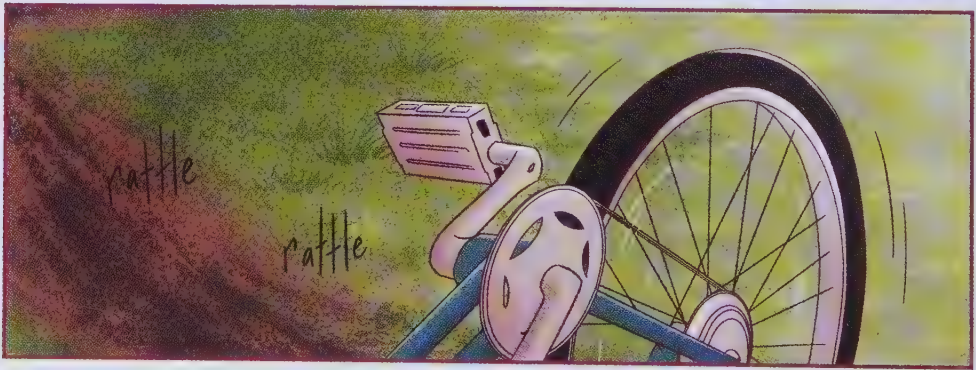
Ah—

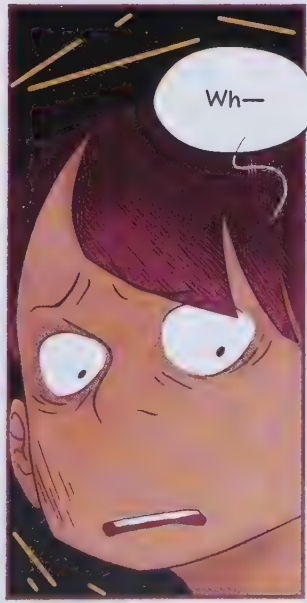
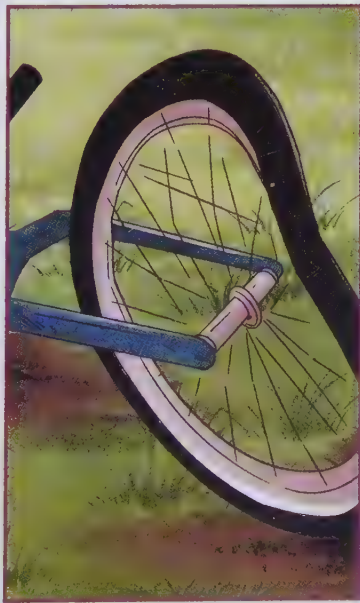
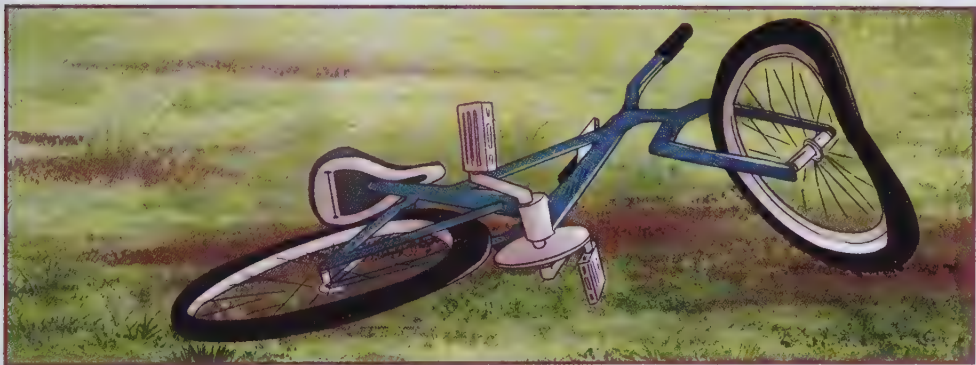
Wait—

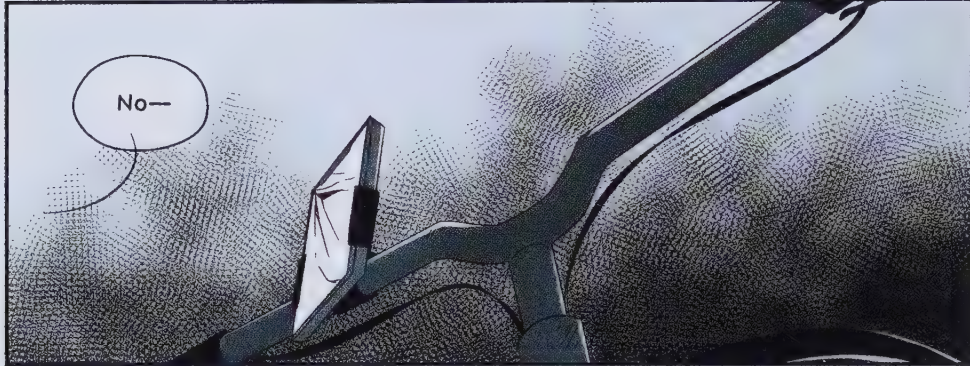




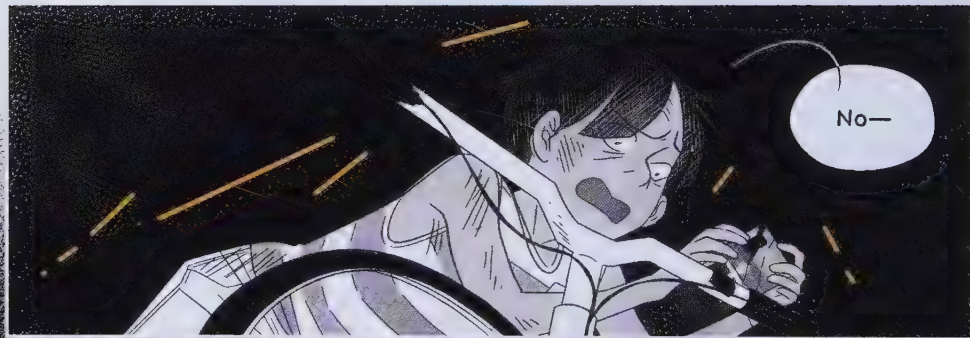
AGH!







No—



No—



No,
please—



clik
clik
clik

C'mon—



NO!

