

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE EXCITED TO GO TO SCHOOL. THE SUMMER WAS GOOD TO ME, AND I'M ARMED WITH A NEW WARDROBE.



I GOT RID OF THAT CRUMMY BOW. IT MADE ME LOOK TOO MUCH LIKE A LITTLE GIRL, WHICH I'M NOT ANYMORE.

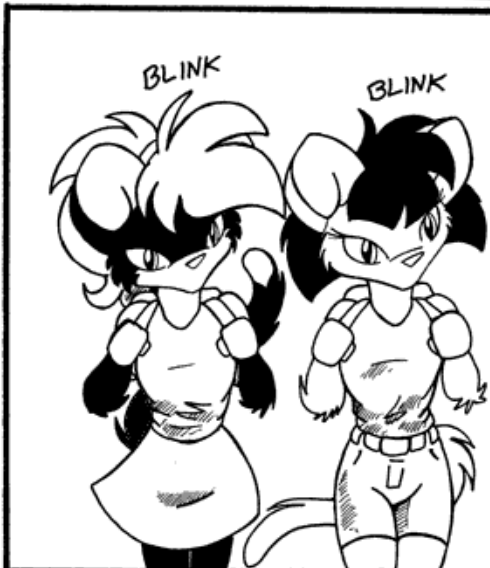
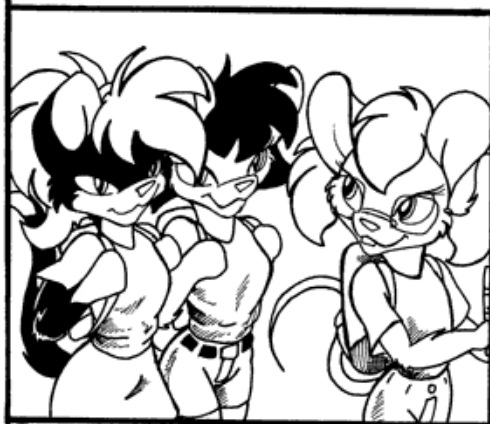


THERE'S SO MUCH I NEED TO DO. I NEED TO START WEARING EARRINGS, MAYBE SOME TIGHT SKIRTS, BIG PUNKY BELTS LIKE CINDY LAUPER...



AND SOME LOWWWW CUT SHIRTS TO SHOW OFF MY SWEET NEW BOY MAGNETS! AREN'T THEY NICE?







ELIZABETH?

SORRY ABOUT THAT, LUCY.

WHAT'S WRONG?



PAH! LOOK AT YOU!

YOU'RE AWESOME.
LOOK AT ME!
I'M GOING
TO BE AN
AWKWARD
GEEK FOR
THE REST OF
MY LIFE!

IT'S THE SEVENTH GRADE!

EVERYONE AROUND
ME IS TURNING
BEAUTIFUL AND
HOOKING UP!



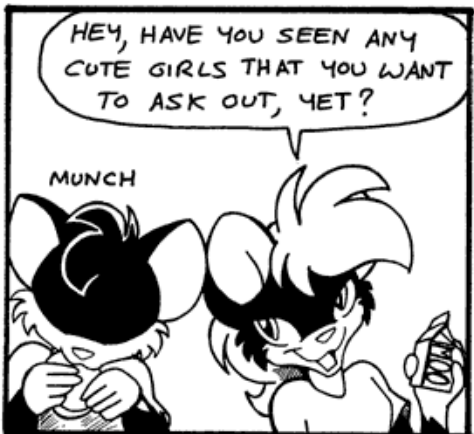
HEY, MY MOTHER
SAYS THERE'S SOME-
ONE FOR EVERYONE.

YAH. I COULD WAIT 'TIL
I'M EIGHTEEN AND MY MOM
WILL HOOK ME UP WITH
SOME NERDY PHD...

I CAN HEAR HER NOW: "BUT
HONEY, HE'S A DOCTAH!" NEVER
MIND HE'S FIVE-ONE AND
OWNS SIX FERRETS, MOTHER!
"WHAT!?! YA DON'T WANT
TO MARRY A POOR HUCKLEBERRY!"
AND THEN...


A black and white comic panel showing two anthropomorphic cats. The cat on the left has dark fur and a white chest, looking towards the other cat. The cat on the right has lighter fur and a white chest, looking back. A speech bubble from the left cat says "HI, FISK!".

HI, FISK!


A black and white comic panel showing the two anthropomorphic cats. The cat on the right is holding a can of soda. A speech bubble from the right cat says "HEY, HAVE YOU SEEN ANY CUTE GIRLS THAT YOU WANT TO ASK OUT, YET?".

HEY, HAVE YOU SEEN ANY CUTE GIRLS THAT YOU WANT TO ASK OUT, YET?


MUNCH

A black and white comic panel showing the two anthropomorphic cats. The cat on the right is speaking. A speech bubble from the right cat says "'CAUSE IF NOT, SEE, I KNOW SOMEONE...".


'CAUSE IF NOT, SEE, I KNOW SOMEONE...

