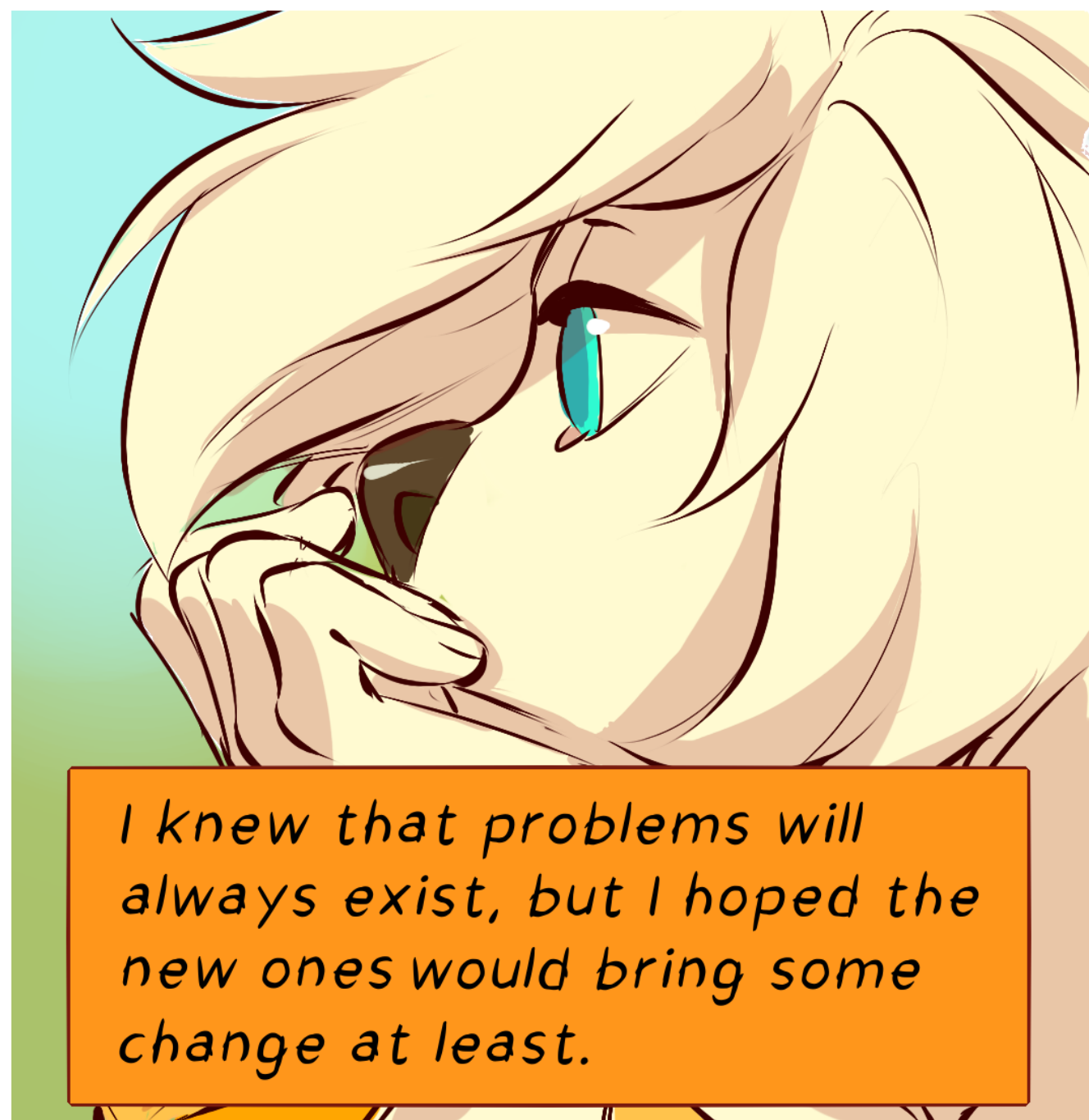




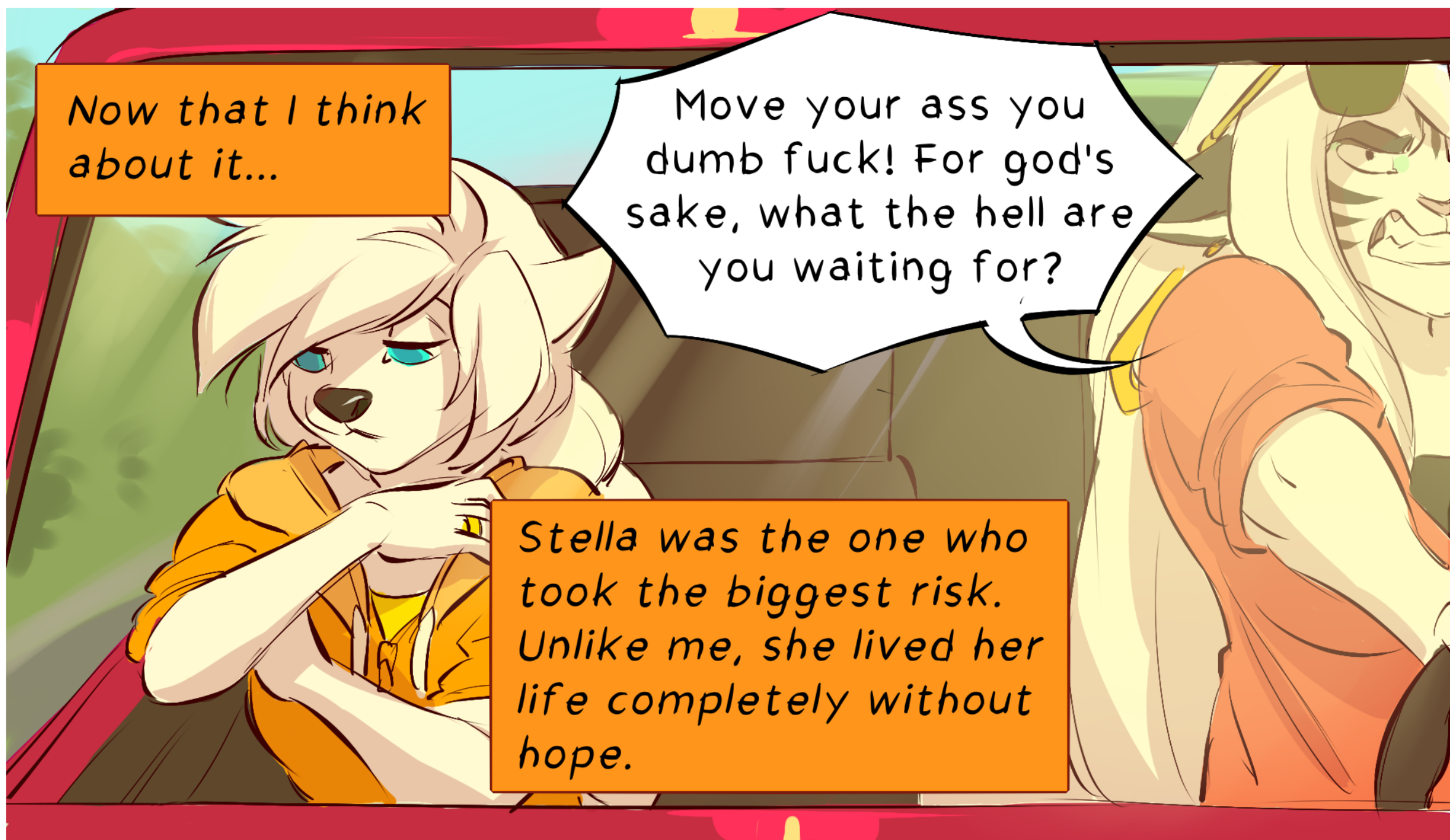
Despite all the atrocities, I went to bed every night in hope for a brighter tomorrow.

HONK
HONK

I knew when I leave the orphanage new problems would replace the old ones.



I knew that problems will always exist, but I hoped the new ones would bring some change at least.



Now that I think about it...

Move your ass you dumb fuck! For god's sake, what the hell are you waiting for?

Stella was the one who took the biggest risk. Unlike me, she lived her life completely without hope.



Yeah I'm talking to you! **MOVE!** Don't flip me off shithead! I'm going to rip off your finger and stick it up your ass!

And that tiny bit she could gather, she invested in me.



Oh yeah? Alright, you fucking asked for it!

She didn't really know me yet. I could have been a person just like the ones who defined her whole life.



But she took the risk, even if her trust was more fragile than anything.





Like that day...

I can't even remember when was the last time the metro had such an enormous crowd.

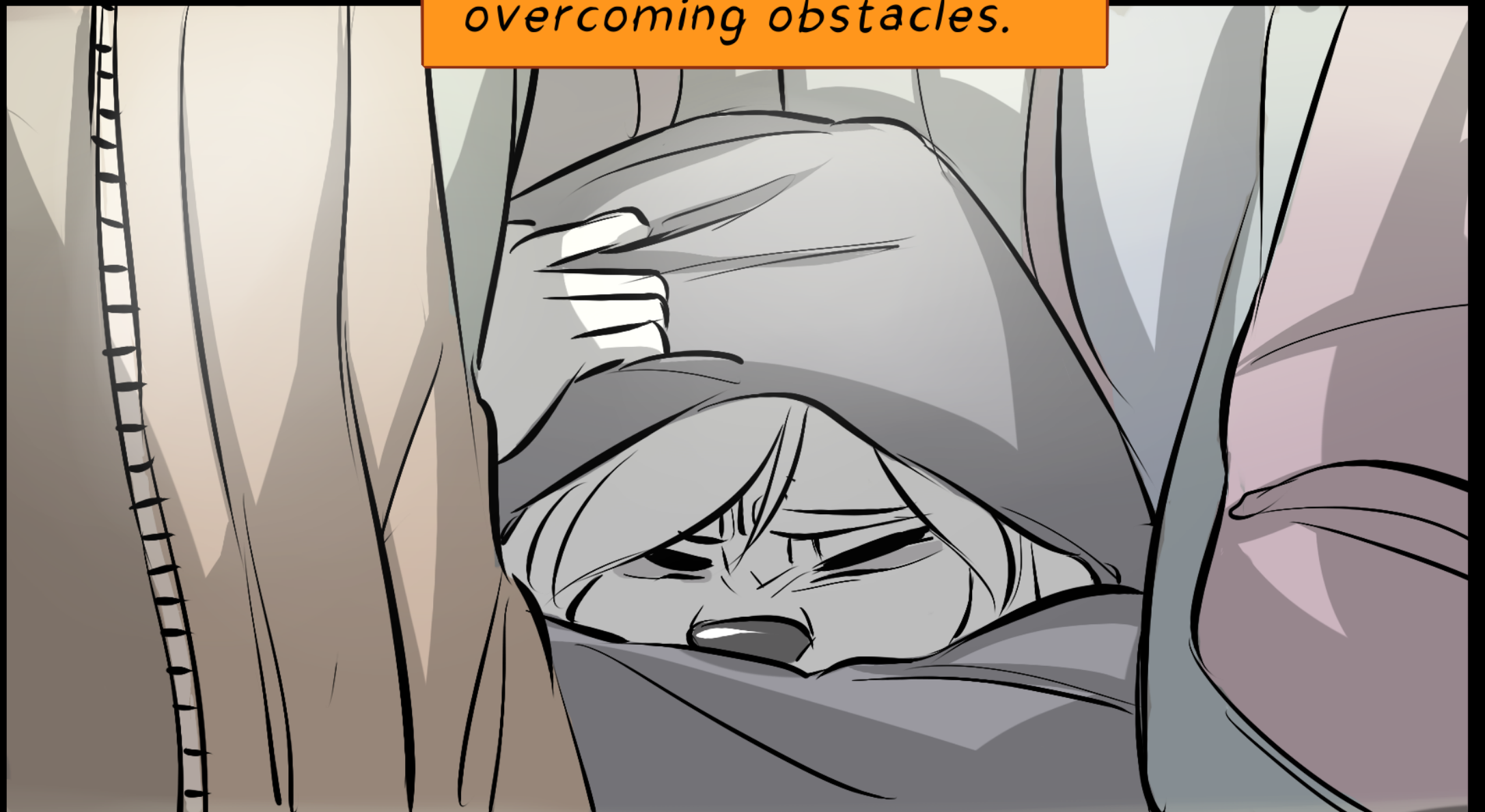
From all of my weak points, crowds were my weakest...



