

Welcome to NEW DAWN

BY ZUMMENG

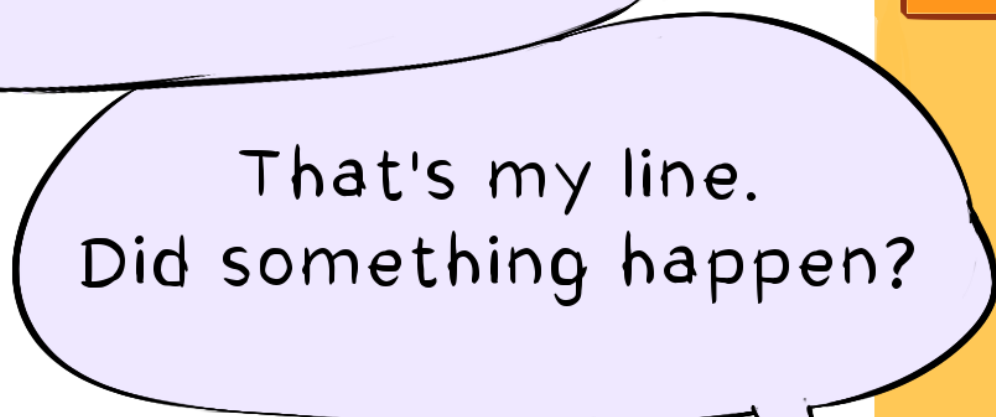
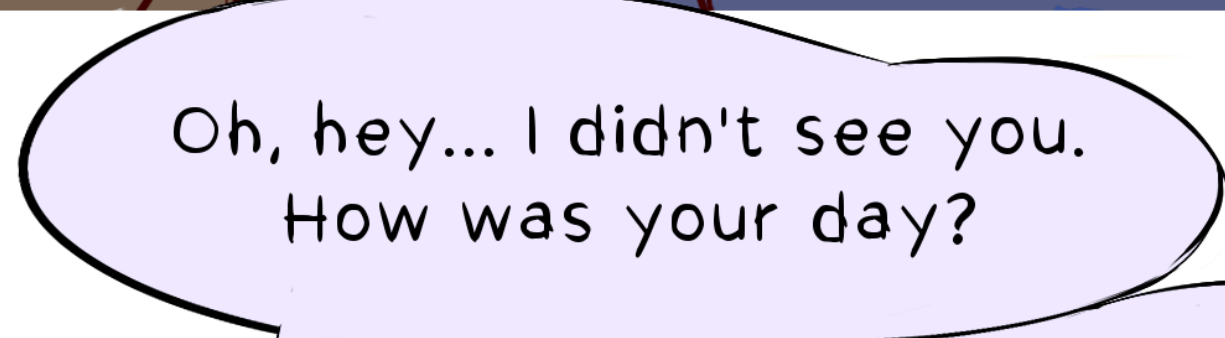
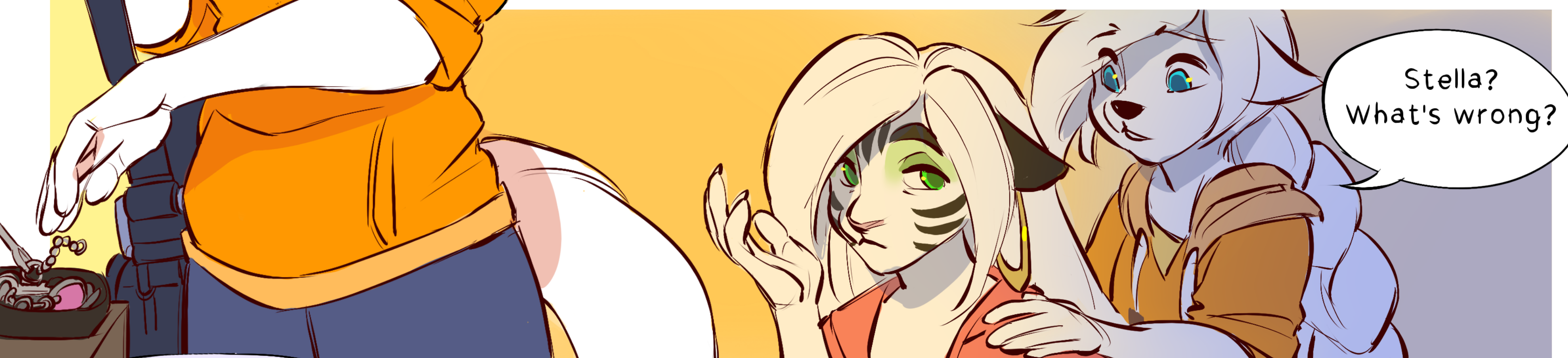


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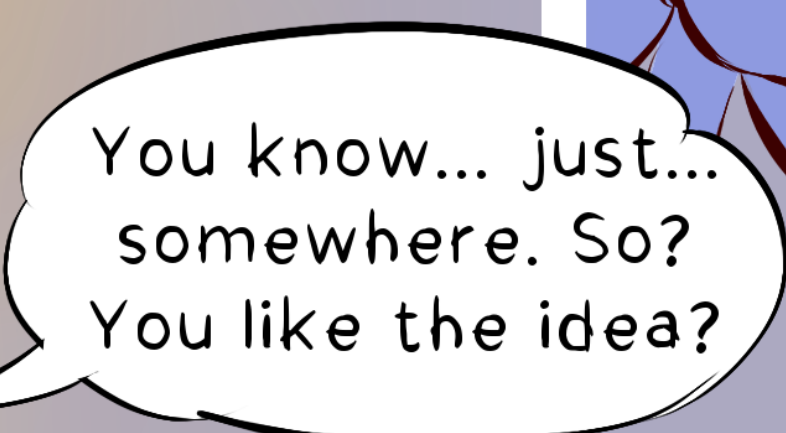
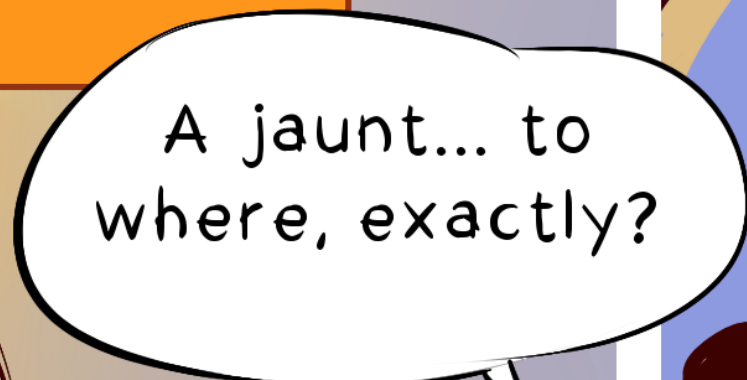
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Estella always thought she can hide her feelings well from me.



But it was quite the opposite.



And even if I hate when she tries to act like nothing hurts her...



...I would never ever let her face her demons alone.