blip

tap

tap

tap

tap

klik

klik

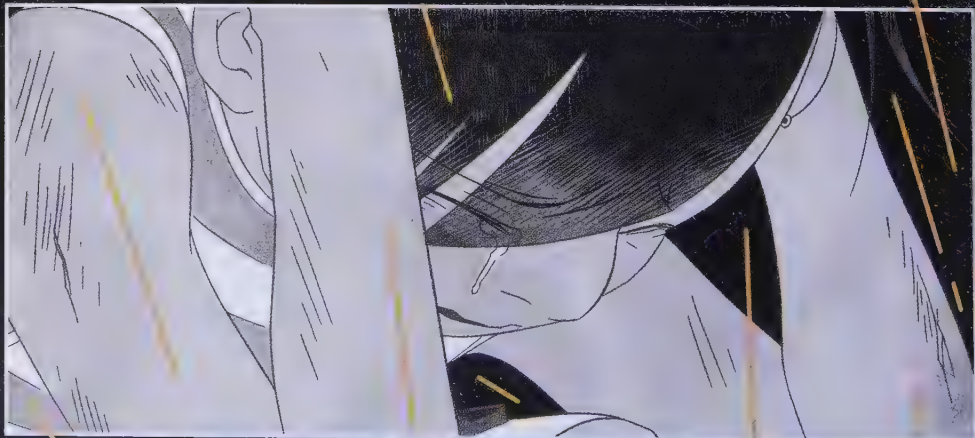
No, no,
no—

klik

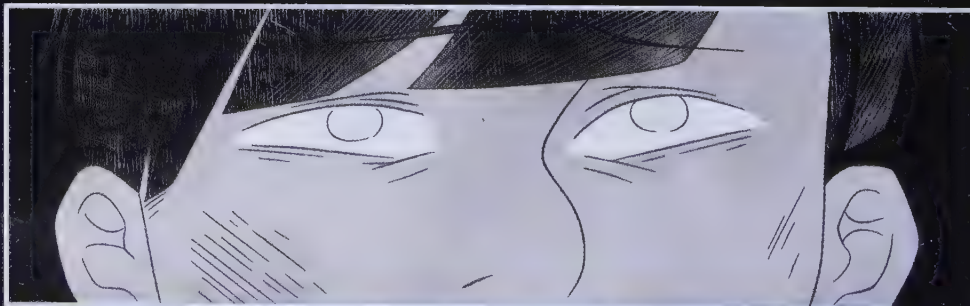
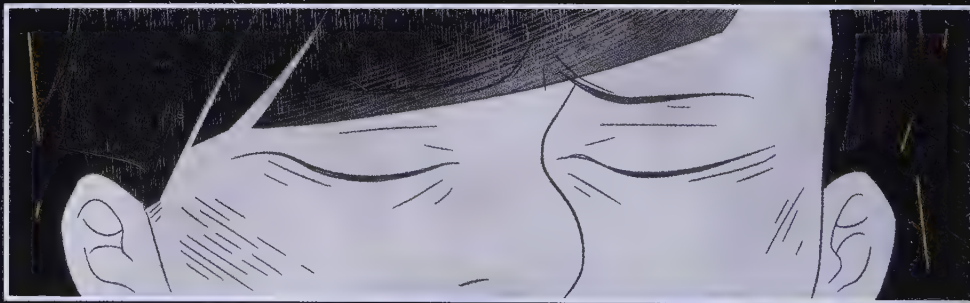
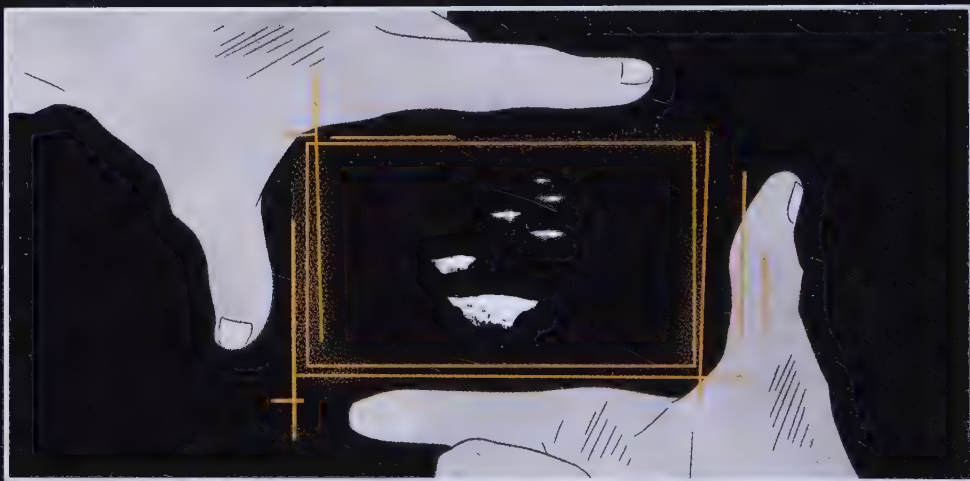
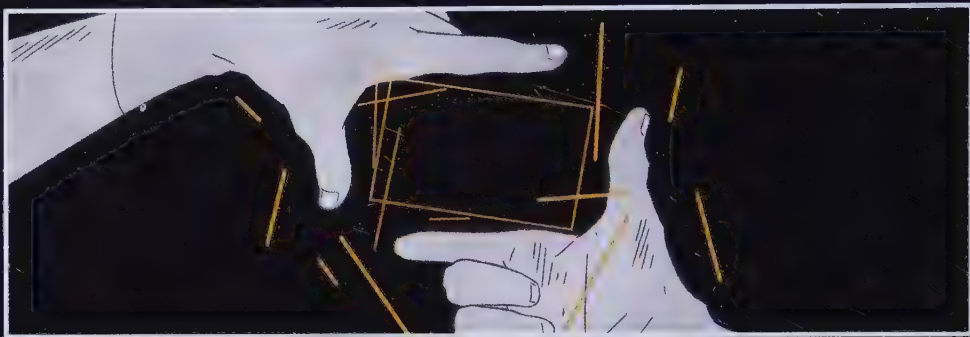
klik

klik

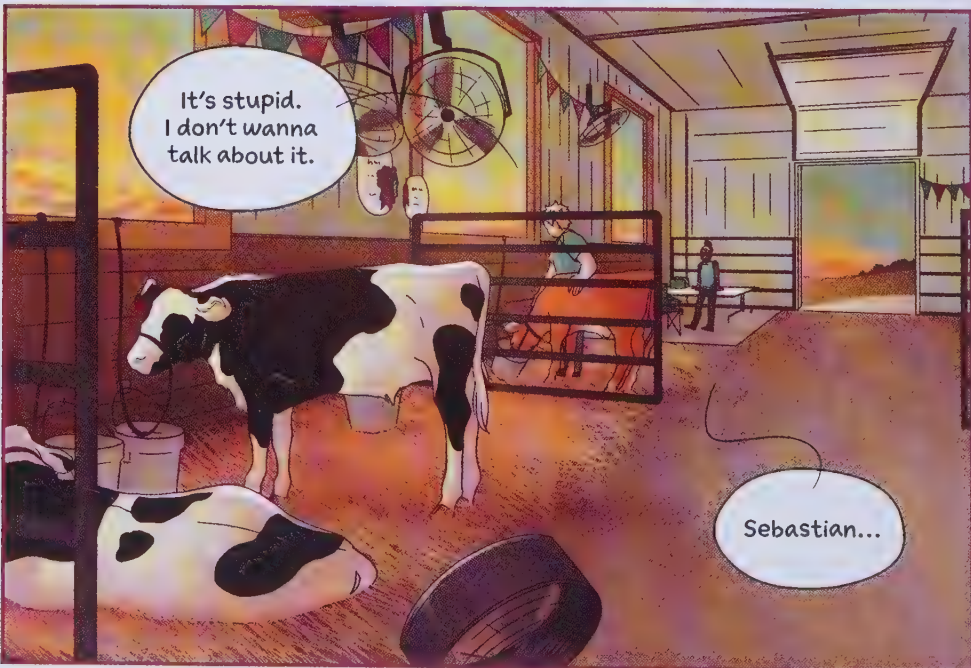
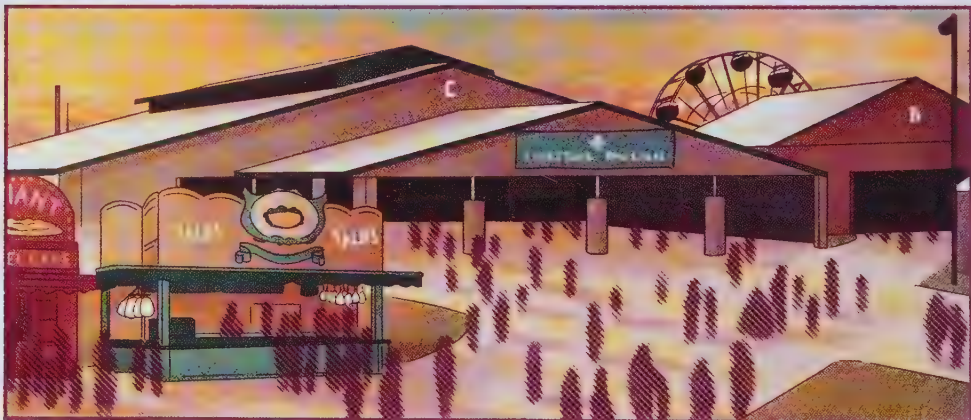
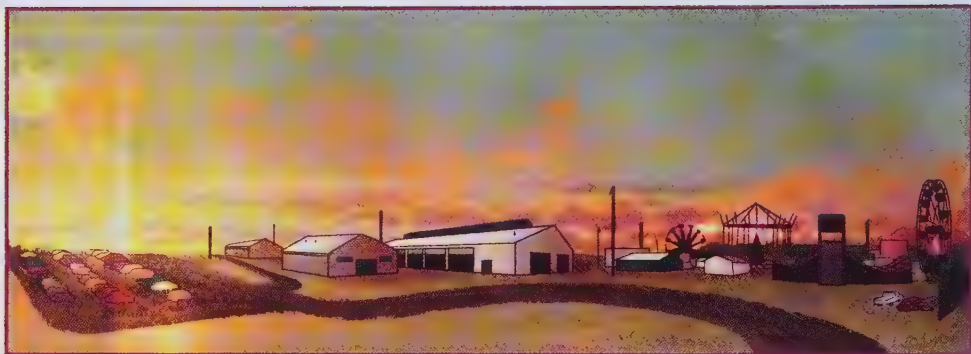
klik













I just messed up, is all. It's not their fault.