A black and white comic panel showing the two anthropomorphic cats. The cat on the right is speaking. A speech bubble from the right cat says "IT WOULD KIND OF BE DOING ME A FAVOR, IN A WAY, TOO...".

IT WOULD KIND OF BE DOING ME A FAVOR, IN A WAY, TOO...

A black and white comic panel showing the two anthropomorphic cats. The cat on the right is speaking. A speech bubble from the right cat says "IN SUMMARY... ... YOU HAVE TO ASK ELIZABETH WACHSMAN OUT ON A DATE."

IN SUMMARY...
... YOU HAVE TO ASK ELIZABETH WACHSMAN OUT ON A DATE.

A black and white comic panel showing the two anthropomorphic cats. The cat on the right is speaking. A speech bubble from the right cat says "IS THIS A 'THE FREE WORLD WILL PERISH, OTHERWISE' KIND OF HAVE-TO, OR A 'MY SISTER WILL PITCH A FUSS, OTHERWISE' KIND OF HAVE-TO?".

IS THIS A "THE FREE WORLD WILL PERISH, OTHERWISE" KIND OF HAVE-TO, OR A "MY SISTER WILL PITCH A FUSS, OTHERWISE" KIND OF HAVE-TO?

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN!

NO. I WON'T DO IT.
IT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION.

WHY NOT?

DO I HAVE TO SPELL IT OUT? IS
IT REALLY THAT HARD TO GET?
LISTEN HERE FOR A SECOND
AND SEE IF YOU CAN WRAP
YOUR GIRL BRAIN
AROUND THIS...

ONE, SHE TALKS TO YOU ABOUT IT,
THEN YOUR BROTHER ASKS HER
OUT SHORTLY THEREAFTER. VERY
OBVIOUS WHAT'S GOING ON. TWO,

I HAVE A HARD TIME
SHOWING AFFECTION
TO PEOPLE I
LIKE, MUCH LESS
FAKING IT FOR
THOSE I DON'T
CARE ABOUT.


AND LASTLY, IT WILL EVENTUALLY
ALL COME TO A HEAD. I CAN'T
DATE HER FOREVER, AND SHE'LL
FIND OUT THE TRUTH, AND SHE'LL
BE MORE CRUSHED THAN

EVER, AND YOU'LL
FEEL LIKE SHIT AND
I'LL FEEL LIKE
SHIT...

THERE WILL BE A LOT OF
WAILING AND GNASHING OF
TEETH, AND IT WILL ALL
END IN TEARS! YOU MARK
MY WORDS!

EITHER YOU DO THIS FOR ME,
OR MOM FINDS OUT WHAT
REALLY HAPPENED TO HER
LAWN GNOME.

YOU FOUL
WENCH...




HEY, ELIZABETH.


AHEM

OH, HI
FISK.


I WANTED TO,
LIKE, ASK YOU
SOMETHING...



I WAS THINKING OF CATCHING
"HAPPY TREE FRIENDS" AT
THE THEATER, THIS WEEK-
END...



... AND, YOU KNOW, IT SUCKS TO
SEE MOVIES ALONE...



SO... IF YOU'RE NOT
BUSY, I'D LIKE TO GO
WITH YOU THIS WEEKEND.
WHAT DO YOU
SAY?



NO.

AH, OKAY I—
WAIT... NO? WHAT
DO YOU MEAN,
NO?!

SORRY, FISK. IT'S JUST A LITTLE STRANGE. DID YOUR SISTER PUT YOU UP TO THIS?



NO WAY!

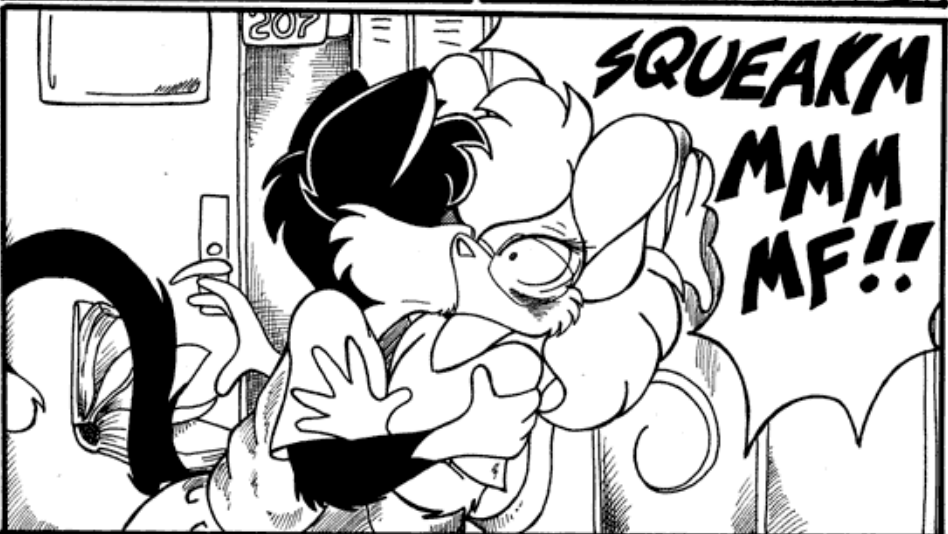
IF YOU'RE TRYING TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER, I APPRECIATE IT, BUT I'M NOT DENSE. I CAN'T SEE MYSELF AS YOUR TYPE AT ALL.



