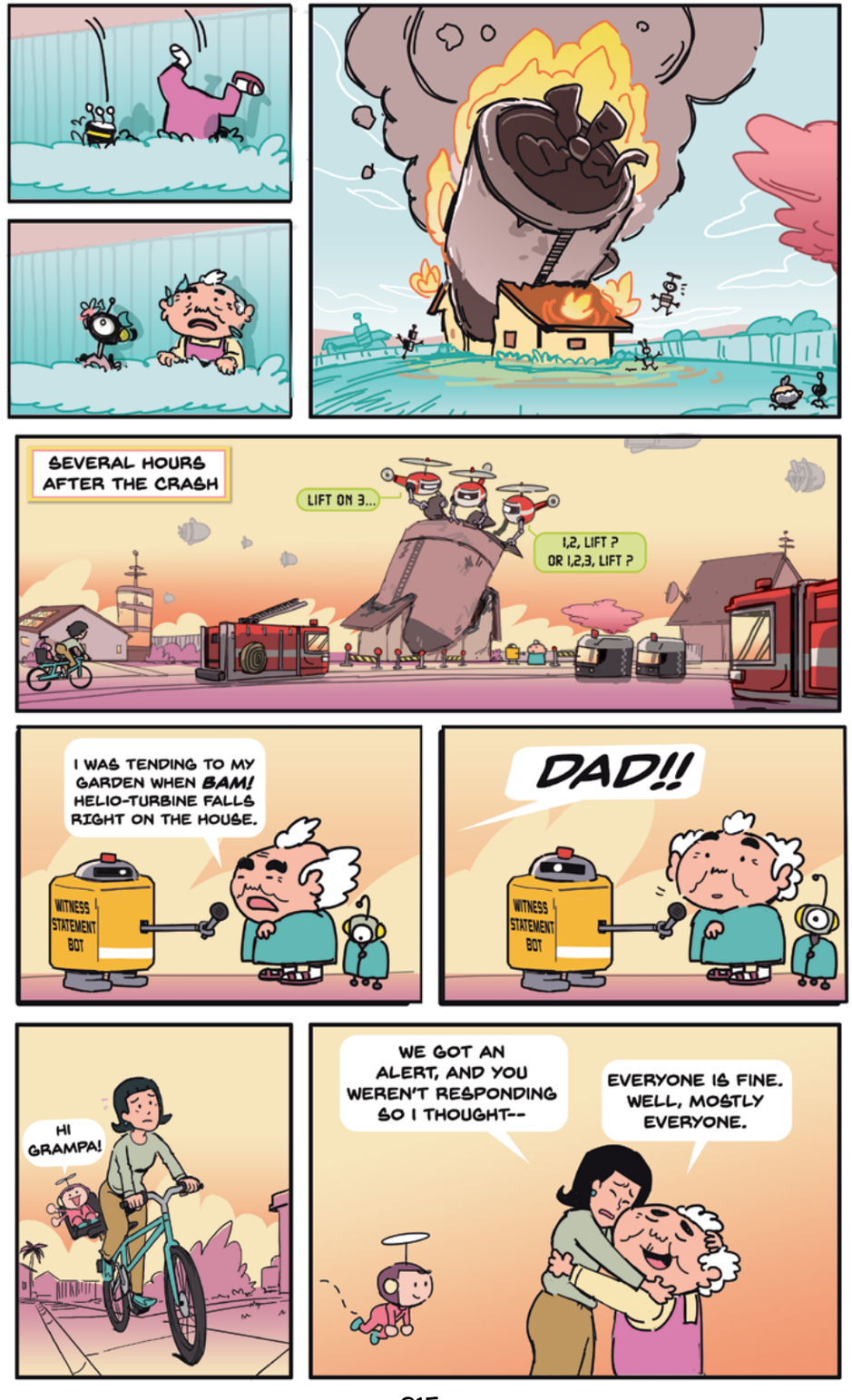
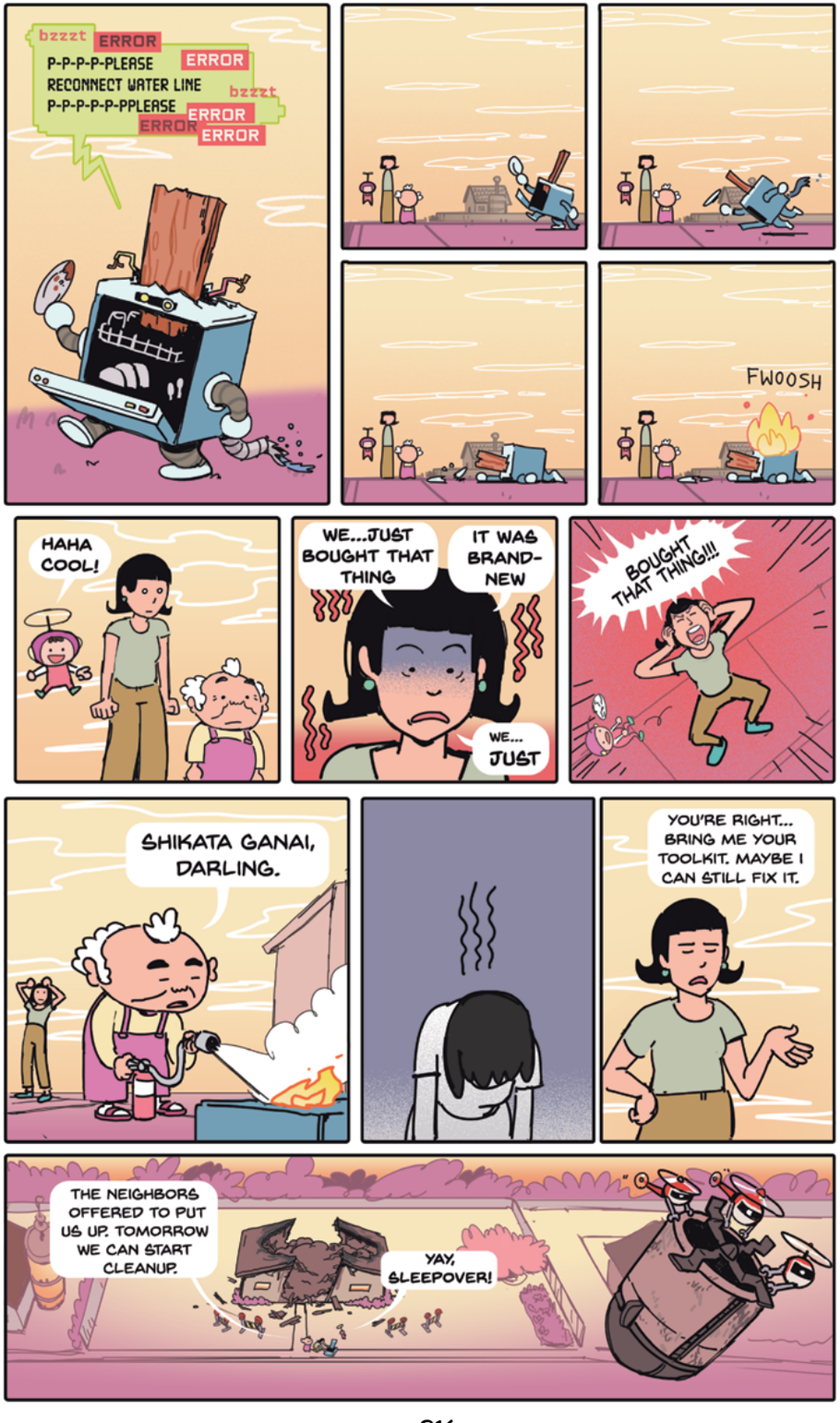