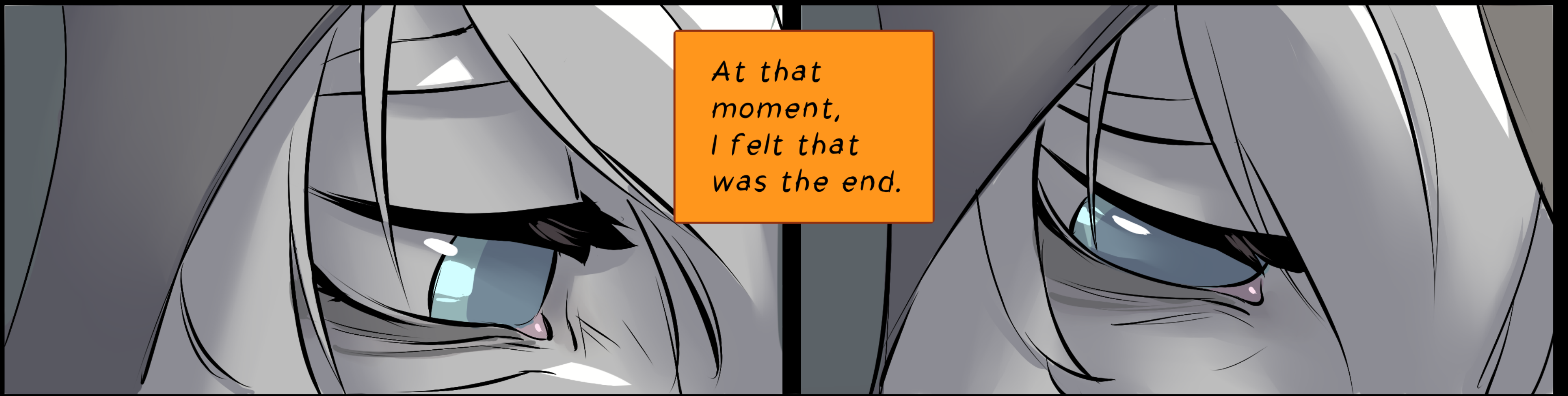
The fulfillment of many everyday things in life meant a grievous job for me, but traveling on a daily basis on metro was somewhere on the top of my list.



And I was pretty bad at overcoming obstacles.



It took all of my strength, but even that was ridiculously little.



At that moment, I felt that was the end.

And then there was only darkness, and pain running through my back.

I couldn't breathe anymore.

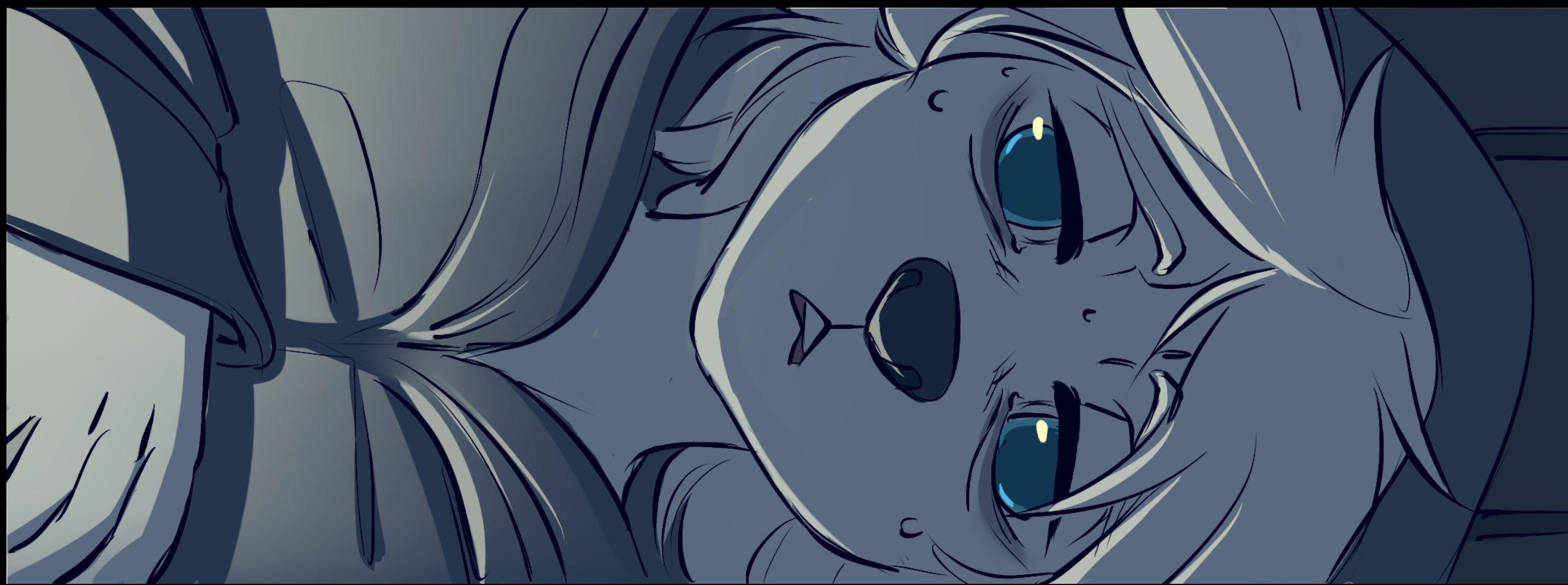
The deafening noise of the crowd blunted to an almost silent hum.

Then suddenly...

...strong hands grabbed and drag me through the crowd.

A pleasant, cooling breeze woke me up.

I was lying under the beautiful and infinite starry sky. I thought I was dreaming, because I had no idea how I got out of the metro.



W-w-where am I...

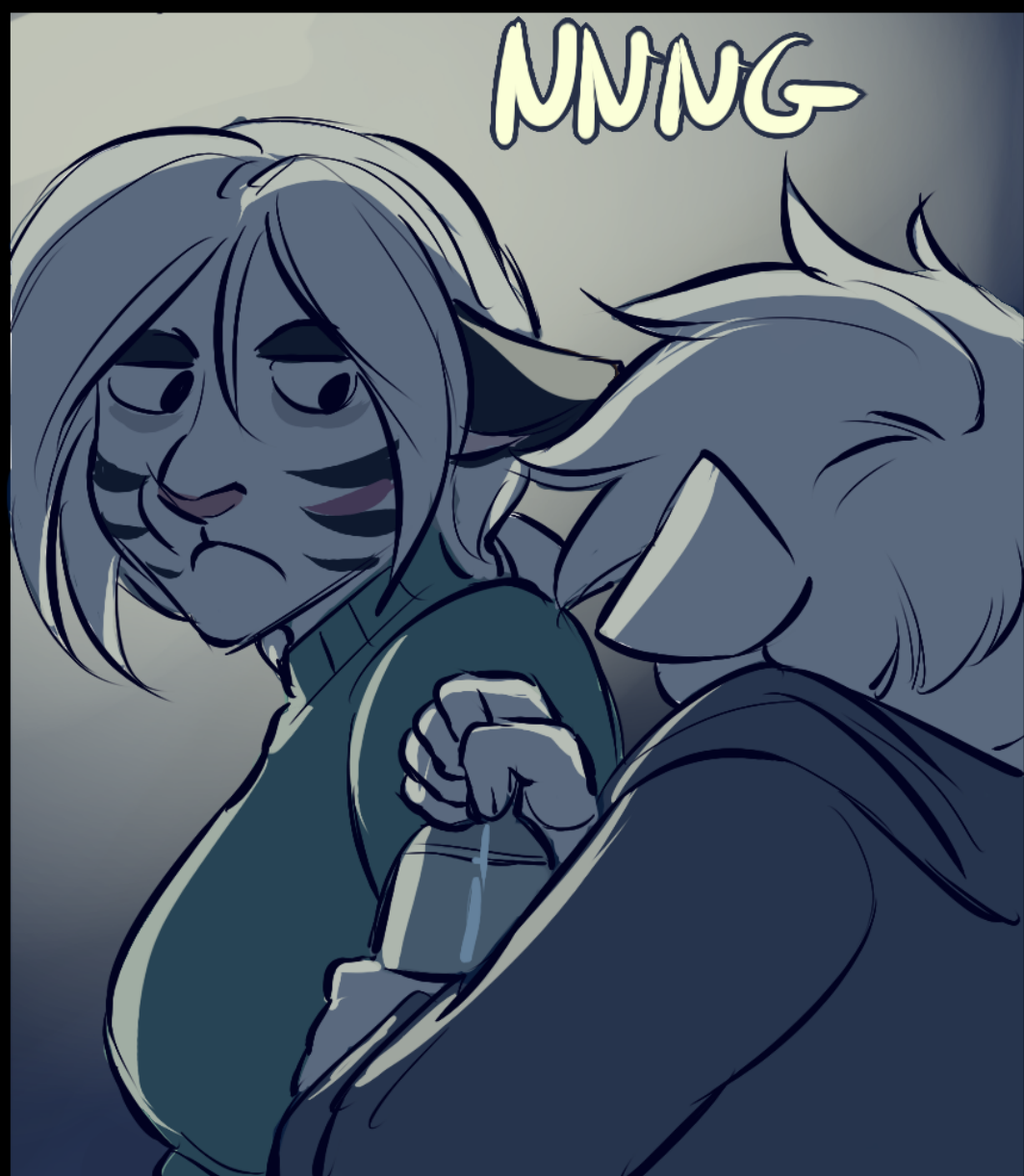


Oh. You are awake. Great! For a second I thought there might be some grim shit with you.