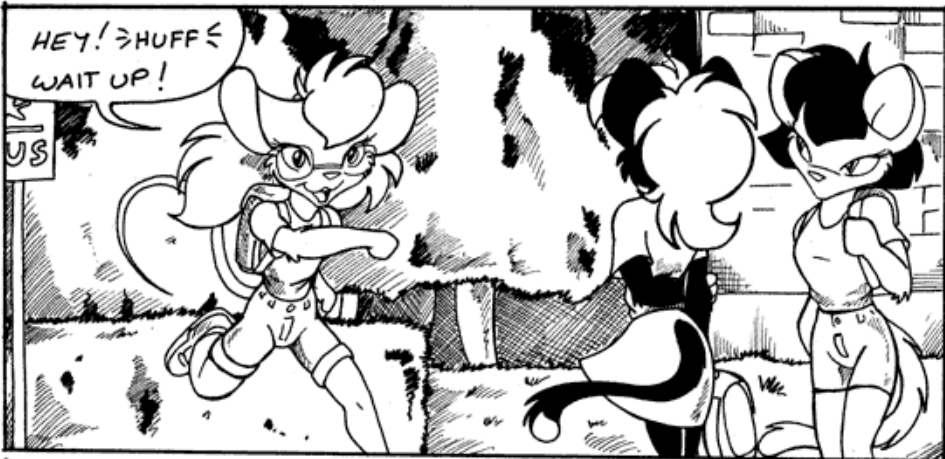
ARE YOU KIDDING? WHY WOULD I WANT TO DATE A DITZ? YOU'RE SHARP AS A TACK AND YOU HAVE A CUTE FACE.



YOU'RE SWEET, FISK, BUT IT IS KIND OF SCARY. HOW CAN I BELIEVE YOU?



SQUEAKM
MMM
MF!!



HEY! >HUFF<
WAIT UP!



SORRY. GOT PULLED
ASIDE... >HUFF<



ARE YOU
GOING TO FUN
CHARLIE'S WITH
US THIS
WEEKEND?



OOO... NO. I HAVE
A DATE THAT DAY.

A DATE!?
WITH WHO?



WITH
FISK.

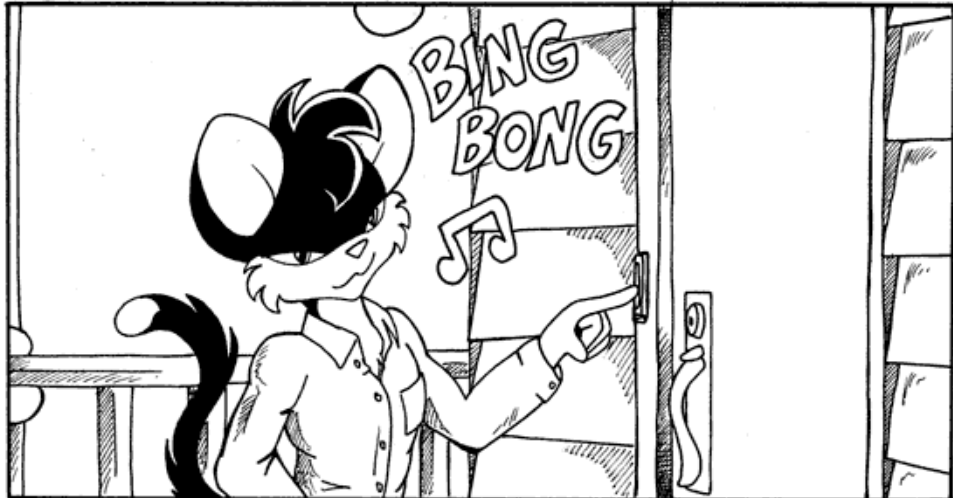
WHOA...



WHAT?

YOU KNOW WHAT
HE DID WITH THAT
HYENA GIRL...

OH
DEAR.



HMM. I'VE NEVER BEEN ON A "TRADITIONAL" KIND OF DATE BEFORE. I NEVER THOUGHT IT'D BE WITH ELIZABETH...

SHE SEEMS NICE EVEN IF SHE'S NOT "HOT."