The little weekend jaunt was silent. Too silent, actually.

With Stella, not a single moment passes without her tattling.

I mean usually, not right now.



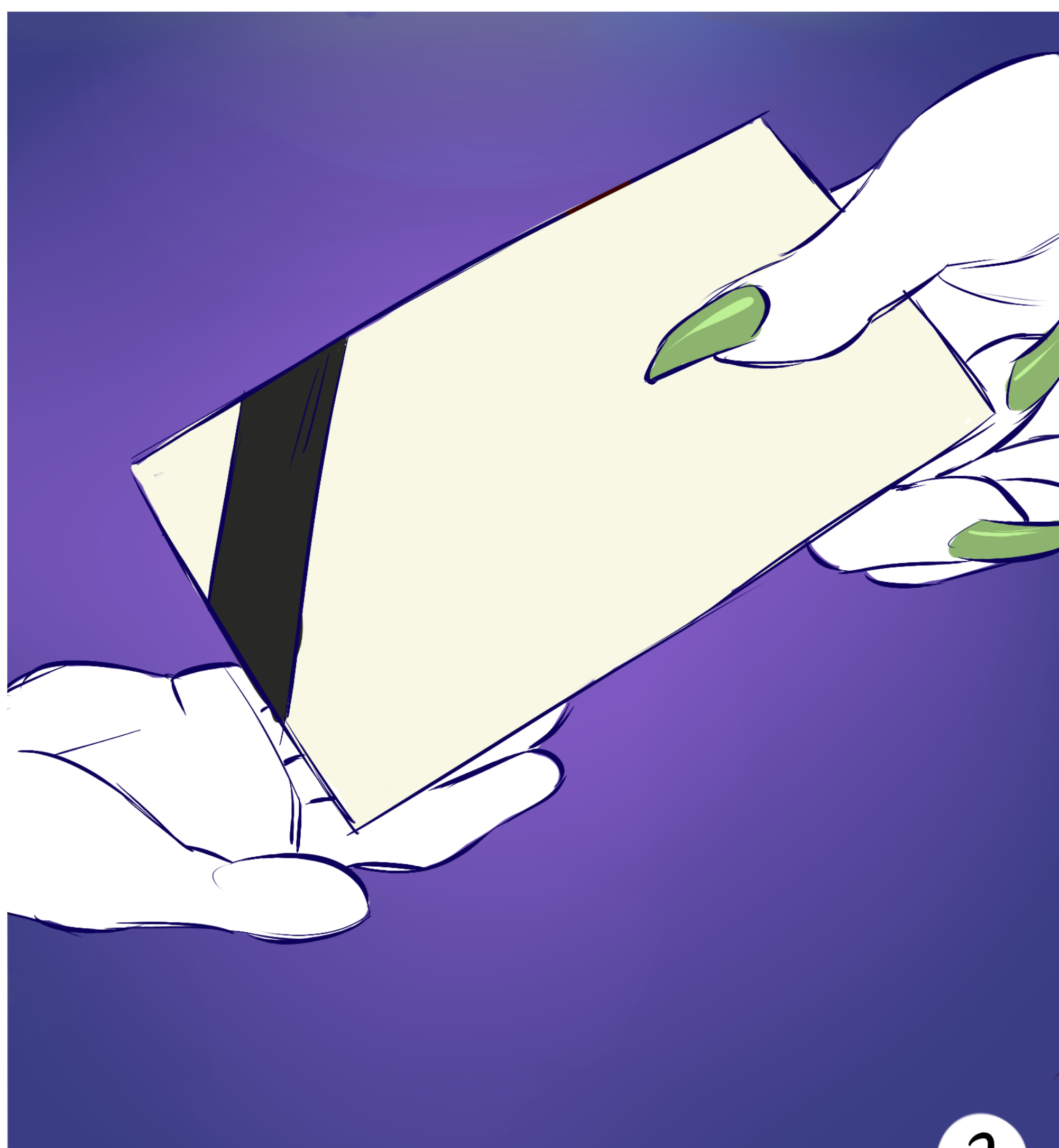
But I understood it pretty fast.



Or rather "not fast enough" as Stella would surely say.



Stella... Why... are we here?



Stella... This is...



I'm sorry I didn't tell
you anything...
I just... I didn't want to
scare you, you know?
I'm really sorry, but...
I just can't do this alone!



You could have
just said it.
I would never
leave you on
your own.
You know that.



You know very well it's not
just about me.



I know.

...
Thank you.

Well, this really looks like an interesting little jaunt.

Hmm, I'm still not sure if I should start
crying now, or later.



Welcome
to
New Dawn

I'm sure I should do it
later, yeah...

So weird... It's like everything has changed in the past ten years.



Everything looks so different. So... bright?

Can the Earth's orbit around the Sun change in only ten years?



Nah, that sounds stupid!