Y-y-you got me... o-o-out?

Yeah. Here. This might help to pull yourself together.

T-t-thank you...



NNNG



NNNNN
NNNG



Give me that for the love of...

PLK

T-t-thank you v-v-very much...



Sooooo...

GLUB
GLUB
GLUB

You have some anxiety, or panic disorder shit, or what?



I-I-I don't k-k-know what t-t-those are...

I see.

Great!

It will be **SO** much fun talking to you...



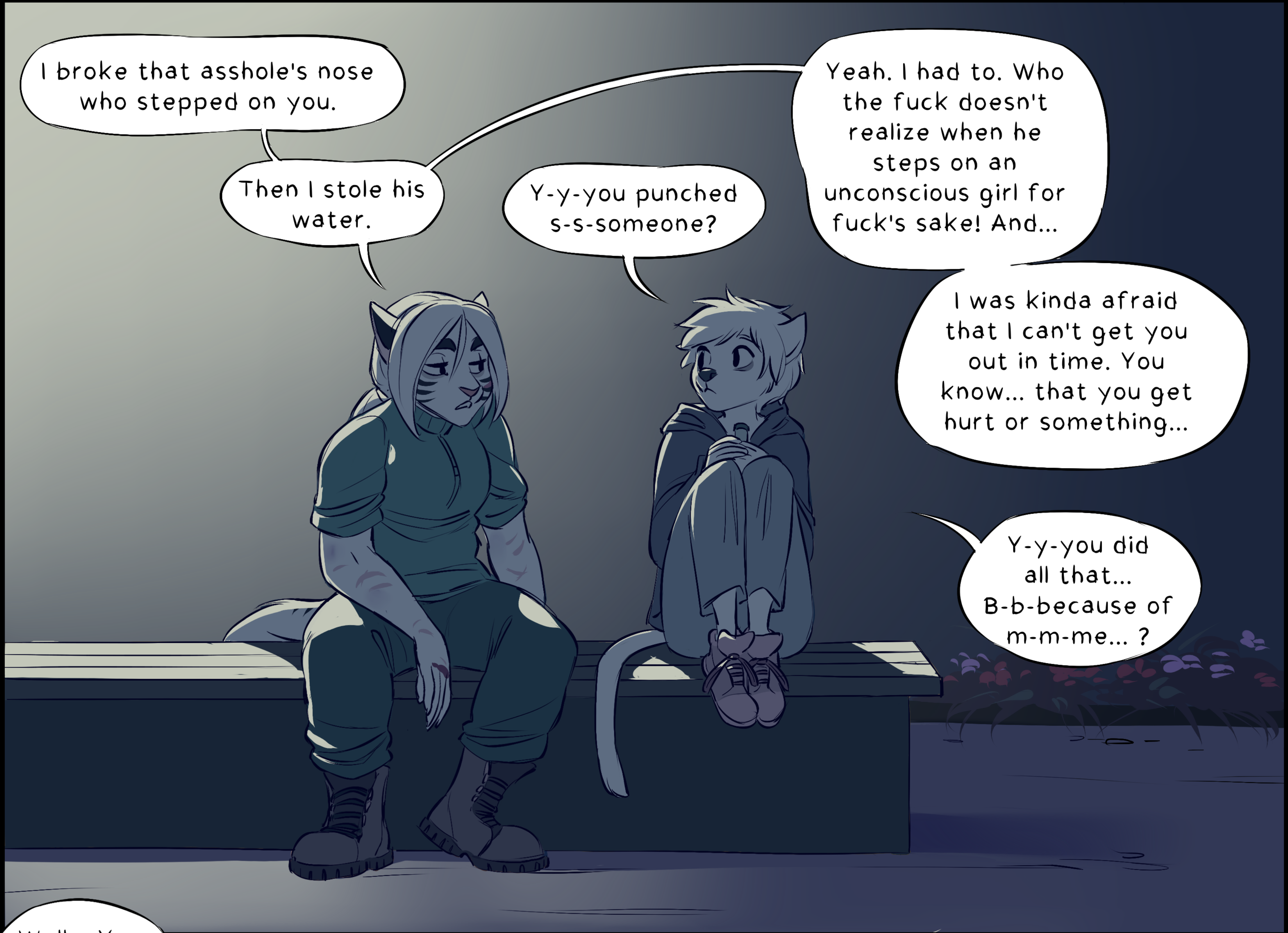
Y-y-your hand...

It's b-b-bleeding!



Oh, this? Don't worry, it's not mine.

If I only knew back then how often I'm going to hear that sentence...



I broke that asshole's nose who stepped on you.

Then I stole his water.

Y-y-you punched s-s-someone?

Yeah. I had to. Who the fuck doesn't realize when he steps on an unconscious girl for fuck's sake! And...

I was kinda afraid that I can't get you out in time. You know... that you get hurt or something...

Y-y-you did all that... B-b-because of m-m-me... ?



Well... You looked like you could use a hand. And I still had to make up for those tissues anyway...

That's when I got to know how it feels when someone doesn't abandon you. When someone helps you to get up, so you can face your obstacles again.



It was a strange feeling.

But a good one.



Look
Stella!

LOOK!



I want a hot-dog!

**OH MY
GOD!**

I just can't believe
my eyes!



I can't believe this guy is
still alive!

Stella! It's
rude to say
that in front
of him!

Rude or not, it's
still unbelievable!



Two please!

What was it
dear?

**TWO
HOT-DOG
PLEASE!**

Speak up dear,
I can't hear you.

**TWO! SEE? I'M
SHOWING! TWO!**

I can see dear, no
need to yell.



There you go ladies,
enjoy your meal!

Thank you sir, we will!

I'm glad to hear
that.

Yes, thank you
for being deaf
only to my voice...

Stella!

Whatever...



So?
How is it?

It's underdone...

And it's
dripping in fat...

**JUST LIKE
BACK THEN!**

I remember, the cool breeze needed a few minutes to get me on my feet again.

As it turned out later, the unknown girl was called Estella, and she was exactly as old as I was. She worked at home as a tailor and seamstress, but she knew how to knit and weave too.

And I found that really cool!

And she was much more friendlier person than she looked. At least she was with me.



S-s-so... y-y-you really p-p-punched in someone's n-n-nose?



Yeah.

Why, you haven't punched anyone like, ever?

N-n-no, never...

SERIOUSLY?

You are living in an orphanage, and you never had a fight with **ANYONE**?

Of c-c-course I had! I-I-I just... never h-h-had the o-o-opportunity to punch b-b-back...

OPPORTUNITY?

Weak excuse! You are too much of a wimp. But we can help on that! I'll show you where a good aimed punch hurts the most!

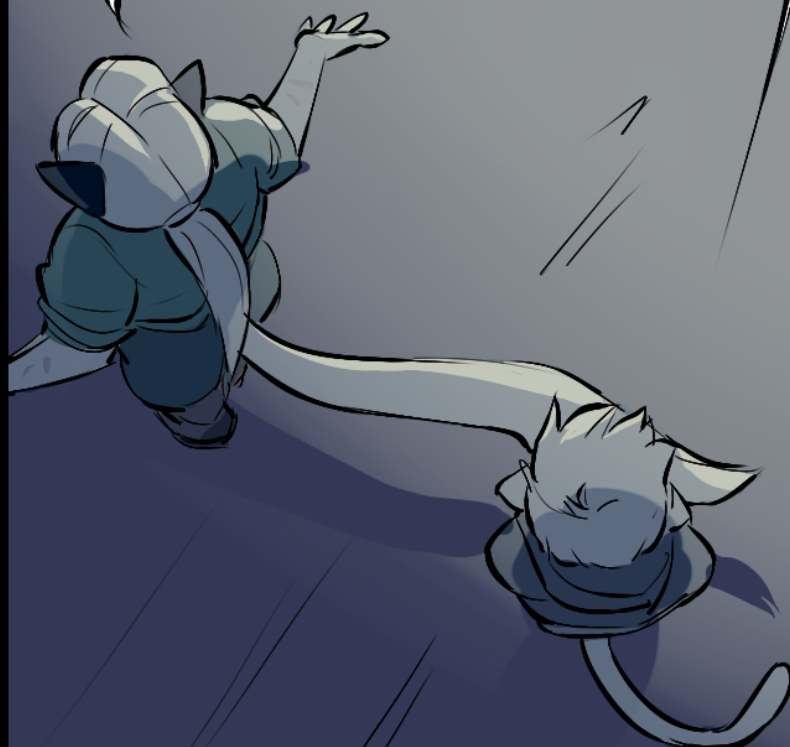
D-d-do we really h-h-have to...?

If you want them to get off your back, yes we do.



I'm s-s-sure there must be a m-m-much more peaceful s-s-solution...

If you want it to work, there isn't.



You hungry?

NOD



Two please!

Right away young lady!

R-r-really...?



You like it?

It's u-u-underdone, and the w-w-whole thing is d-d-dripping in fat. It's h-h-horrible! Still, it's so h-h-heavenly right n-n-now!

Hehe, same here.



Y-y-you know... you are v-v-very special.



WRONG! Everyone is the same. **EVERYONE!** I learned that much already.

I-I-I think e-e-everyone is u-u-unique in their own w-w-way.

Oh, of course they are! I am special! You are special! That hot dog guy is special!



Just like that hobo taking a crap by that bush.

