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UCR Honors Capstones 2025-2026

Title

HUA HUA

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Publication Date

2026-06-15

HUA HUA

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

April 25, 2026

University Honors

University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Hua Hua is an autobiographical fiction graphic novel featuring seventeen stories across twenty-one pages. Across these stories, the graphic novel focuses on the key memories of Mei, a young Taiwanese-American woman, as it follows her chronologically from early childhood to young adulthood. It focuses on her challenges growing up as an outcast at home and in school, and her constantly evolving sense of self. Throughout, she questions and evaluates her relationship with her culture, family, friends, and former acquaintances. Depending on the audience, Mei learns which aspects of herself she should hide away and others she can safely express. Her early childhood focuses on the struggles of growing up as the only Taiwanese student in her predominantly white elementary school. It explores her earliest encounters with self loathing from the constant teasing and badgering of racial and cultural differences. Meanwhile, her teenage years focus on self discovery, retrospection, and acknowledging generational trauma and destructive behavior stemming from her relationships. Mei's story culminates in the acceptance of the experiences, positive and negative, that made her the sum of who she is. With these stories, the graphic novel aims to balance the comedy and troubles that come with growing up in an environment that ostracizes those who are unwilling to conform. It conveys that bitter experiences in the moment can be looked back on as through the lens of a story with a lesson or punchline.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Susan Straight, for her invaluable support and guidance. With her encouragement, I was able to push my boundaries and accomplish more than I could have before. I would also like to thank my friends and family who were there to encourage me and keep my motivation up during the sleepless nights.

HUA HUA CONTEXT

I chose to write and illustrate *Hua Hua* because I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity presented to me to create a work utilizing my creative skills. Since I was a young child, I always loved to draw, and today, I draw sketches and illustrations based on my favorite shows and games in my free time. Despite my passion for drawing, I had never created an original work, and I rarely had a chance to since I focused most of my attention and energy on academics. My desired career is in the aerospace industry, so this would be one of the rare opportunities to create something from my own passions.

I spent a lot of time brainstorming potential novel ideas, toying between fantasy and comedy, but none of them felt complete. Ultimately, the inspiration behind my graphic novel came from unfortunate circumstances before entering my junior year. During September of 2024, my paternal grandmother, who was my only living grandparent, suddenly passed away due to complications from a stroke she had endured a few years prior. After her passing, I spent a lot of time thinking about my relationship with my culture and family, and I came to the conclusion that the only story that felt right to me was one retelling specific memories. I wanted to retell the stories that frame the way I grew to understand my culture and my relationships with the people around me. As a Taiwanese American who grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood, I felt divorced from my peers since I did not share their light hair and eyes, food, or customs at home. In addition, I did not feel fully involved at home. As someone who grew up with immigrant parents, I dealt with a lot of pressure from their expectations to succeed in a society that would find every opportunity to other me while also living up to the beliefs instilled in them from generations past. Growing up, I felt as though I was an outcast at school and at home, so I wanted to use my project as a space to show the experiences that I did not see represented

growing up. I intended for my project to display the memories, the happy, funny, and painful, in the way they are in my head, stories to look back on and laugh about how far I have come since. While my primary goal was to write and illustrate to the young me who was looking for someone who would understand her experiences, I hoped that the presentation of my stories would be understandable even for those who did not experience the same as I did.

When it came to the planning behind *Hua Hua*, I decided upon a graphic novel since it would allow me to use my visual storytelling skills to its advantage. Prior, I had many years of experience in character illustrations and the occasional short comic, but I did not have as much experience in my writing, especially dialogue. Since the project would be half comprised of a familiar format, I was confident in testing my boundaries and experimenting. During the research and planning phase, I consulted my favorite comics for inspiration in panel layout, dialogue, background detail, and effects. I took careful note on how these stories manage to convey their ideas in a limited page space, and in particular, I enjoyed the use of visual comedy and interactions between the characters and the formatting. At the end of my planning, I decided to retell my memories with a fictional character in a fictionalized setting based on my hometown. Mei, the protagonist, took on the role of me, and with few exceptions, the rest of the cast would not have a name. Since *Hua Hua* focuses on Mei's perspective, her family members are primarily referred to by their romanized Chinese titles, and her peers are unnamed. For characters, Mei preferred to forget, their names and faces were crossed out to emphasize how she attempts to rewrite her memories. In order to convey the passage of time, I planned four separate phases in Mei's life: early childhood, adolescence, teenage years, and early adulthood. In the early childhood stories, Mei is at odds with her peers who make it clear to her that she does not conform to their standards. The conflict comes from the repeated badgering or dismissal about

her looks, language, name, or food; there is not a single person responsible for her distance from her culture, but rather, a series of interactions that wears her down. During her adolescence, the difference between her parents' way of life and her own conflict, and their business first mindset widens the emotional gap between them. Mei's teenage years and early adulthood focus on attempting to find her own identity and understanding herself as a culmination of all of her past experiences and relationships. In order to create levity, lighthearted and positive stories are interspersed throughout. These stories focus on the positive influences in Mei's life.

The start of the creation process began with the scripting. I used a simple script format prioritizing dialogue over details for each panel. Every script began with a description of the opening shot, and when applicable, the background required for the page. The descriptions were short and simple, only describing what the setting was, since I had more confidence in the illustration process and did not want to be bogged down by trying to describe each panel beyond what was necessary. The following lines would be dialogue or expression with markers attributed to each character. I also made the deliberate decision to not translate any Mandarin Chinese phrases or words, and for longer sentences spoken in the language, the dialogue would be italicized and bracketed. This was to represent how I processed the language in my head as translated subtitles. The simple pattern for lines would continue until the page was scripted, and from there, the scripts would be organized by their placement in the novel and illustrated.

For the illustration process, I consulted the tips in Star Prichard's *How to Webcomic!: The Ultimate Guide to Making Online Comics*. In order to create twenty pages of equal quality, I made certain creative decisions that would allow me to illustrate quickly. In Prichard's guide, she recommends picking a method that works best for the process and keeping pages simple when needed (Prichard 60). I chose to simplify my art style by reducing the level of detail for faces on

background characters, using simple backgrounds for most panels, and sticking to a simple five value grayscale color scheme. Using the scripts I had previously written, each page would undergo a process called thumbnailing where each panel is roughly laid out along with approximate space for the speech bubbles. Each page could have up to three different thumbnails to compare possible layouts while they were easy to edit. During the thumbnailing process, the flow of panels and speech bubbles was heavily considered. As a visual medium, the layout of the page determines the pace at which the reader will proceed, so extra care is placed to ensure readers can easily follow the action from panel to panel. This was done by strategically placing bubbles to guide the reader's eyes from the top left corner and zigzag towards the bottom right corner. Additionally, characters were placed where they would face towards the right if they were on a left panel and face towards the left if they were on a right panel. For most of the stories, the final panel serves as the punchline, and for them, I provided more space for the final line to stand out. With the thumbnails completed, they were brought into my digital illustration software. From there, I would mark the borders to each panel and begin sketching. The sketching process took the rough ideas from the script and thumbnails and combined them into the rough draft for each page. At this step, I focused on the expressions and body language, and I prioritized the eyes and hands to convey most of the emotions. Oftentimes, Mei's disinterest in her situation has her eyeline drift away from the subject or speaker. Once I was satisfied with each sketch, I would clean them up by erasing construction lines and out of place marks. Afterwards, I lined each page and filled them in with my minimalist palette. The final step in the illustration process was adding the speech bubbles and effects.