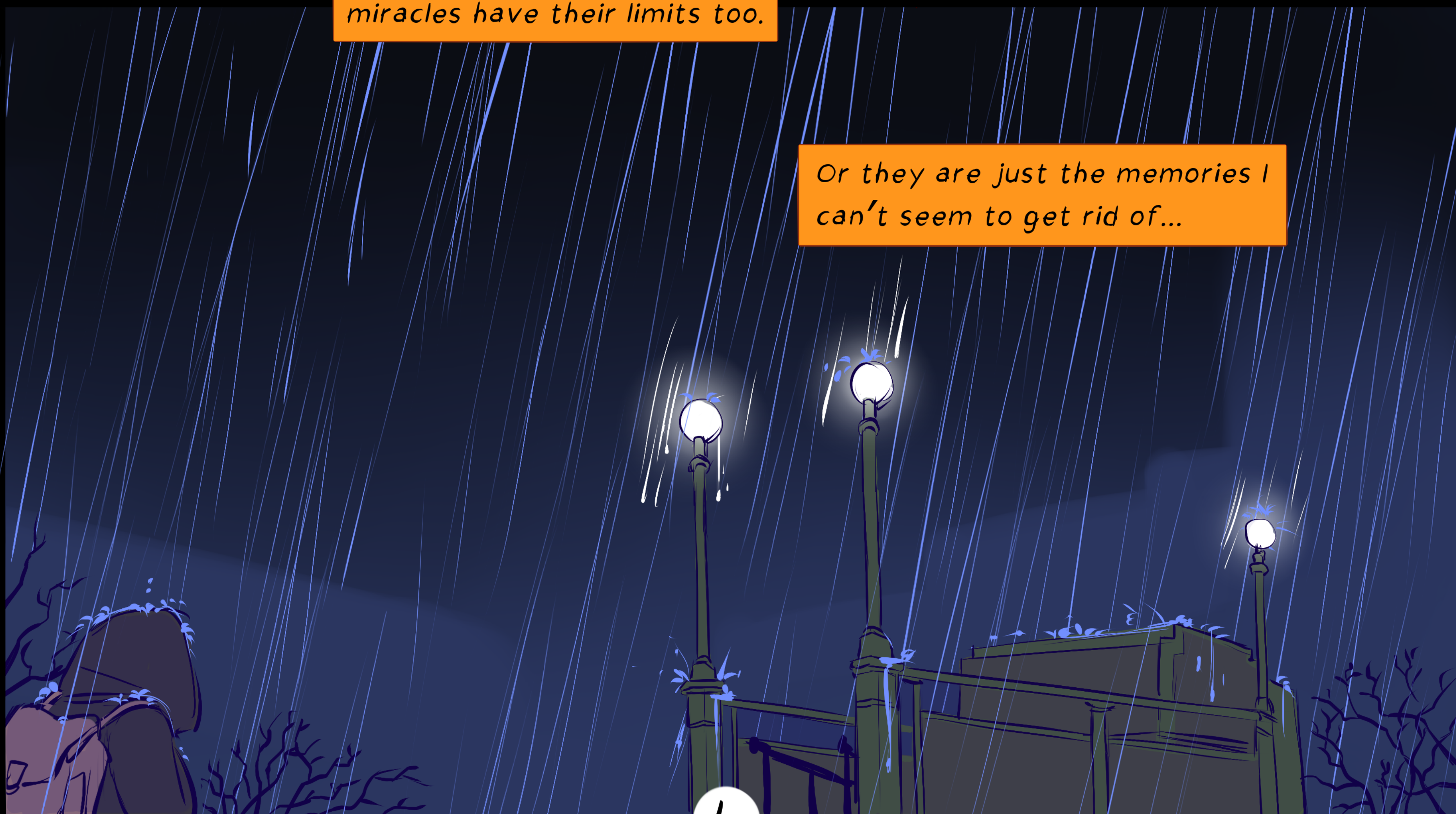


But I'll google it a bit later. Just to be safe.



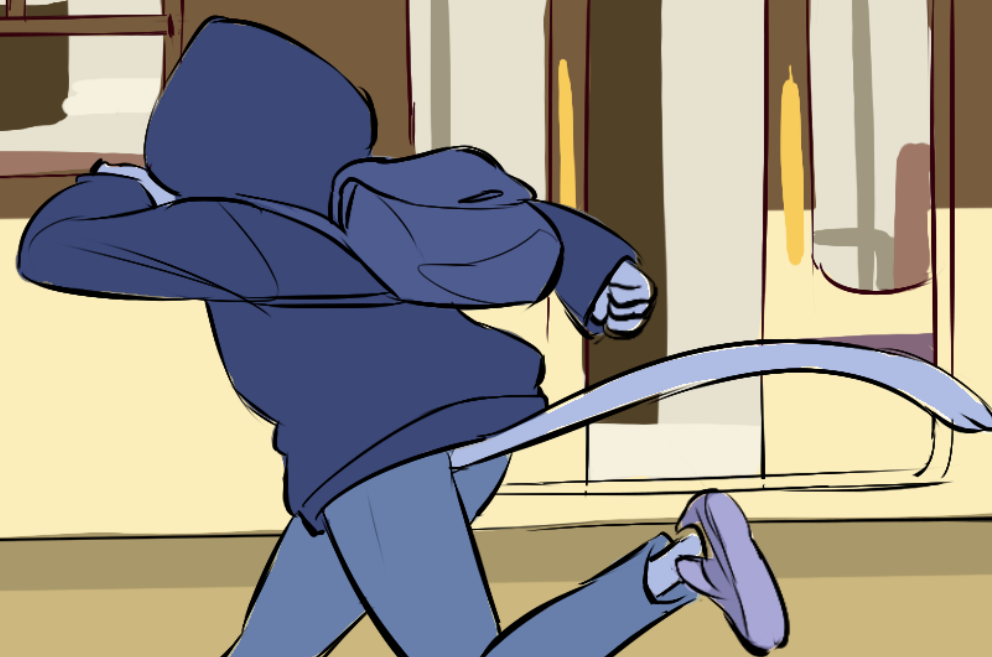
Well, looks like the Sun's miracles have their limits too.

Or they are just the memories I can't seem to get rid of...



It's funny how deep a few memories from the past can bury themselves in your head.

A few of them are still so vivid I can even remember how warm it was, and what scents were around me.



I remember, back then only solitude could calm me down a bit.

I... I made it...

It's funny that only the empty metro at late night could provide some peace.

Every time I had to be around people, I could feel them staring at me.

I could feel their judgment. Their contempt. The disgust.

At least that's how I felt back then.

But the moment I first met Estella...

*I could **NEVER** forget that moment.*

Sometimes I wish it would be easier to forget...

In that ice cold, stinky old metro.

Not that I want to.

Only a few of her wounds were fresh. Her face and arms were covered in scars and bruises.

That wasn't the first time she was in such a horrible condition.

Fucking asshole! Fuck! That stupid dickhead...

And not the last one either.

I've never seen such rage and hatred in a single person before.

I could almost feel it burning my skin.

I always tried to stay as far away as possible from everyone.

When someone entered the same vagon where I was sitting, I always went and tried to find an empty one.

But not that night.

Goddammit...

I still don't know to this day what made me step to her instead of running away. Maybe the first time in my whole life, I felt...

H-h-hi...

What the hell do you want?

...that I could finally be of use...

...even if all I could offer was a few tissues.

H-h-here...

Oh...

Thank you...

W-w-who... d-d-did this to y-y-you...?

You know, I really appreciate the tissues, but maybe you are not the person I want to discuss it with.

And for some reason, the first time in my life, I just couldn't stop talking.

Oh... y-y-yeah... I u-u-understand...

D-d-does it hurt...?

Hurts like hell. But I'm already used to this.

B-b-but that's... not good. I-I-I mean... when p-p-pain is p-p-part of your l-l-life.

True...

But it's still better than living it through every time like it was the first. If you slowly get used to it, it gets easier to bare every time.

Until that day, that was the saddest, most painful thing I've ever heard in my life. Maybe because I realised, I felt the same way.

I-I-I'm sorry, t-t-that's all I h-h-had.

D-d-do you t-t-travel around h-h-here often?

Not really. I just... had some business around here, that's all.

I-I-If you think, I c-c-could show you the n-n-nearest hospital, or p-p-pharmacy, or...

No need for that, thanks. I'll live.

Oh, no problem. They actually helped a lot.

But...

I'm sure others have these moments in their life too, when you just act unconsciously. When your body just acts on it's own.

That was one of those moments.

