

TWOKINDS

Chapter Fifteen



HAUNTED



Okay, Keith.

I understand, it's been a long time. I know this is sudden.

I... I shouldn't have expected things to go back to the way they were...



Wait... no!

Laura, I've reconsidered!



Huh?

I don't need more time! I want us to be together again.

You want us? B-but what about your people?

It doesn't matter anymore! I don't need to stay here. All I want is to return with you!



R-really? You mean it?

Yes!

Oh, thank you, Keith! That's all I've ever wanted to hear.



You have no idea how long I've waited.

I... just...



I wish this was how it happened.



Ah!





Hmph...

Having trouble sleeping, Keith?



You? What are you doing here? How did you get on the ship?

You don't think the king would send you away without an escort, did you?

I am here to assist you.

From now on, I shall act as your advisor and manservant, as the need arises.



Huh?



Oh... figures they wouldn't trust me to be on my own.

It's not like that at all. Think of me as recompense for your prior banishment.

Right...



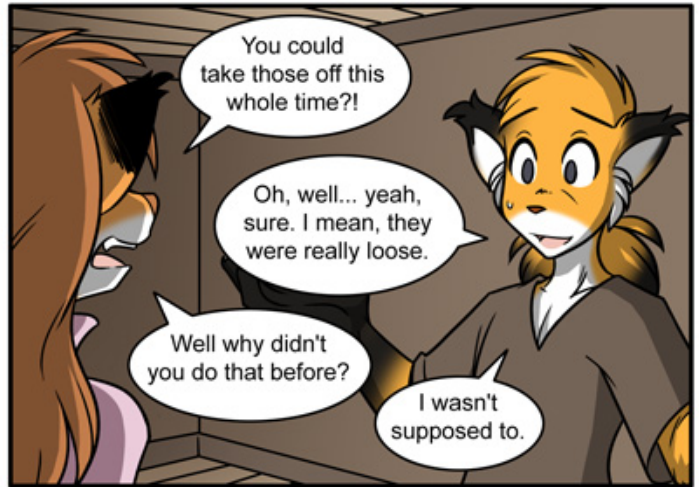
Keith, I am sorry about what happened to your fiancé.

I know Laura meant a lot to you. I remember the way your eyes lit up when I informed you she was on the island.

She must have been very special.



...yes, she was.





There you are!
It's about time!

Oh, Natani.

Right, sorry. I
was... nevermind.

Whatever!
Just hurry up and
shut the door!



Well, let's get
this over with, I need
something to wear.

Okay, fine then.
We'll get started.

Put that down and
lift your arms out.



Huh? W-why?
I'd rather just stay
right over here, if
you don't mind.



I need to know your measurements before I can make a robe for you.



I-I don't think I'm comfortable getting "measured."

C-can't you just guess? Does it really matter?



It's not going to fit right unless I take measurements!

Well, I don't care if it doesn't fit well! I-



Oh just take the damn thing off already!!!



...



I... I'm so sorry, Natani.

I don't know where that came from.



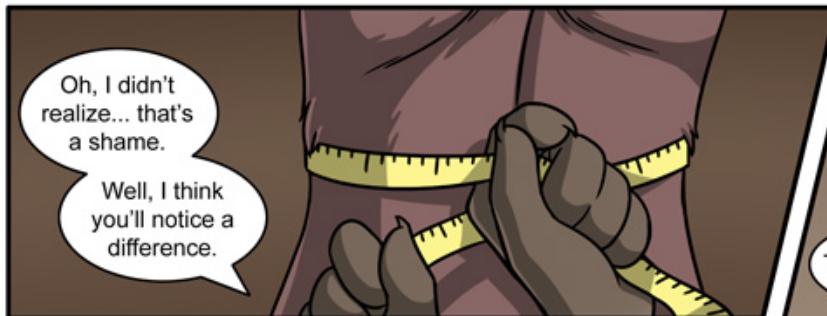
This will only take a minute.

You've never had clothes made for you before, have you?

No. Can't say I have.

Most of my clothes were handed down from my brother.

We usually couldn't even afford new clothes, much less have them custom made.



Oh, I didn't realize... that's a shame.

Well, I think you'll notice a difference.



What's it like out there? You know, in the wild.

The wild?

I mean... what is it like to be a... a real Keidran?



Can... can I ask you something, Natani?

If you have to.



I'm probably not the best person to ask.

I haven't exactly lead what you would call a... typical Keidran life.

The wild is not a place a domesticated Keidran like you could survive.

Really? Why, what happened to you?

Natani come on!

No!!

Ngh... It's not a time I think about.

Look, just be quiet and hurry up with my clothes already!



I'm sorry, I didn't realize... I mean, I... I just...



You know what? No. I... I'm kinda not sorry!

Eh?

In fact... I think I'm not sorry at all!



I've been trying to help you and you've been nothing but mean to me!

But I don't have to take orders from you, or anyone else now!

W-wait!

If this is how you're going to treat me then you can walk around naked for all I care!

No, wait, come back!



Stop, please!

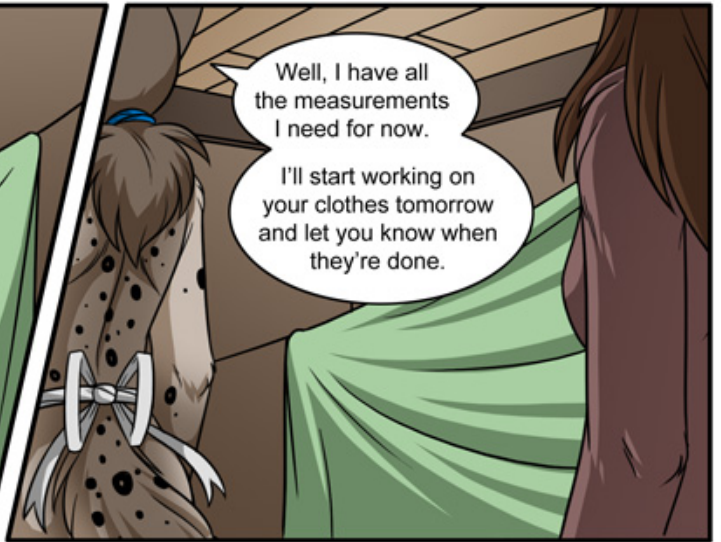
I'm sorry. I'm still kinda freaked out about this whole... uh... *gender curse*... but you're right. I took it out on you.

If you help me, I'll tell you about Keidran life. I promise!



Alright, alright.
I'm sorry, too.

I guess we're
both a little stressed
out tonight.



Well, I have all
the measurements
I need for now.
I'll start working on
your clothes tomorrow
and let you know when
they're done.



Okay, great!



Wait a minute!

Tomorrow?!
I can't wait
that long!