I hope those girls step in something gross!

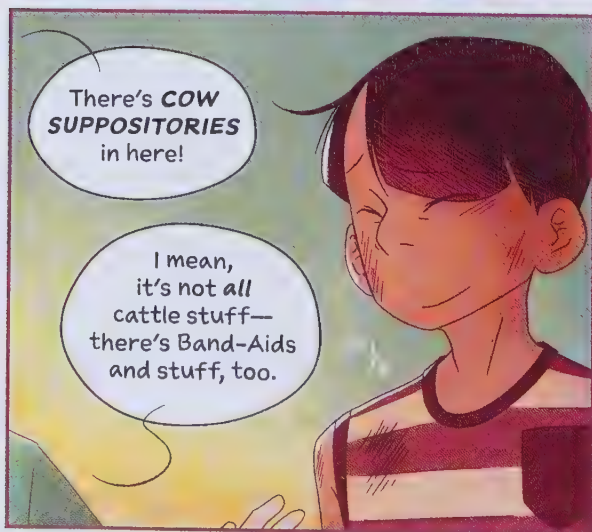
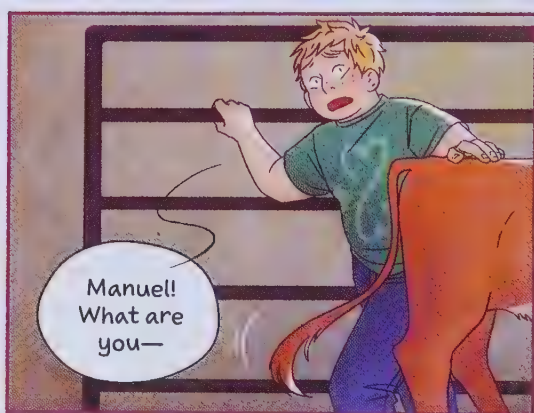


They don't get to say stuff like that when someone else is up getting judged!

Just...drop it, okay...? Please? I don't...

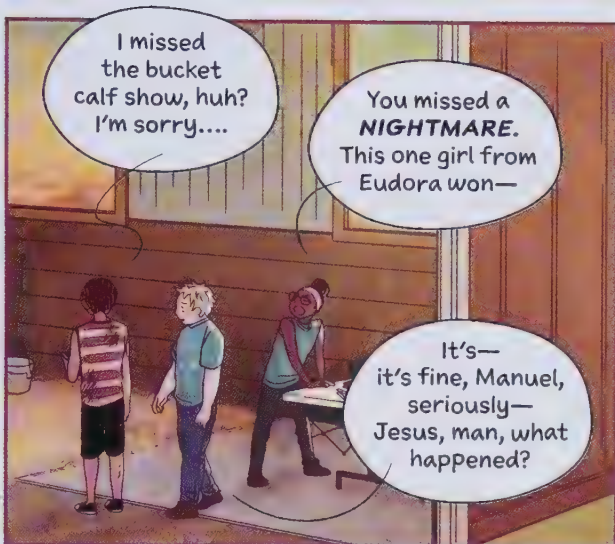


'Bastian...?





Ah...



I missed the bucket calf show, huh? I'm sorry....

You missed a **NIGHTMARE**. This one girl from Eudora won—

It's— it's fine, Manuel, seriously— Jesus, man, what happened?



I crashed my bike— It's a long story—

I...



I had another panic attack, I guess....



But... it's okay.



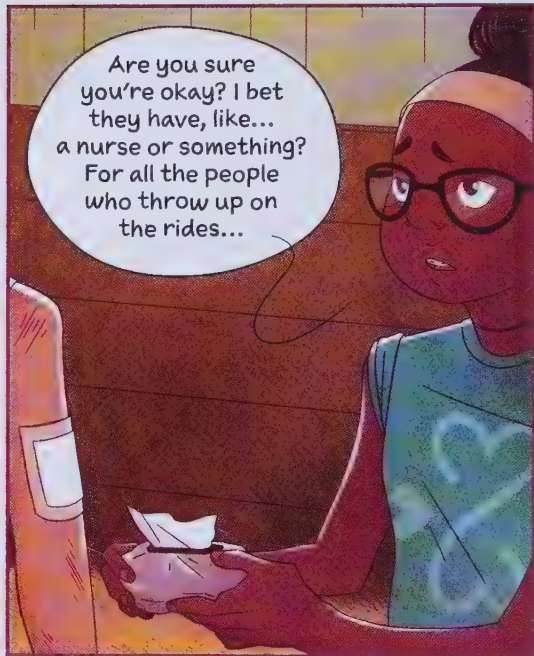
I'm okay.

I got here.



Yeah.
Yeah—

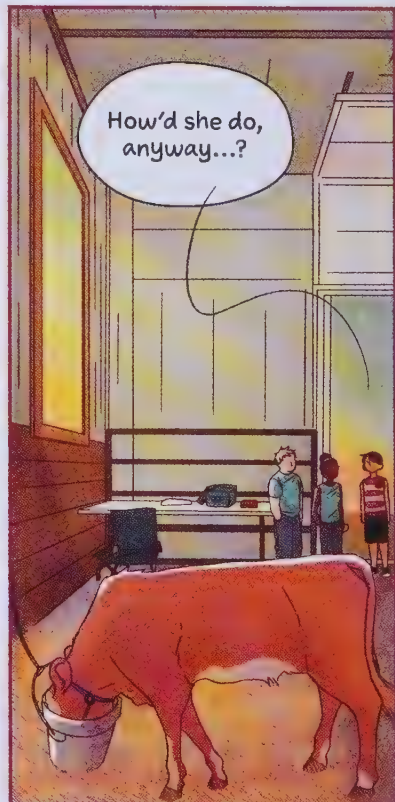
It's—
it's good
to see you,
man.



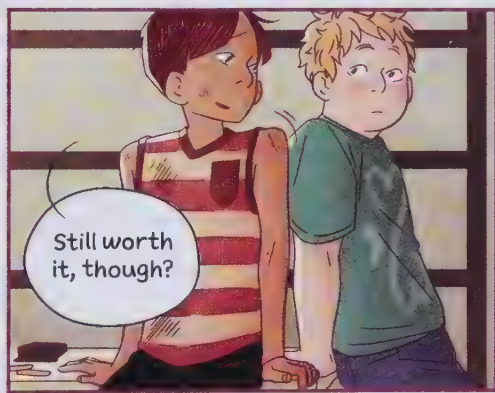
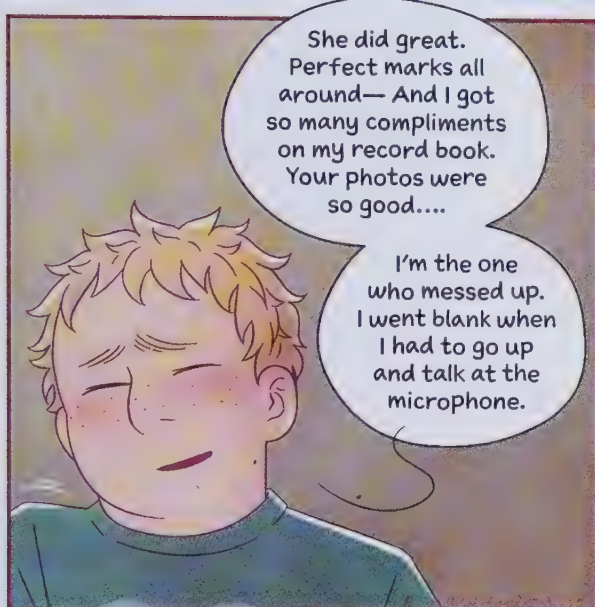
Are you sure
you're okay? I bet
they have, like...
a nurse or something?
For all the people
who throw up on
the rides...