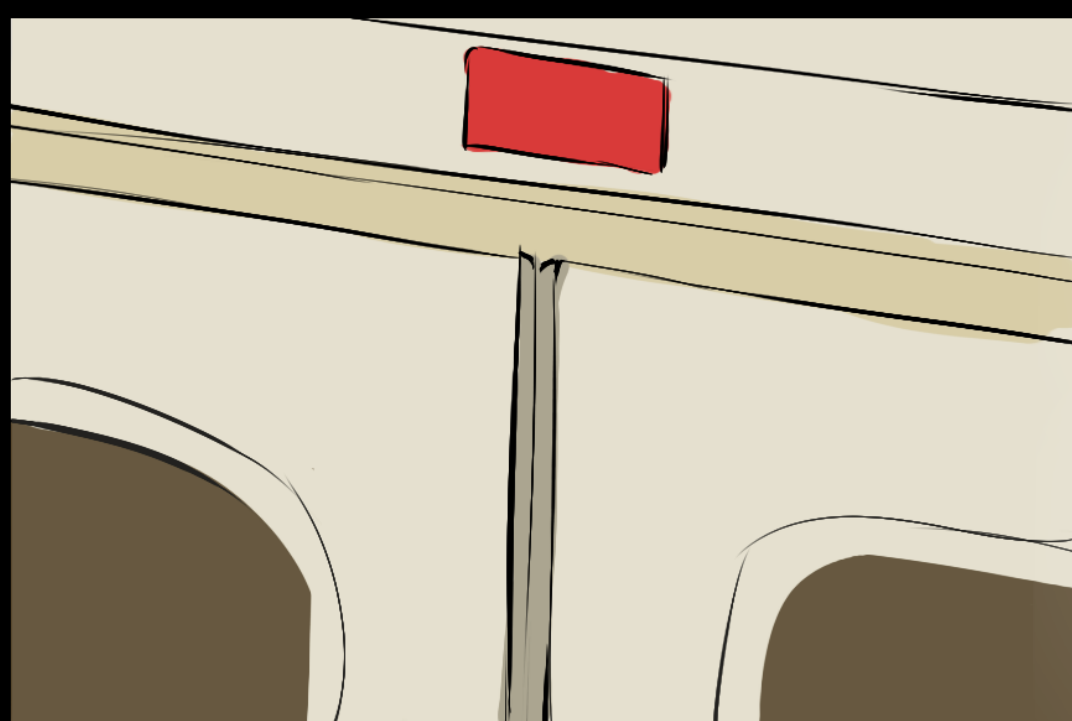
Yeah, just one. I had a lot more of those later on.

Aaand I still do...

You are still bleeding...



As I **SAID**, I'll be fine!



I... really have to go now... Still have a... lot to do... But thanks for the tissues!



I knew she was lying.

*She just wanted to get rid of that nutty, stuttering girl,
who awkwardly smeared her blood all over her face.*

*And there I was,
alone again.*

*And I was asking to myself
what I have asked countless
times already.*

Why can't I be like everyone else?

Why can't I just be normal?



So?



Sorry, what... ?

What's your answer?

To what?

To the question I just asked two seconds ago, for like the third time already...

Oh. Well... I didn't really pay attention. I phased out a bit...



Do you think I'm nutty?

Of course you are!



But please, don't let the old stuffs come back. You know, I just had the best idea! We settle this shit, then off we go. Never talk about this crap again.

You had some **SERIOUS** moodswing in the last few minutes...

You see, I just realized.



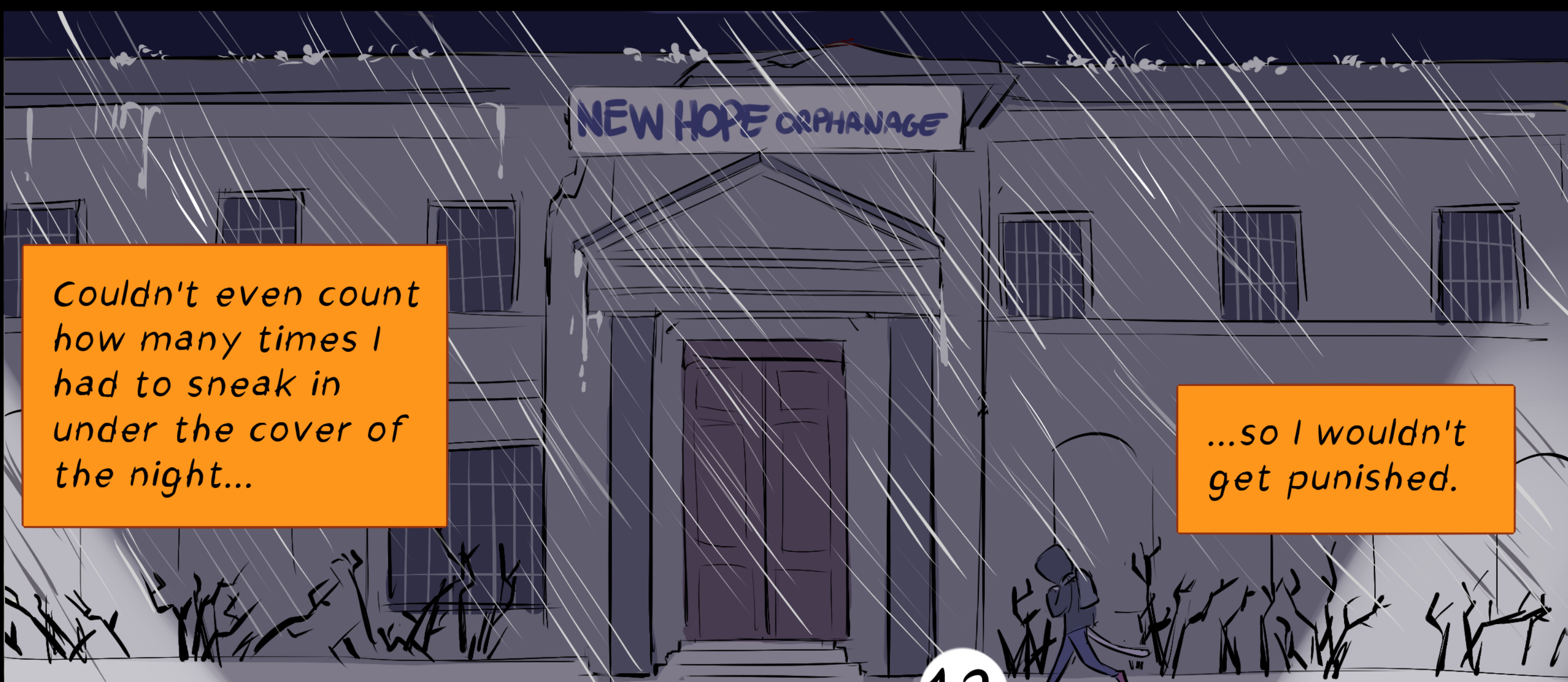
Tomorrow we'll be back to our real life. You know, to our normal life. Not to the old one. Don't let this stupid city get to you. I promise tomorrow we'll go on the bust! We'll go to a cinema, get some dinner in a nice restaurant, get drunk, whatever you'd like. Okay?

Okay. I'll do what I can. But...