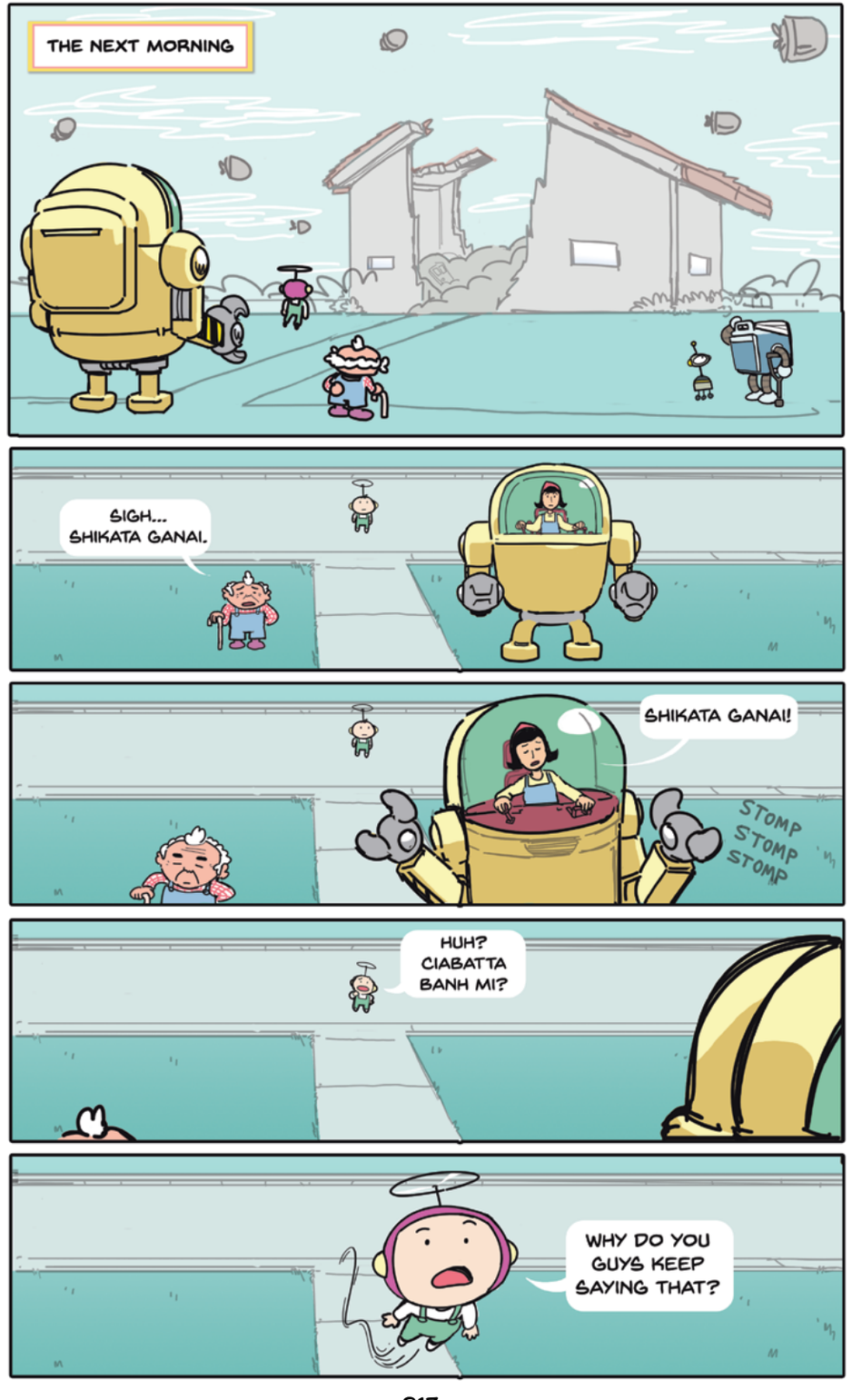
SHIKATA GANAI