With every page completed, I compiled them together and decided on a final order for each story. Each story had a specific life stage, but between the planning and illustration process,

I found the original sequence felt disjointed, so they were reorganized in a way where each story would flow into each other and build upon the previous.

The final step was illustrating the cover and settling on the title. For the cover, I decided on a young adult Mei staring up at a decorated night sky while standing in an open field because I wanted to convey the infinite possibilities for her future. Her back faces towards the viewer since they read her past, and while that is all they will see of her, Mei has an entire future ahead of her that she prefers to focus on. The title *Hua Hua* derives from the word in Mandarin Chinese meaning “to draw,” and it is to pay homage to my culture and my passion for art.

REFERENCES

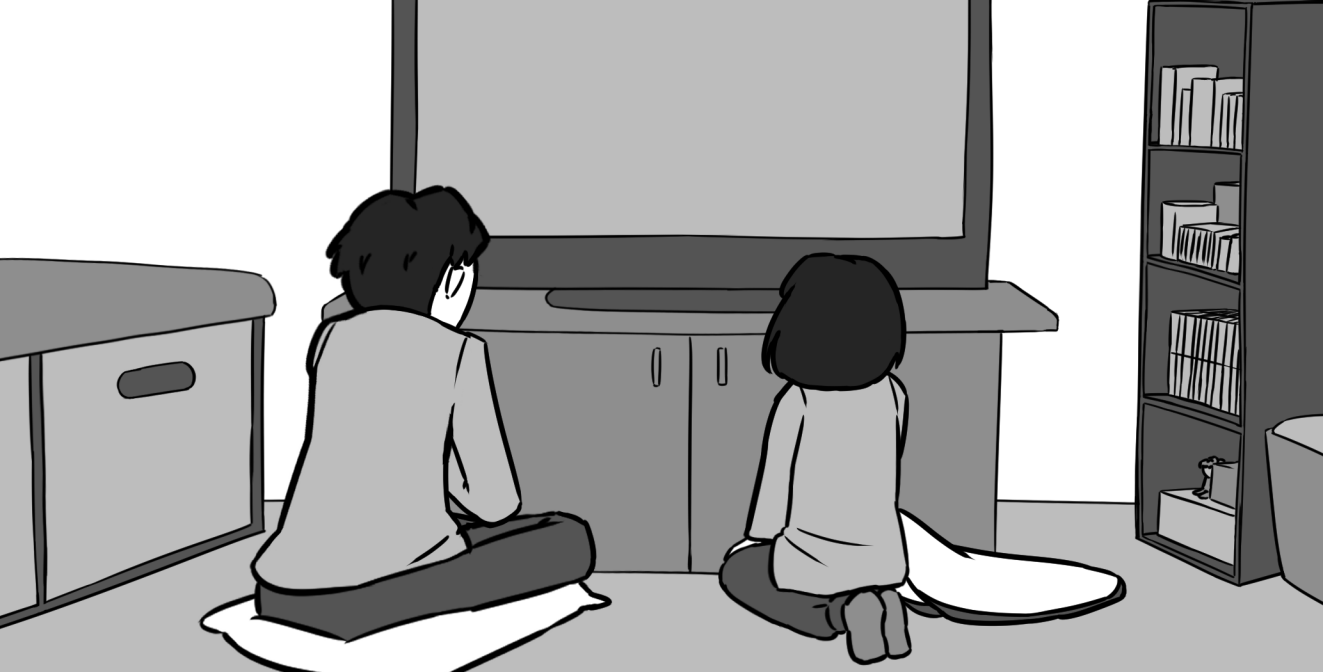
Prichard, Star. *How to Webcomic!: The Ultimate Guide to Making Online Comics*. 2022.

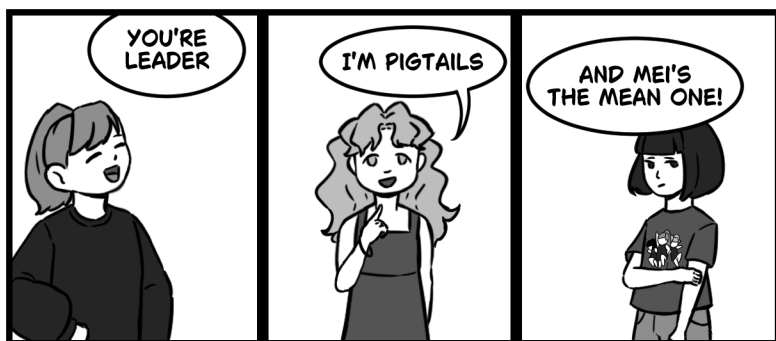
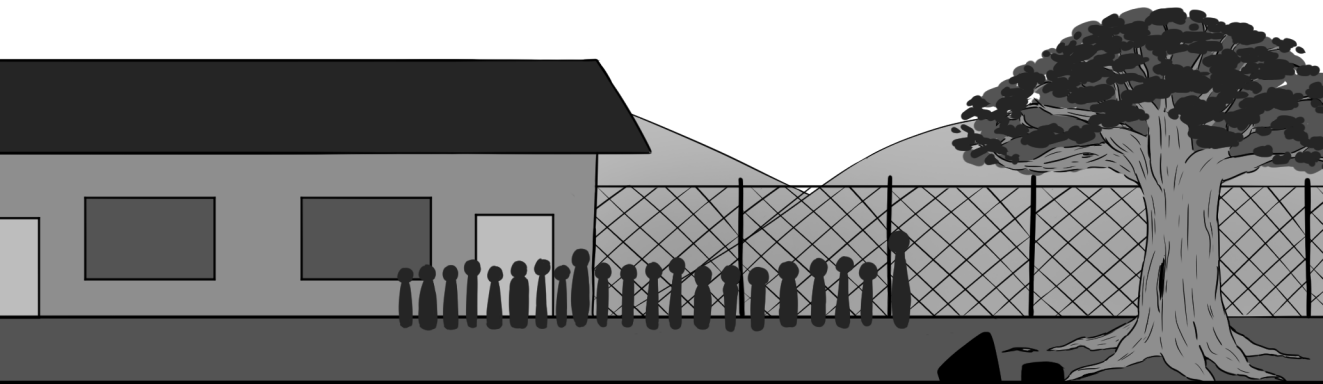
Stephanie Chang