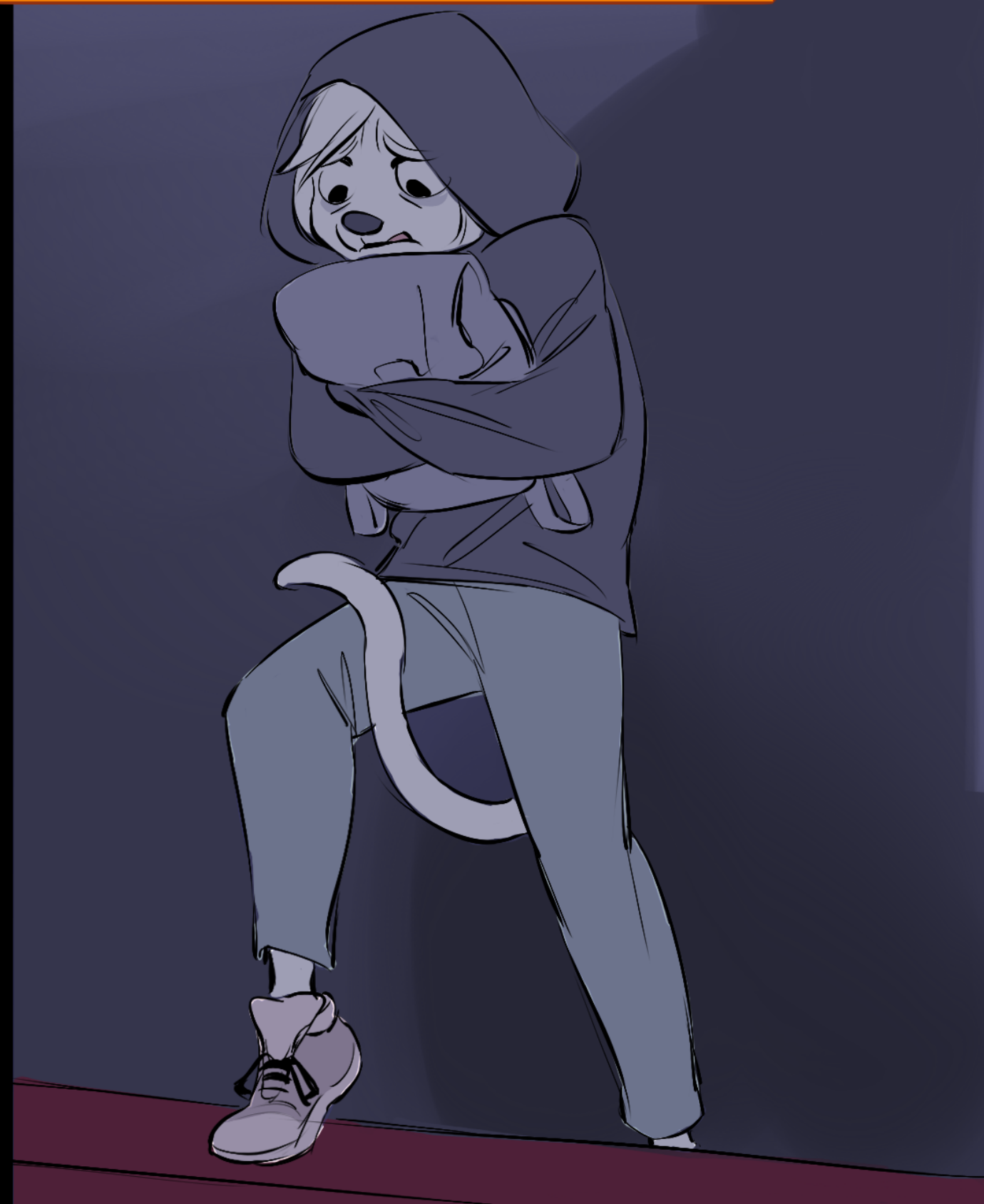


BUT? There is a but again?

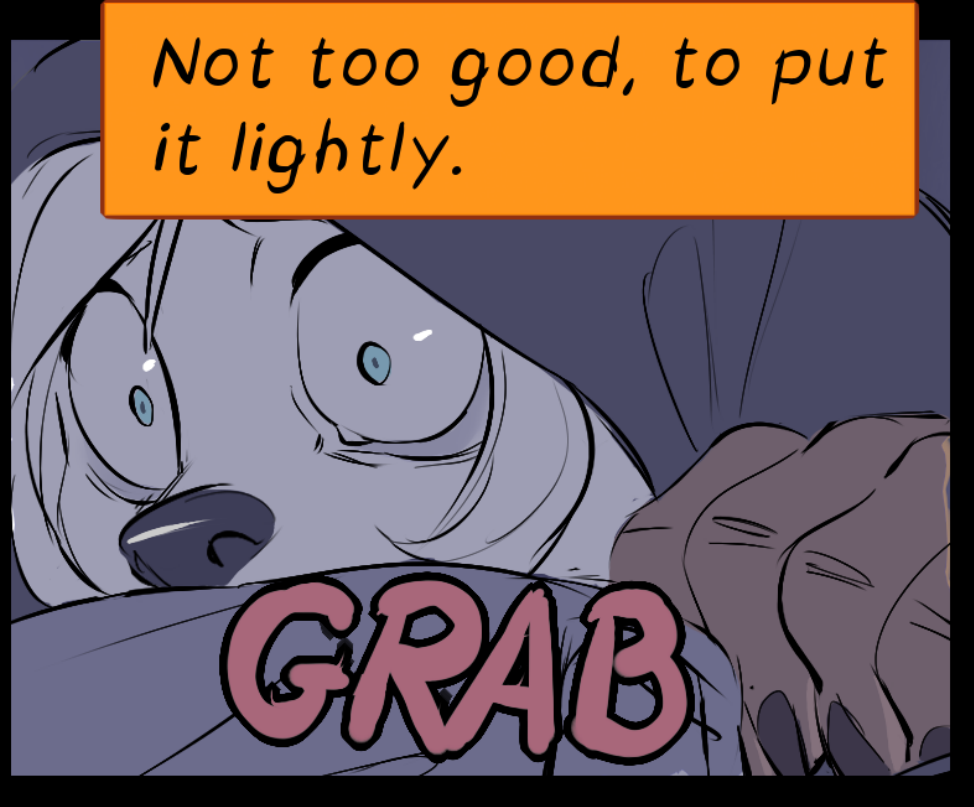
But stop talking like nothing hurts. We talked about this so many times already.



Naturally, as it was rubbed under my nose many times, I was as good in sneaking as I was in any other part of life.



Not too good, to put it lightly.



Is this the time you have to get home you little rat?



I'm s-s-sorry...

You are sorry?
SORRY???

Is that **ALL** you can say every time? That you are sorry? Where in hell were you loitering around again?

It t-t-takes a l-l-lot of time to g-g-get home from w-w-work...

I honestly can't believe that you were the only one who could only find a job at the farthest side of the city!

I-I-I was trying... H-h-honestly...

The rest of the kids could find decent jobs in decent distances. And they aren't just cleaning toilets!