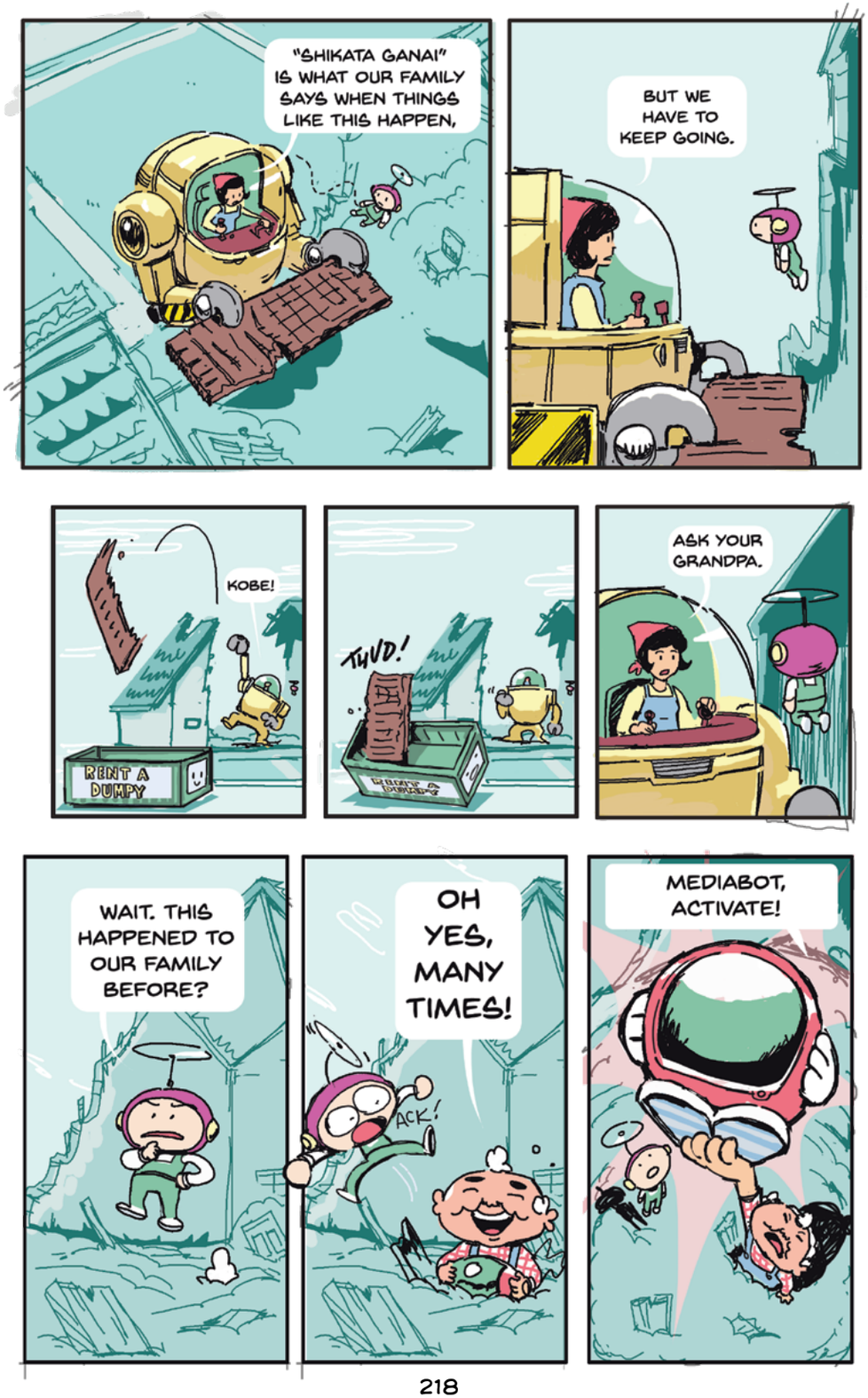
BY STEPHEN LEE






bzzzt ERROR
P-P-P-P-PLEASE ERROR
RECONNECT WATER LINE bzzzt
P-P-P-P-P-PPLEASE ERROR
ERROR ERROR
FWOOSH
HAHA COOL!
WE...JUST BOUGHT THAT THING
IT WAS BRAND-NEW
WE... JUST
BOUGHT THAT THING!!!
SHIKATA GANAI, DARLING.
YOU'RE RIGHT... BRING ME YOUR TOOLKIT. MAYBE I CAN STILL FIX IT.
THE NEIGHBORS OFFERED TO PUT US UP. TOMORROW WE CAN START CLEANUP.
YAY, SLEEPOVER!

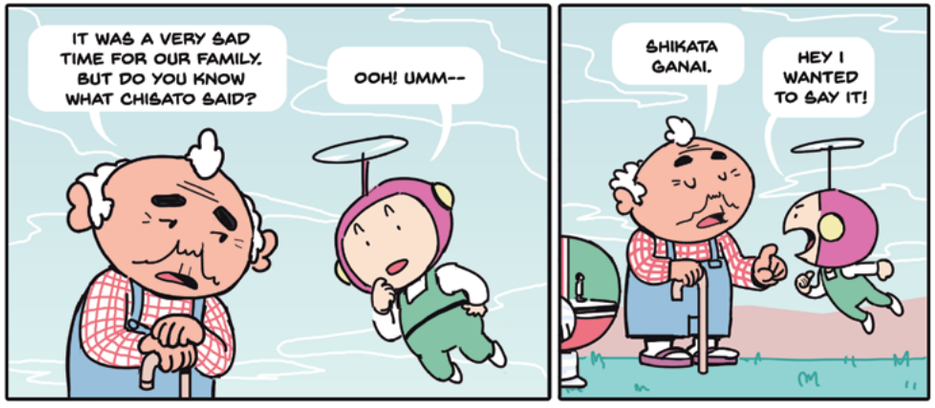

THE NEXT MORNING
SIGH... SHIKATA GANAI.
SHIKATA GANAI!
STOMP STOMP STOMP
HUH? CIABATTA BANH MI?
WHY DO YOU GUYS KEEP SAYING THAT?

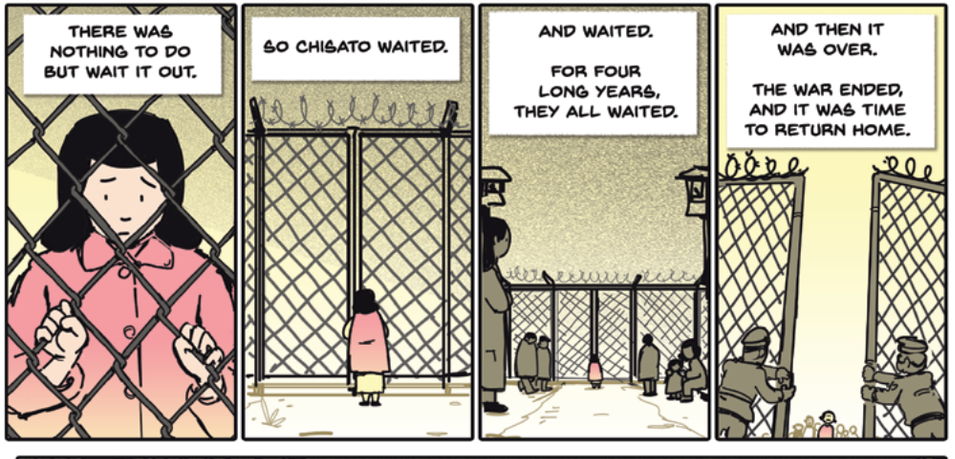

"SHIKATA GANAI" IS WHAT OUR FAMILY SAYS WHEN THINGS LIKE THIS HAPPEN,
BUT WE HAVE TO KEEP GOING.
KOBE!
RENT A DUMPY
THUD!
ASK YOUR GRANDPA.
WAIT. THIS HAPPENED TO OUR FAMILY BEFORE?
OH YES, MANY TIMES!
ACK!
MEDIABOT, ACTIVATE!


SPROING!
Rumble Rumble
HELLO, MILES! TODAY IS TUESDAY, MARCH 9TH, 2125. THE TIME IS 9:33 AM. TODAY'S WORD OF THE DAY IS SKIBIDI! SKIBIDI (ADJ):--
BONK!
ENOUGH OF THAT. MEDIABOT, PLEASE PULL UP FILE "FAMILY_HISTORY.MP9"
SEARCHING... SEARCHING...
AHA!
SHIRO.MP4
GRAMPA, IS THIS GONNA BE BORING?
HIRO, THIS IS A STORY ABOUT YOU! HOW CAN IT BE BORING?
IT ALL STARTED WITH YOUR GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GREAT GRANDFATHER, SHIRO.