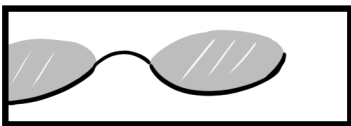
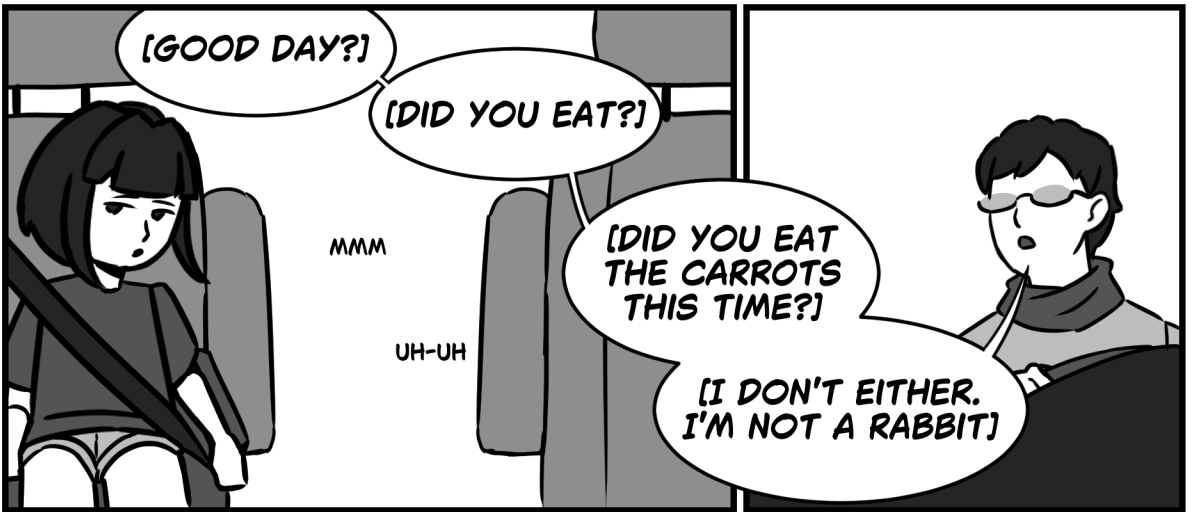


Hua Hua

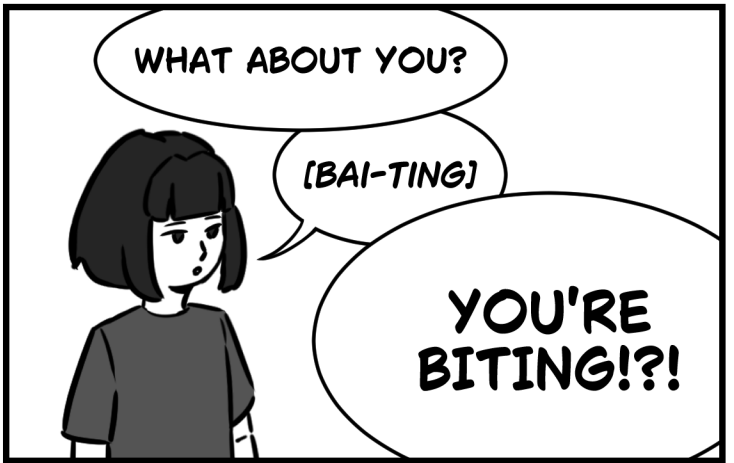
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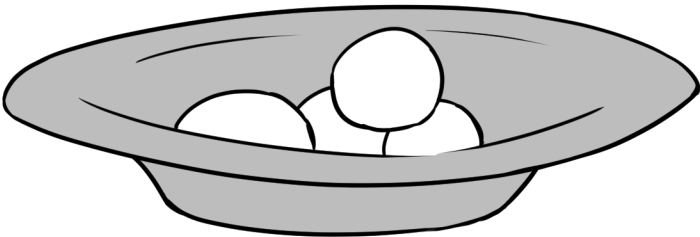
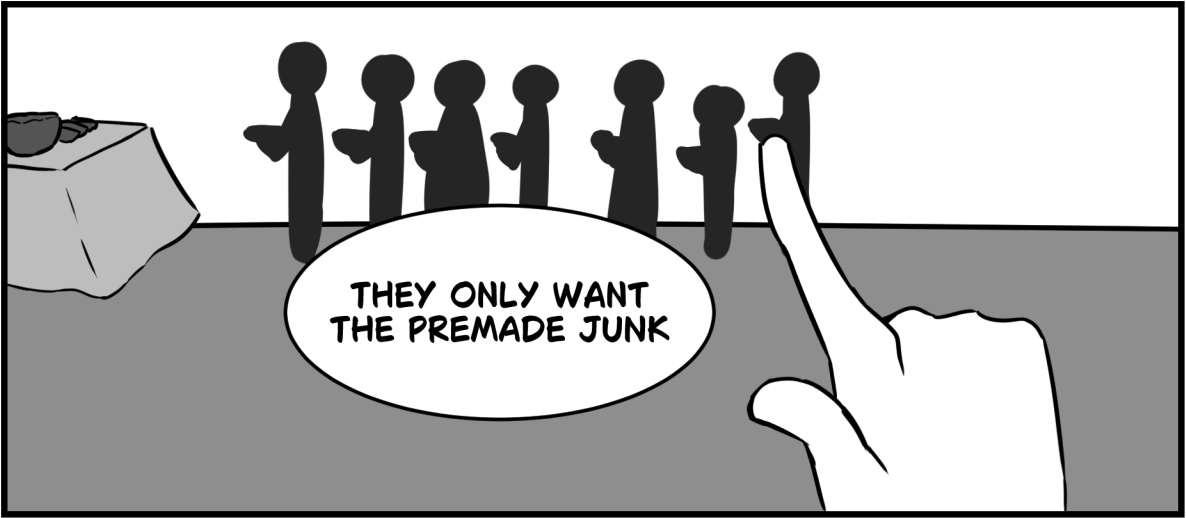