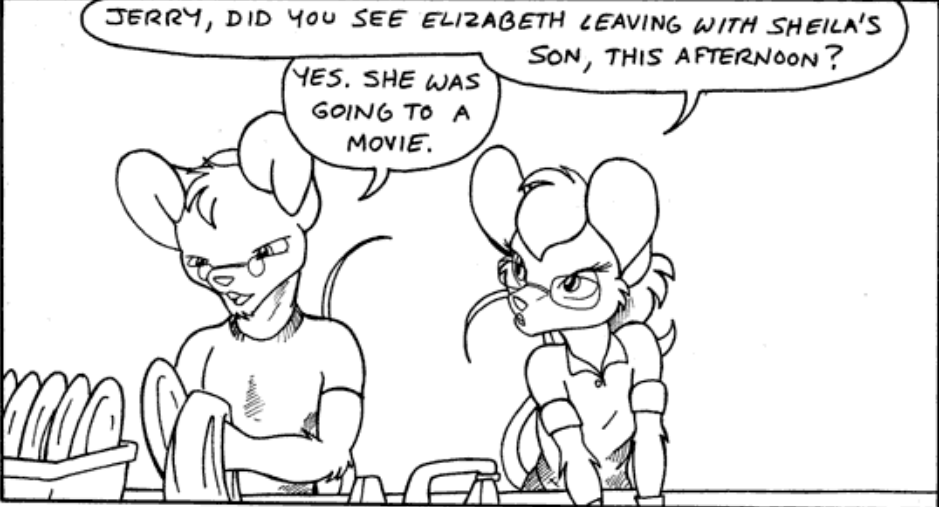
STILL, I HATE DOING THIS ON SOME FALSE PRETENSE. NONE-THELESS, THOSE THINGS I TOLD HER WERE TRUE, AND SHE KISSES WELL ENOUGH. MAYBE IF I CAN REALLY FALL FOR HER, IT WON'T

BE SO MUCH OF A LIE.



HI, FISK!
I'M
READY
TO GO!

WHOA.




JERRY, DID YOU SEE ELIZABETH LEAVING WITH SHEILA'S SON, THIS AFTERNOON?

YES. SHE WAS GOING TO A MOVIE.




IS THAT A GOOD IDEA? ARE WE GOING TO LET HER DATE BOYS WHO AREN'T JEWISH?

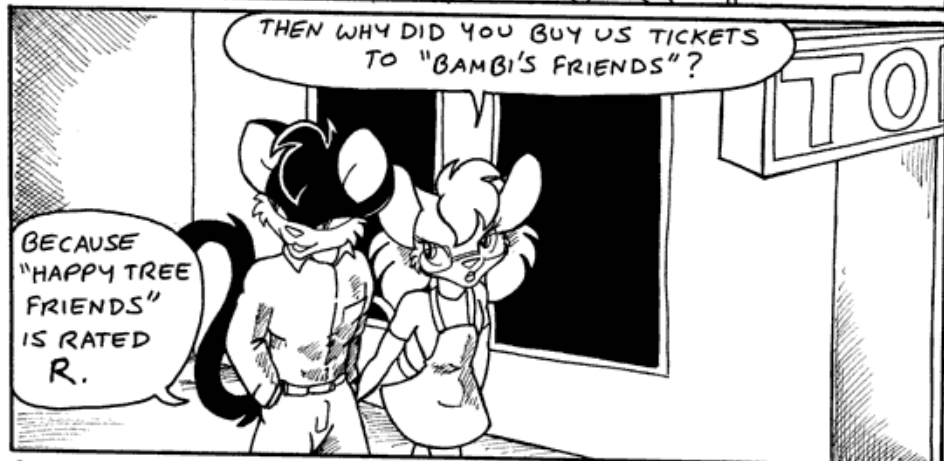


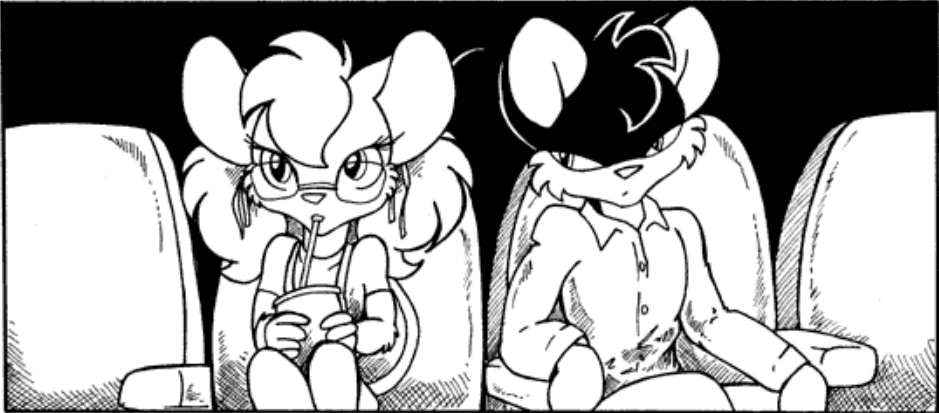
KELLY, THEY'RE GOING TO SEE A MOVIE. THEY'RE NOT GOING TO GO GET MARRIED.

SHE COULD STAND TO HAVE FUN WHILE SHE IS STILL A CHILD.