I'm all right.
If this is good
enough for Daisy,
it's good enough
for me.

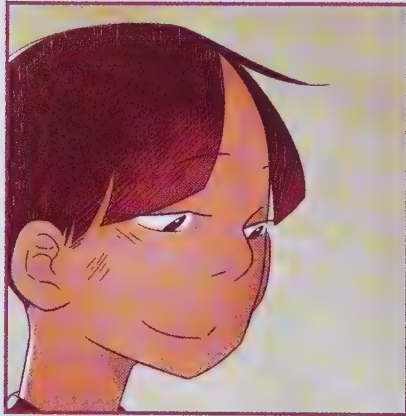


How'd she do,
anyway...?





Definitely.



Caysha!



It's time.

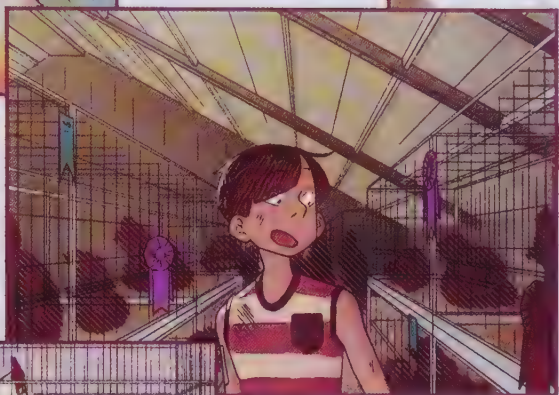
I wanna meet your fancy chickens.

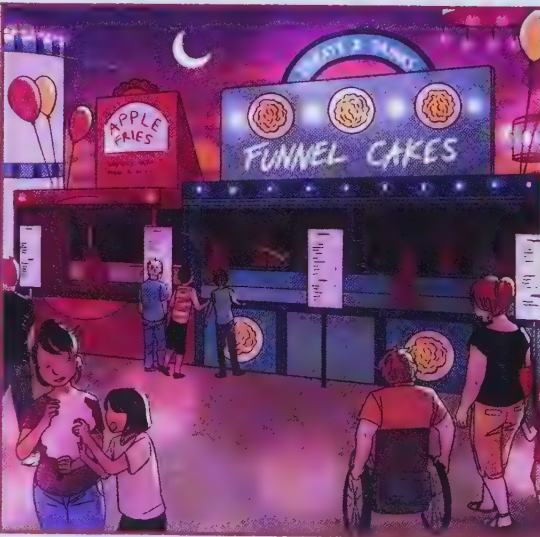
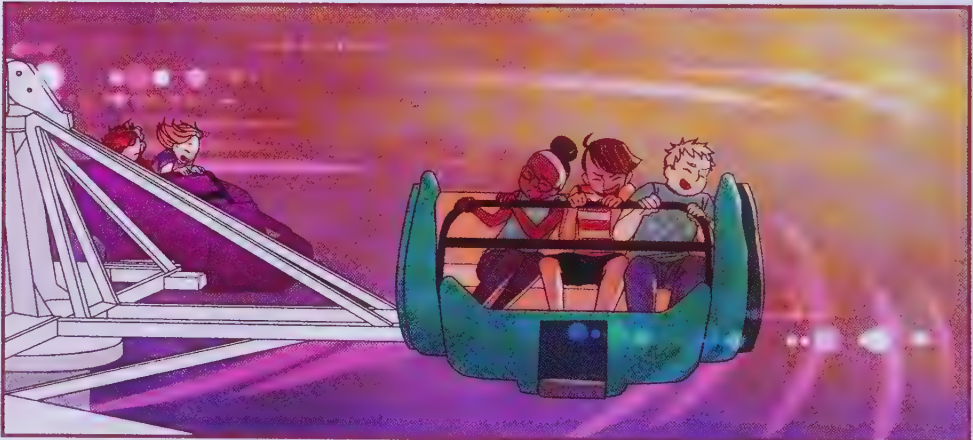


I think you mean...

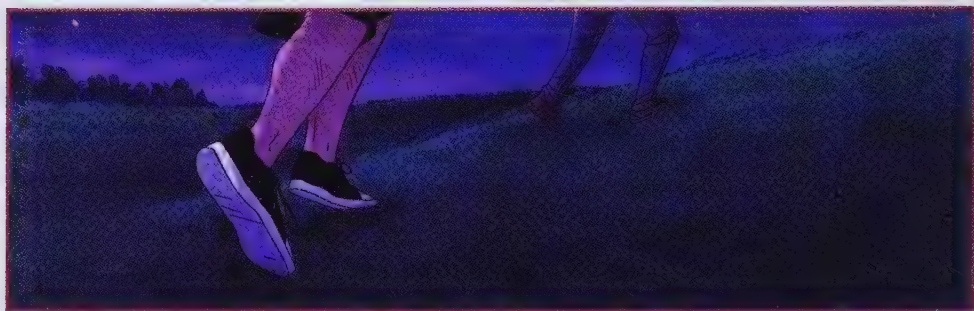


...my **AWARD-WINNING** fancy chickens!







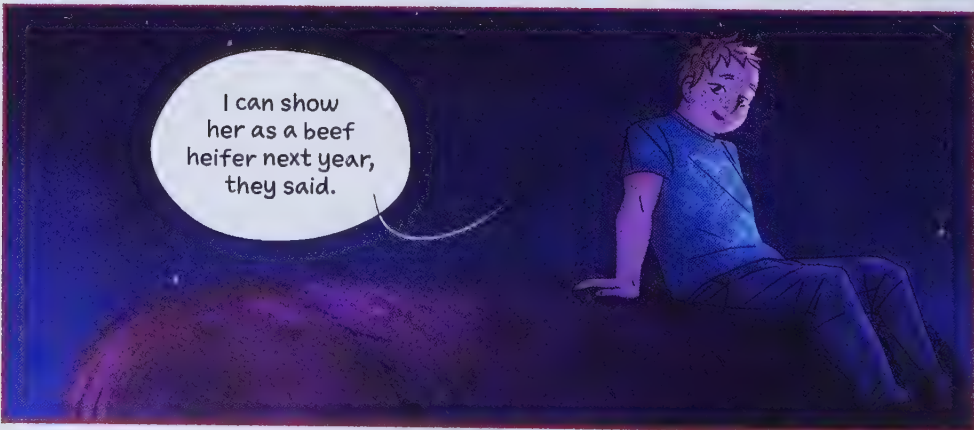


So...you
get to keep
her?