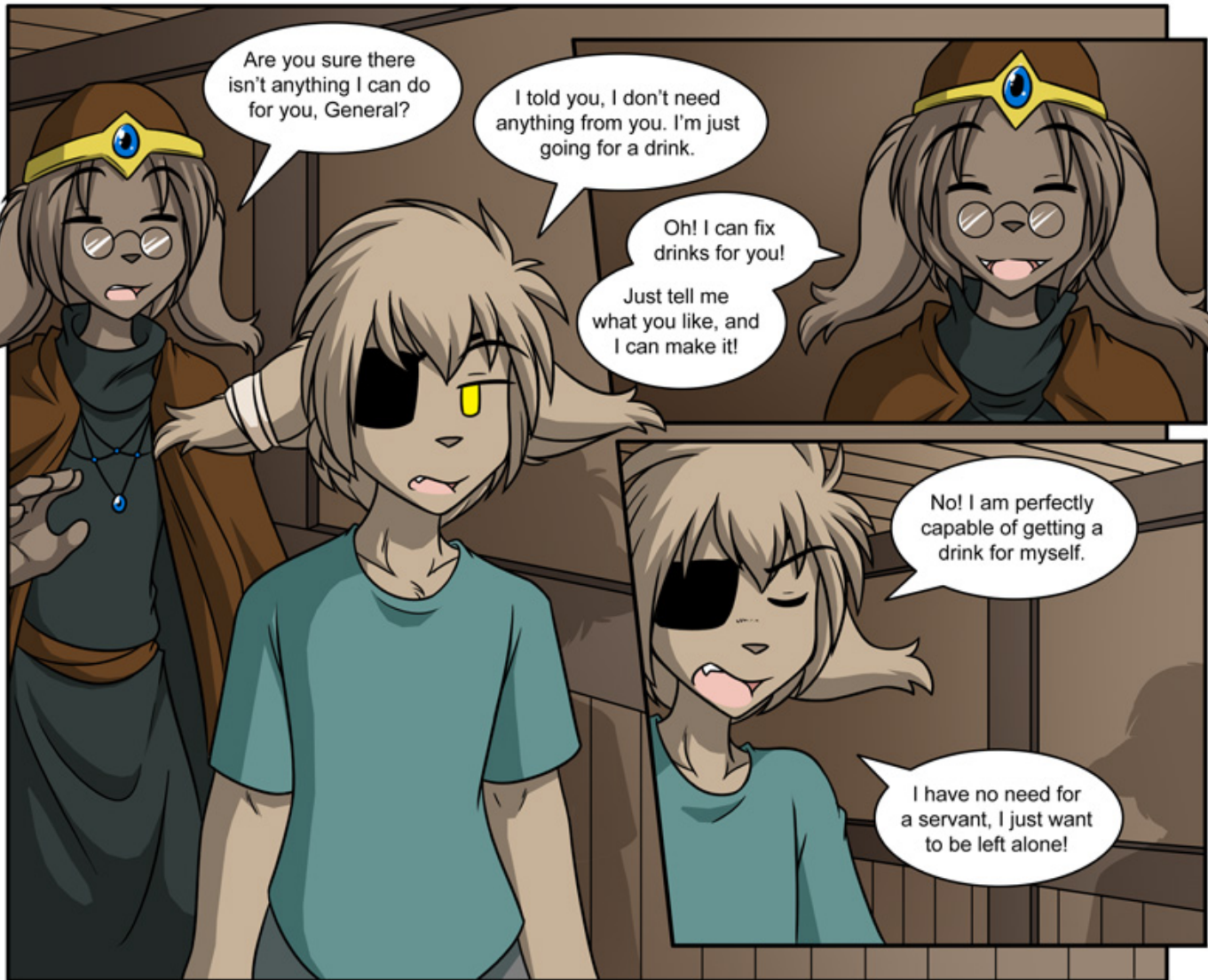
Huh? You didn't
expect me to finish it
tonight, did you?
It's already late.
I need to sleep.

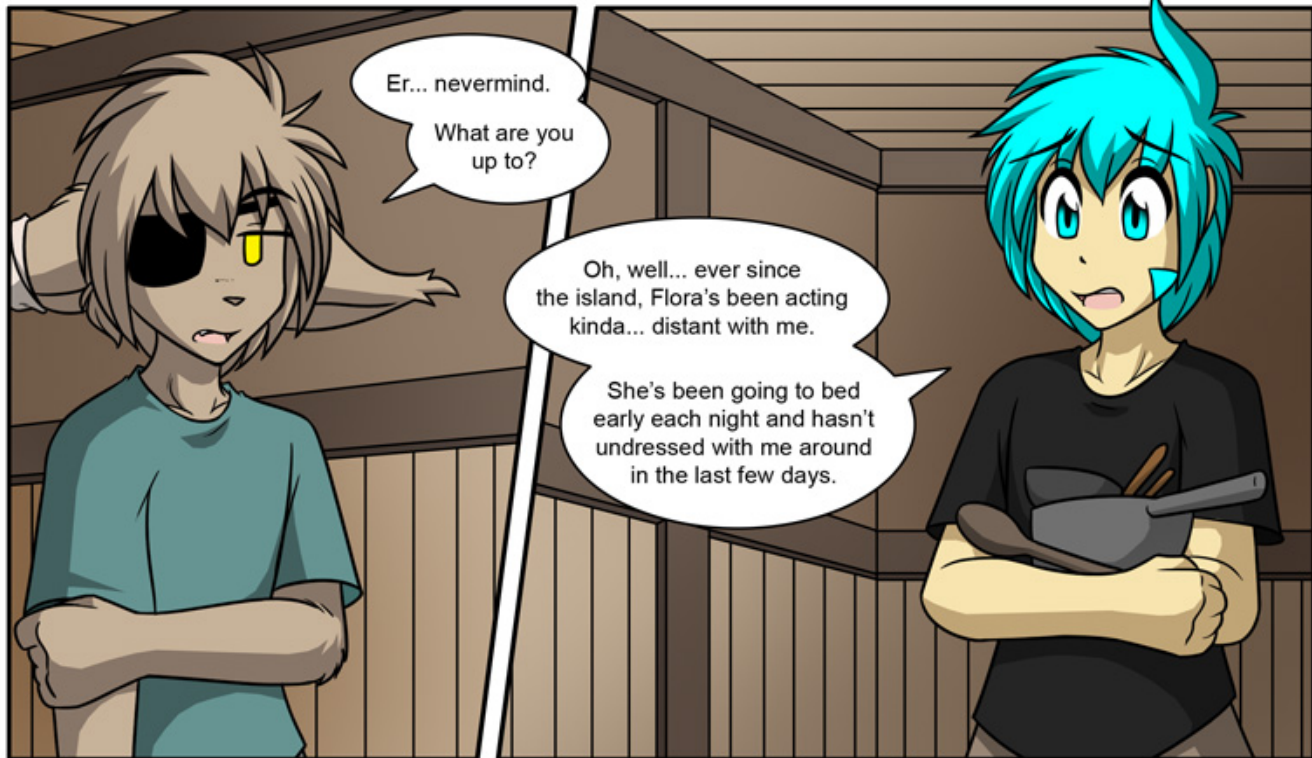


But I can't go
around like this! How
am I supposed to get
back to my room?



FLUMPH!





Er... nevermind.

What are you up to?

Oh, well... ever since the island, Flora's been acting kinda... distant with me.

She's been going to bed early each night and hasn't undressed with me around in the last few days.



I guess what happened at the tower - my... recent outburst - scared her.

I don't know.



But I've decided to turn over a new leaf!

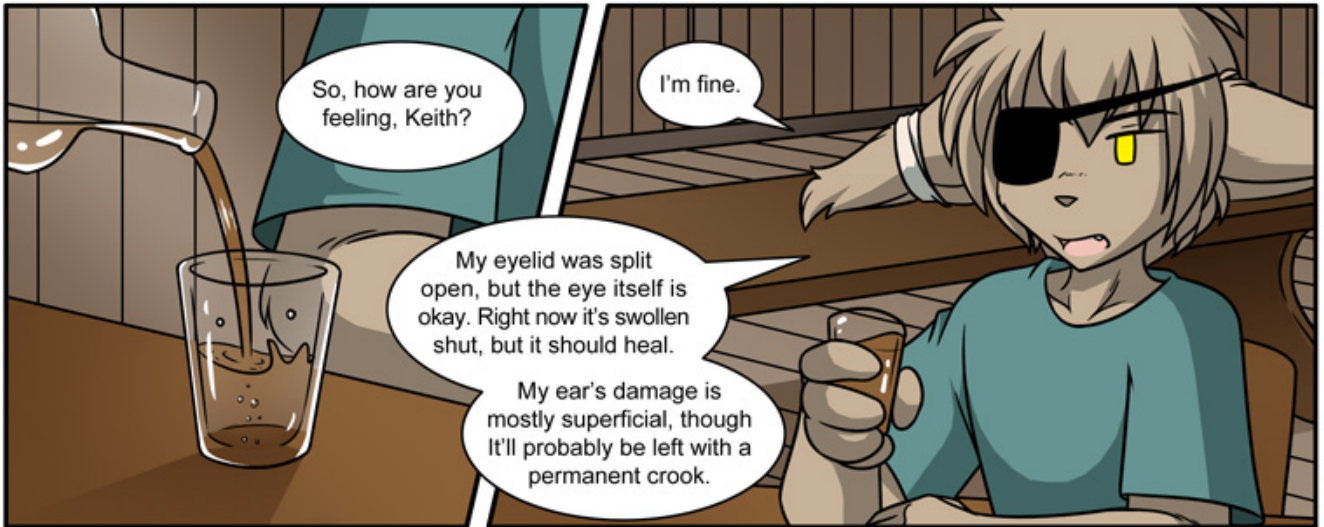
I'm going to show her that I care, and I thought I'd start with breakfast in bed.

So I'm down here trying to learn how to cook!



Unfortunately... either my cooking skills were lost with the rest of my memories...

Or I never had any to begin with.



So, how are you feeling, Keith?

I'm fine.

My eyelid was split open, but the eye itself is okay. Right now it's swollen shut, but it should heal.

My ear's damage is mostly superficial, though it'll probably be left with a permanent crook.



Well, that's good, at least.
Listen, if you ever want to talk about... you know, what happened...



Okay! I understand.



Sigh...
By the way, your food is on fire again.

Gah!!