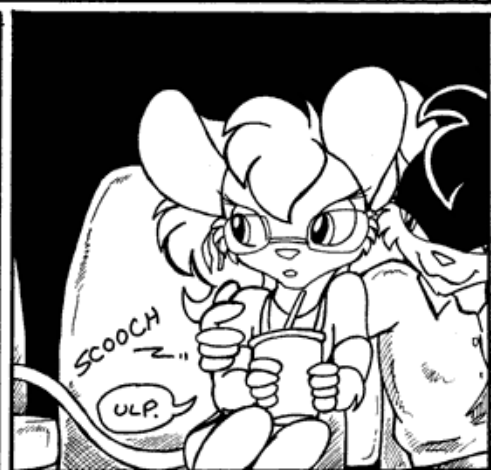


BESIDES, SHE SEEMS TO LIKE HIM. IF WE FORBID HER FROM SEEING HIM, HE WILL SEEM MORE ENTICING. THEN, SHE WILL ELOPE WHEN SHE IS SIXTEEN, AND THEY WILL LIVE IN A TRAILER WITH NO WHEELS IN LUMPKIN COUNTY, WITH CHICKENS.





CRREEEEK...



...PURR PURR PURR PURR PURR PURR



PURR PURR PURR PURR PURR PURR



AND THEN THE SHARK BIT
HER HEAD **CLEAN** OFF!

THIS LEVEL OF CARTOON
VIOLENCE HAS SPARKED
SOME KIND OF GIDDY,
VISCERAL FEELING
I'VE NEVER FELT FROM
A FORM OF ENTERTAIN-
MENT MEDIA...

YEAH, I WAS JUST
THINKING THE SAME
THING.

I'M HOME.
THANK
YOU.

YOU'RE WELCOME.

KISS

NEXT WEEKEND, YOU'RE
INVITED TO DINNER. MY
PARENTS WOULD LIKE TO
MEET YOU.

OKAY.

GOODNIGHT!

WAIT...
PARENTS?

BING
BONG



HEY, LUCY.



I AM HERE TO HAVE DINNER
WITH THE WACHSMANS. WHAT,
MAY I ASK, ARE YOU DOING
HERE?

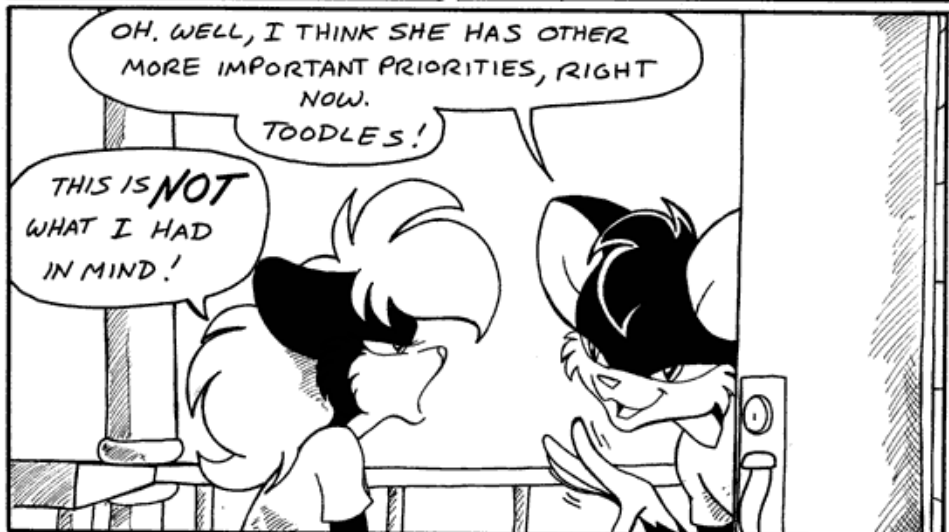


SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE ON OUR
POOL TEAM AT FUN CHARLIE'S,
YOU KNOW, LIKE... EVERY
SATURDAY!



OH. WELL, I THINK SHE HAS OTHER
MORE IMPORTANT PRIORITIES, RIGHT
NOW.
TOODLES!

THIS IS **NOT**
WHAT I HAD
IN MIND!



ERM... HOW MANY
SISTERS DO YOU HAVE?

TSK.
ONLY THREE!



GIRLS! LEAVE THAT POOR
TOM ALONE! RUN ALONG!
INTO THE
KITCHEN!

