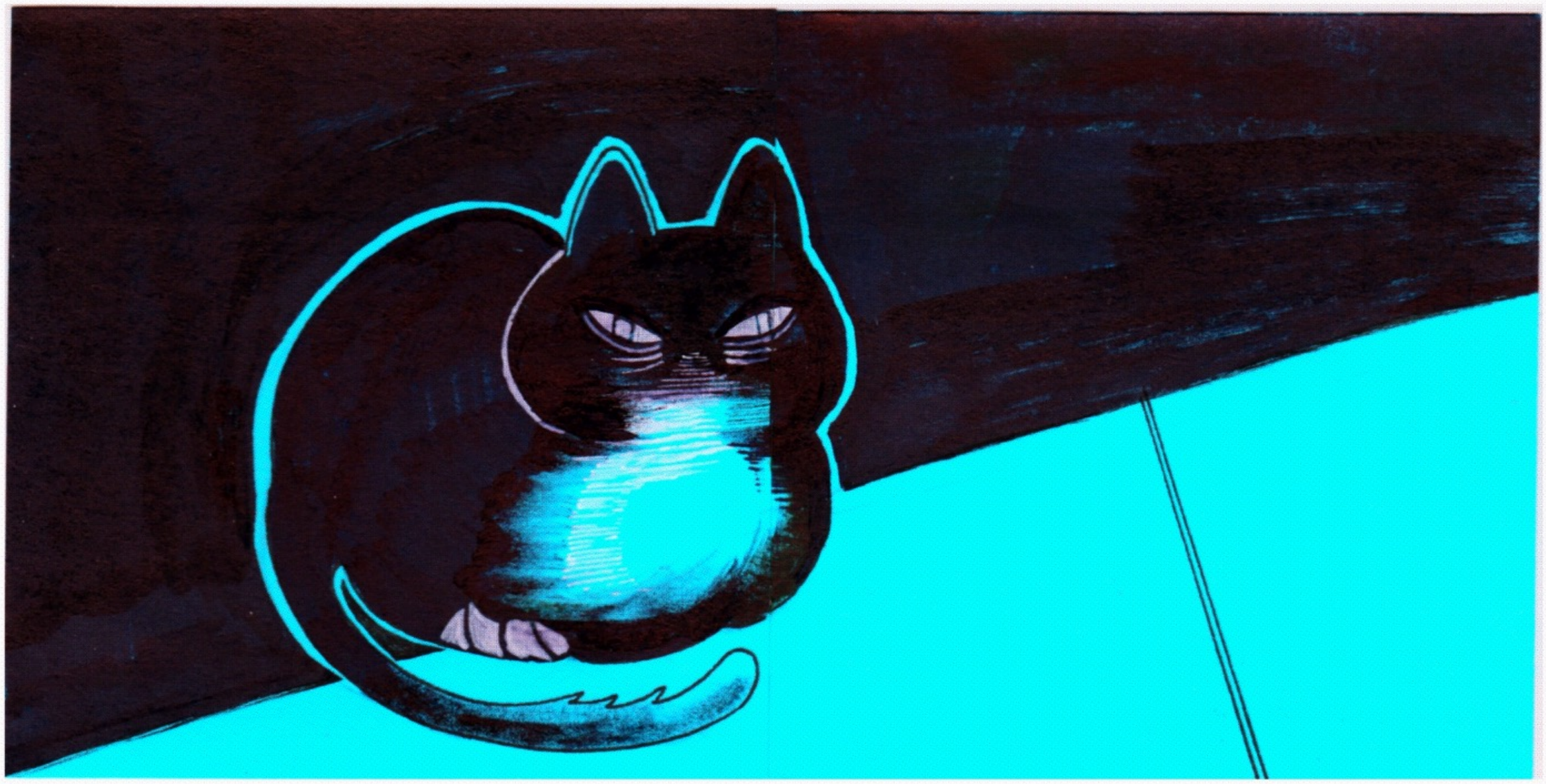

MOM PLACES A PLATTER of crumbly apple pies and strawberry shortcakes stuffed with sweet cream on the dining table. I see it's tucked itself neatly into the armchair. The room smells different, not like the usual sandalwood air freshener that gets sprayed everywhere. *It* sits perfectly still, on the bleached leather armchair, not moving, barely breathing. Like there's something inside of *it* that it's holding onto with a leash, like it'll come snarling right out of *it* if it's not careful. Its left paw is swollen with bandages. I get distracted for a second thinking about the rerun of Futurama on TV tonight, and then my attention trickles back towards *it* on the other side of the coffee table. It's still staring at me; its eyes are guarded behind all too bright pupils, its expression unnaturally passive like the deathly-still surface of a lake.