If you really want, I could just cook it for you.

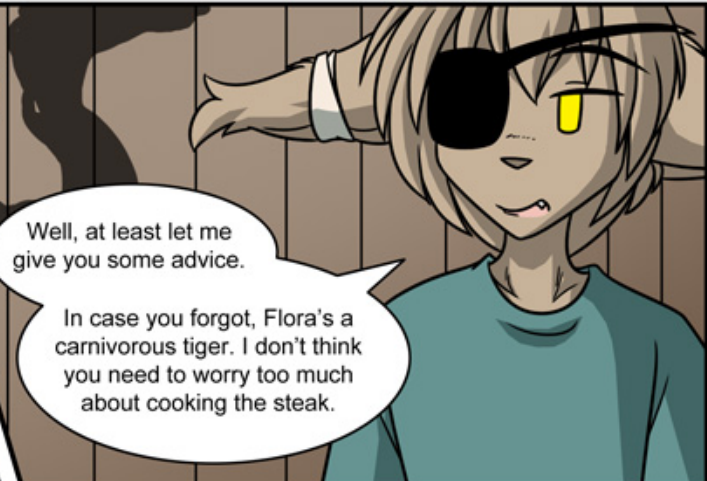


I said I'm fine.



No, no! I appreciate the offer, but I want this to come from me.

PSSSHH!



Well, at least let me give you some advice.
In case you forgot, Flora's a carnivorous tiger. I don't think you need to worry too much about cooking the steak.



Phew! Back safe and sound.

What a mess. I hope that girl gets those robes finished by tomorrow.

I don't care what they look like, so long as I'm covered.



...
...I wonder what Keith will think of my new robes?



NATANI!

Gah!!



Listen, the group I'm tracking finally set camp for the night.

I think this is my best chance!



But I want to have every advantage, so I'd like you... to...

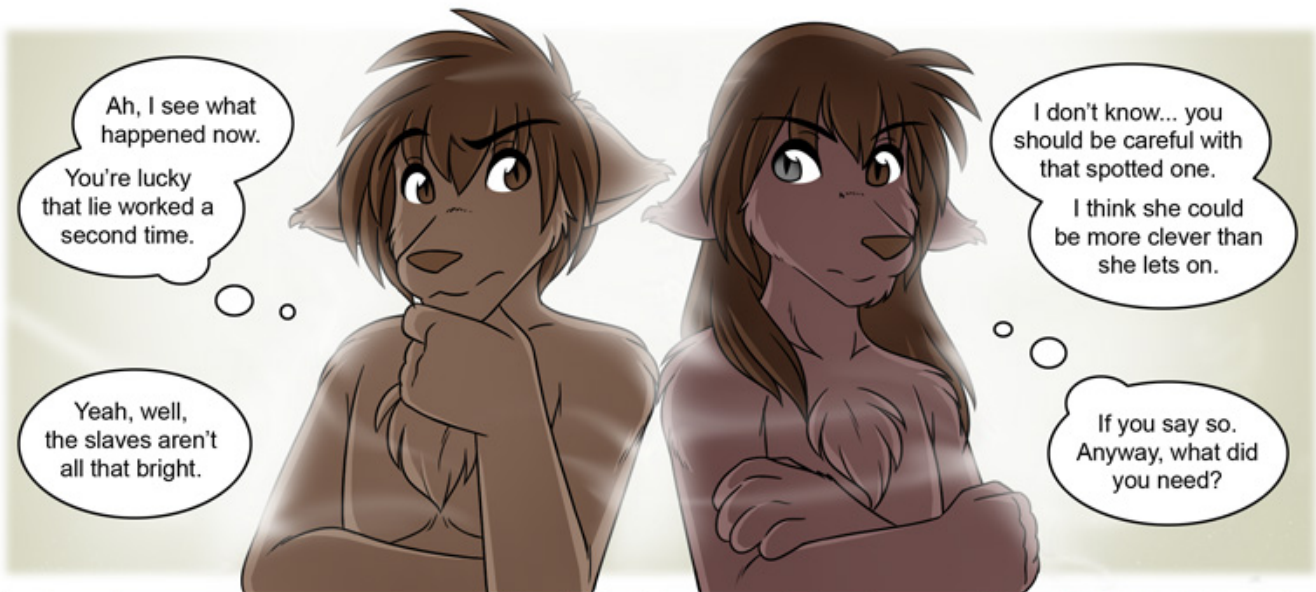


SIGH...

How did you manage to lose your clothes this time?

I don't know!

This just seems to keep happening!



Ah, I see what happened now.

You're lucky that lie worked a second time.

Yeah, well, the slaves aren't all that bright.

I don't know... you should be careful with that spotted one.

I think she could be more clever than she lets on.

If you say so. Anyway, what did you need?



They don't have their guard up.

Right, like I said, the group stopped for the night.

In fact, they've spent most of the day arguing.



Still, it's been a long time since I've done a solo mission. I'd feel better with you watching my back, so to speak.

I know that it's uncomfortable, but if you could...



Of course, Brother.



I've opened my mind fully to yours. We are now one.



I can't believe we had to sell our dresses for these supplies.
I feel like I'm wearing a burlap sack!

It's the best we can do right now.
It wasn't as though we had time to grab a coin purse while running for our lives.



Well, why didn't you sell that sword of yours?
I'm sure *that* would have fetched far more coin.

Hey, we need this sword!



These are dangerous times, especially in the wilderness.

Who knows what might be lurking out there!
You saw what happened to our village!



Yes, I know... I still can't believe what happened.
The village... the tavern! All gone.



But Sis, you always said you hated that tavern.

Well, yes, but it was MY tavern! It was our family's tavern!
Our family name is **Taverndatter**, for crying out loud!



Why, without the tavern, all I am is...
Maren Datter!





Damn it,
where are they?

Why would
Raine go off alone
with him?
Doesn't she know
Keidran are dangerous?
He might hurt her!

Erk!
Or... or worse!
Clothes...! What is
that animal doing
with her?!



Huh?

Come on! You can do it,
O' Mighty Hunter!

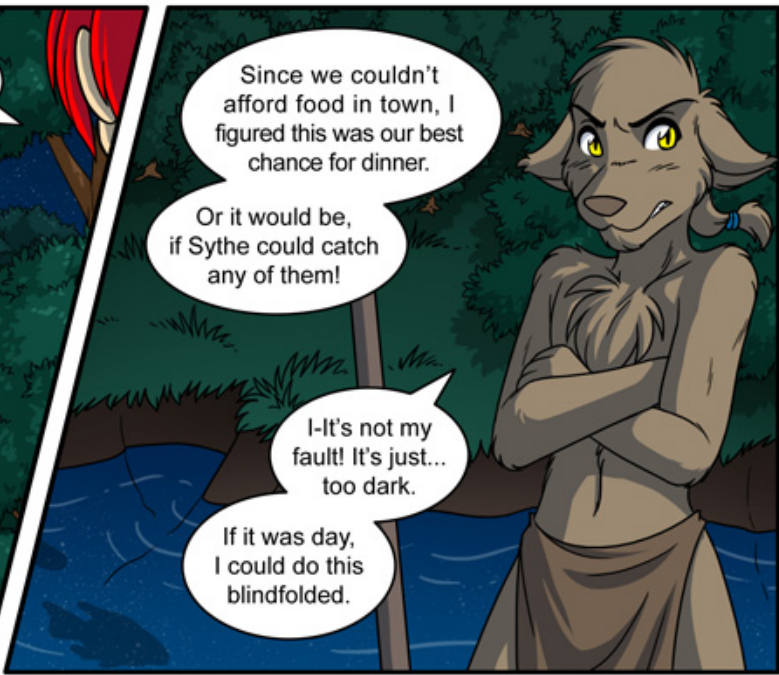
Sure, you may have
failed the last 27 times, but
28th time's the charm!

S-shut up!



Hey! What's going on over here?

Oh, hey!
We're trying to get some fish!



Since we couldn't afford food in town, I figured this was our best chance for dinner.

Or it would be, if Sythe could catch any of them!

-It's not my fault! It's just... too dark.

If it was day, I could do this blindfolded.



But with a blindfold, you'd see le...

I know what I said, Woman!

And you! What are you doing over here, anyway?



Why aren't you guarding the others?

Maren can take care of herself.

But if you're so concerned, maybe you should go, and I'll stay here.



Alright, fine, I will then!



Hmph, Keidran.



I tell ya, Raine, you can't trust any of them.

Pwip!

They're not like you or I. Deep down, they're animals.





No, no, no...!
how can this be
happening?!

Oh no, not
the tail too...
I need to
get ahold of
myself!