I'm t-t-truly s-s-sorry...

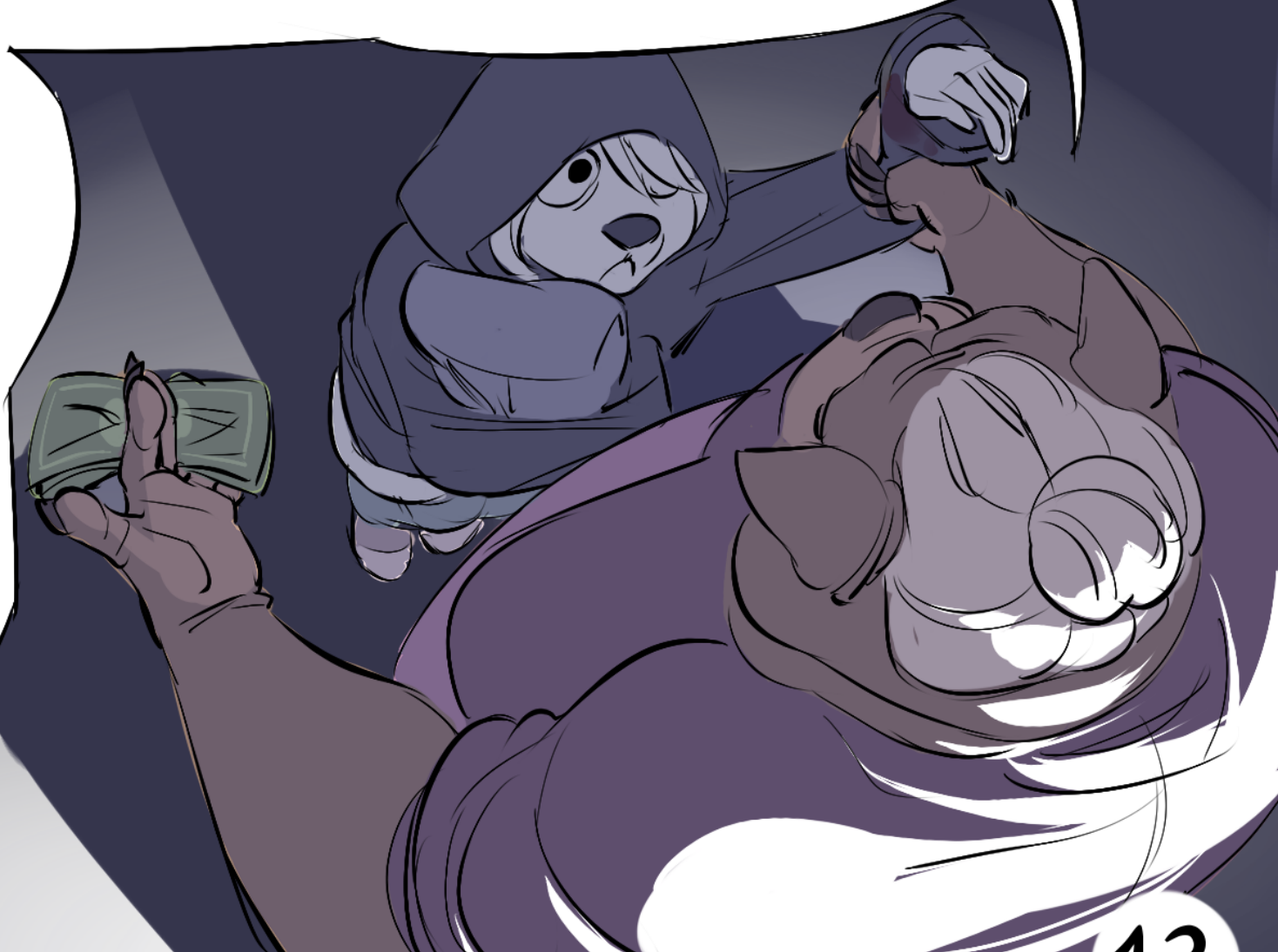
Did you get your paycheck at least?



Y-y-yes...

That's all? Seriously, that is **ALL** you could get with **THAT MUCH** work?

You better do something with yourself, and fast, because I have to feed you from something!



Wait... What's this? What the hell is this?
BLOOD?

Y-y-yes, but it's n-n-not mine, I s-s-swear!

What do you mean it's not yours?

I-I-I just... I j-j-j-just...

What did you get yourself into again?

N-n-nothing! I just... w-w-wanted to... help... s-s-someone...

Oh really? And **COULD** you?

A lot of things hurt that day, but I guess this question hurt the most.

SHAKE

Because I truly believed I couldn't.

And I felt that was my last chance to become a normal human being.

Because you are **ABSOLUTELY** incapable to get home in time, you go and make the toilets crystal clean. All of them. At least you might be capable of that... And this was the **VERY LAST** time I let you away with this much.

Next time I'm going to stint you of food. Understand?

Y-y-yes m-m-ma'am...

But maybe you are already used to that... Whatever, get out of my sight!

But don't forget, you barely have three years left! So make an effort!

And do something with that **INFURIATING** stuttering of yours for god's sake, it's driving everyone crazy!

Less than three years before reaching the upper age limit of the orphanage...

If a resident couldn't get a proper job till then, they are out in the street. At least that's how it was back then.

I asked if that ever happened to anyone. The answer was always the same.

They said: "There was no precedent for it..."

And then they added: "...so far."



So I would have been unique in that matter.



I always wondered, when the days comes for me to leave, could it be even worse than this?

Or you just can't go deeper from the bottom of the well?

I was certain if there is anyone who could falsify that, it would be me.

Look guys, the stutterer has to lick the toilets clean again!

Hehehe!

W-w-what's the m-m-matter s-s-s-stuttery? Did you fuck up something again?



L-I-leave me alone a-a-already...

Oh, I-I-I-look s-s-stuttery!



YOU MISSED A SPOT!