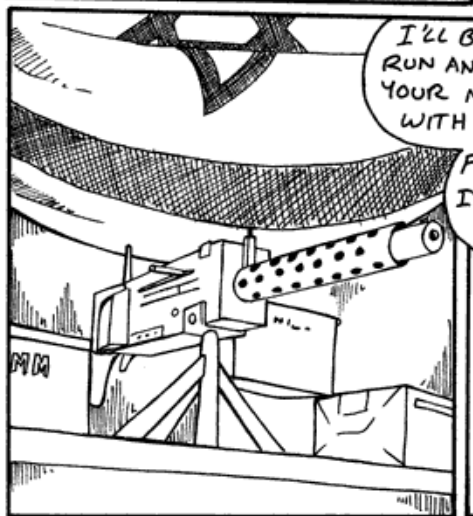
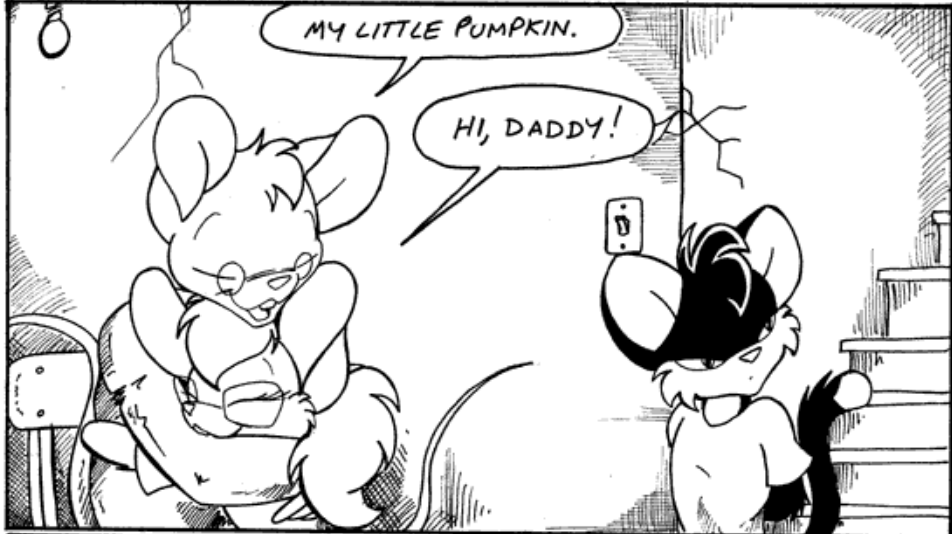
CLAP
CLAP

EEEE!

IS DADDY IN THE BASEMENT?

YES HE IS. YOU CAN GO
SEE HIM. I THINK I HAVE
ENOUGH HELP IN THE
KITCHEN.







YOU LIKE LOOKING AT THE GUNS? YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF GUN THIS IS?

UM... AN OLD GUN?



IT'S MORE THAN AN OLD GUN. LOOK AT IT, IT'S A COLLECTION OF CRAFTED PARTS COMING TOGETHER TO CREATE A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT.




THIS GUN IS LIKE A RELATIONSHIP. YOU ARE THE WOOD AND SHE IS THE METAL. WITHOUT ONE ANOTHER, YOU DON'T WORK. YOU FORGE EACH OTHER TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEEDS OF THE RELATIONSHIP'S COMPONENTS. YOU ARE DESIGNED TO CERTAIN TOLERANCES. YOU CAN ENDURE EXTREMES FOR SHORT PERIODS, BUT TOO MUCH HARSH WEATHER, OR ROUGH TREATMENT, AND THE WOOD CRACKS, WARPS, AND TURNS GNARLED AND BITTER. IF YOU TRY TO PUT TOO MUCH POWER THROUGH THE CHAMBER, THE METAL MAY STRESS AND FORM FRACTURES. FORCING IT TO DO THINGS FOR WHICH IT IS NOT DESIGNED WILL CAUSE THE METAL TO WEAKEN SLOWLY, THE DANGER BUILDING OVER TIME THROUGH REPEATED MISUSE...



... AND POW! IT EXPLODES IN YOUR FACE!



THE BLAST CAN EVEN KILL YOU...



SO, I ASKED OUT ONE OF MY SISTER'S FRIENDS...

OH?


YEAH. SHE'S REAL SWEET
AND FAIRLY NORMAL.

WHEW!


REALLY.



SHE'S FROM A HUGE JEWISH FAMILY.
IT'S INTERESTING TO SEE HOW A COMPLETE
FAMILY BEHAVES TOGETHER.




HER FATHER IS VERY
COOL, EVEN IF HE
LOOKS LIKE A
BANKER. HE'S
INVITED ME TO GO
SHOOTING WITH HIM
AND HIS SON, IF MY
MOTHER ALLOWS.



IT'S GOOD FOR YOU TO HAVE
A POSITIVE MALE INFLUENCE
IN YOUR LIFE. YOU NEED TO
SEE AND EXPERIENCE HEALTHY,
NORMAL LIVES, AND REALIZE

THAT YOUR
EXPERIENCE
WITH NIKKI
WASN'T THE
IDEAL.



YEAH... I DON'T THINK I CAN
DO THOSE THINGS I DID WITH
NIKKI, TO ELIZABETH. THAT'D
FEEL KIND OF LIKE ... PISSING
IN FRONT OF A NUN...

FISK! YOU HAVE TO STOP SEEING ELIZABETH...

HELL NO. SHE'S NICE.

TRY TO UNDERSTAND MY POSITION, AS A GIRL... PLEASE! I JUST WANTED TO MAKE HER FEEL BETTER, NOT TO HAVE MY BROTHER DATING ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS! WE RARELY SEE HER! WE CAN'T EVEN GOSSIP!

I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T EVEN REALLY LIKE HER!