If I just calm down
and control my emotions,
I can change back.
As long as I keep my
emotions in check...



So, Raine, I've
been thinking.

I know this isn't the best
time for it, what with us being
on the run and all, but...

We've known each
other for a while now, and
I was wondering if...



Look, you're a beautiful woman,
and I was wondering if maybe once
we're no longer running for our lives,
you might want to... I dunno...

...go do something
together?



Is he...

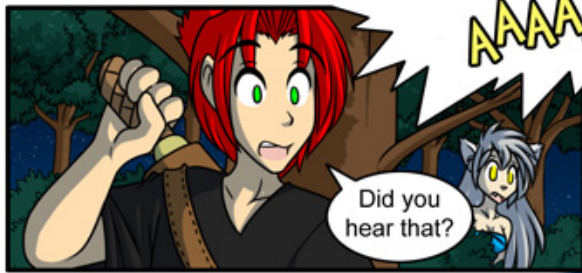
...asking
me out?



Raine? Er... what
do you think?



I think I'm
screwed...



Did you hear that?

AAAAAAAAAH!!!



What the-?



Someone's in trouble. Come on, Raine, I want you close to me.

I... I'll be right behind you...



Maren?

Hang on, I'm coming!



Maren!



Maren, what happened? Come on, wake up!



Get your hands off her!

Huh?



I knew you couldn't be trusted!
Keidran... it's only a matter of time!



What?! I'm not responsible for this!

Ngh...





Oh no... not a muzzle, too!

It's no use, I can't stop it! There's nothing human left of my body now.



The shackle... it's broken, and with it... the suppression enchantment.



Which means I... I could be stuck like this! What am I going to do?!

There's no way I can hide it from them... and I can't will myself to shift back with my emotions like they are.

I don't even know if I can shift back when calm.



I guess... I have no choice. I knew I couldn't keep it secret forever.

Maybe it's best it comes out now, before... regrets are made.



I'll kill you!

Huh?



What's going on?



Why are they fighting? And Maren! what happ--



GASP!



That... that's not Maren!



No!!

Huh?
Who said-?

I won't let
you hurt him!

CRASH!

Wha-! Who
the hell is this?!



Maren?!

No!

Get your filthy hands off her, you flea-bitten wolf!



Huh?



No, wait!
It's me!

Yip!!

SLICE!



Alright, Wolf, where did you come from?
Are you two in league with each other?

I was trying to help!
Why?! Why did you hurt me?

What are you talking about?

Maren... she's... a fake... she's not the real...

Hey! Don't listen to her!

She's with the wolf! Kill her!

He's speaking in Keidran, can't you hear it?



No I can't, and why should I believe you?

Don't you recognize me?

You said... you liked me.

You... you called me beautiful.

Wha? Raine?! Th-that can't be...



STOMP!!

Eh?!

So, "Maren."

If you're really her, then you should be able to tell us who we are, then.

Huh?

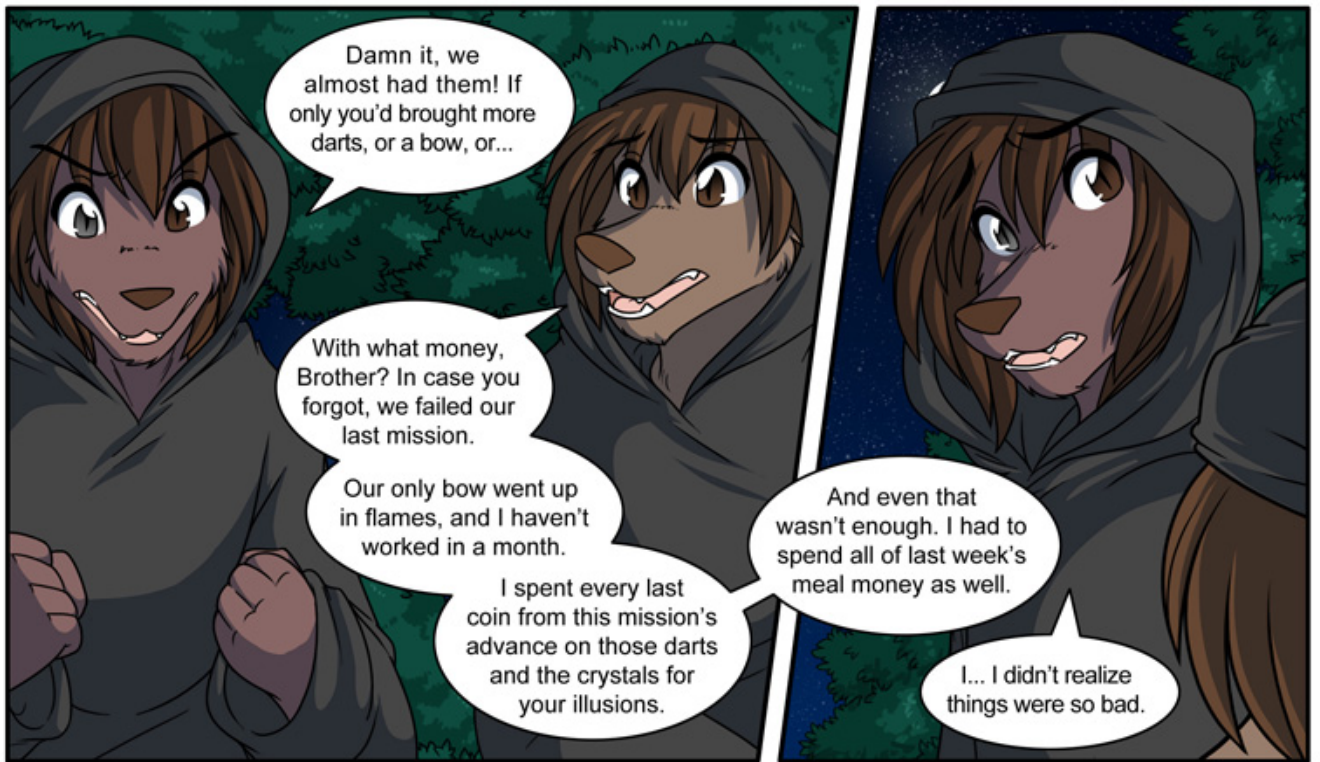
Yes, if you're the Maren I know, tell me, what's my name?

Oh, that's easy, its... ah...

Wait, what is it? They must have said it at some point...

It's... uh...
...Red?





Damn it, we almost had them! If only you'd brought more darts, or a bow, or...

With what money, Brother? In case you forgot, we failed our last mission.

Our only bow went up in flames, and I haven't worked in a month.

I spent every last coin from this mission's advance on those darts and the crystals for your illusions.

And even that wasn't enough. I had to spend all of last week's meal money as well.

I... I didn't realize things were so bad.



I didn't want to worry you, so I tried to keep it out of your mind... literally.

But... things have been rough back home. If we don't succeed with this mission... Well, I...



But we will!
It's just the two of them now. The poison in those darts was weak, but without an antidote, they won't be waking up again.

With two - possibly three - down, they're not going anywhere.

And I doubt those guys will be getting any sleep tonight.



So tomorrow, when they're exhausted and weak... we'll strike!

But for now, let's get some rest.



Sorry, Raine.
I'm no healer.
This is the best
I can do for you.

Thanks for
all the help by the
way, "Red."

Hey, I dunno
nothing 'bout Keidran
or healing.
And don't call
me that.

What's the matter
with you? I thought you
cared about her?



I still can't believe
that... that thing is Raine.
If this was that assassin's
doing, shouldn't it have
worn off by now?

I don't know.
Guess we'll have
to wait until she wakes
up again to ask.



Look, I don't like
you, and you don't
like me. I get that.

But it's just the two
of us now, and the girls
are counting on us.

We're going to have to
work together if we're going
to have any hope of living
through this.



After this is all
over, we can go back
to hating each other,
but until then...
Truce?

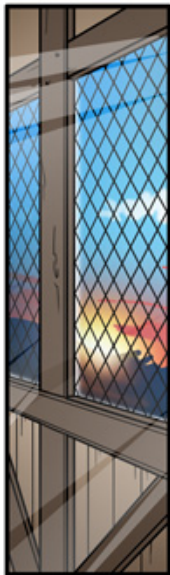


.....



Alright, Furball.
Truce.

For now.



Snrrk...



Trace?



Hm? Oh, there he is!

Oh, good morning, Flora.



Er...



...You're up quite early today.

Yes, well...
When I woke up and saw that Trace hadn't come to bed, I was a bit worried.



I think Trace was hoping he'd be finished before you were up. He wanted to have breakfast ready for you.