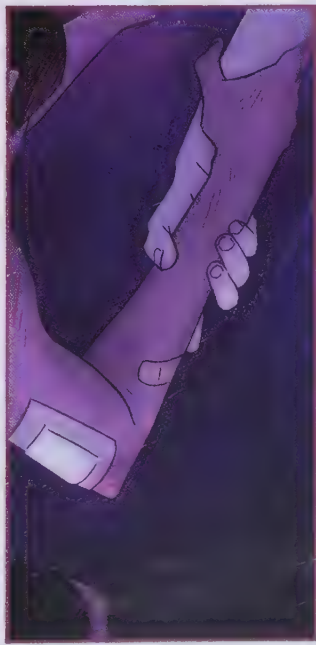
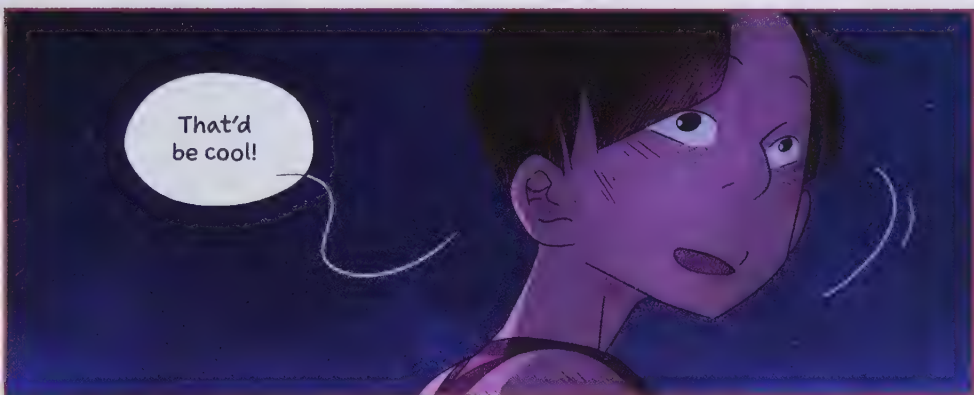
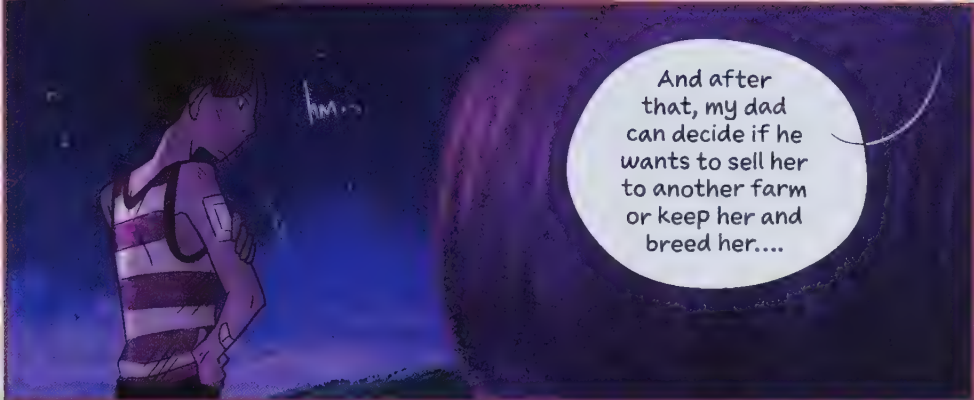
Hm?



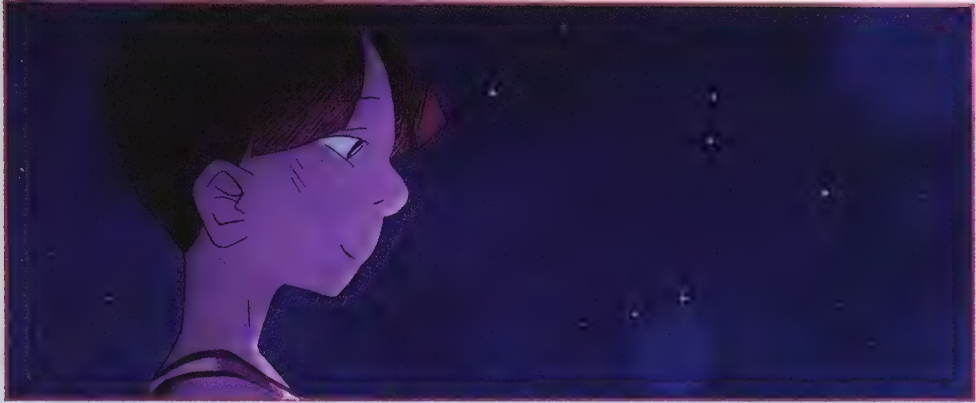
Yeah!
For now,
at least—

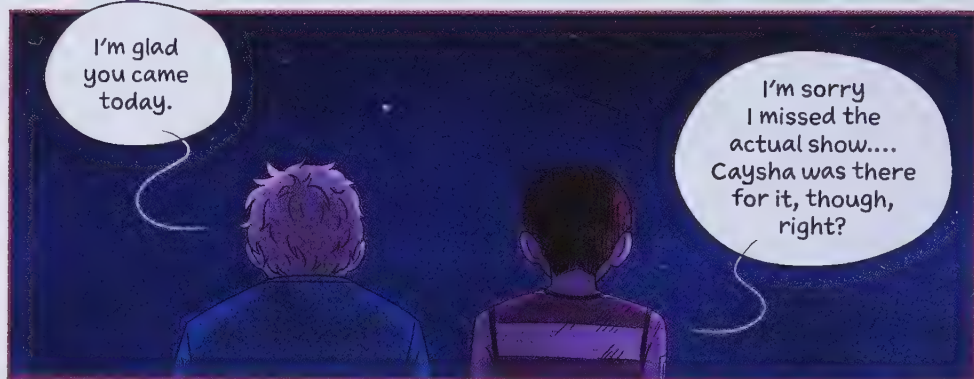


I can show
her as a beef
heifer next year,
they said.









I'm glad you came today.

I'm sorry I missed the actual show.... Caysha was there for it, though, right?



haha
Yeah— yeah, she came with a bunch of her friends. They made a silly sign with Daisy's name and everything.

Seriously?

I think she stashed it back at the calf pens. I'll show you later.



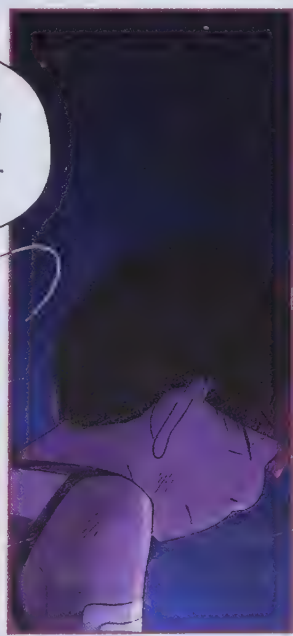
haha
What, she didn't make you two pose with it and take a million photos?

No! God, no way.



No, I was too busy freaking out about how bad I did in front of the judges.

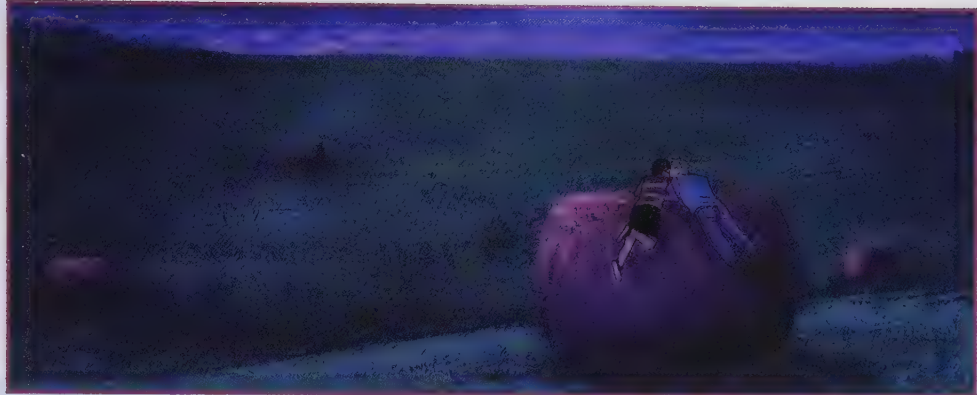
I'm sorry I couldn't be there. I really tried, I just...