SHIRO WAS THE FIRST MEMBER OF OUR FAMILY TO COME TO AMERICA.
HE SAID GOODBYE TO HIS FAMILY AND LEFT BEHIND EVERYTHING HE KNEW FOR A NEW LIFE ACROSS THE SEA.
HE SET OFF,
TRAVERSING THE PACIFIC OCEAN
AND ENDING UP NOT FAR FROM HERE, IN PASADENA WORKING IN A FACTORY DYEING OSTRICH FEATHERS.
IT WAS GRUELNG WORK, AND SHIRO WAS ALONE.
EVERYONE HE KNEW AND LOVED WAS AN OCEAN AWAY FROM HIM.
BUT SHIRO DIDN'T GIVE UP.
HE SAID
shikata ganai.
AND PERSISTED.

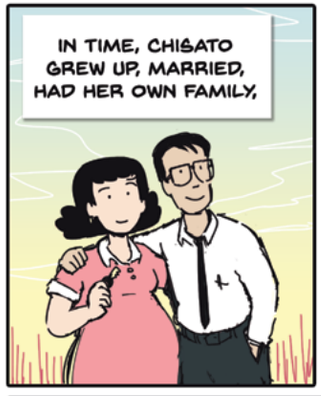

SHIRO MADE A LIFE HERE, MARRYING AND HAVING CHILDREN OF HIS OWN,
INCLUDING YOUR GREAT-GREAT-GREAT GRANDMOTHER CHISATO.
CHISATO'S FAMILY COULD AFFORD AN ALL-AMERICAN LIFE FOR THE FIRST TIME: NICE CLOTHES, A HOUSE, EVEN SOME FANCY VEHICLE CALLED A "CADILLAC."
A WORLD WAR CHANGED THAT.
WAR! JAPAN BOMBS HAWAII
JAPAN AND AMERICA DECLARED EACH OTHER ENEMIES, AND OVERNIGHT,
JAPANESE AMERICANS LIKE OUR FAMILY WERE VIEWED AS ENEMIES AS WELL.
FAMILIES LIKE OURS WERE ROUNDED UP, PUT ON BUSES AND TAKEN FAR, FAR AWAY,
TO INTERNMENT CAMPS WITH BARBED WIRE AND WATCHTOWERS,
AND CRAMMED INTO DRAFTY BARRACKS, TWO FAMILIES TO A ROOM.
THIS WASN'T THE LIFE CHISATO HAD DREAMED OF.

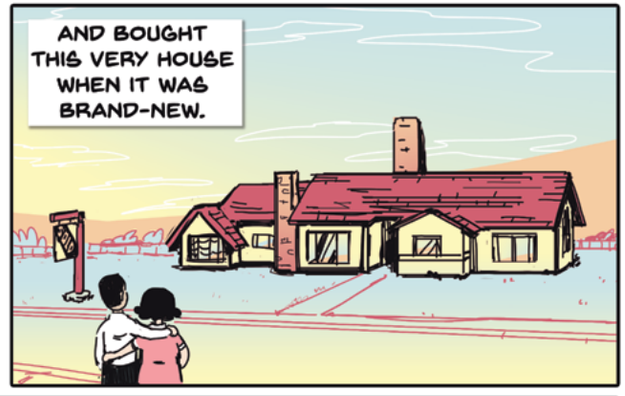

IT WAS A VERY SAD TIME FOR OUR FAMILY. BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT CHISATO SAID?
OOH! UMM--
SHIKATA GANAI.
HEY I WANTED TO SAY IT!

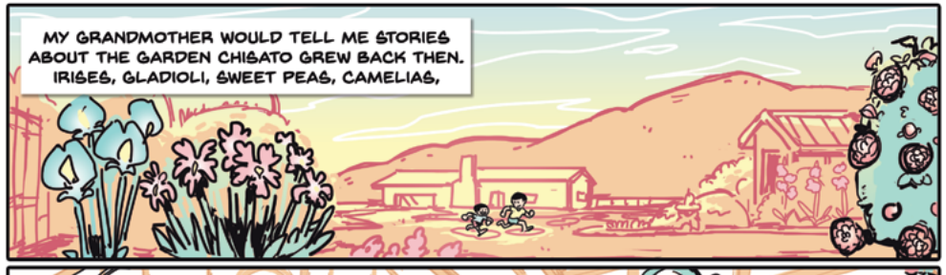

THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT WAIT IT OUT.
SO CHISATO WAITED.
AND WAITED.
FOR FOUR LONG YEARS, THEY ALL WAITED.
AND THEN IT WAS OVER.
THE WAR ENDED, AND IT WAS TIME TO RETURN HOME.