Aw, poor guy.



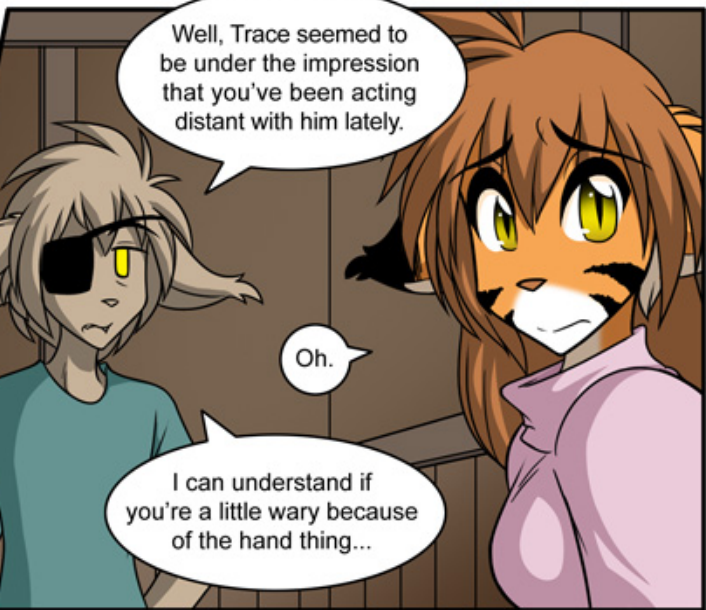
TWO KINDS

9TH ANNIVERSARY



So, is everything alright between you two, Flora?

Huh? Why do you ask?



Well, Trace seemed to be under the impression that you've been acting distant with him lately.

Oh.

I can understand if you're a little wary because of the hand thing...



No, no, it's not that. It's just that... um... it's nothing.

...Ahuh, right.



Besides, I should be the one asking you how you're doing.

After what happened on the island... I'm so sorry, Keith.

...



We're your friends, and we're all here for you.

If you ever want to talk about it...

.....

Um... I - I'm sorry, I shouldn't have brought it up.



Sigh...

No, it's okay. Thank you.

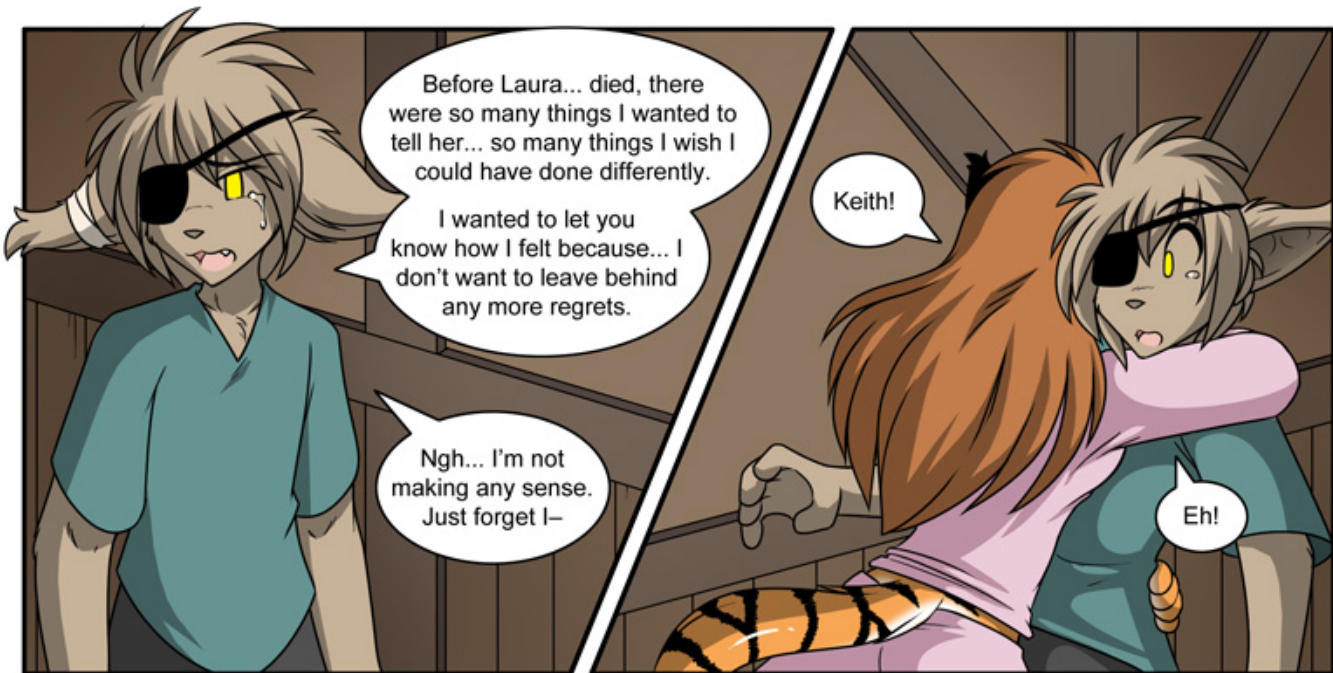
I know it's something I should talk about. Just... not right now.



You know... I don't think I've properly apologized to you, Flora.

A-apologized? What for?





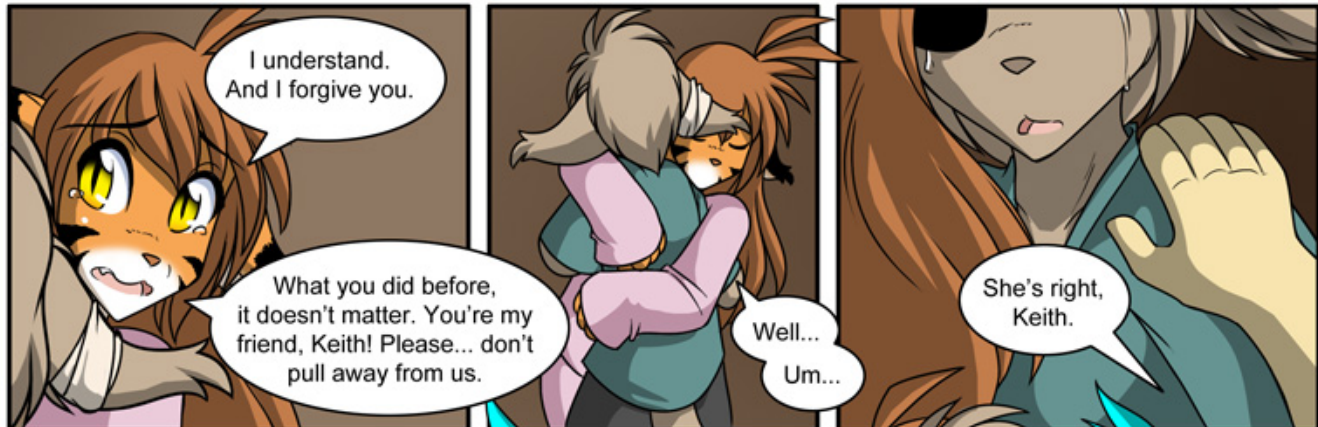
Before Laura... died, there were so many things I wanted to tell her... so many things I wish I could have done differently.

I wanted to let you know how I felt because... I don't want to leave behind any more regrets.

Ngh... I'm not making any sense. Just forget I-

Keith!

Eh!



I understand. And I forgive you.

What you did before, it doesn't matter. You're my friend, Keith! Please... don't pull away from us.

Well... Um...

She's right, Keith.



Trace, you're awake!

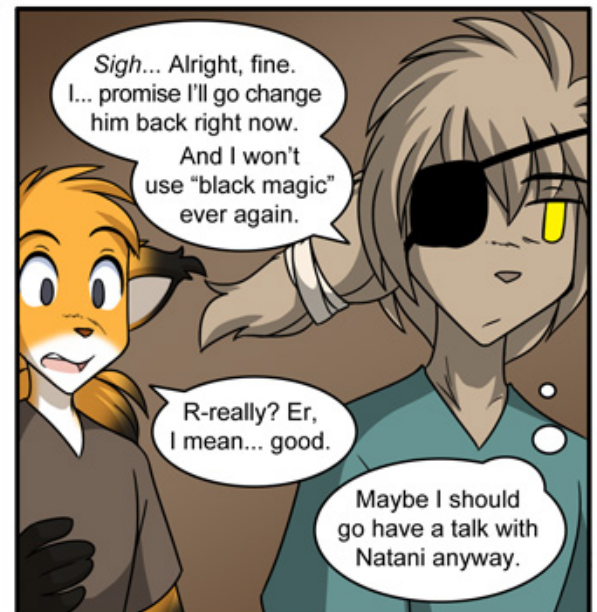
We all have things in our past we regret. I of all people can relate to that.