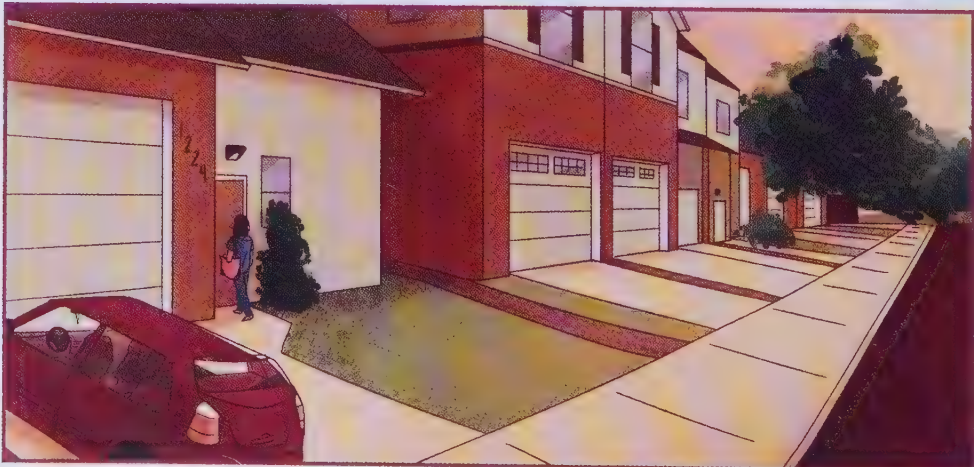
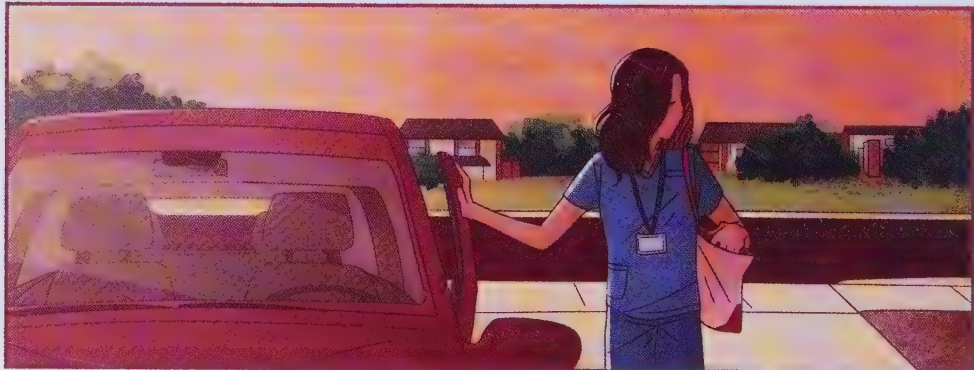
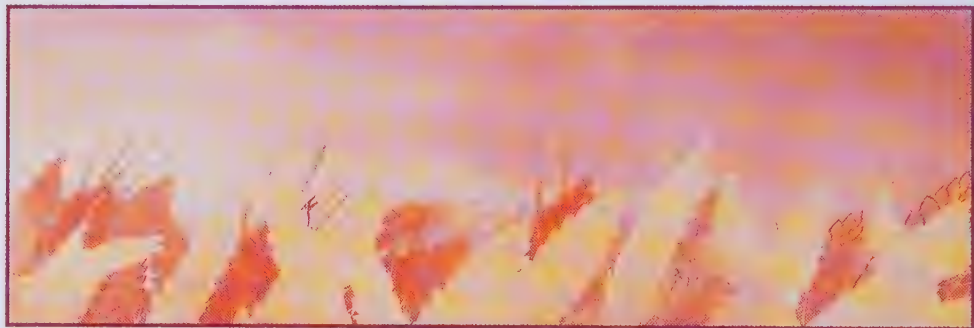




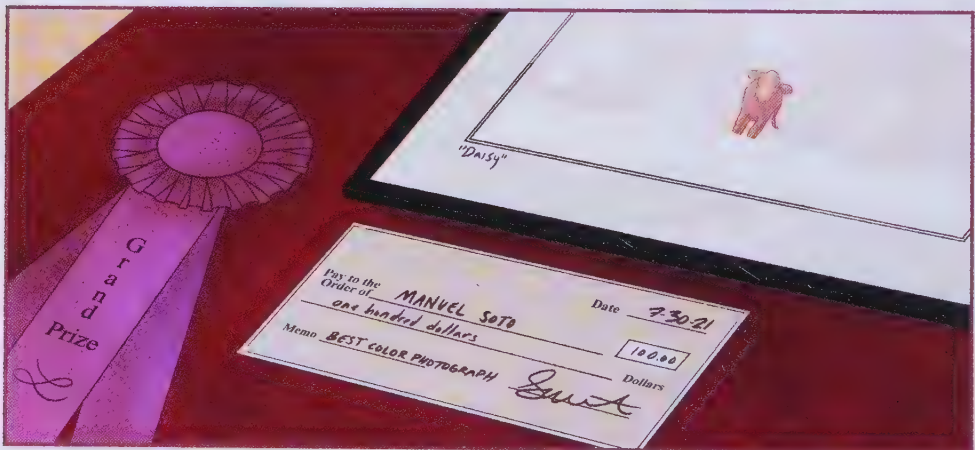
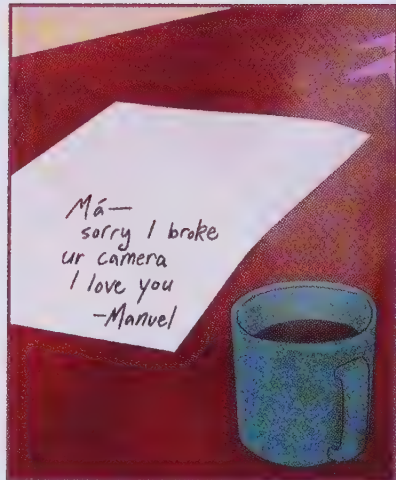


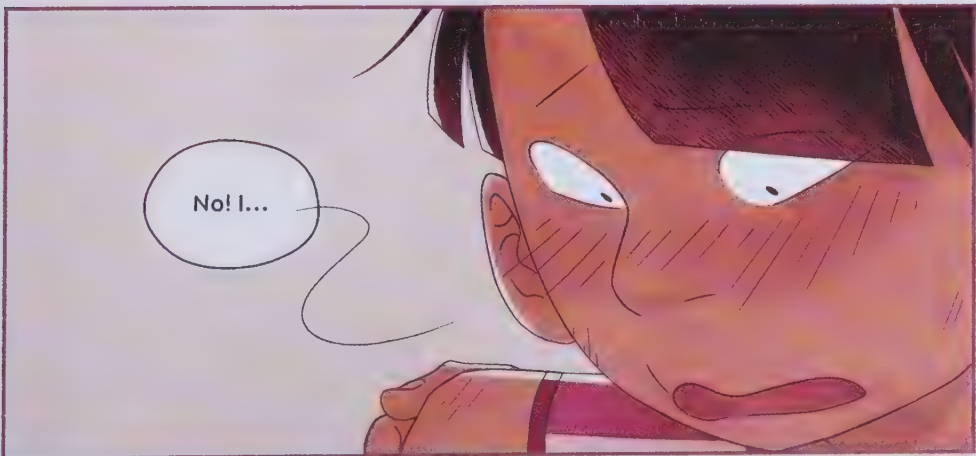
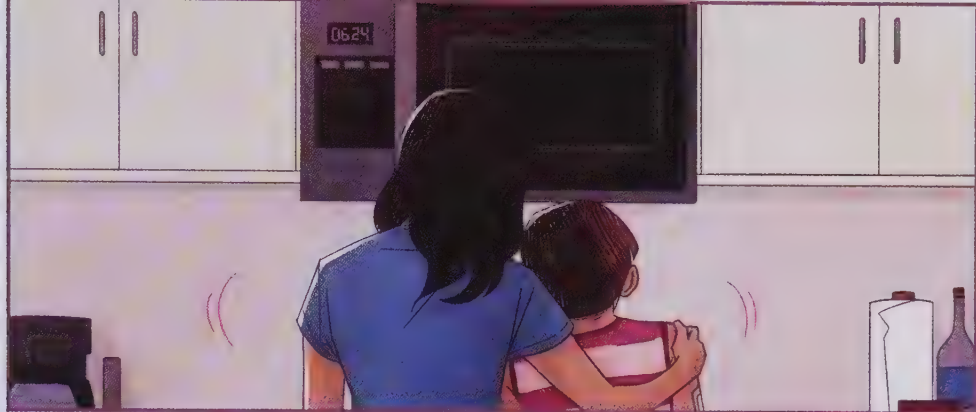














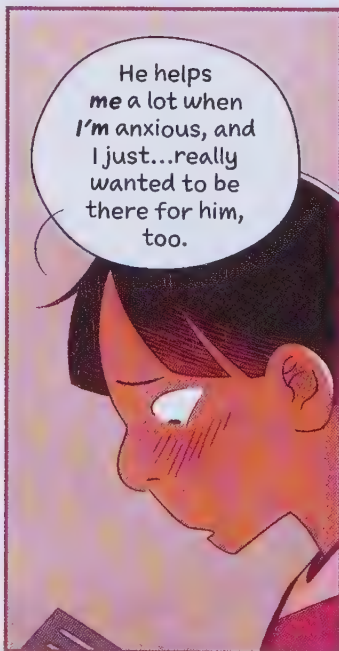
I'm
sorry....