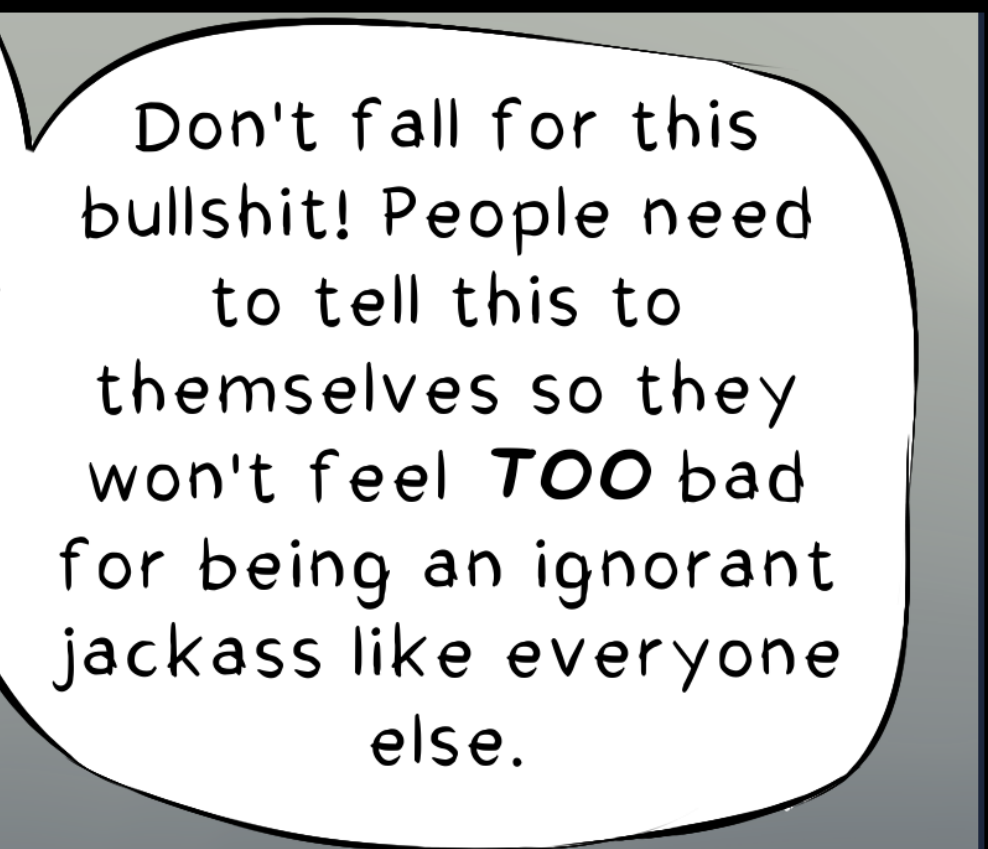
HEEEY!



EVERYONE is special. And if everyone is, then **NO ONE** is!



EXACTLY what I was talking about! Everyone is a special little snowflake. **SO** unique, **SO** one-of-a-kind...



Don't fall for this bullshit! People need to tell this to themselves so they won't feel **TOO** bad for being an ignorant jackass like everyone else.



I-I-I think y-y-you are w-w-wrong. P-p-people are like a s-s-snowfall...



Y-y-yes, but...

I-i-if you are s-s-sitting in your room, and only through the window do you l-l-look at the falling snow outside, you won't see anything s-s-special. Every single snowflake could blink in different colors, you won't see anything but an indistinct swirl of colors. But if you go outside, reach out, and you look carefully at the flakes falling on your coat, you won't find two alike. Different shapes, different sizes... No matter how many similarities there are between them, every single one will be truly unique in it's own way. I belive people are like that too.

It's easy to say everyone is the same when you don't take your time to look at them closer. But if you do... You can see how similar, yet how different everyone is. This all could sound so contradictory but if you think about it...

Just imagine how many people could exist who are just like you, yet **FUNDAMENTALLY** different! Who went through similar events in their life, or lived in similar conditions. They felt similar pain and joy to you... Yet at the end, these experiences shaped them in a **COMPLETELY** different way. That's what makes everyone truly unique. And I think that's just **WONDERFUL**...



You...

Where the **HELL** did you get all this crap?

I-l-l read it in a v-v-very good b-b-book...

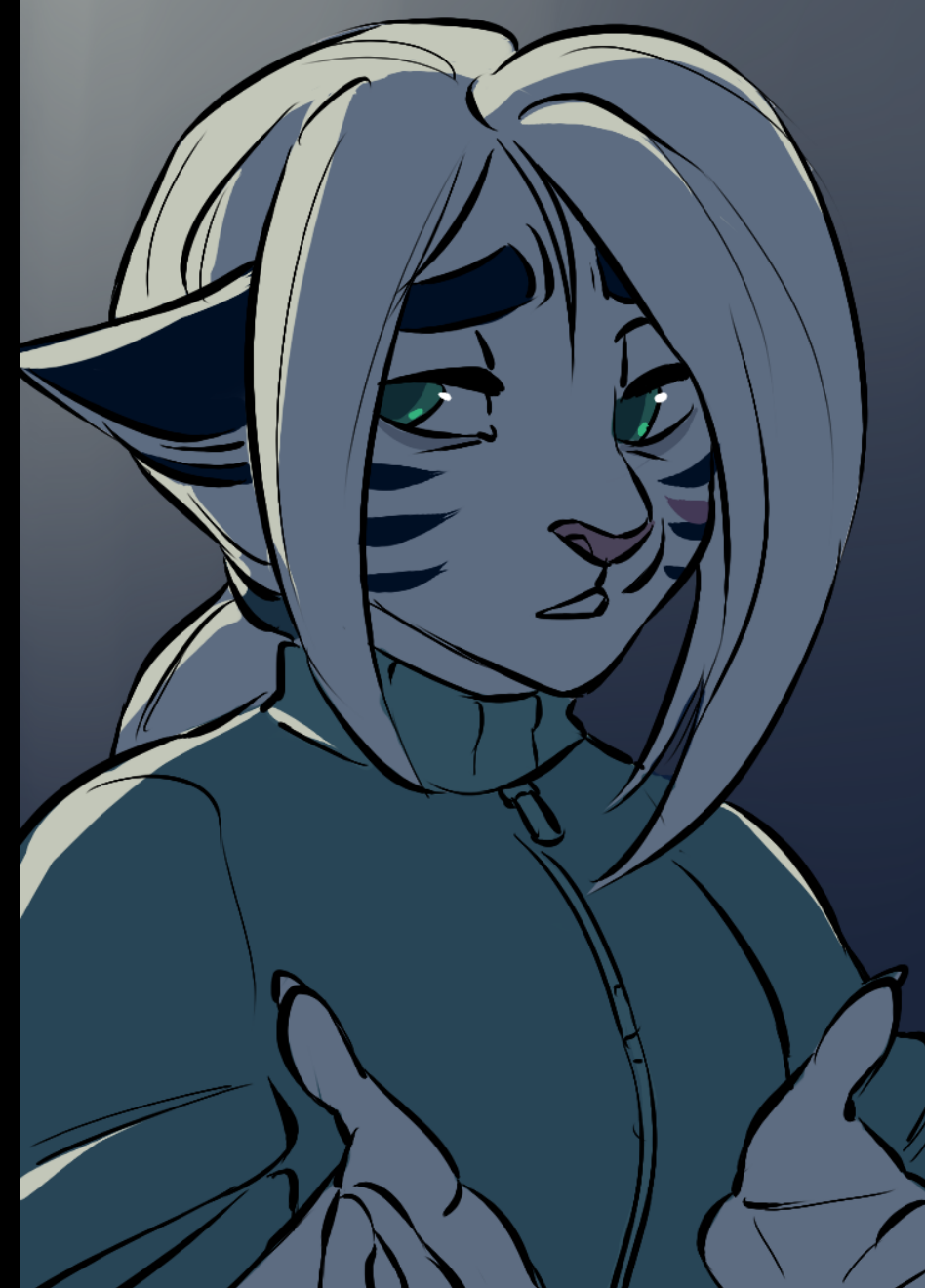
I-l-l like b-b-books...



First of all, let me tell you that this was the most nauseating, mushiest bullshit I've **EVER** heard in my **ENTIRE** life.



But...





You say... that I'm special?
You don't even know me yet.

Y-y-yes,
you a-a-are.

But why?

B-b-because...



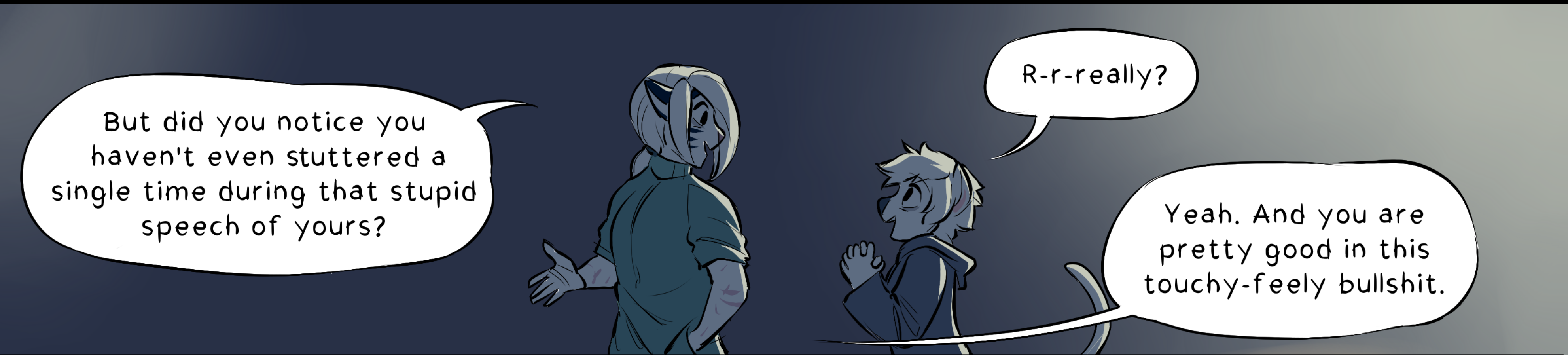
You w-w-were
the only
one w-w-who
stopped
a-a-and took
your t-t-time
to look at
me c-c-closer.

And then... y-y-you saved m-m-me...



Thanks
but...