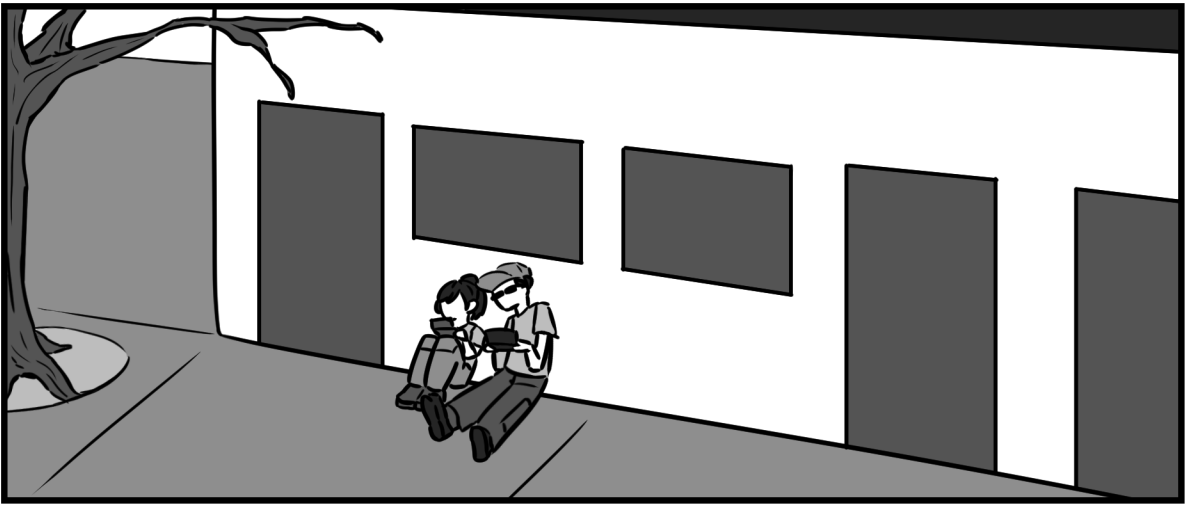


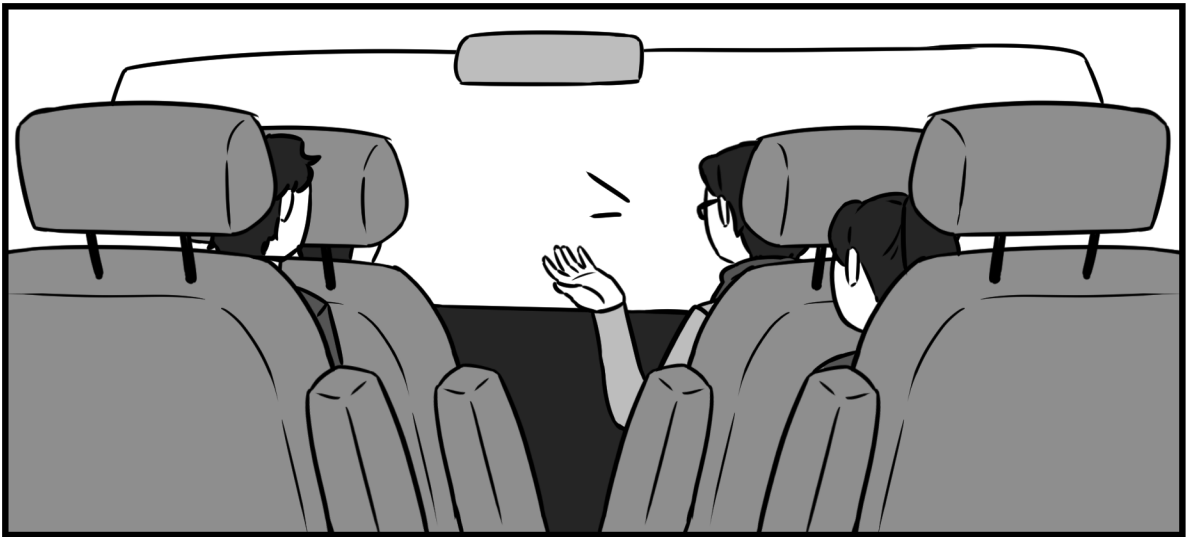












YEAH. "BUSINESS"



MORE LIKE
PYRAMID SCHEME





WHERE DID YOU
GET THAT FROM!?!



IT'S A MLM!
ONLY PEOPLE AT
THE TOP MAKE
MONEY!

THAT'S HOW
ALL BUSINESSES
WORK!

OK, CALM
DOWN WHERE
DID YOU HEAR
THIS FROM?