Sebastian's
competition was
yesterday....

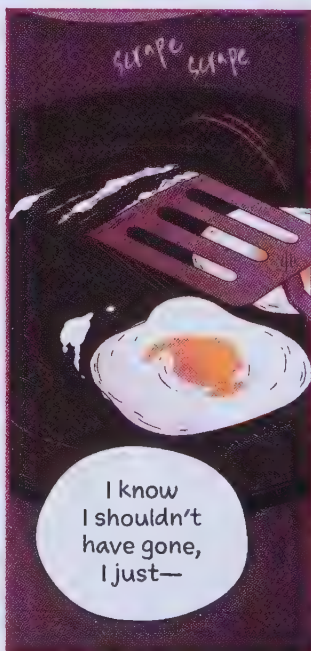


He was
really anxious
about doing the
whole event
on his own.

I promised
I'd be there no
matter what,
Mā—



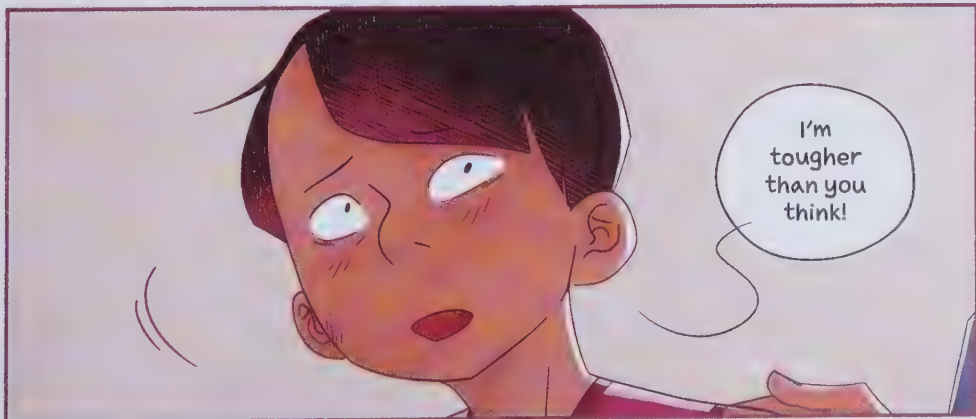
He helps
me a lot when
I'm anxious, and
I just...really
wanted to be
there for him,
too.

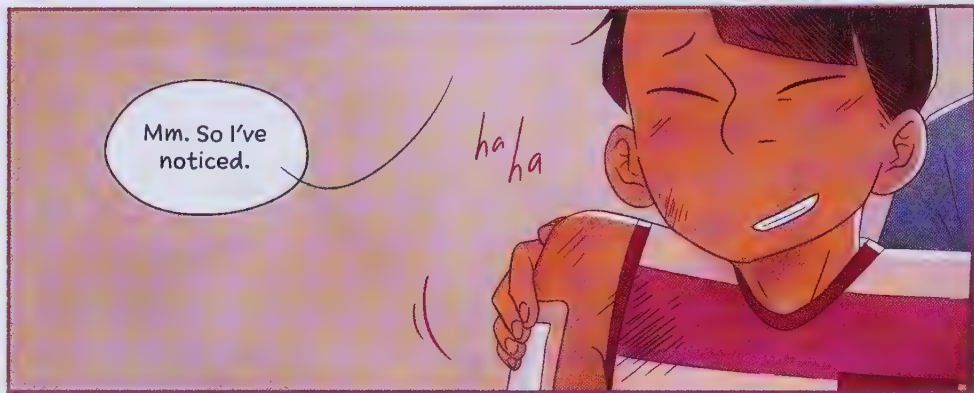


I know
I shouldn't
have gone,
I just—



You didn't...
You didn't
listen to
me....









Where's
your phone,
Manu?



Ah...este...
pues...

Well...



About
that...





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



The Golden Hour was in many ways inspired by my childhood in Kansas. Like Manuel, I was the “town kid” in my local 4-H chapter, and I spent many years earning ribbons of all colors for my drawings and photography. Thank you so much to Janelle Crawford-Hine and the entire Crawford family for letting me spend so many weekends on your cattle farm growing up.



I wouldn't be making graphic novels without all my wonderful art and English teachers over the years. Thank you especially to Angelia Perkins for your endless guidance and support, and for letting us spend so, so many high-school afternoons in your class darkroom. I don't do much photography anymore, but I think about your lessons on composition every time I draw a comic panel.



I couldn't have made this book without the tireless support of my agent, Charlie Olsen. And so many thank-yous to my wonderful editor, Rachel Poloski, who made sure I had a steady stream of calf and chicken GIFs to keep me going! *The Golden Hour* would still be an awkward mess without the incredible help of my art director, Ching Chan, and the rest of the amazing LBYR team.

Thank you so much to Belinda Kay Peñaloza Sloop, aka "Bee," and Andrea Melania Rodriguez Moon for your incredible help and translations, and for always letting me ask just one more thing—over and over again. And to my mental health consultants: Thank you; your feedback was invaluable.

Thank you to all the friends and family who were happy to read this book in its early awkward stages: Sarah, Kori, Sfé, and Jules. And to Bradley, who is always there when I need to wax nostalgic about the Kansas landscapes of our childhood!

And to Kiri...for everything.





A Note from the Author

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be caused by many things, but it often affects people who have experienced a distressing or life-threatening event.

Throughout *The Golden Hour*, Manuel struggles with many lasting symptoms of PTSD: nightmares, invasive flashbacks, and anxiety. There are also physical symptoms, such as shortness of breath and shaking. In particular, Manuel experiences panic attacks and what is called "derealization": a state in which he feels detached and disconnected from his surroundings.

In working with his therapist, Manuel learns to practice grounding himself. Grounding can take many forms, such as focusing on your breathing, counting backward, reciting a mantra, or touching an ice cube. Manuel's therapist encourages him to use his cell-phone camera as an anchor when he feels himself begin to dissociate.

Everyone responds to trauma differently. If you or a loved one are struggling with anxiety, you can talk to your school counselor or doctor. They'll be able to help you obtain the right resources to find a way to cope with the symptoms.

Resources

ADAA.org: Anxiety and Depression Association of America

NCTSN.org: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

TheTrevorProject.org: The Trevor Project, crisis intervention for LGBTQ youth

Manuel's art teacher gives him a book about the history of photography. As he flips through the pages, you can see a few famous pieces.