*But what hurt
the most?*



*That I was unable to give
up hope completely.*



*The hope, that one
day everything will
be different.*

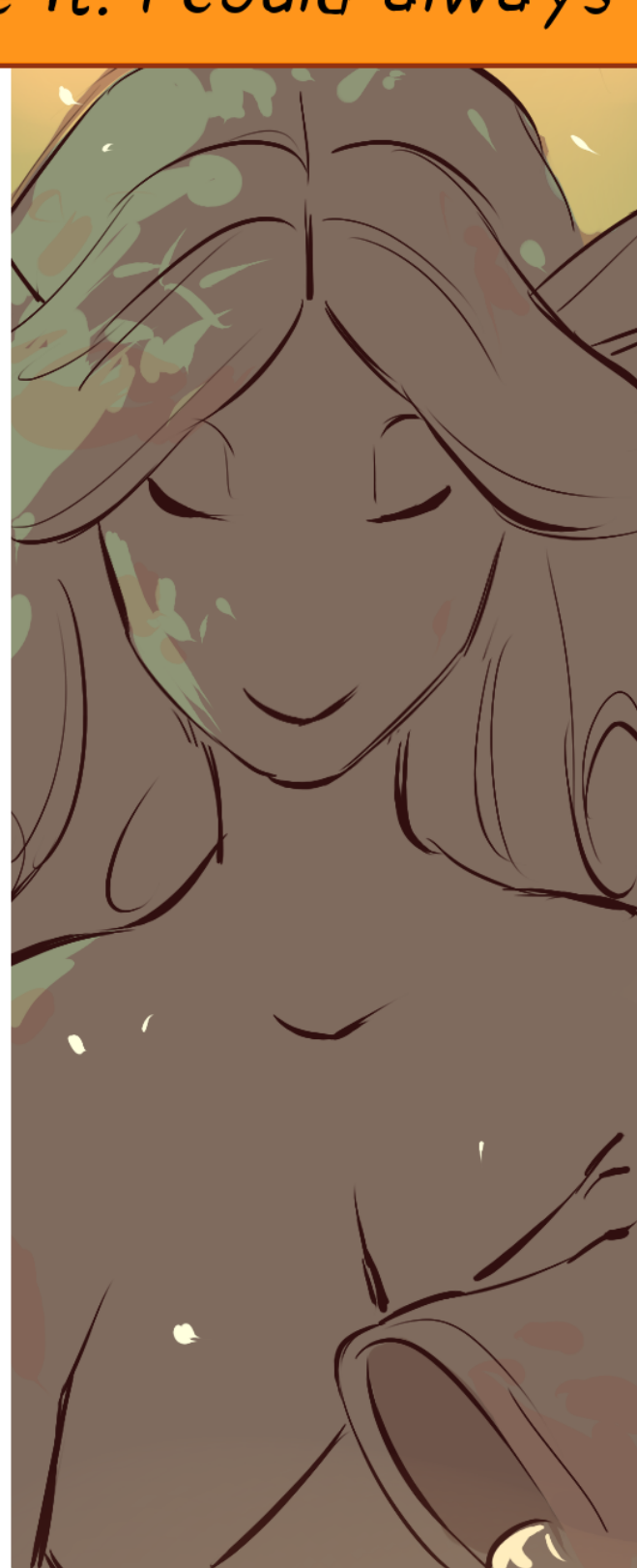
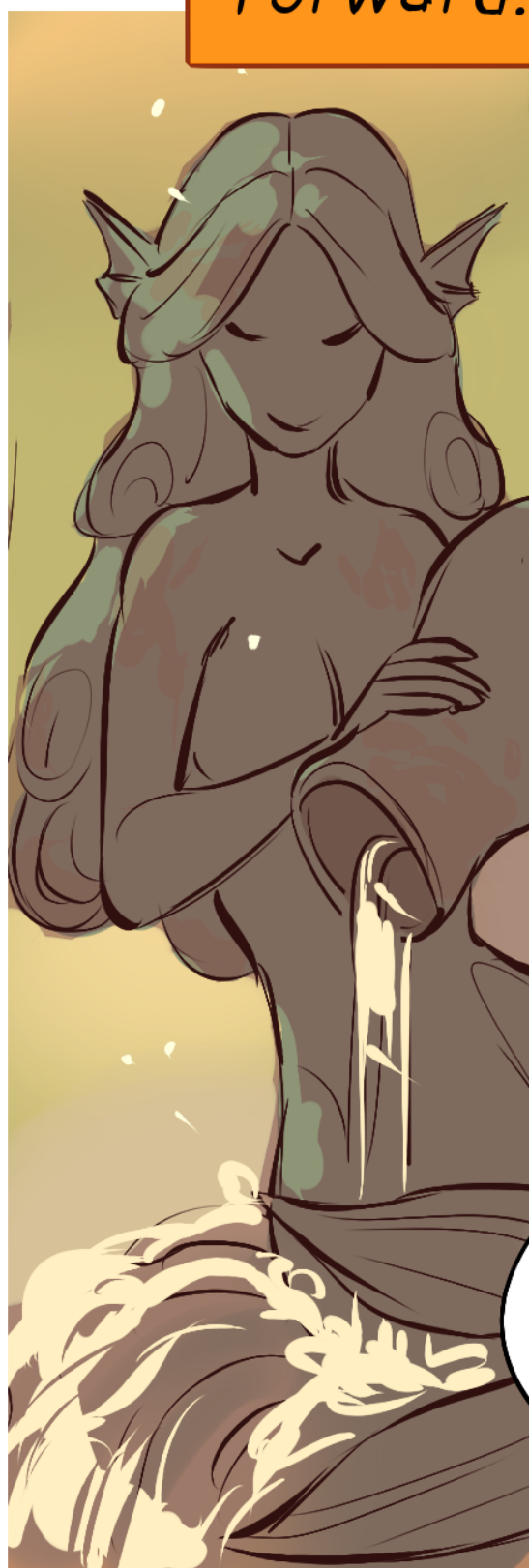


I'm really starting to think that this city might be just like any other one. That maybe only our past and memories make it a hell on earth. And maybe we should just simply move on.

But it's not an easy thing to do... And I'm afraid Stella would even refuse to ever get over our past.

It's like she feels our past is the only thing that makes her who she is. That only our past pushed her to reach for another life.

But it was always our present and future that pushed her forward. I could always see it. I could always feel it.



My god, I can't wait to finally leave this unholy shithole called "city" behind forever...

Stella, don't you think...

If one day I just happen to die, and if I go straight to hell, it would look **EXACTLY** like this goddamn city! But who knows, hell might even be a lot more friendlier place...

Or maybe this **IS** the actually hell itself, but no one realised it yet, because everyone living here is degenerate and blind...

But I'm afraid it will be hard to convince her about that...

That night, as Stella told me later, she was roaming the city aimlessly for hours.

On the other hand, she couldn't get that weird girl from the metro out of her head.

Of course she couldn't just walk around the city forever. For her greatest sorrow, she had to sleep somewhere.

On one hand, she didn't want to go home until there was a chance finding her father still awake.

And that night she wasn't in the mood for the police to take her as a homeless again.

She only hoped for her father to be asleep.

But like on so many occasions before, she wasn't lucky that night either.

What the **FUCK** were you doing until now? Like it's not enough that you just **RAN AWAY**, you only come home **NOW**?

None of your fucking business!

I already told you to choose your words carefully kid!

Screw you! I had enough of your threats for today!

Oh, is that so?

I should just beat you again like I did in the morning. But you know what? I won't do that. Do you know why?

Because I just **LOVE** my little girl!

Tss...

I'll let you go this time, but only if you play a little game with me first! What do you say?

Fucking awesome...

Alright, let's start then!

Come on, guess what I drank today!

Ghhh... I don't know... Maybe horse piss and diarrhea...

That's no way to talk about booze! This one was your mother's favorite too. Come and have a taste! You'll change your mind I guarantee! Hehehe!