IT'S ON THE
WIKIPEDIA PAGE

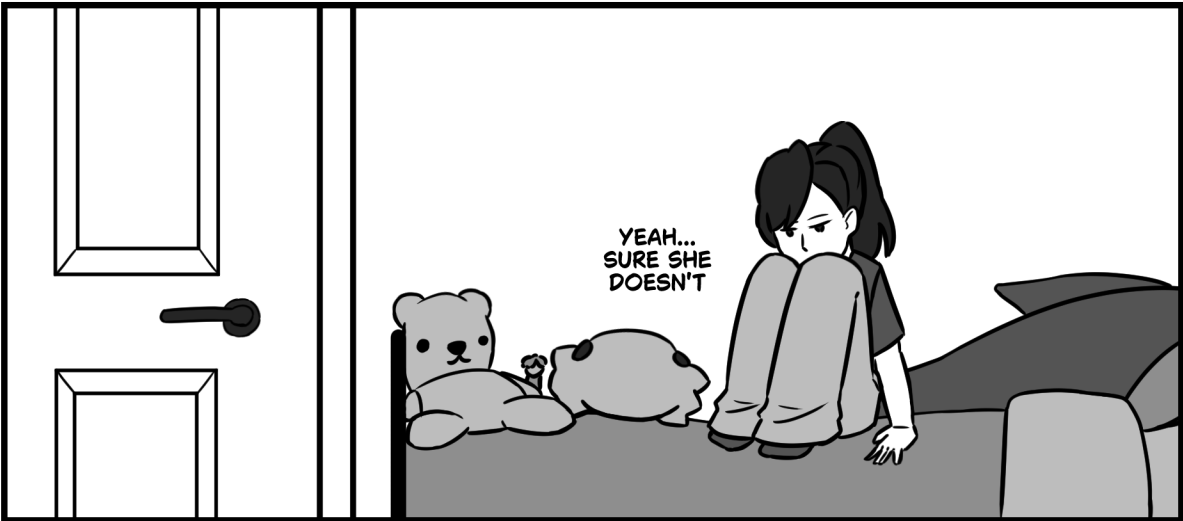
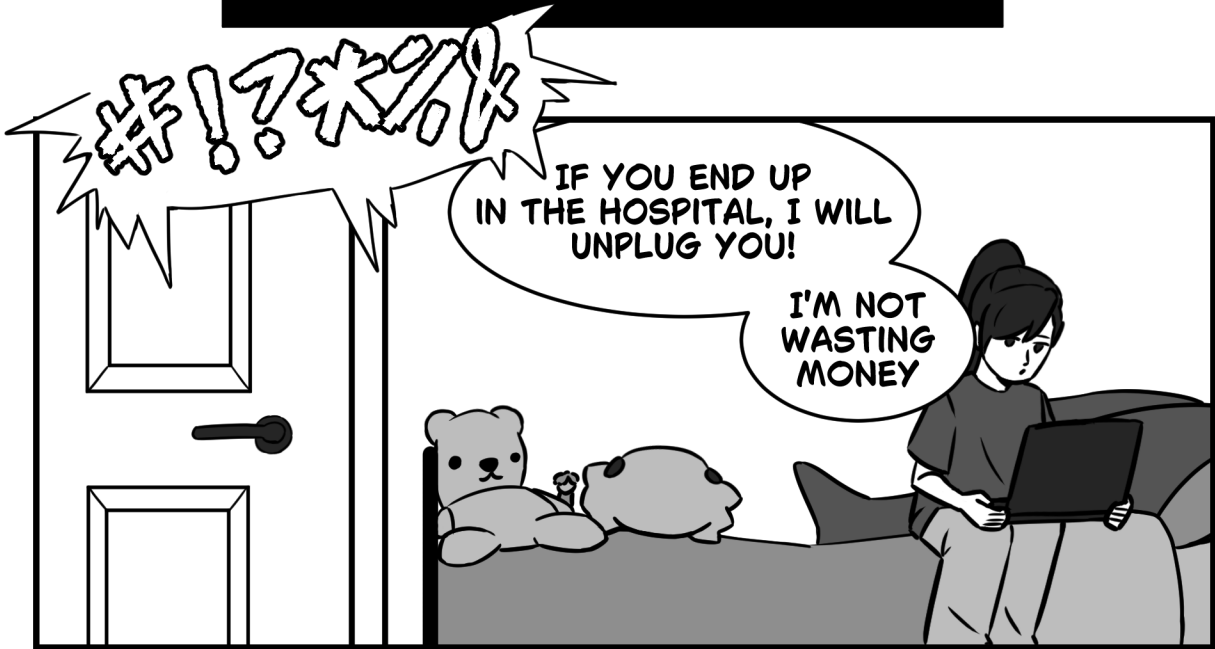
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE ALL THAT NONSENSE YOU READ!
DON'T GO SAYING THIS TO OTHER PEOPLE. I DON'T
WANT THEM SAYING MY KIDS SAID I'M PART OF SOME
SORT OF PYRAMID SCHEME!

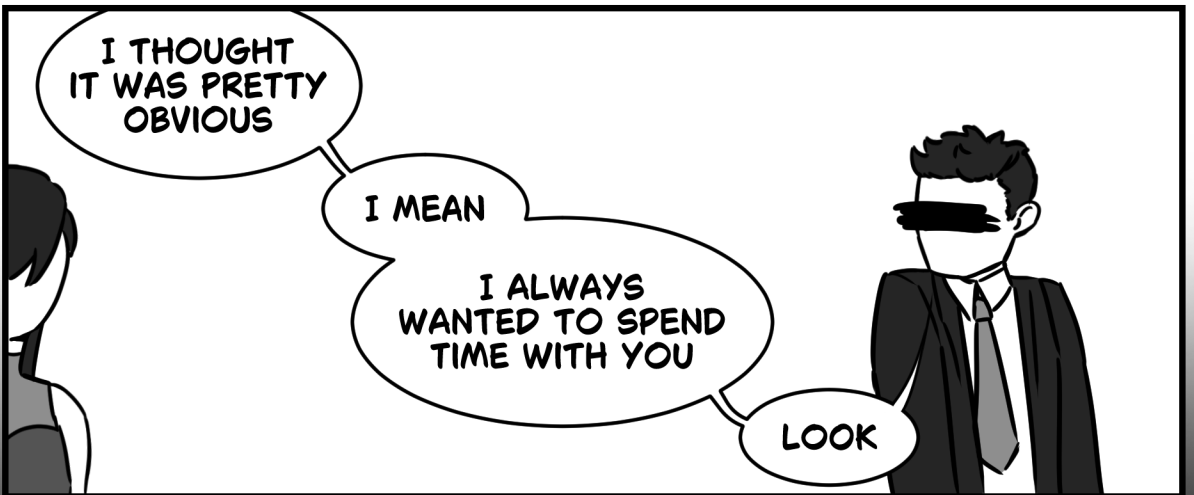
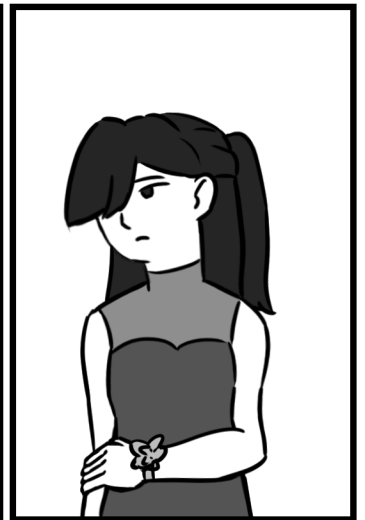
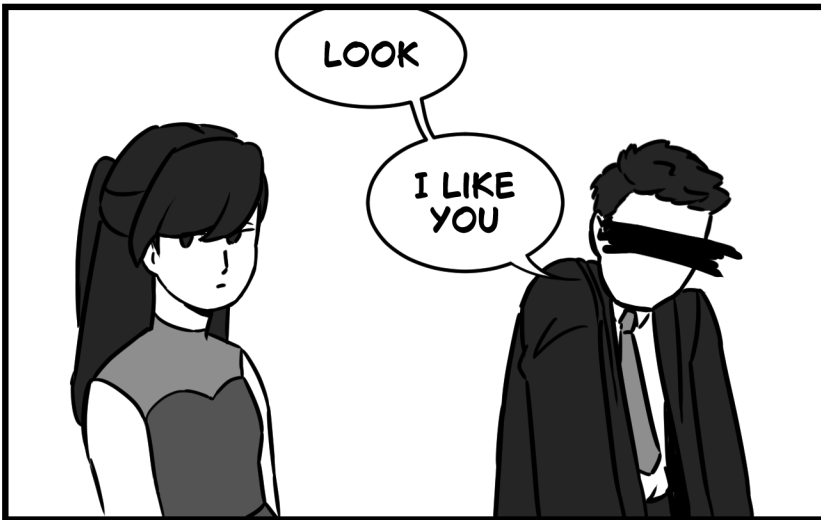
ALRIGHT! DON'T YELL
WE'RE GOING TO CHURCH

I'M NOT YELLING!
I'M JUST TALKING
LOUD!!