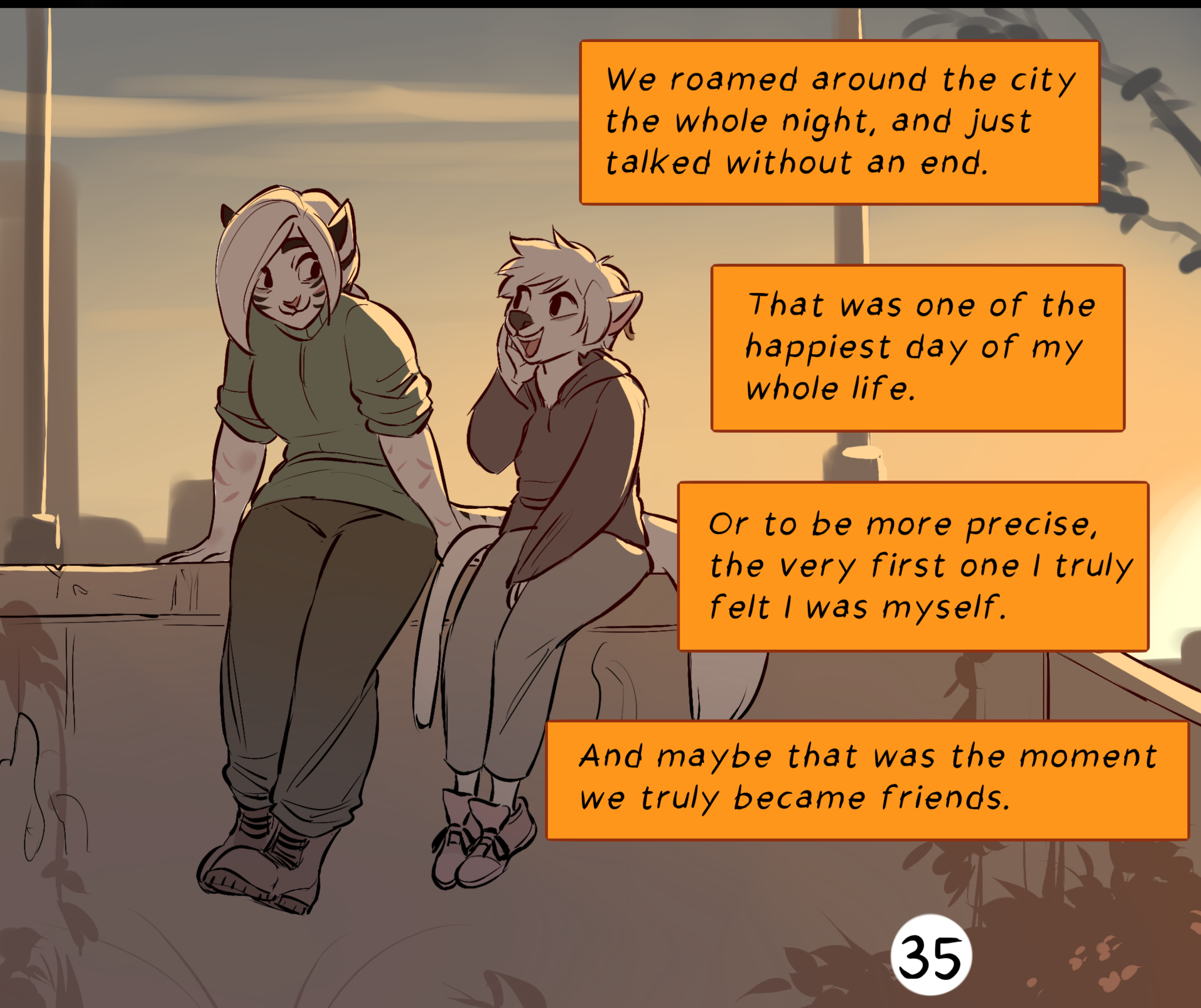
It's still
bullcrap...



But did you notice you
haven't even stuttered a
single time during that stupid
speech of yours?

R-r-really?

Yeah. And you are
pretty good in this
touchy-feely bullshit.



We roamed around the city
the whole night, and just
talked without an end.

That was one of the
happiest day of my
whole life.

Or to be more precise,
the very first one I truly
felt I was myself.

And maybe that was the moment
we truly became friends.



And soon,
even more.



I feel like we forgot how many nice things happend with us in the past.

You are right! We could thank **COUNTLESS** unforgettable memories for this stinkin' dirt nest of a city.



You know what I mean. There are just a lot of things I would never want to forget.

Jesus Christ, you are not serious, are you? Has your memory deteriorated so much in the years? Must be because of the amount of sweets you are capable of stuffing in your face...

I'm being serious.



Oh please, enlighten me, what counts as "nice" to you? The hiding? Or maybe the starvation? Or the times you had to steal back your OWN money? Or the regular beating? Or maybe...



Our first Christmas.

I was thinking on our first Christmas...



Oh...

That was actually a nice day...

Nice? That's all? It was only nice for you?



Okay, it was **FANTASTIC!** It's still one of the best days of my whole life!

Are you happy now?

Yes, I am!

Okay Sunshine, you got me. That day I really don't want to forget.

I knew it.

That's right, our first Christmas together.

A few weeks after what happened on the metro, we were already completely inseparable.

In a few months I faced more adventures and excitement than ever before in my life.

I've never run so much before.

And I've never cried and laughed that much either.

And for my biggest shock, even my stuttering moderated a bit.

When I was around Stella, that's when I felt truly free. That's when I felt being truly myself. We had no secrets between each other.

Needless to say, we haven't spent every single day in joy and happiness.

Not even close.

But together, we were able to hold on. Together we were able to look with hope for every coming day.

And maybe that's why we had so many amazing and unforgettable experiences.

And even if there were so many of them, one particularly still stands very close to my heart. And that is the very first Christmas we spent together.

For me Christmas was always the most magical time of every year. I really can't put my finger on why exactly, but when Christmas came, my heart always filled with life and hope. Either people acted differently with each other, or it was real magic!

I've puzzled my brain for so long, what could show her how much she means for me?

And after a very long consideration, I came to the conclusion, that nothing at all.

There is absolutely nothing that could express how much she means for me.

Or maybe it was because of all the pretty lights...

But I decided to surprise Stella with something.

Eventually I decided to get her something pretty. So I started looking for something that would immediately bring her to my mind at the very first glance.



But let's just say my financial status didn't really give me too many options in getting something pretty.



Hm? Are you lost, little girl?



E-e-excuse me sir, how much does those b-b-beautiful earrings in the shop-window cost?

I'm affraid you won't be able to afford those. How much money do you have?

T-t-twenty dollars.

I'm very sorry, but that is quite far from their price.

Do you h-h-happen to have anything here I could buy with t-t-this much money?

Honestly? If you'd bring in some nice gold jewelry with you, I'd be glad to clean them. They would look like new.

Oh...

I see...

Well, if there's nothing I can help you with, please let me show you out.

And sadly, there went my very last idea.

Pssst!

But when I was in the greatest need...

Hey!

Kid!

Come closer!

...a real Christmas wonder showed up.

Don't you want to surprise your daddy with something nice for Christmas?

LOOK how many **ORIGINAL** golden wristwatches I have! And all of them are mind blowingly cheap!



I'm s-s-sorry, but I don't have too much m-m-money...

You don't have too much?

Dear child, I give my wares for almost **FREE!**

So.

How much do you have?

T-t-twenty dollars.



Twenty dollars? Seriously? Little girl, that's A **LOT!**

And maybe I'll be even kind enough to bargain down the prices with you.

R-r-really?

That's right! So, would you like a nice watch?

Do you happen to sell earrings?



Do I sell earrings?

DO I SELL EARRINGS?



Wow!

But of course I sell earrings!



That one!

How much does that one cost?

Oh, that one?

That one would be **EXACTLY** twenty five dollars.



Oh, I see...



But because I have a heart made of gold, I'll **GLADLY** do some bargaining with you little one.

This is how a true Christmas wonder looks, right?



But as I found out later from Stella, I wasn't the only one preparing with some kind of surprise.

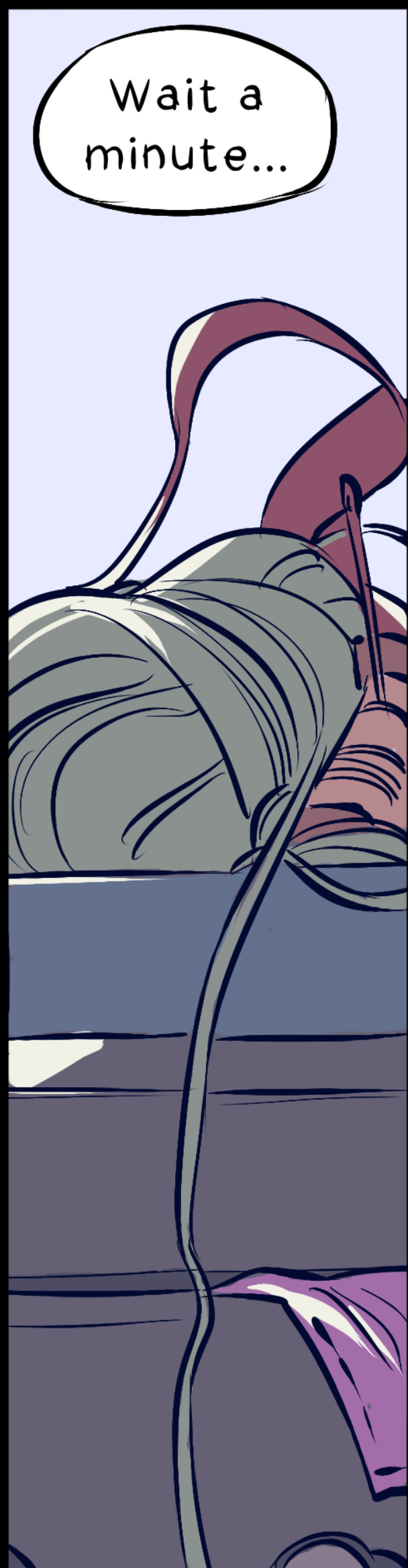
What the **HELL** could I possibly give to her?

Damn it!

I have barely enough money to buy the necessary tools and stuffs I need for work...



For work...?



Wait a minute...



THAT'S IT!

And if I hurry up, I can make it in time!

I only need a few things!



Yes! They still had just enough balls for me!

I just couldn't imagine a more fitting color to her.

This will be perfect!



FUCK ME!

Hm?



This was my favorite jacket! God damn it!

They just don't sell warm thing like this anymore!



And of course it's the middle of the fucking winter...

Just my luck...