Grrrr... Take your... dirty hands... off me...

Come now, don't resist, you'll **LOVE** it!


I said...



**...TAKE YOUR
GODDAMN HANDS
OFF ME!!!**


Urghhh...

SLAP



I see the morning one wasn't
enough for you. If you want
more...

SO BE IT!



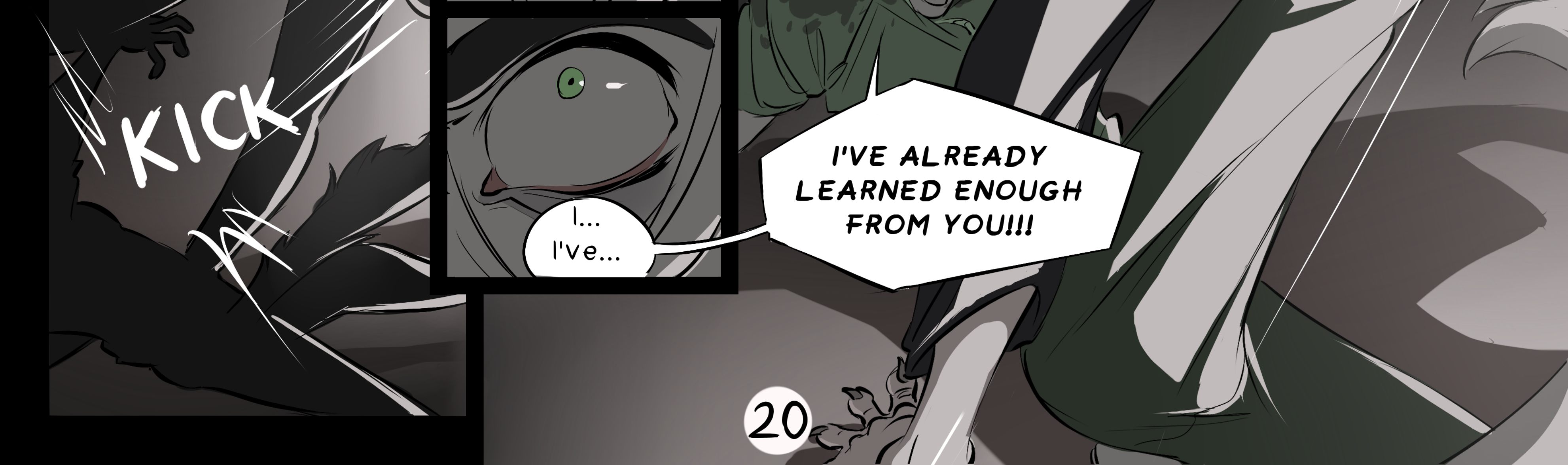
How many times do I
have to teach you...



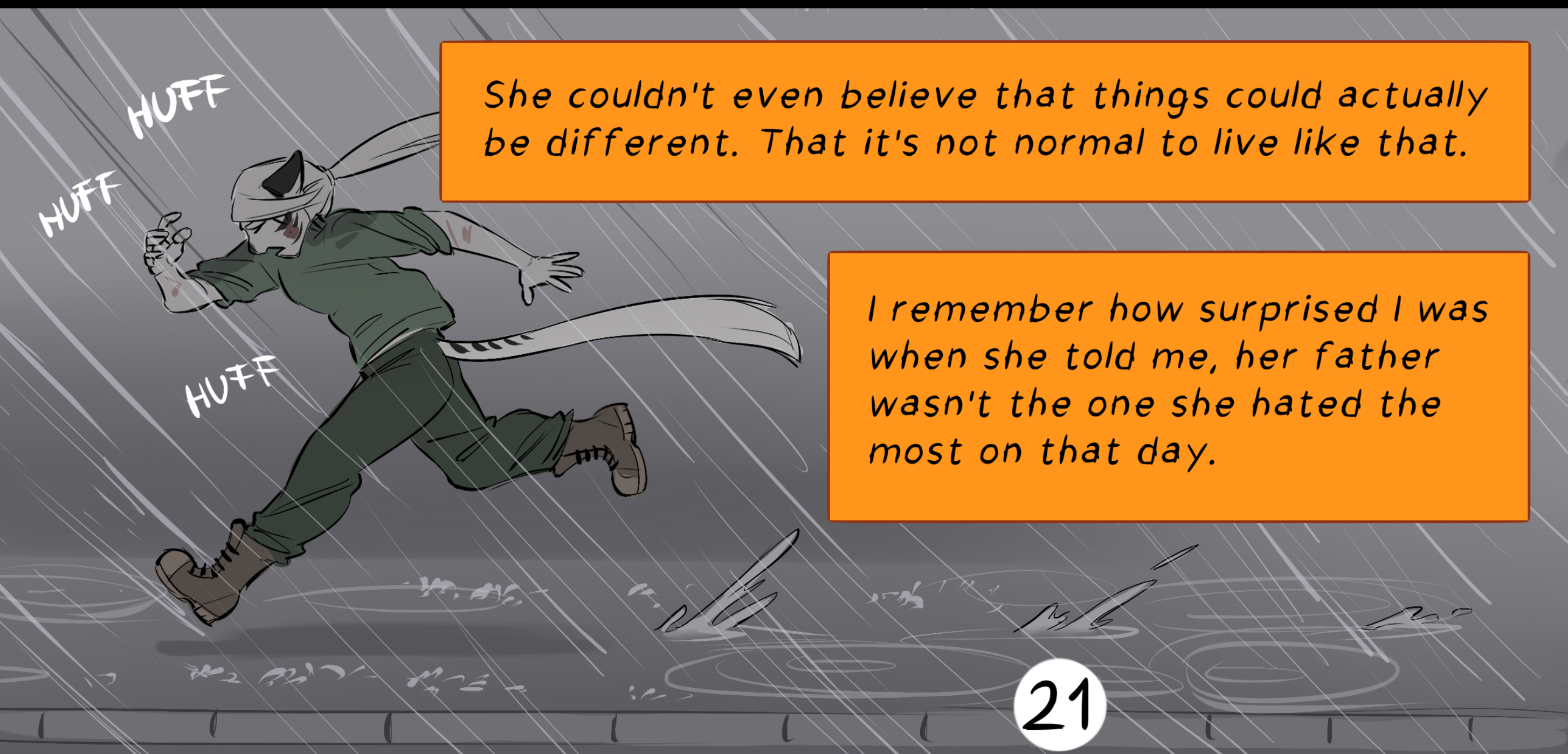
...until you finally...

...learn your
lesson?

I...
I've...



**I'VE ALREADY
LEARNED ENOUGH
FROM YOU!!!**



She said she just couldn't get my stupid face out of her mind.



She said there was no malice or ulterior motive in my eyes.



She refused to believe there could be anyone with unconditional selflessness or kindness.



Because she dreaded, what if that small, cold snowflake at the bottom of hell...



...is just another illusion, like everything else.



What the fuck are you so happy about...

...bitch...