But we're friends.

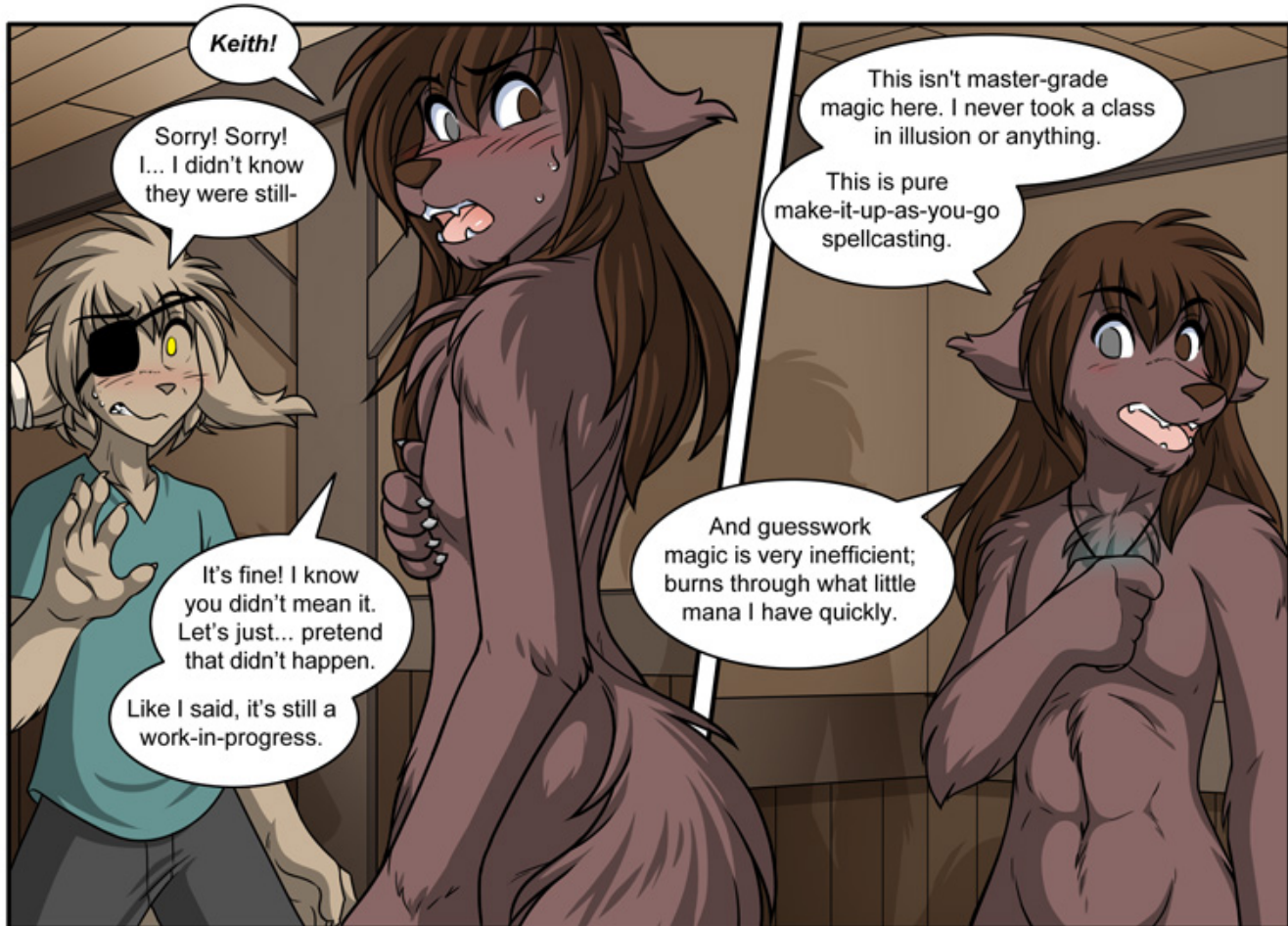
And we're here for you. While we can never take back the things we've done, together we can try to make it right again.











Keith!

Sorry! Sorry!
I... I didn't know
they were still-

It's fine! I know
you didn't mean it.
Let's just... pretend
that didn't happen.

Like I said, it's still a
work-in-progress.

This isn't master-grade
magic here. I never took a class
in illusion or anything.

This is pure
make-it-up-as-you-go
spellcasting.

And guesswork
magic is very inefficient;
burns through what little
mana I have quickly.



These crystals were
never meant to be charged
over and over like this.

But...

CRACK!

Eh, it's stupid.
My robes went
up in flames during
the ship fire, and-

Fire?! Wait,
what fire?



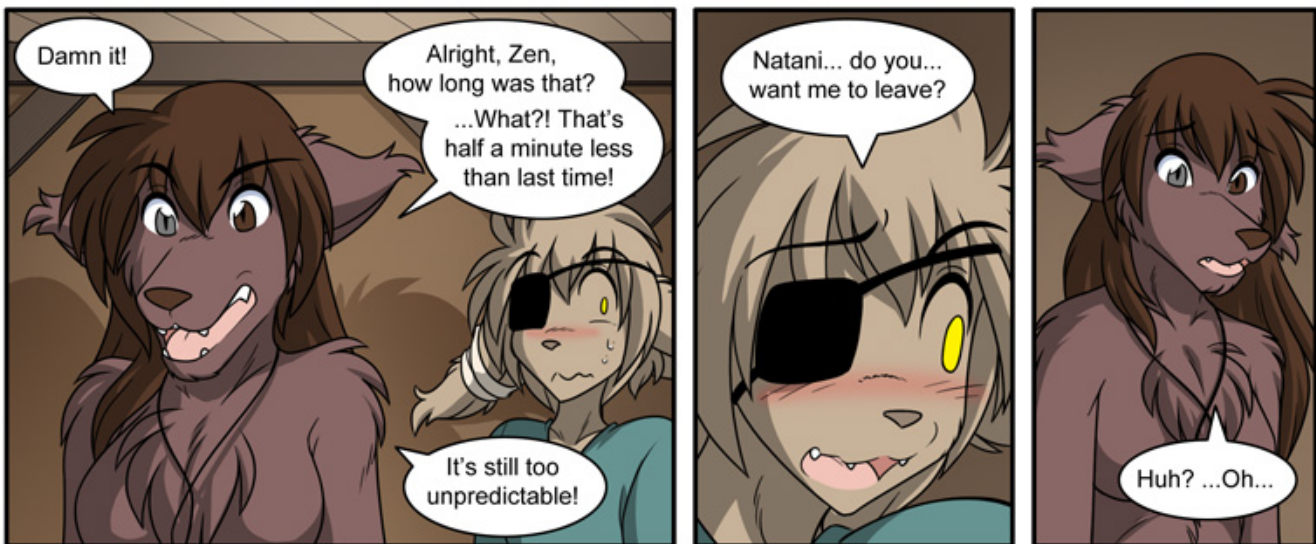
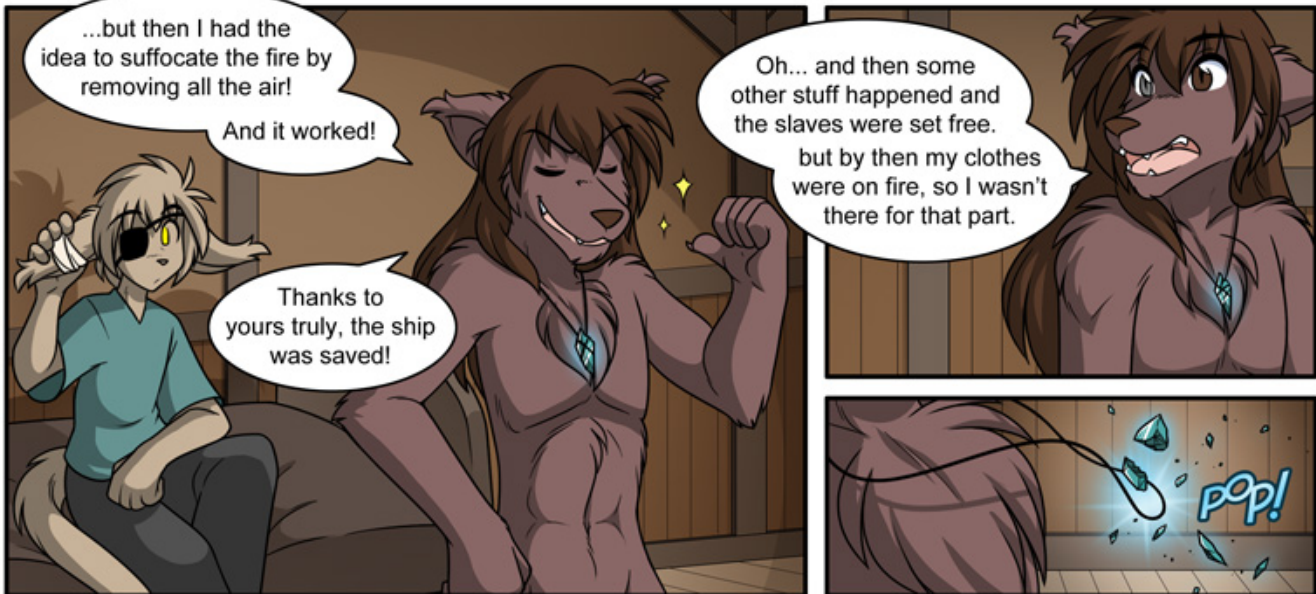
Hopefully it'll be enough.
Mike's convinced, but I'm
not so sure about Kat.