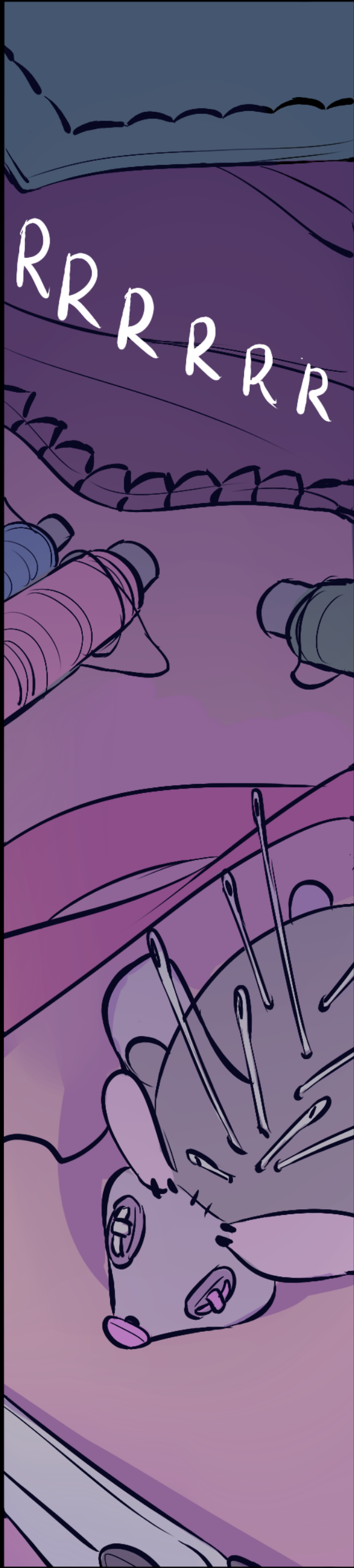
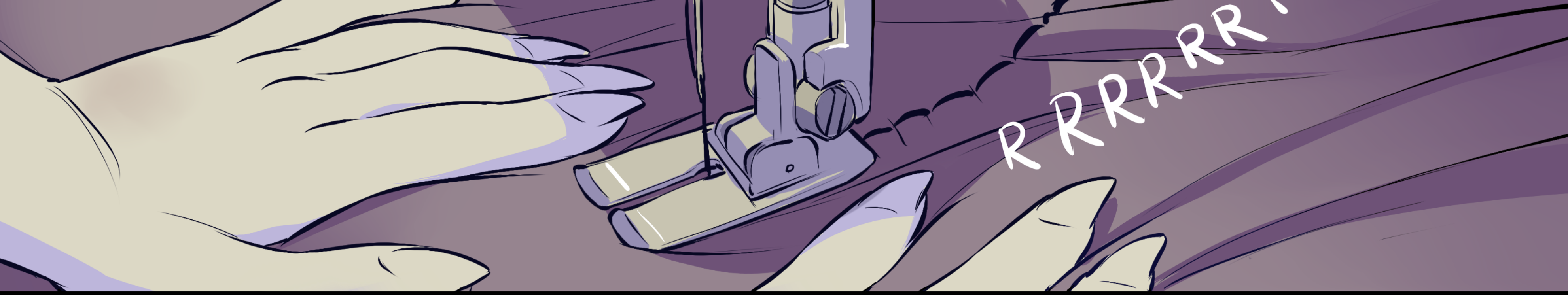


Hmm...



HEY MISTER!

WAIT UP!



We couldn't meet for a whole week before Christmas, because Stella said she had too much work to do for the holidays.



That wasn't completely true, but as it turned out, it was kind of a white lie.

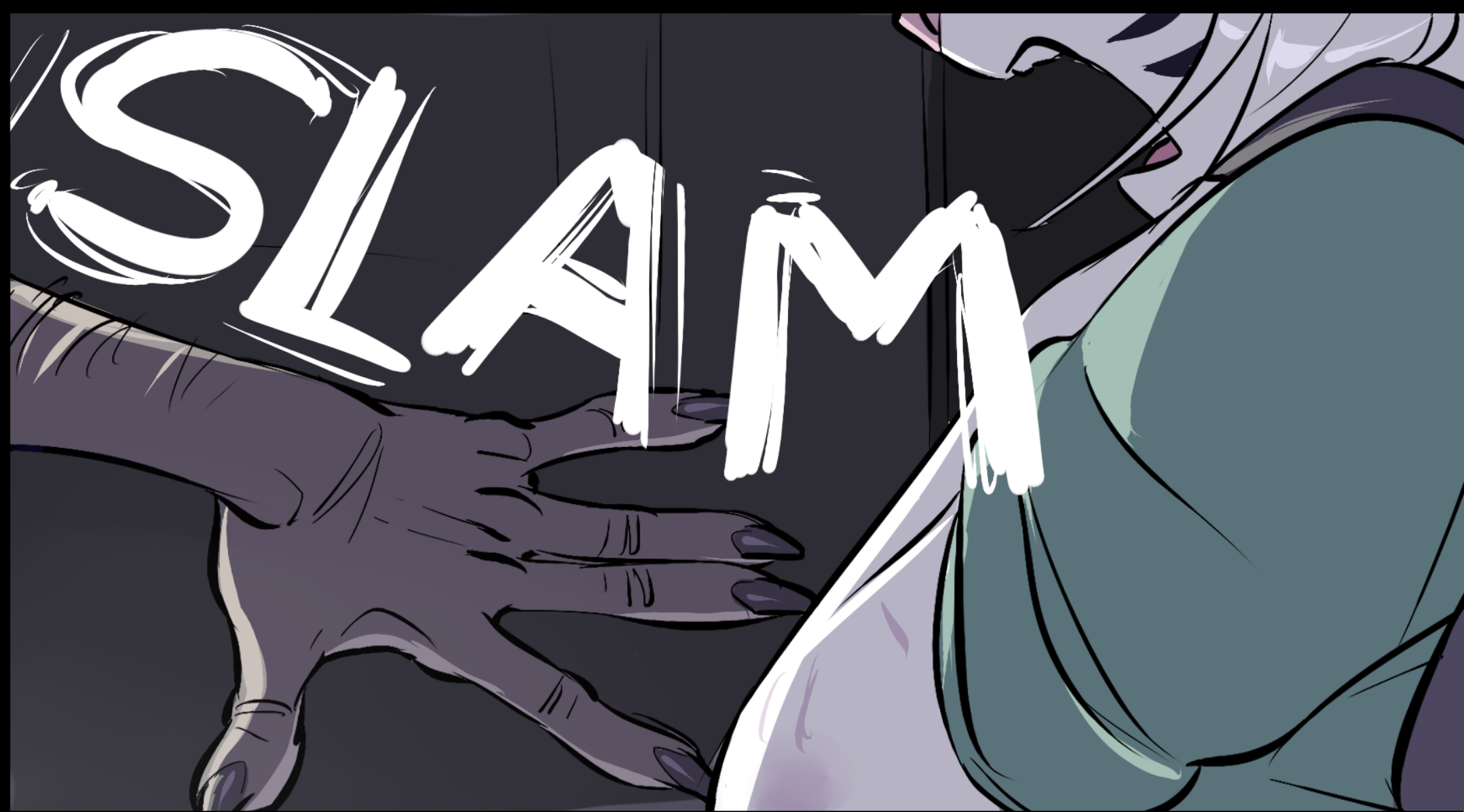
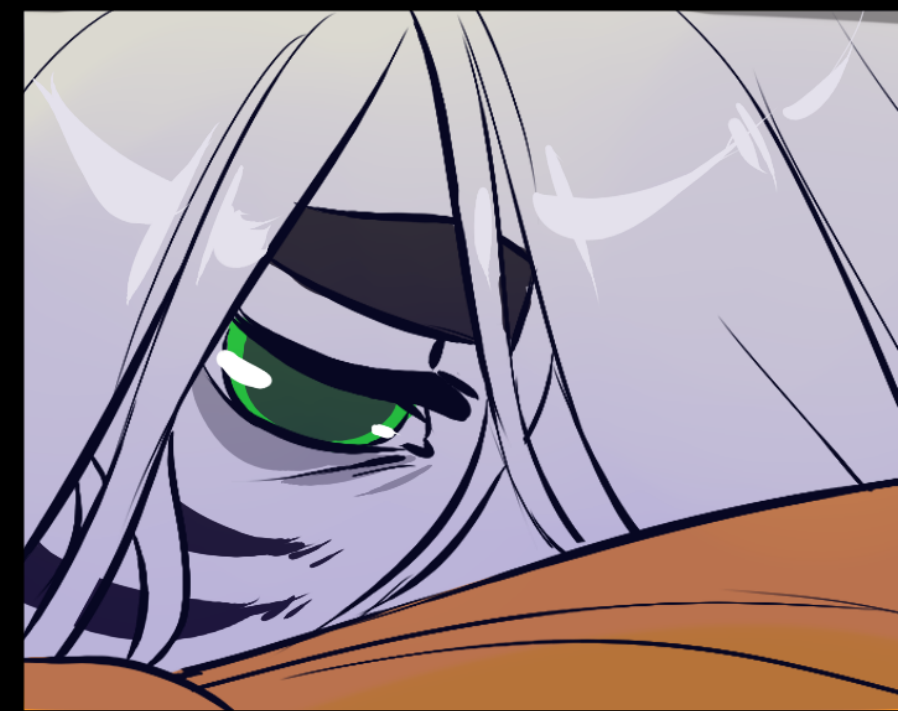
And how could I be angry at her, with the surprise she came up with for me.

Then the day finally came. I was incredibly excited to give Stella my little gift, so I even got to the agreed meeting place a lot sooner.



I wasn't worried when Stella was a bit late.

But when that "late" got much longer, knowing Stella's everyday life, I started to get a bit nervous.





