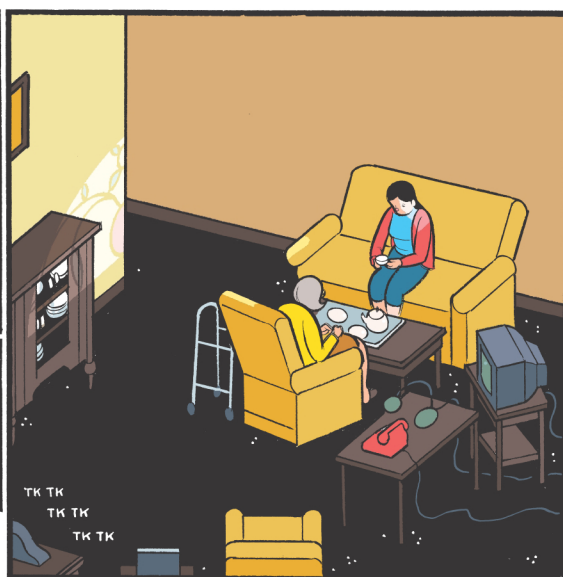
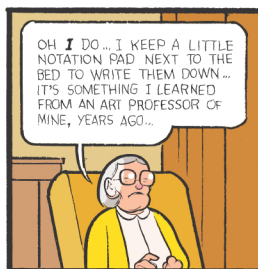




THE STRIP

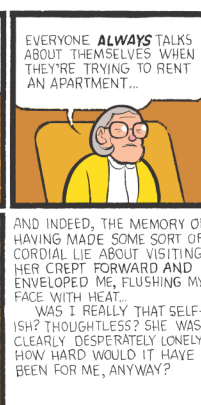
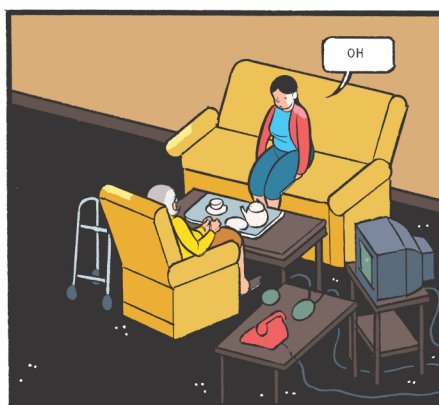


I MEAN, THERE WAS THE USUAL EXPECTED EXCHANGE OF MUSTY NICETIES, THE SMELL OF OLD CARPET, THE SAD BALD SPOT ON THE BACK OF HER HEAD THAT I STARED AT AS I FOLLOWED HER INTO THE LIVING ROOM CARRYING HER TEA TRAY, BUT WITHIN ONLY FIVE MINUTES SHE'D ALSO TOLD ME ABOUT HER MOTHER'S PROTRACTED ILLNESS AND DEATH...



AS IT TURNED OUT, SHE'D ACTUALLY TAKEN A CLASS OR TWO AT "THE ACADEMY" IN THE 1920S OR 1930S... SHE DESCRIBED IT AS A "SUNDAY WATERCOLORIST SORT OF AFFAIR," WHERE A GROUP WOULD TRAVEL TO INDIANA FOR THE DAY AND SET UP THEIR EASELS...

I WONDERED WHAT KIND OF ART PROFESSOR WOULD BE ADVISING A BUNCH OF GIRLS ABOUT THEIR DREAMS THOUGH...



I FELT BAD... I HADN'T MEANT TO
HURT HER FEELINGS...I'D JUST
FIGURED SHE DIDN'T WANT TO
BOTHR WITH HER TENANTS,THAT'S ALL...

I WONDERED IF WE MIGHT EVEN BECOME GOOD FRIENDS...SHE SEEMED SMART, SHE'D STUDIED ART...A DISCONNECTED MONTAGE OF SENTIMENTAL IMAGES RAN THROUGH MY MIND: HER SHOWING ME SOME OF HER PAINTINGS, US SITTING ON A PARK BENCH AMONG FALLING YELLOW LEAVES, A TEARFUL HUG ON THE PORCH OF AN OLD WHITE HOUSE...