SHE'S AN AWESOME KISSER, AND SHE MAKES THESE CUTE SQUEAKING NOISES WHEN YOU SUCK ON HER NECK. HER TONGUE-

AAUGH!

SPARE ME! JESUS! GOD!

DON'T MAKE ME USE THE HEAVY ARTILLERY!

WHA-?

MOM'S CIVIL WAR COMMEMORATIVE ROBERT E. LEE LAWN GNOME!

GOD-DAMMIT!

GO AHEAD AND TELL MOM,
YOU HEARTLESS BITCH! I'LL
TAKE THE HEAT!



IT CAN'T LAST, FISK! I'VE
WATCHED ENOUGH TV TO KNOW
HOW TEEN ROMANCE ENDS.
IT'LL BE EASIER NOW.



I TOLD YOU THIS WOULD
HAPPEN! YOU TOLD ME
TO ASK HER OUT IN THE
FIRST PLACE!




AW **FUCK!** UM... PERHAPS
I SHOULD HANDLE
THIS, FISK...






FISK, I KNOW HOW TO TALK TO HER!

YOU'VE MESSED UP ENOUGH! STAY OUT!



BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO SAY TO HER?



IT IS MY FAULT, ULTIMATELY. I LET MYSELF BE PRESSURED INTO SOMETHING DISHONEST. I THINK SHE NEEDS TO HEAR THE TRUTH, NOW.





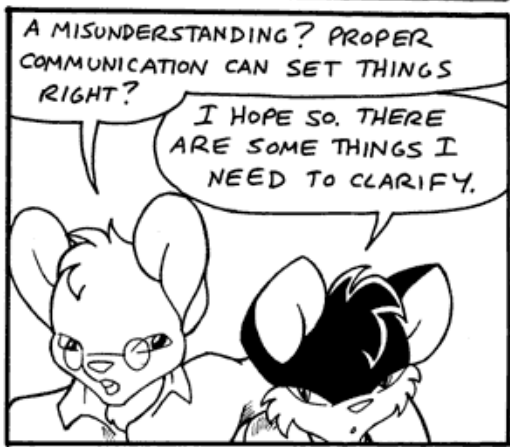
HELLO, FISK.

HELLO, SIR. I WAS WONDERING IF ELIZABETH WAS AVAILABLE?



SHE WENT TO HER ROOM, UPSET. SOMETHING'S WRONG?

A LITTLE.



A MISUNDERSTANDING? PROPER COMMUNICATION CAN SET THINGS RIGHT?

I HOPE SO. THERE ARE SOME THINGS I NEED TO CLARIFY.

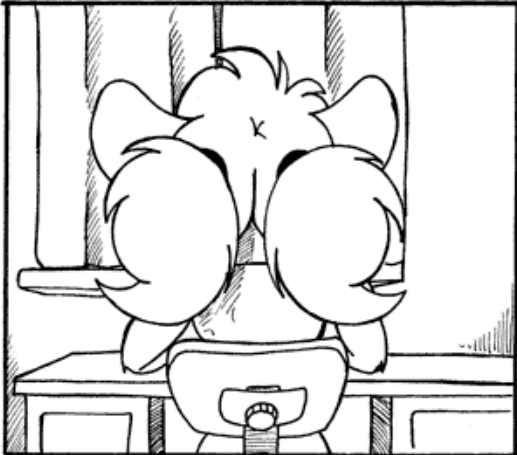


YOU LIKE HER, RIGHT?

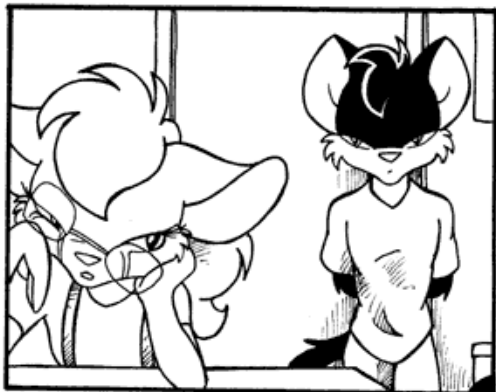
VERY MUCH.

EXPLAIN EVERYTHING TO HER. SHE'S A SMART GIRL.

CREEK



CLICK




WHAT ARE YOU
DOING HERE? YOU
LIED TO ME.






I'M REALLY NOT GOOD WITH WORDS. I HAVE TO TRY AT LEAST... BECAUSE IT'S IMPORTANT.



