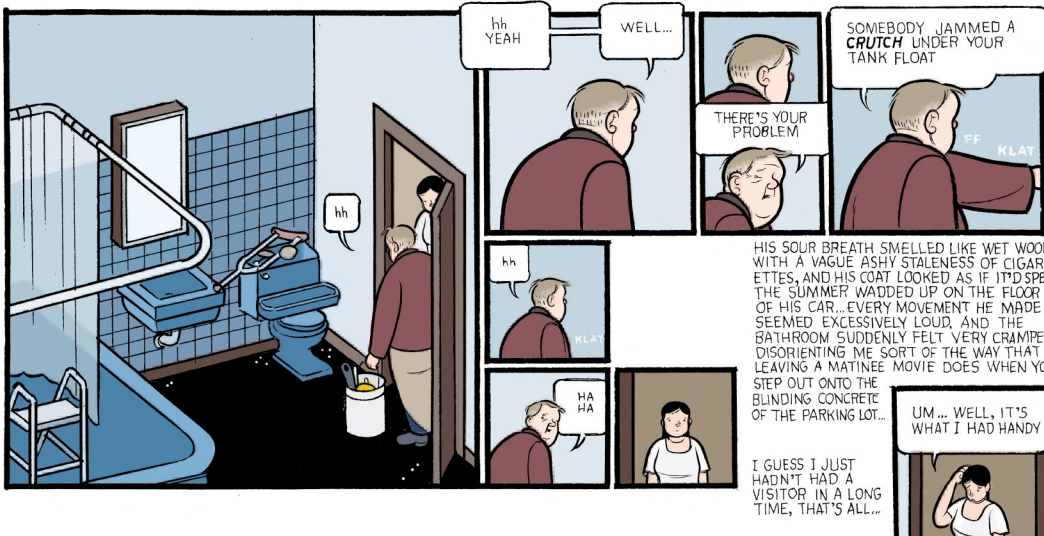
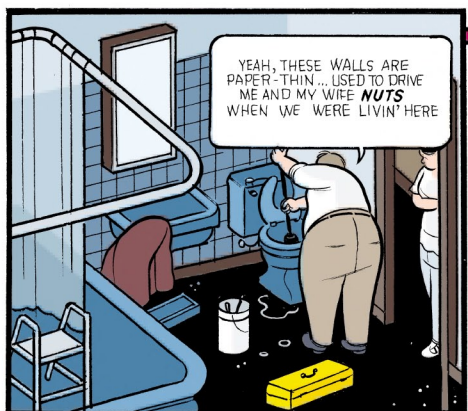




THE PLUMBER FINALLY SHOWED UP RIGHT AT 5, ARRIVING IN A BEAT-UP STATION WAGON THAT MUST'VE BEEN 30 YEARS OLD...HE HAULED HIMSELF UP THE STAIRS SLOWLY, CARRYING A TOOLBOX AND A PLASTIC BUCKET FILLED WITH BIG BLACK WRENCHES, TRYING AS BEST HE COULD TO CONCEAL HIS LABORED BREATHING... HE HAD A CUTE NAME, THOUGH... MR. BELL ...



I REALLY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH MYSELF WHILE HE WAS CROUCHED DOWN ON MY FLOOR PLUNGING HIS HANDS INTO GOD KNOWS WHAT, THOUGH... I COULDN'T TELL IF HE WANTED ME TO LEAVE HIM ALONE OR NOT... I FOUND MYSELF APOLOGIZING FOR WEIRD STUFF, LIKE NOT CLEANING OR THE RADIO BEING ON IN THE KITCHEN (WHICH I'D PUT ON TO DROWN OUT THE YELLING OF MY DOWNSTAIRS NEIGHBOR...)



AND NOT ONLY THAT... HE'D LIVED IN **MY VERY APARTMENT**, ACTING AS A SORT OF MAINTENANCE GUY FOR THE WHOLE BUILDING IN EXCHANGE FOR A RENT DISCOUNT... APPARENTLY, HIS WIFE HAD ENDURED A TRYING PREGNANCY, AND HE'D HAD TO QUIT HIS JOB TO STAY HOME TO LOOK AFTER HER... EVEN AFTER HIS DAUGHTER WAS BORN AND HE AND HIS WIFE MOVED AWAY, HE STAYED ON CALL AS THE BUILDING'S HANDYMAN...