EARLIER





Dragons



Club

I WANT TO
BEFRIEND THE
SQUIRREL!

SURE.
ROLL ANIMAL
HANDLING

Nat 20

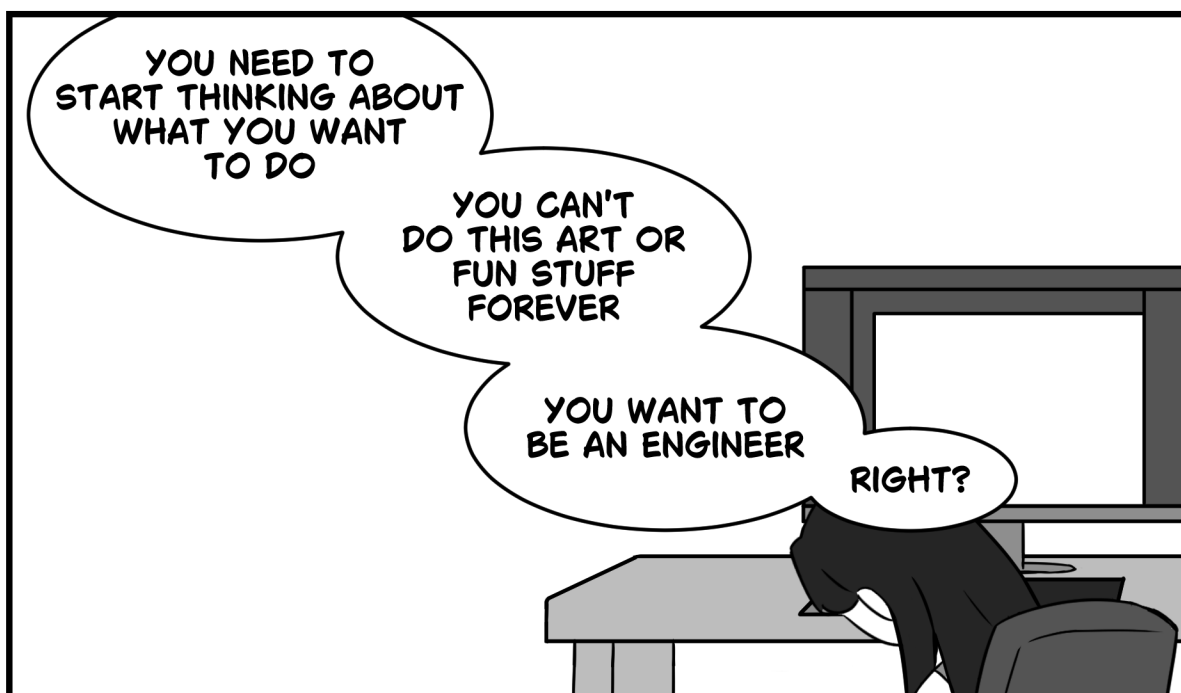
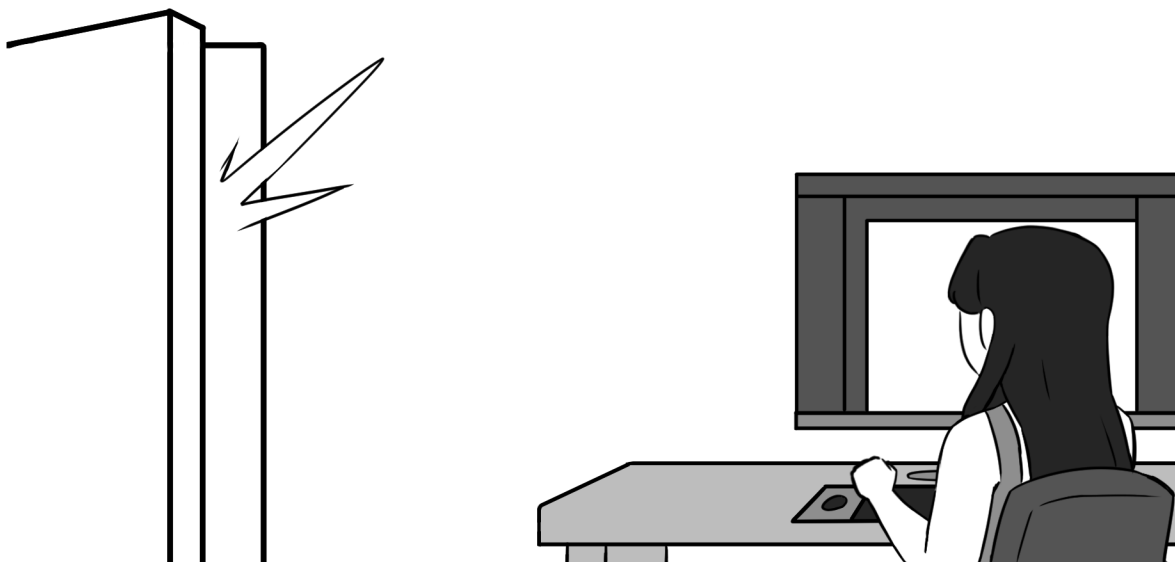
ALRIGHT