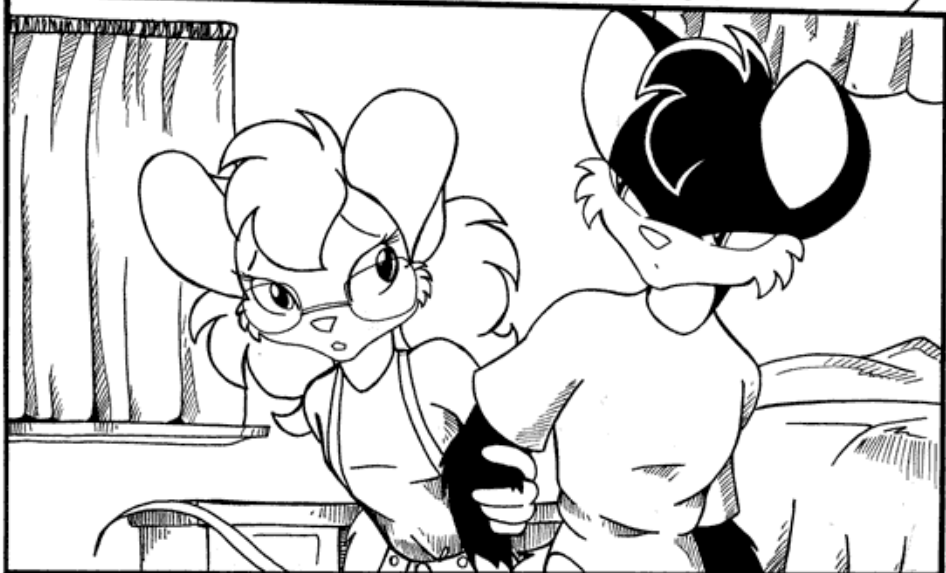
YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH. LUCY WANTED TO SET US UP, AND I GOT PRESSURED INTO IT.


BUT, THAT'S NOT ALL OF IT...



WHEN WE WERE TALKING IN THE HALLWAY, I REALIZED EVERYTHING I WAS SAYING WAS TRUE. MOST BOYS JUST LOOK FOR SOMETHING PRETTY. I GUESS I MAY HAVE GOTTEN BURNED OUT ON PURELY PHYSICAL GIRLS WHEN I WAS WITH NIKKI... I DIDN'T KNOW HOW NICE IT'D BE TO HAVE A GIRL AS A FRIEND.


I'M SORRY I LIED, INITIALLY. IF YOU WANT TO KEEP HATING ME, I'LL UNDERSTAND AND I'LL LET YOU BE. BUT, I HAVE TO LET YOU KNOW THAT I REALLY FELL FOR YOU... ... BEFORE I GO.






IS FISK JOINING US FOR DINNER, AGAIN?

I DIDN'T THINK SO. WHY DO YOU ASK?




I SAW HIM GO UPSTAIRS.



YES, BUT I DIDN'T SEE HIM LEAVE.

YES. HE WENT UPSTAIRS TO SPEAK TO ELIZABETH ABOUT SOMETHING.



HE'S BEEN UP THERE FOR FORTY MINUTES!



RIGHT. OKAY. I'LL GO CHECK.




THAT'S MY AUNT. SHE LIVES IN NEW YORK WITH AN APARTMENT FULL OF FERRETS AND A LITTLE WIMP FOR A HUSBAND. SHE HATES MY DAD.

I THINK A FAMILY THIS BIG WOULD BE MOSTLY EMBARRASSING.




I THINK IT'S NICE TO HAVE HISTORY. THAT'S MY MOTHER'S FATHER. HE DIED FIGHTING THE EGYPTIANS.



YOUR DAD DIED FIGHTING, RIGHT? IF HE WERE ALIVE YOU'D BE MORE PROUD THAN EMBARRASSED.



YOU KNOW... I HAVEN'T REALLY THOUGHT — ELIZABETH?



DINNER'S ALMOST READY. FISK CAN JOIN US IF HE'D LIKE.

OKAY!



HOW'D IT GO?

IT WENT OKAY.



ARE YOU STILL GOING OUT?

WE'RE GOOD FRIENDS. "KISSING FRIENDS".




YOU DON'T SOUND HAPPY.




IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN.






PART OF WHAT YOU SAID WAS TRUE. WE'RE SMART ENOUGH TO SEE IT. WE CAN LOOK FORWARD AND SEE THE INEVITABILITY OF A BREAK-UP SIMPLY BECAUSE THERE'S NO POSSIBILITY OF A "NEXT STEP" FOUR, FIVE, OR TEN YEARS FROM NOW. SHE'S PERFECT IN EVERY WAY EXCEPT FOR THAT. HER PARENTS ARE JUST CONVINCED WE'LL RUN OUR COURSE AND GROW APART. SO, WE'VE AGREED ON A CLOSE FRIENDSHIP.

MY MIND TELLS ME IT'S BEST, BUT MY HEART IS REFUSING TO LISTEN.




YOU LIKE HER THAT MUCH?

I WISH I COULD CHANGE HOW I FEEL. IT JUST FEELS WORSE THAT SHE SEEMS PERFECTLY FINE WITH IT.



YOU CAN'T JUST ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE WHILE YOU HAVE IT?

NOT WHILE I'M JUST WAITING FOR A MOUSE TO COME AND TAKE HER AND TAKE MY GUTS OUT.



YOU'LL PROBABLY FIND SOMEONE BEFORE SHE DOES, ANYHOW.

I SUPPOSE IF I MANAGED TO FIND SOMEONE WHO WASN'T AS DUMB AS A SACK OF HAMMERS OR UGLY AS SIN...

SIGH...



END