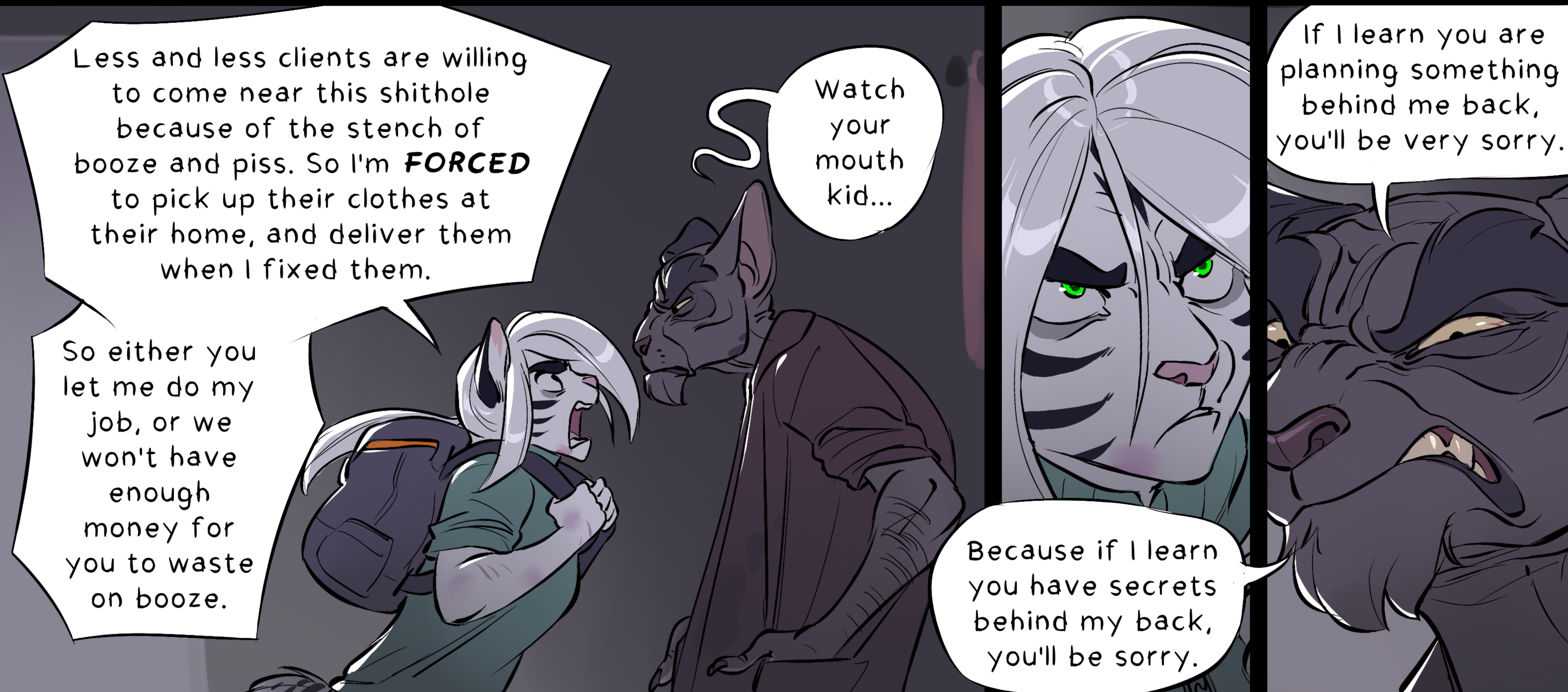
None of your business...

Oh?

I think otherwise. You spend more and more time away from home. You think I didn't notice?

I have a lot of work, and I have to go to a lot of clients.

Oh, you **HAVE** to go to the clients by yourself? People can't just dump their torn clothes here anymore, like they always did?



Less and less clients are willing to come near this shithole because of the stench of booze and piss. So I'm **FORCED** to pick up their clothes at their home, and deliver them when I fixed them.

So either you let me do my job, or we won't have enough money for you to waste on booze.

Watch your mouth kid...

If I learn you are planning something behind me back, you'll be very sorry.

Because if I learn you have secrets behind my back, you'll be sorry.



And if I learn that you have a stupid boyfriend, who's fucking you behind my back, you'll be very, **VERY** sorry.

I guarantee.

Well, at least there's one thing you won't have to worry about.

I guarantee.

SLAM

Stupid little bitch...

You won't ruin my day, you old sick bastard. Not today.



Maybe something h-h-happened with her. I better go a-a-and check...



Oh! S-s-stella!

You are here!



I was so w-w-worried that something might h-h-have...

No time to explain! Come!

O-okay...



Where are we g-g-going?

Which part of "no time to explain" don't you get?

The whole.

Figures...



I'm f-freezing my ass h-here...



Oh my god... Is t-this h-how I die...?



I'm here!

Y-you're l-late kid!

I know, sorry for that.



I a-already had to s-start the film.

What film?

I thought so. Here!

Fixed as promised!



This is fantastic! Just like a brand new one! And how is it so damn warm?

I changed the old stuffing for a better, and new one. Consider it a Christmas gift.

Holy hell kid! Thanks a lot! Well, I kept my end of the bargain.

Well a deal's a deal. Follow me!



What is t-t-this place?



Follow me, this way. But be **VERY** quiet!

Where are we going?

He said be quiet!

But...

Quiet!



You were w-w-working on that kind man's jacket until now? H-h-have you even slept at all?



Well, to be honest...



That wasn't the only thing I was working on in the past weeks...

There is something else that...



Well... I made for you.

This... You m-m-made this... just for me...?

Yeah.
I thought... it would fit to you.



Merry Christmas.
Hope you like it.



I l-l-love it!



I prepared w-w-with a small surprise too, but...

Oh, you've w-w-worked so much just because of me...

Thank you.

Rest now, you'll g-g-get your surprise later.



And that's how we spent our very first Christmas together.

And I think it couldn't be more beautiful.

Two hours later.

Damnit... I'm so sorry for falling asleep...

I didn't see a single moment from the movie...

Oh, I l-l-loved it! Would you like to h-h-hear what it was about?

Oh, you s-s-shouldn't worry about it.

Sure. But first...

How do you like your gift?

A-a-are you kidding?

I love it! It's j-j-just so beautiful, and so soft and c-c-comfy, and it's so warm, and... you m-m-made it with your own hands... just f-f-for me...

It's not n-n-nearly as cool as yours, but here, I b-b-bought this for you.

BOUGHT? We barely have any money, why the hell did you spend on me?

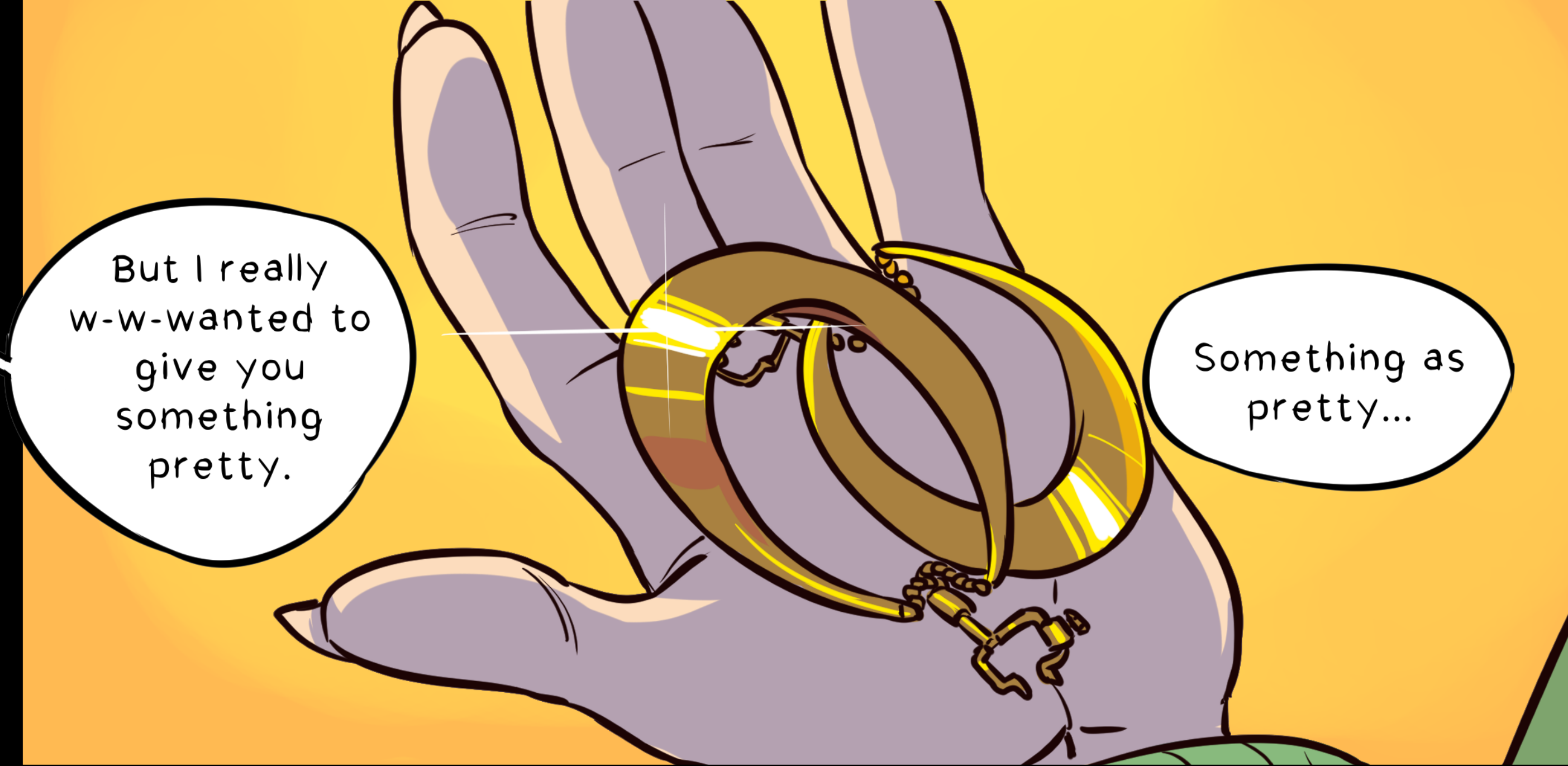
Oh no! I haven't e-e-even give you my gift yet!

I knew y-y-you'd say that. But it's still y-y-yours!

Okay then...



I don't k-k-know if you'll like it...



But I really w-w-wanted to give you something pretty.

Something as pretty...



...as you are.



It's not r-r-real gold, just an imitation.



A-a-and you can just clip it on, but...

I felt it w-w-would fit you.



W-w-wait.



Let me just...



I t-t-think you are so
p-p-pretty like this.

Thanks...



Do you l-l-like them?

I do. And I will **NEVER**
EVER take them off.





We have arrived.





Still to this day, I just can't believe you actually managed to convince me to pick up "Dawn" as our surnames.



I think "Mrs. Dawn" really suits you!

Oh, shut up Mrs. Dawn!