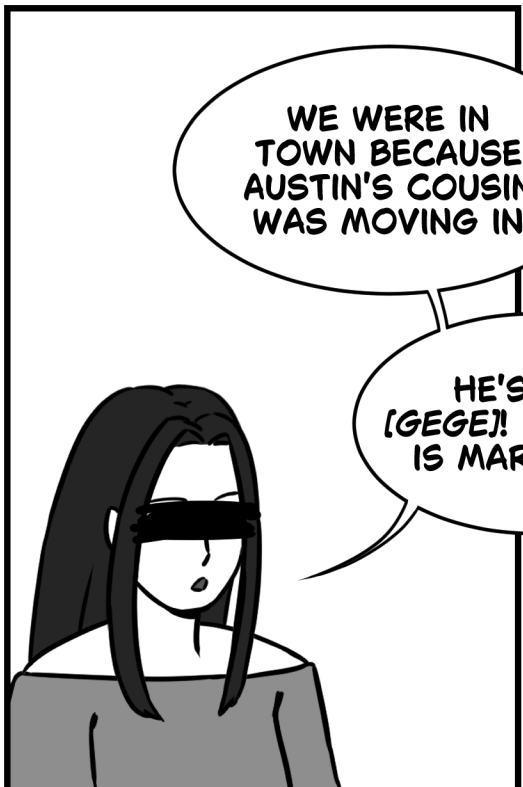
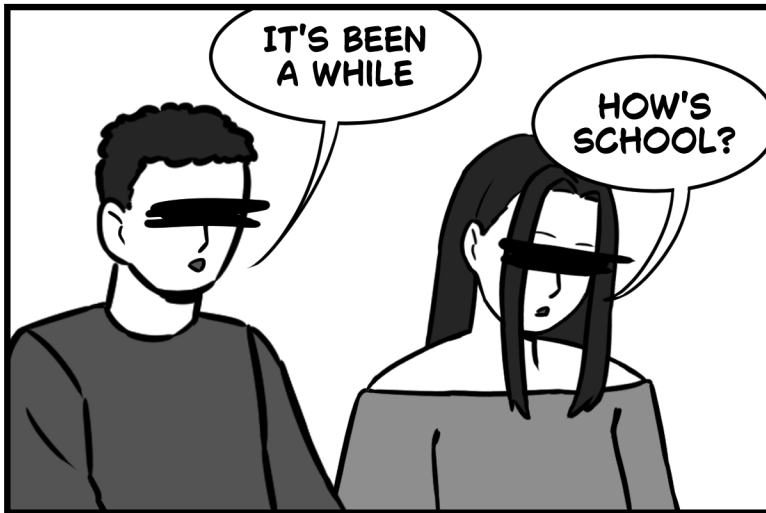
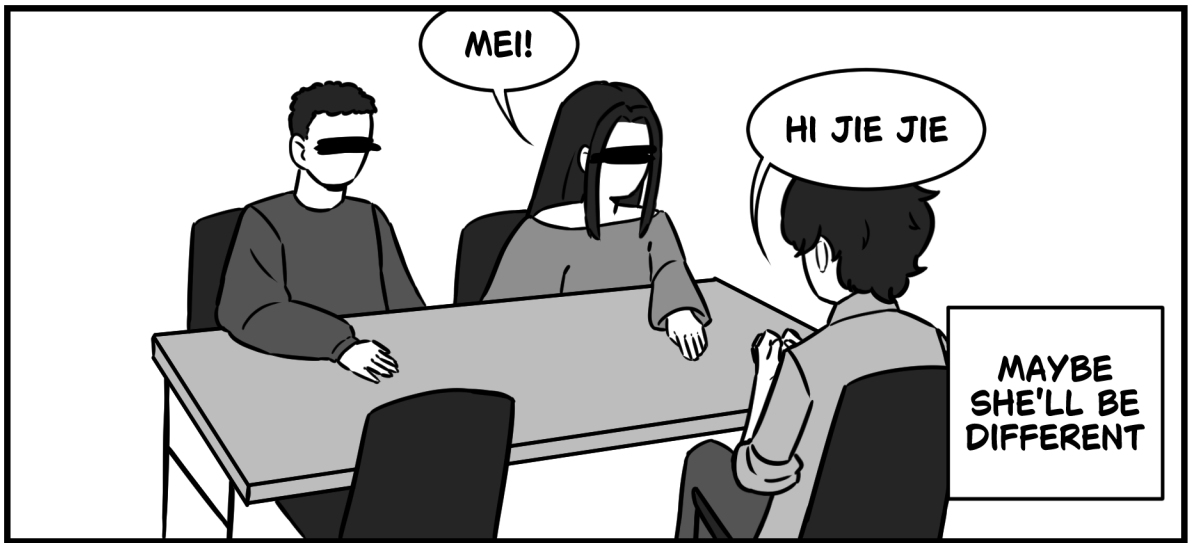
YOU PULL OUT A
HANDFUL OF NUTS, AND
THE SQUIRREL JUMPS
INTO YOUR PACK

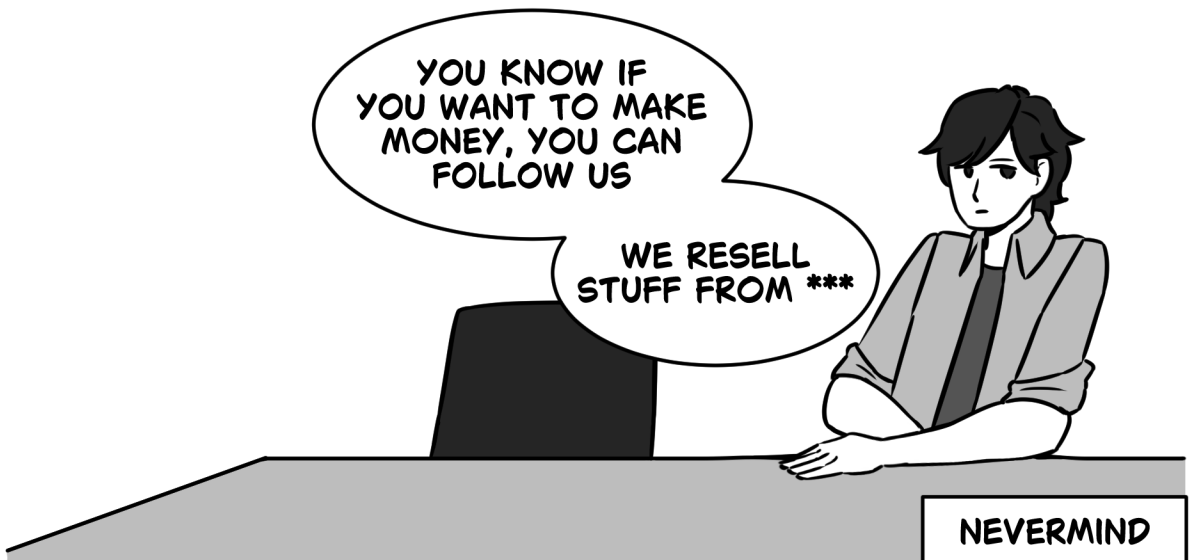
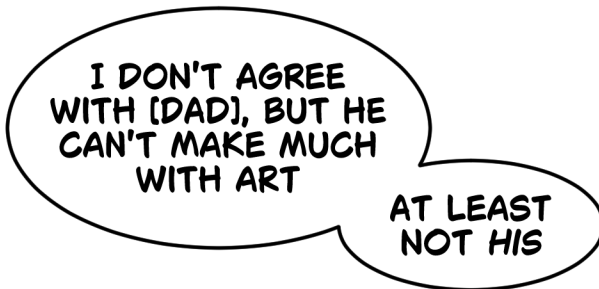
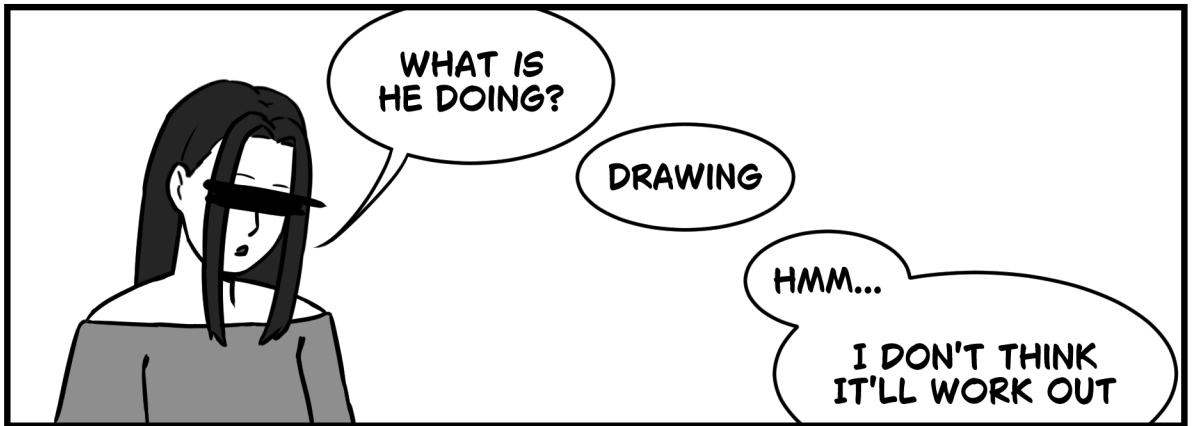
CONGRATS.
YOU'RE NOW A
SQUIRREL TAMER