Huh? Kathrin
caught you too?

What happened?
Seems like I missed
a lot yesterday.

Oh, right. Man,
you really did miss
a lot, didn't you?

Well, I'm not going
anywhere for a while. So if
you want, I'll fill you in while
I try to fix these *problems*.





I guess that's kinda sad considering we've tried to kill each other more than once.

Right?



Yeah...



A-anyway...

If there's ever anything I can do for you, I'm here.

...



Natani... do you remember when we first met?

You and your brother attacked us. You shot me with an arrow.

But... right before then... do you remember what you did?



Y...yes?

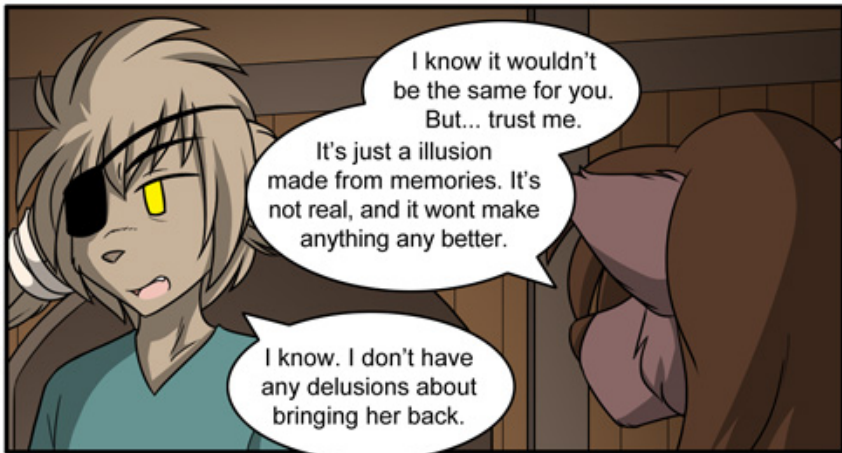
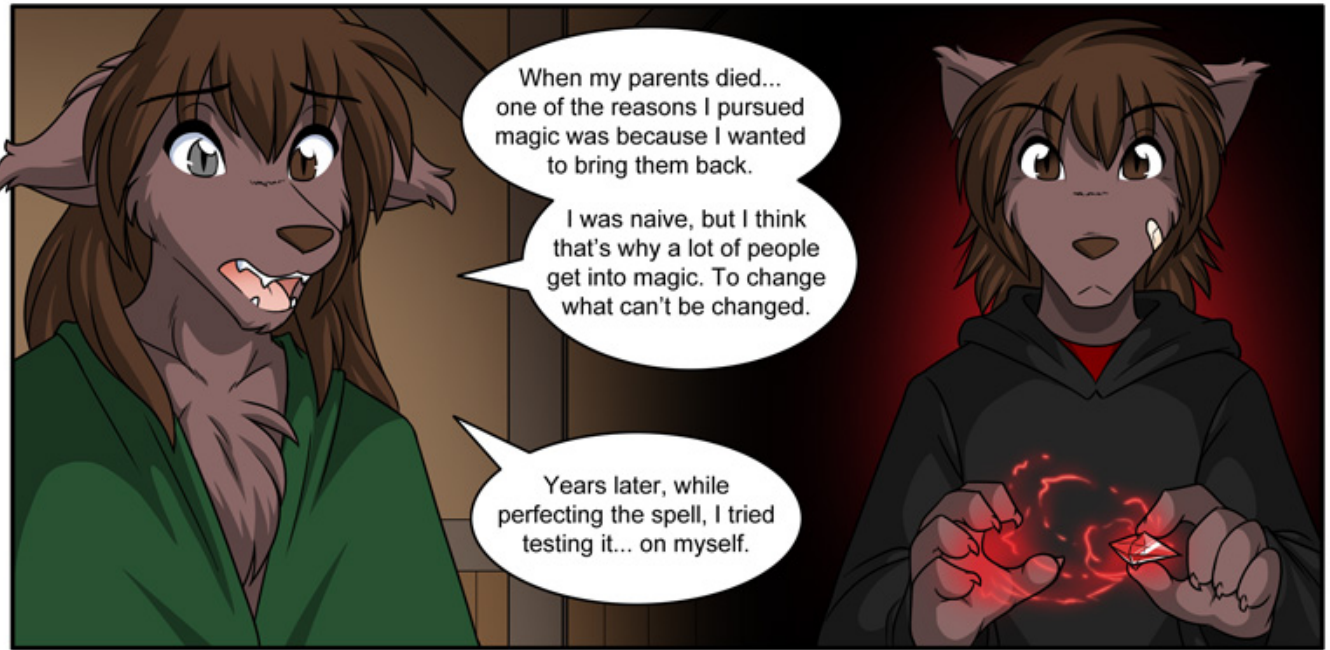


Could you do it again?



Keith... I... Even if I could... It's not a good idea.

I'm sorry, Keith. I can't. Not that.







I could go back to bed and pretend to be asleep if you really want me to.

Well... I suppose my breakfast in bed idea was a bit of a bust.

Aw, sorry about that.

Ha, no, it's fine.

And it doesn't mean I can't still treat you!



Come, have a seat. Relax!

Eep!

I'll go get your breakfast going!

Well, thank you, Trace! But... what's the occasion?

No occasion! I just feel like I haven't been giving you the attention you deserve, and I intend to correct that!

SCOOT!



Well, if you insist!
Go my chef!
Prepare my royal breakfast!

As you command, my lady!



Keith's a good teacher - I think I'm really getting the hang of this!

Hm?



Nrgh~

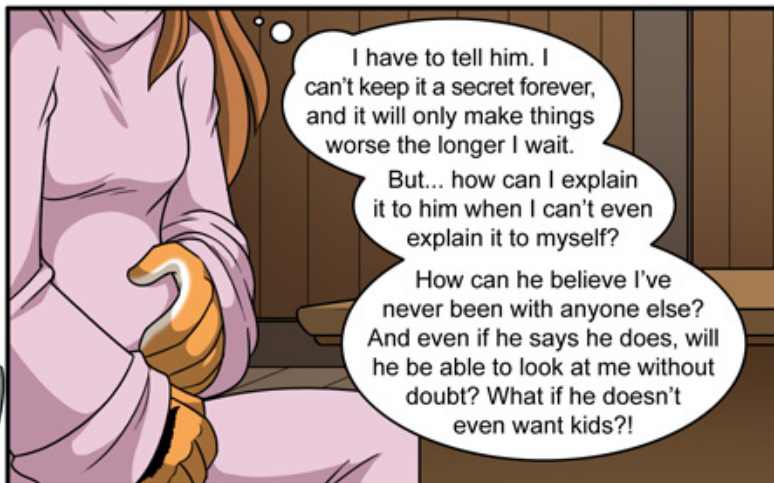


Something wrong, Flora?



W-wrong? No no! Just... my stomach growling! Heh heh...

Well I can fix that!



I have to tell him. I can't keep it a secret forever, and it will only make things worse the longer I wait.
But... how can I explain it to him when I can't even explain it to myself?
How can he believe I've never been with anyone else? And even if he says he does, will he be able to look at me without doubt? What if he doesn't even want kids?!



What am I going to do?!



You know, maybe we should rethink this *enchanted mistletoe* prank, Flora...

Aw come on, Trace! It's all in good fun!
Besides, this spell of yours is too funny to waste!
I wonder who we'll get first?