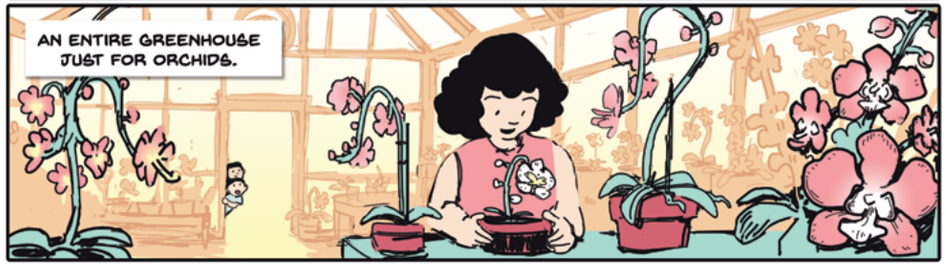

A FOUR-YEAR SENTENCE SERVED FOR THE CRIME OF BEING JAPANESE.

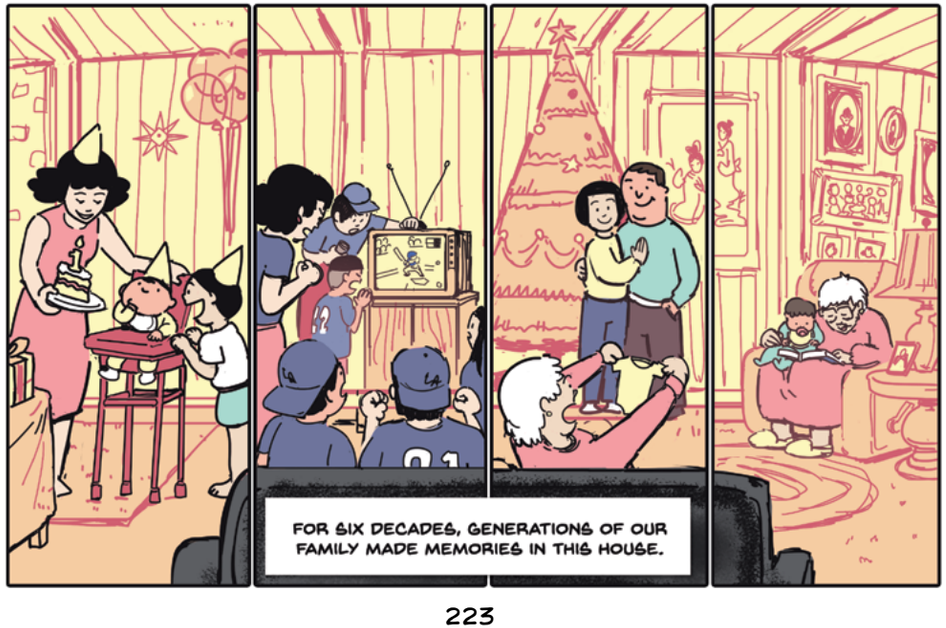

NO "I'M SORRY", NO RESOLUTION.
SHIKATA GANAI.

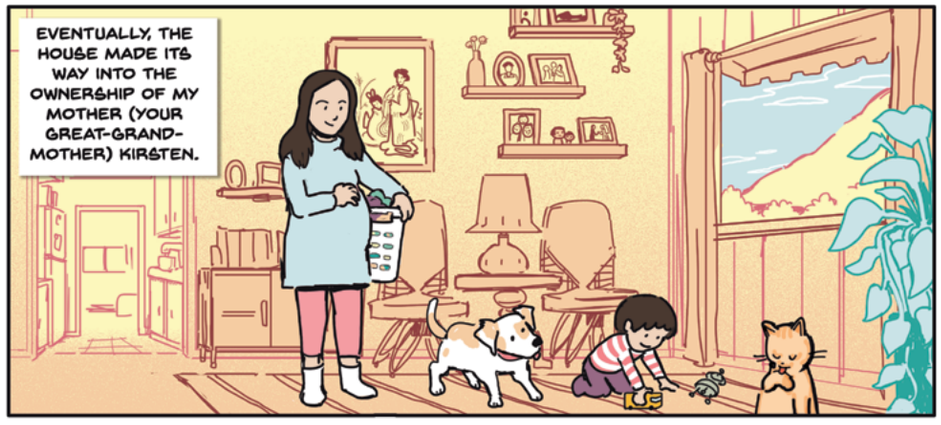

IN TIME, CHISATO GREW UP, MARRIED, HAD HER OWN FAMILY,

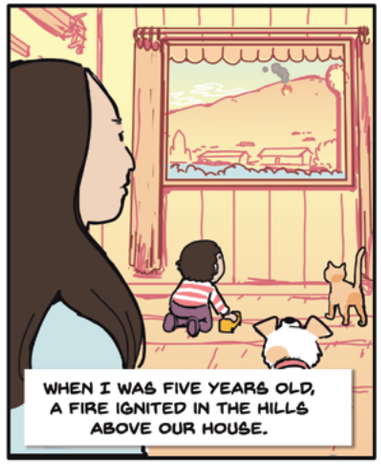

AND BOUGHT THIS VERY HOUSE WHEN IT WAS BRAND-NEW.