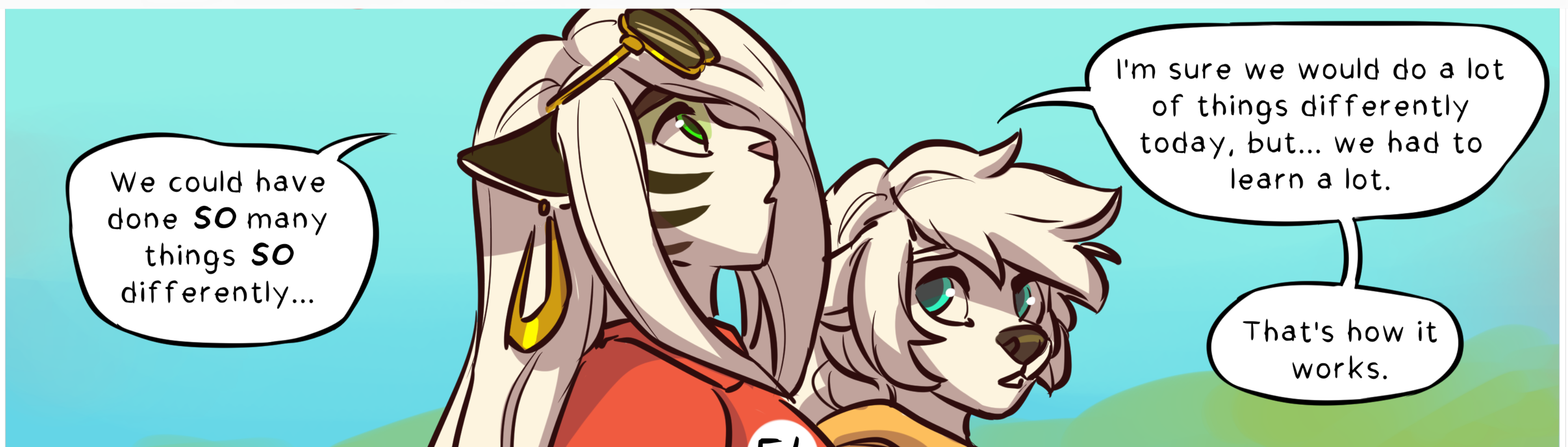
But don't worry. We don't have to go in, you know.



Actually, we didn't even have to come all the way here.

I mean, we had to get the papers, but...

We can go home now.



We could have done **SO** many things **SO** differently...

I'm sure we would do a lot of things differently today, but... we had to learn a lot.

That's how it works.





*...our everyday life
remained the same.*

*Nothing changed when we
were apart from each
other.*

*We thought we'd
became stronger.*

*We thought we could handle
the world around us better.*



*We thought things
had changed.*

But they didn't.

*Even though we changed
each others life, we still
couldn't get strong enough
to make those change by
ourselves.*

*We still needed more
time to get rid of a
lifetime of suffering.*



*We weren't
stronger when
we were apart.*

*We still needed
the other to be
strong.*

*And because of
that, things kept
going as always.*





And the wounds just kept coming.

Every day we lost everything we built up on the previous day.

Every day Stella came back with new cuts and bruises.

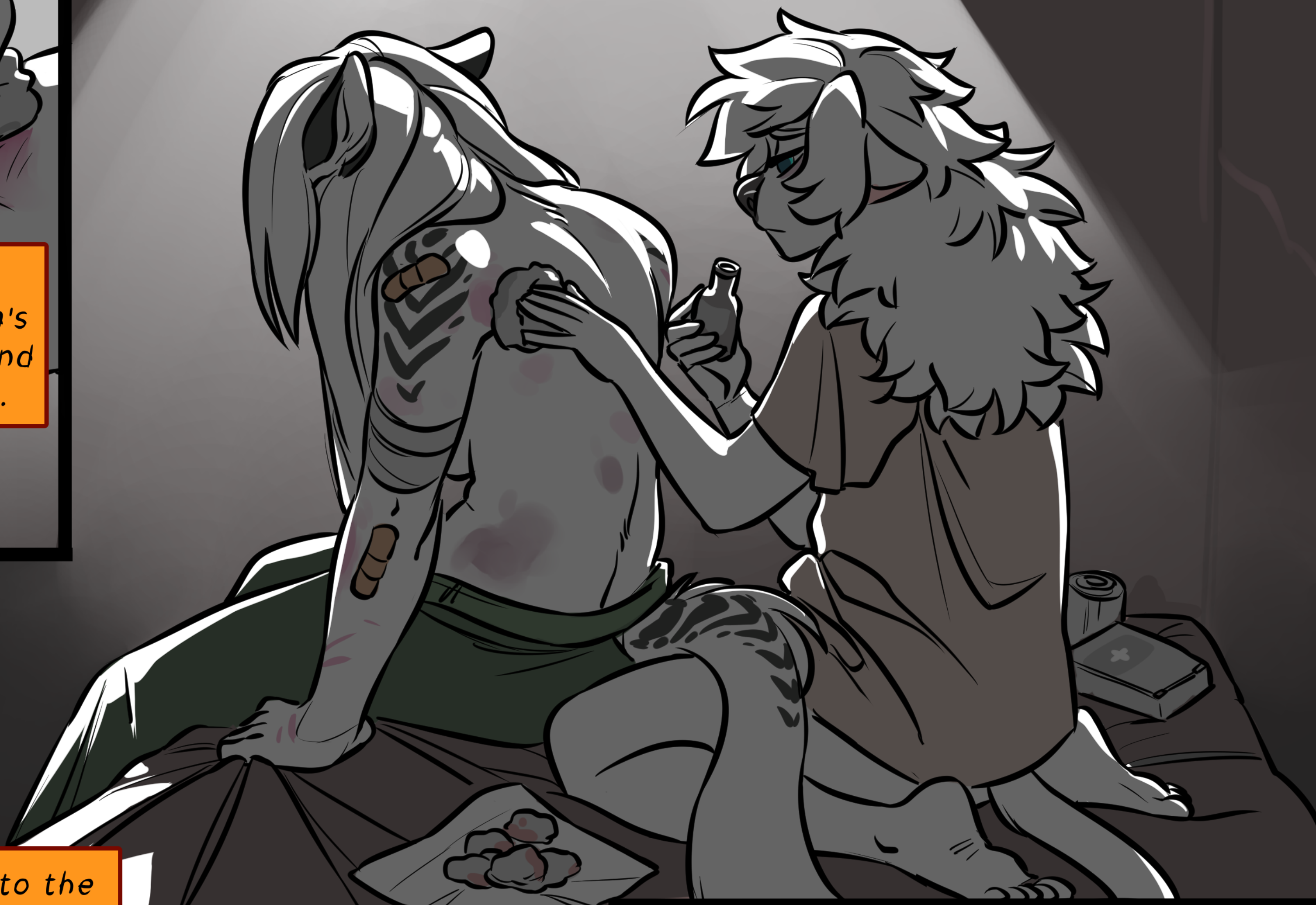
It all became a horrid routine.

But after a while...



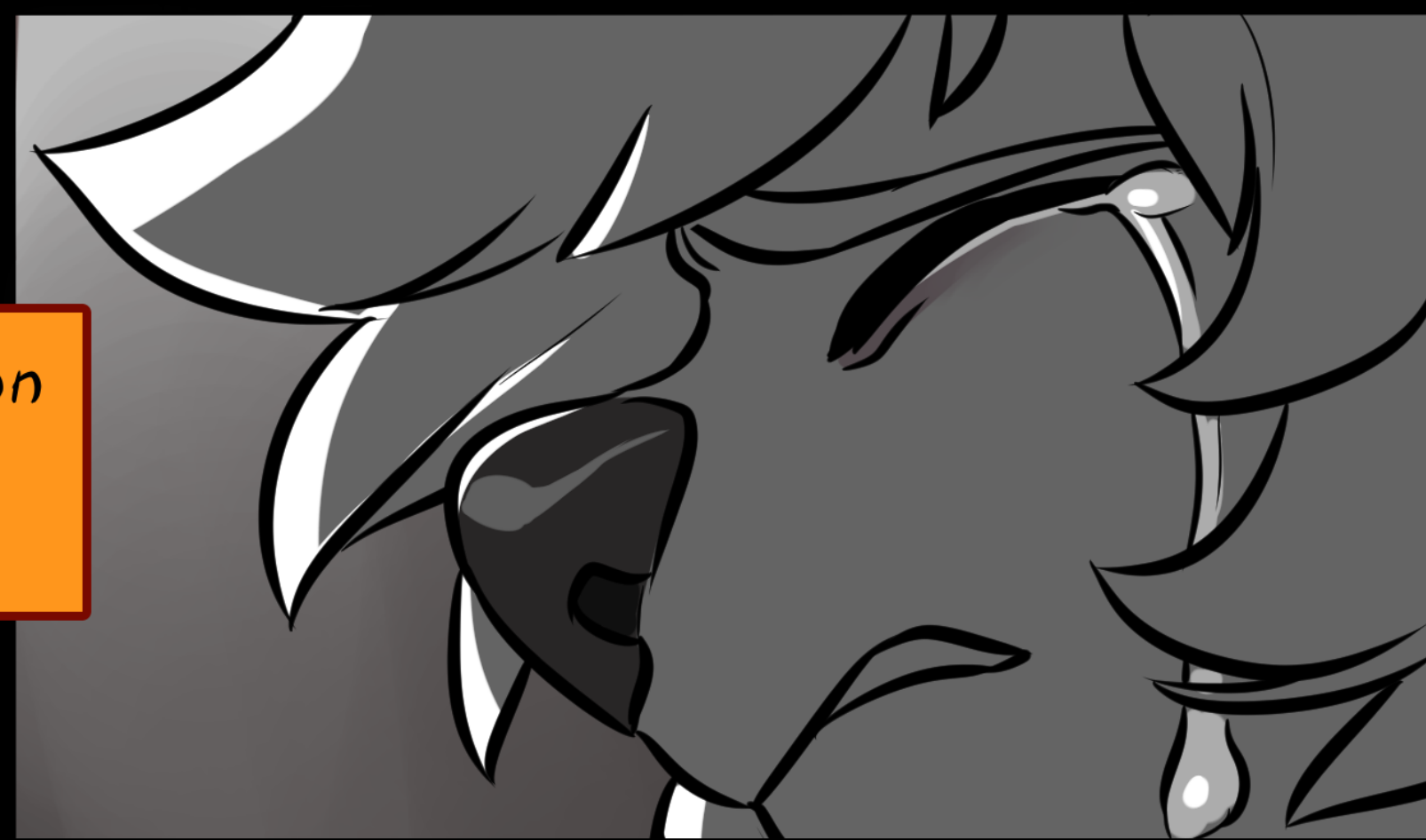
...I just couldn't bandage Estella's wounds again and again any more.

I just **HAD** to do something.



I **HAD** to talk to the man who hurt Stella every day.

I couldn't watch the person who gave meaning to my life suffer.



And no matter how much I dreaded from the mere thought of it...

...I wanted to do it for Stella.

For us.

It was too late to step back.

And because of Stella, I wouldn't even want to.

But to be honest...

This was one of the worst decisions I made in my life.

Who the fuck are you, and what the fuck do you want?