Wait, Flora! Someone's coming down the stairs!



Shoot! I almost had it up!



H-hey guys! What's up?

HIDE!

Hey Flora. We found some of the missing decorations up in the attic.



Oh, great! I know Maddy was looking for those this morning.



Trace!

Mistletoe made me do it!



Well, I'll let you get back to— eep!



"What are you going to do" about what?"

Eep!
Um... nothing, nothing!

Are you sure?

Yes! It's... nothing.



Well... alright, if you say so.
You know you can always talk to me about anything.

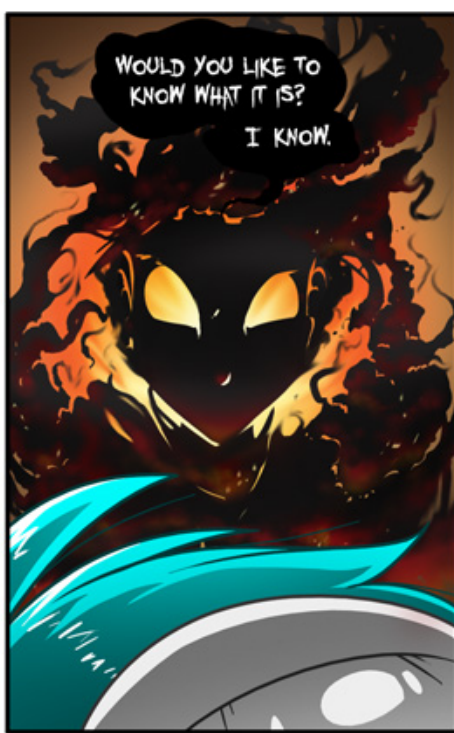


Sigh...
I can tell there's still something wrong. I wish I could get her to open up about it.



SHE'S KEEPING SOMETHING FROM YOU. SOMETHING SHE DOESN'T WANT US TO KNOW.

Who...?



WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW WHAT IT IS?
I KNOW.



Who... what are you?

YOU KNOW WHO I AM. WE WERE ONCE ONE AND THE SAME.



No! Get out of my head!

I'm never going back to the way I was, and nothing you can say to me will change that!



WE'LL SEE.



YOU'RE MORE CLUELESS THAN I THOUGHT. YOU REALLY HAVEN'T NOTICED? AREN'T YOU AT LEAST A LITTLE CURIOUS?

I told you to leave me alone!

YOU ALSO SAID NOTHING I COULD SAY WOULD CHANGE YOU.

YOU'RE WRONG. I CAN BREAK YOU WITH JUST ONE IDEA. AND IT IS...



No! I won't listen to you! Do you really think I'd believe anything you tell me?!

ASK HER YOURSELF THEN.

I'm not doing anything you say! I trust Flora!



HEHEHEH... FINE. BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT. SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO HIDE FOREVER.

I LOOK FORWARD TO THE MOMENT WHEN WE ONCE AGAIN SEE KEIDRAM FOR WHAT THEY REALLY ARE.

AND WHEN YOUR MIND SHATTERS, I'LL BE THERE TO FILL IN THE CRACKS.



I... I've made up my mind. I can't keep it a secret any longer. When Trace comes back, I... I'm going to tell him.



Here's... um, your breakfast, Flora.



I know it's not exactly a four-course meal.

It's fine. This was sweet of you.



Oh, wow...

It looks... delicious!



... Trace, I...

Hm?



I have to tell you something, but I... I'm really scared you won't believe me when I do.



Believe you? Flora, I trust you, and you can trust me!

I know, Trace, but this is—



CRASH!

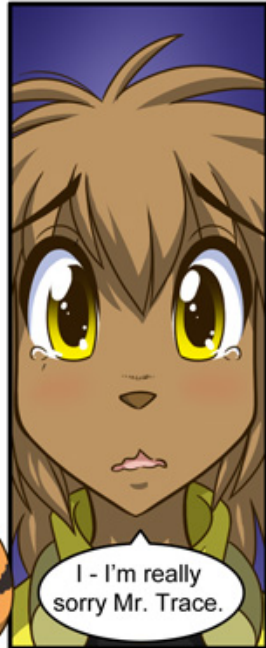
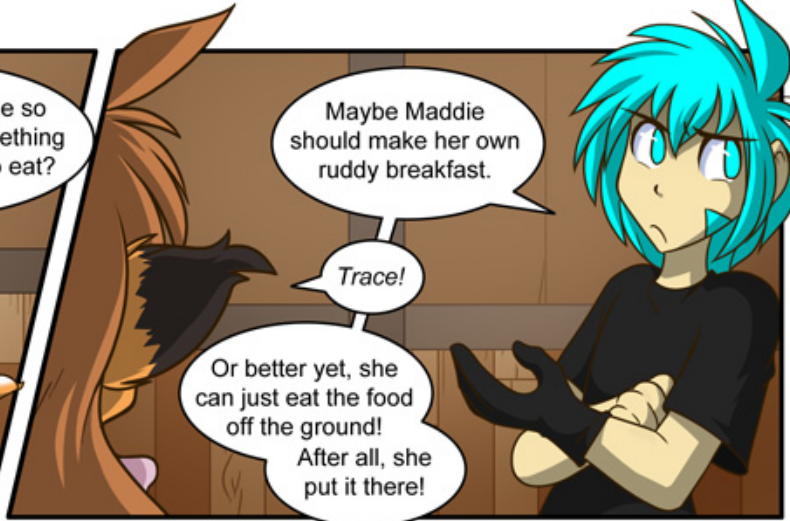


Madelyn?

Oopsie! my bad.







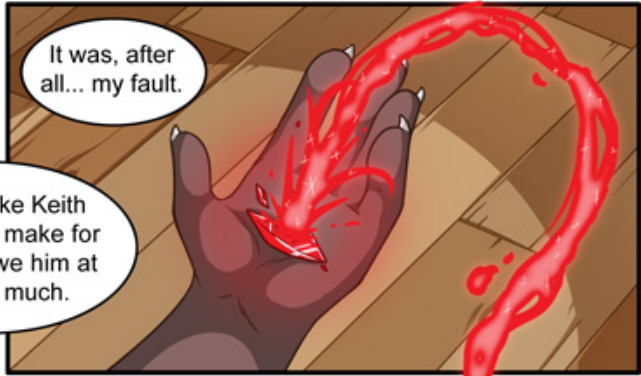




This is a mistake...
I just know it is.

I shouldn't have
relented, but...

It's a mistake Keith
deserves to make for
himself. I owe him at
least that much.



It was, after
all... my fault.



I just hope
his lesson...

Keith...



...is not as painful
as the one I had to
go through.



I've missed
you so much.



Laura...

Keith, why are you crying?

Everything's alright. We're together now.

No...



We're not, and I'm sorry. Laura, I'm so sorry.

You saved me. So please don't be sad, Keith.

No, stop it! I didn't save you! I couldn't...

You look and sound just like her, but I know there's nothing inside. And that just makes it worse!

I put you in danger. It's my fault you're gone.

But I'm not gone. You brought me back, and we never have to be alone again.

Keith...



You're dead, and it's all my fault.

I'm sorry, Laura! I wish I'd never come back to the island.

I wish I'd never asked you to marry me.

I wish... I wish we'd never met!



SMACK!



How... how could you say that, Keith? D-do you really regret everything we had together?

Hearing you say that hurts worse than anything else I've gone through!



L-Laura?

W-wait...

Where am I?
H-how did I...?

Eh?

What's
going on?

I'm... not sure.
But remember,
Keith, it's not-



Keith!



Keith! It's me!
I'm here, I... I'm
not sure how...

W-what?
What do you
mean?



I... I'm not really sure.
I remember collapsing on
the beach, and then... there
was just... emptiness.

I kept feeling like I was
supposed to go somewhere,
but the magic on the island...
it's like it was broken.

I just kept trying to
find you. I could sometimes
hear your voice. And then...
I was pulled here, and you
were talking to me.

Is... is that
possible...?



Keith, it's not real!
The one in the forest made up
things too, remember? You want
Laura back so it's coming up with
any way for it to be possible!

You have to let
go of it, now!

Go?! No, please!
It's me, Keith, I swear
it's me! D-don't... don't
make me go back.



Not to t-that...
nothingness. It took so
much effort to pull myself
back, I don't think I can
do it again!



Keith, this is not up for debate!
It has to go!

Please...
Keith, don't send me away!



If you don't stop it you will *die!*

W...what?

No.



I won't do it.
I'm not letting you go. Not again.

No matter what happens... you won't be alone this time.

Keith...

No...

End.