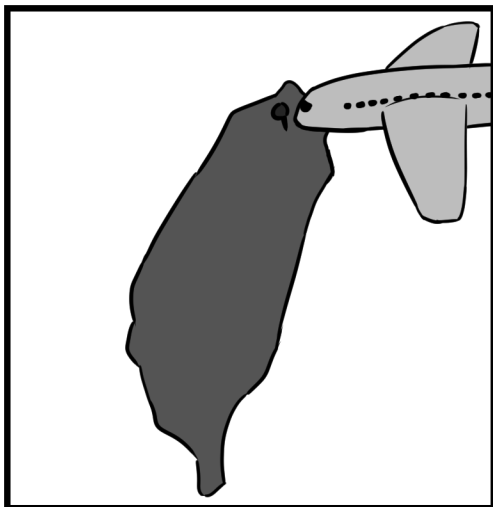
FOR SQUIRRELDOM!













Hey is this Mei?

Who is this?

It's [REDACTED] - from high school. I know it's been, like 3 years? I had your number saved, and I wanted to apologize for everything that happened between us



Was hoping you'd kinda hear me out, though I'd understand if not

What do you want?

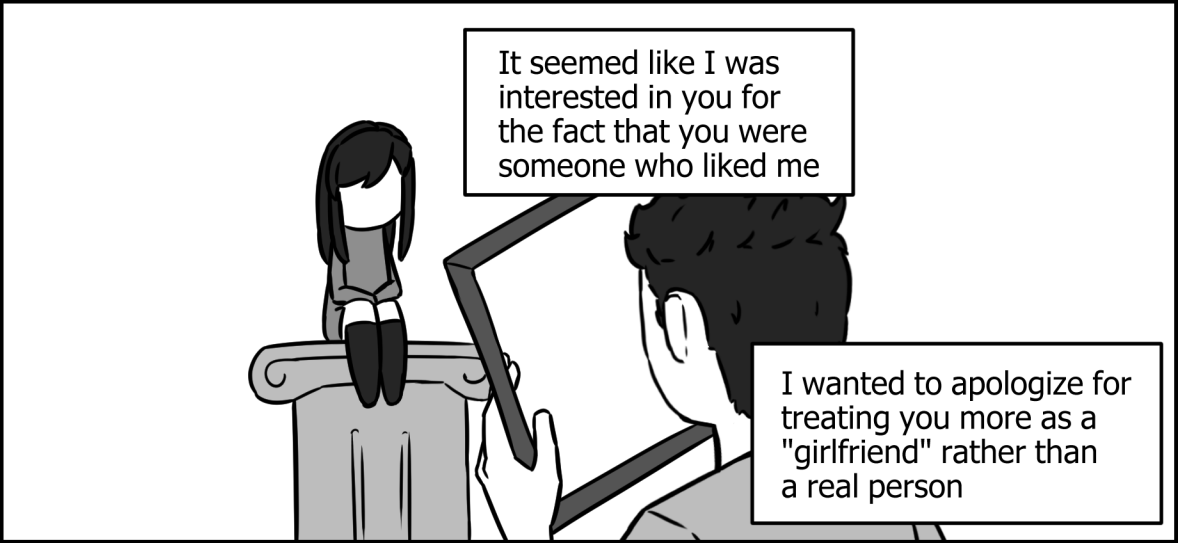
I wanted to apologize for how I acted when we were together

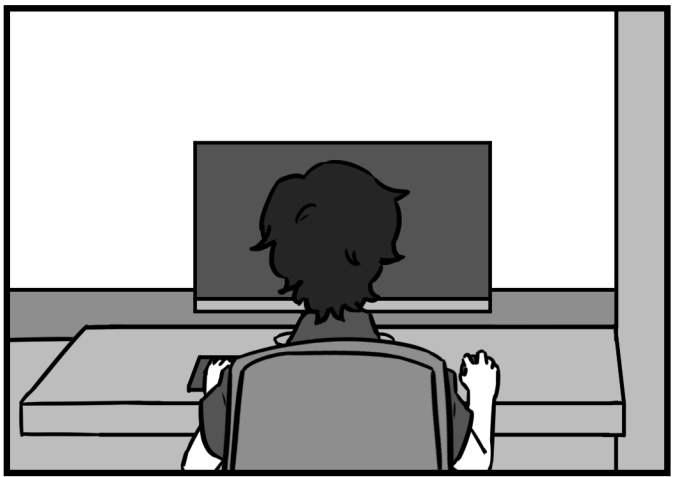
I was selfish, extremely clingy, and very very pushy



I kept asking, asking to do things you weren't fully comfortable with







ARE WE AN ARTIST
IN THE FUTURE?

STILL ARE.
HEY, DON'T LET
ANYONE TELL
YOU OTHERWISE

MAYBE LEARN
SOME ANATOMY
THOUGH...

ARE WE SUPER
RICH?

PFFT I WISH

ARE WE
HAPPY?

EVENTUALLY



IT WON'T BE EASY, BUT YOU'LL SURVIVE. YOU ALWAYS DO