THE STRIP



**Building Stories** By Chris Ware

PART 22: 5 p.m.

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 ...









SOMEBODY JAMMED A CRUTCH UNDER YOUR TANK FLOAT THERE'S YOUR PROBLEM

HIS SOUR BREATH SMELLED LIKE WET WOOD, WITH A VAGUE ASHY STALENESS OF CIGARETTES, AND HIS COAT LOOKED AS IF IPD SPENT THE SUMMER WADDED UP ON THE FLOOR OF HIS CAR...EVERY MOVEMENT HE MADE SEEMED EXCESSIVELY LOUD, AND THE BATHROOM SUDDENLY FELT VERY CRAMPED, DISORIENTING ME SORT OF THE WAY THAT LEAVING A MATTINEE MOVIE DOES WHEN YOU STEP OUT ONTO THE BUNDING CONCRETE OF THE PARKING LOT... WHAT I HAD HANDY WHAT I HAD HANDY

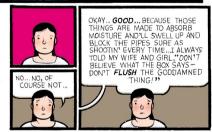
I GUESS I JUST HADN'T HAD A VISITOR IN A LONG TIME, THAT'S ALL...





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 WERD STUFF, LIKE NOT CLEANING OR THE RAPTO BEING ON IN THE KITCHEN (WHICH I'P) 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 ACTING AS A SOMI 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 HER... EVEN AFTER HER MOVED AND HE AND HIS WIFE MOVED AWAY, HE STAYED ON CALL AS THE BUILDING'S HANDYMAN ...







WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO ...
TELL HIM THE TRUTH? BESIDES, IT WASH'T LIKE HE WAS GOING TO FIND OUT OR ANYTHING... (BUT REALLY — WHY DO THEY SAY "FLUSHIBLE" IF THEY "RE NOT? DON'T THEY DO RESEARCH?)

MOSTLY, I WAS JUST WANTING TO GET BACK TO ASKING HIM ABOUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO LIVE HERE, AND ASK ABOUT THE OLD LADY AND! HE'D EVER SEEN ANY OF HER PAINT-INGS... BUT, LIKE MOST PEOPLE, HE WASN'T LONG ON DETAIL AND JUST KEPT MENTIONING PERSONAL FACTS THAT DIDN'T INTEREST ME...













I'M SORRY.

777777NNF



**WELL...** NOT MY WIFE...SHE PASSED A FEW YEARS BACK...





NOPE