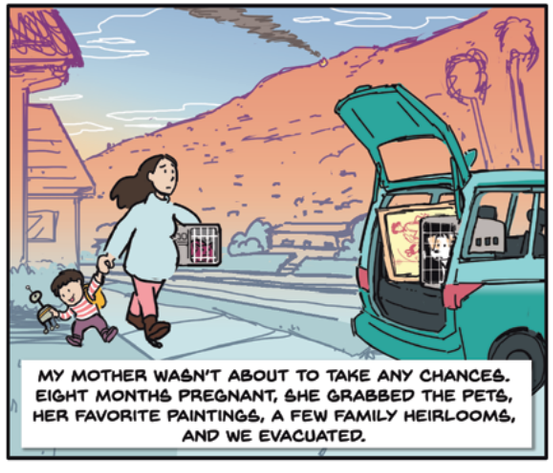

MY GRANDMOTHER WOULD TELL ME STORIES ABOUT THE GARDEN CHISATO GREW BACK THEN. IRISES, GLADIOLI, SWEET PEAS, CAMELIAS,


AN ENTIRE GREENHOUSE JUST FOR ORCHIDS.


FOR SIX DECADES, GENERATIONS OF OUR FAMILY MADE MEMORIES IN THIS HOUSE.

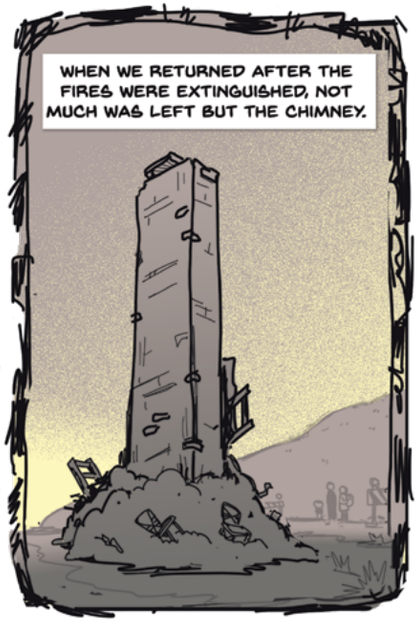

EVENTUALLY, THE HOUSE MADE ITS WAY INTO THE OWNERSHIP OF MY MOTHER (YOUR GREAT-GRAND-MOTHER) KIRSTEN.

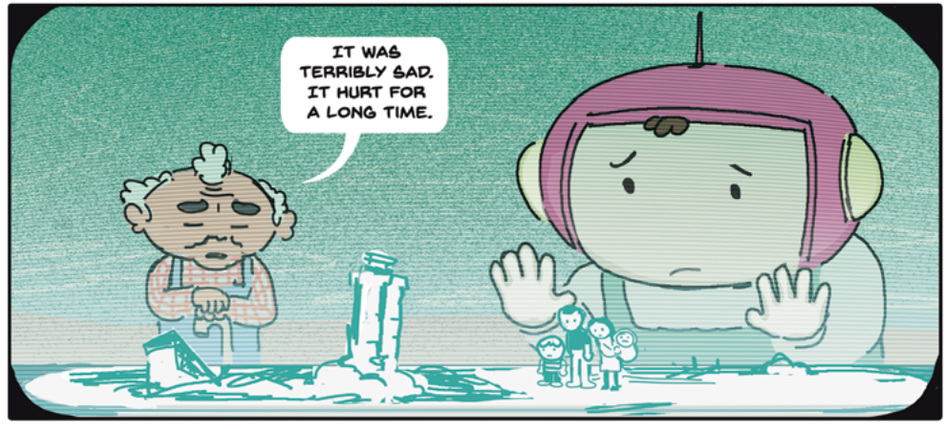

WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD, A FIRE IGNITED IN THE HILLS ABOVE OUR HOUSE.


MY MOTHER WASN'T ABOUT TO TAKE ANY CHANCES. EIGHT MONTHS PREGNANT, SHE GRABBED THE PETS, HER FAVORITE PAINTINGS, A FEW FAMILY HEIRLOOMS, AND WE EVACUATED.

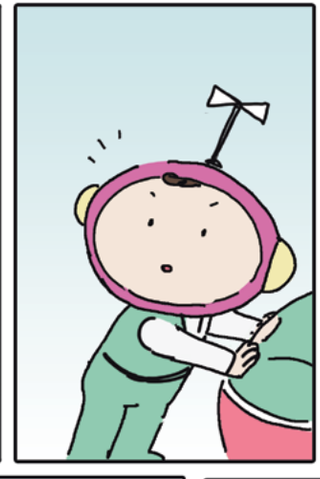

WE ASSUMED THE FIRE WOULD BE PUT OUT, AND WE COULD RETURN HOME IN A DAY OR TWO.


UNFORTUNATELY, THAT WASN'T THE CASE.

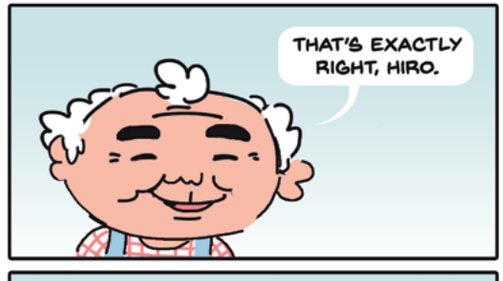

WHEN WE RETURNED AFTER THE FIRES WERE EXTINGUISHED, NOT MUCH WAS LEFT BUT THE CHIMNEY.