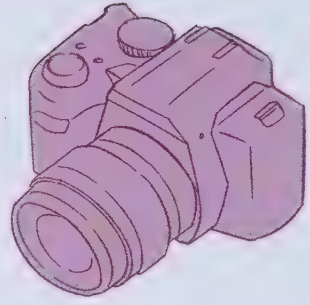
Boulevard du Temple
Louis Daguerre, 1838



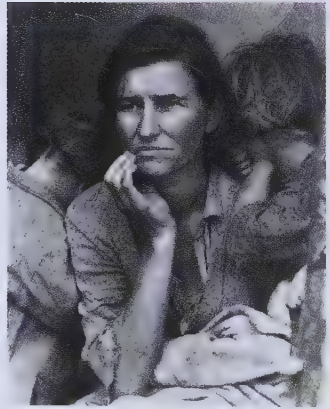
The Tetons and the Snake River
Ansel Adams, 1942
National Archives



Heat Wave at Coney Island
© Weegee, 1940



Migrant Mother
Dorothea Lange, 1936
Library of Congress



Speed camera, 1943
National Archives

→
taken
with this
kind of
camera

Manuel

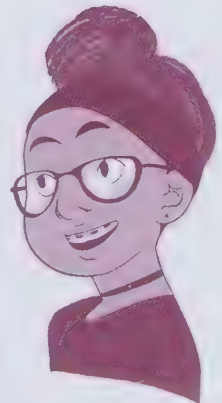
first sketches



Sebastian

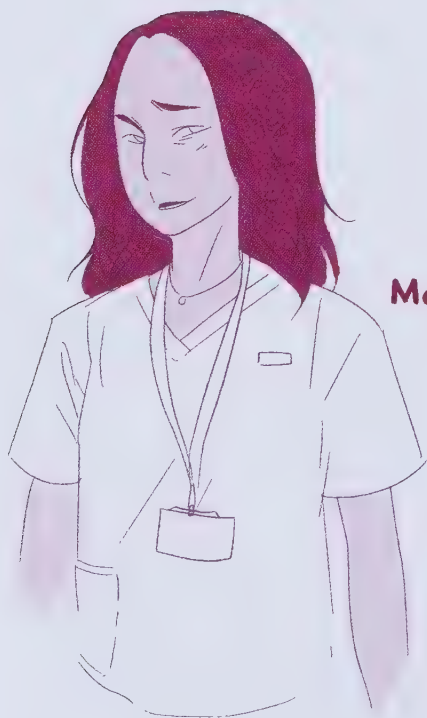
The town *The Golden Hour* is set in is made up, but I like to think it's near where I grew up, in northeast Kansas. I named it "Kanwaka" after my old 4-H club.

Caysha

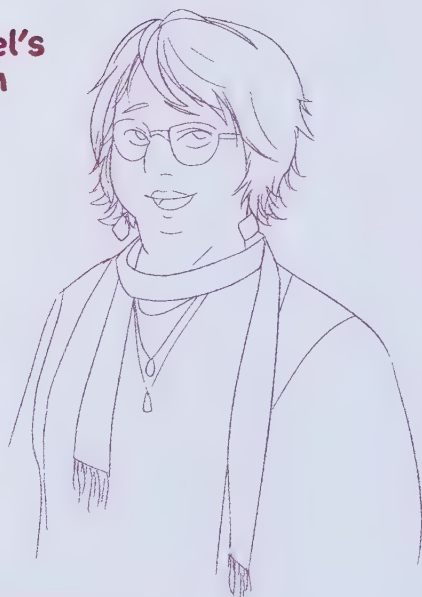




**Sebastian's
dad and mom**



**Manuel's
mom**



Ms. Winstone



Daisy

It took a while
to decide what colors
to give her

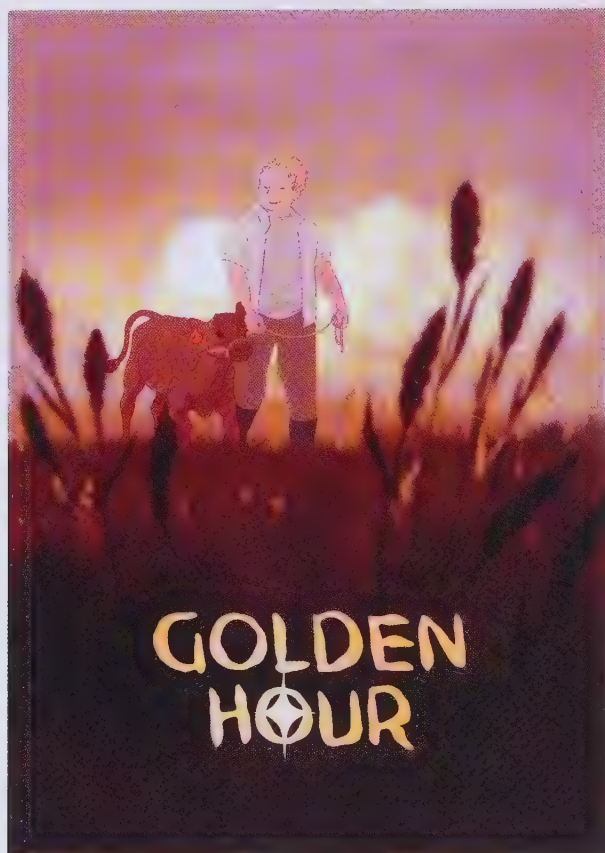


I looked at a lot of
photo references
in my early sketches
to help me figure out
calf anatomy



**One fancy
fancy chicken**





Another of my early drawings. I knew I wanted the backgrounds to look painted, so this was my first attempt at figuring that out.

This one was colored in Photoshop, but the final book was drawn and colored in Clip Studio Paint.

↑ If you look closely, parts of the wheat + sky are in the final book cover

The "golden hour" is a special term in photography for the red-tinted light you see only at sunrise and sunset.

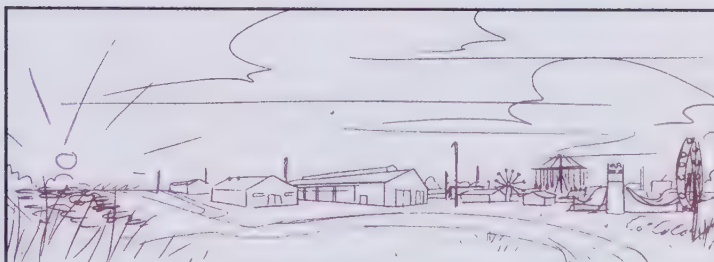


A PANEL FROM START TO FINISH

PAGE 204

Panel 1

The county fairgrounds, the sun setting into evening, the light gold but fading. In front of the fairgrounds is a mile of mowed grass roped off and acting as parking lots. There are huge pavilions with exhibitions, and in the distance there are lights of the rides and food carts.



SCRIPT

This is written kind of like a movie script. I figure out pacing and how the story unfolds.

ROUGHS

I split the page into panels, add lettering, and do a quick sketch.

LINE ART

I carefully redraw each panel. The yellow lines are what I'll reference when I paint the background.

FLAT COLORS

This is when I figure out the color scheme for each scene.

FINAL COLORS

I add lighting, shading, and textures.



Kiri Wolff

NIKI SMITH no longer lives in the Sunflower State, but she will always call Kansas home. She is the author of the Lambda Literary Award–nominated graphic novels *The Deep & Dark Blue* and *Crossplay*. Niki now lives in Germany with her wife.



Renewals: (800) 4

www.scccl.o



Kiri Wolff

Niki Smith no longer lives in the Sunflower State, but she will always call Kansas home. She is the author of the Lambda Literary Award–nominated graphic novels *The Deep & Dark Blue* and *Crossplay*. Niki now lives in Germany with her wife.



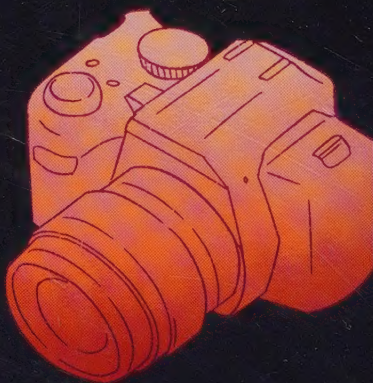
VISIT US AT
LBYP.com

#ReadTheGoldenHour

Jacket art © 2021 by Niki Smith
Jacket design by Ching N. Chan
Lettering by Sarah J. Coleman
Jacket © 2021 Hachette Book Group, Inc.
Printed in China

**Ground yourself.
Find a focus.
Something small.
An anchor.**

**When the world feels unstable,
find an anchor.**



ISBN-13: 978-0-316-54037

SANTA CLARA COUNTY LIBRARY



9 780316

3 3305 25037 8514