IT WAS TERRIBLY SAD. IT HURT FOR A LONG TIME.


BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT WE SAID?

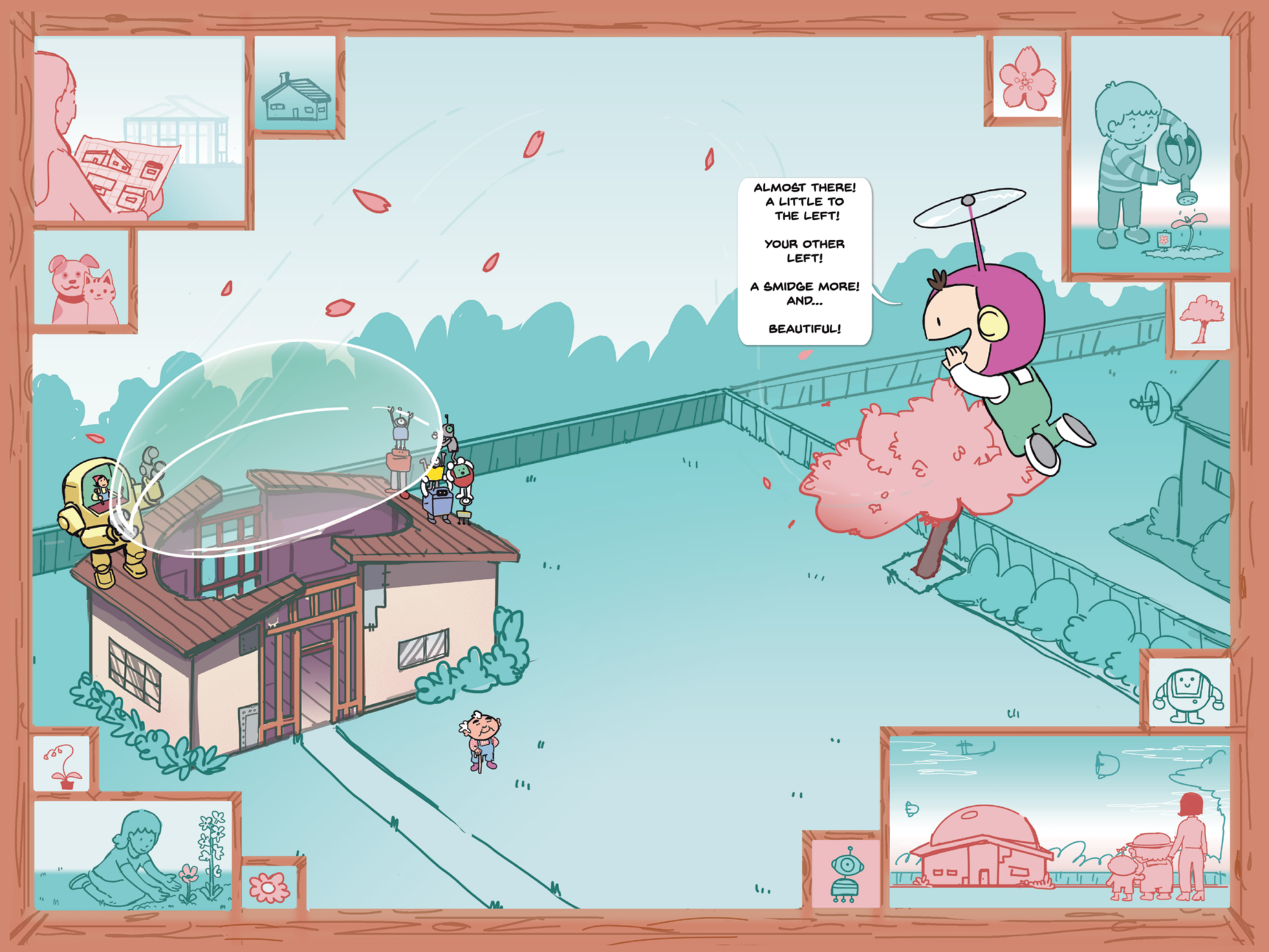



SHIKATA GANAI.


THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT, HIRO.


WE REBUILT THEN. WE WILL REBUILD NOW, TOO.


MEDIABOT, START RECORDING. IT'S TIME TO ADD A NEW CHAPTER TO OUR FAMILY STORY.


ALMOST THERE! A LITTLE TO THE LEFT!
YOUR OTHER LEFT!
A SMIDGE MORE! AND...
BEAUTIFUL!

Nonprofit Spotlight

For each of our free eBooks, the storytellers select a local nonprofit to highlight. The creator of "Shikata Ganai" chose Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California.

ASIAN AMERICANS ADVANCING JUSTICE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

From the Creator

"Shikata Ganai" is all about how ripples from past events continue to affect our world today, both good and bad. I chose AAAJSC as my nonprofit because the advancements PoC have made isn't guaranteed—it requires constant vigilance like the work that AAAJSC does."

--Stephen Lee, Creator of "Shikata Ganai"

You can read about and donate to the AAAJSC here.

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