

TWO KINDS

Chapter Sixteen



CONFESSIONS



Uurgh...

Hey, I think she might be waking up...



I-is someone there? Erg... what happened?



Hey, Raine. Don't worry, you're okay.

Try not to move around too much. The cut wasn't bad, but you lost some blood.



Luckily, "Red" isn't as good with a sword as he thinks he is. Still, it probably hurts like a bi-er, ah... like heck.

It does... but I... I'll be...



...I'm still covered in fur, aren't I?



Yeeeah, I didn't want to start pointing it out or nothin', but...

Well, for a human, you're looking pretty wolf-ish right now.



You're probably going to have to explain that one to us at some point.

Yes... yes, I know, and I will.

Ngh, where are the others?

Well...

Maren and Karen... they haven't woken up yet. We're not sure what's wrong with them.



As for Red, he's just outside the tent. I think he's still in denial.



"Red?" Why do you keep calling him that?

Because it ticks him off, and I think it's hilarious!

Anyway, I'll send him in now. And if it's any consolation, I think the new look suits you!

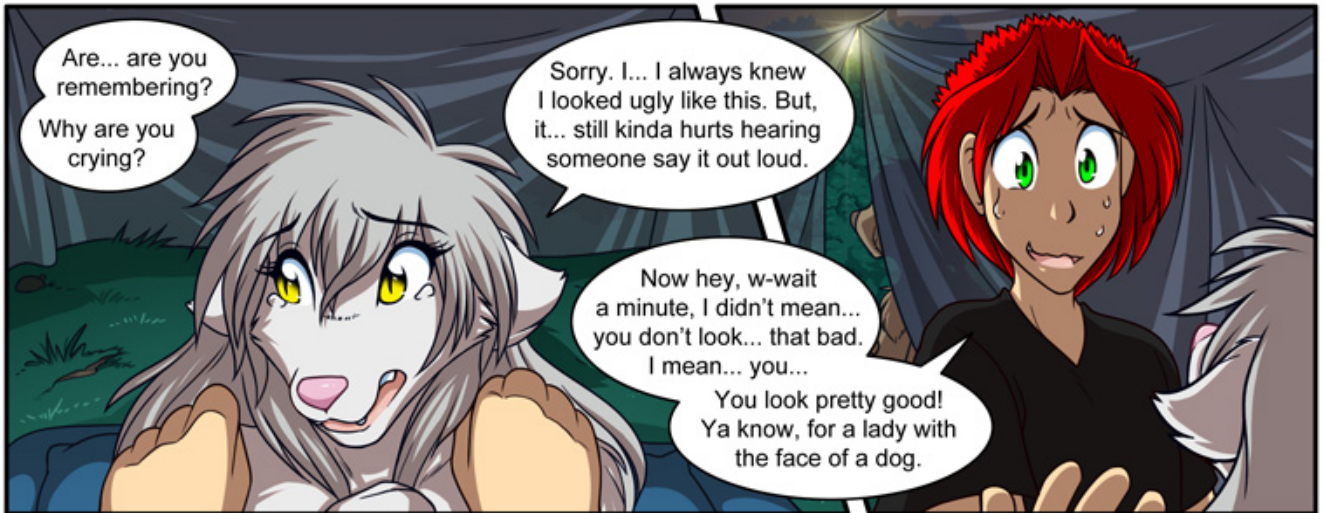




Oh no!
It's already started to affect your mind!

Raine! Remember who you were! You were a human, not this... *hideous beast!*

Hideous?



Are... are you remembering?
Why are you crying?

Sorry. I... I always knew I looked ugly like this. But, it... still kinda hurts hearing someone say it out loud.

Now hey, w-wait a minute, I didn't mean... you don't look... that bad. I mean... you...
You look pretty good!
Ya know, for a lady with the face of a dog.



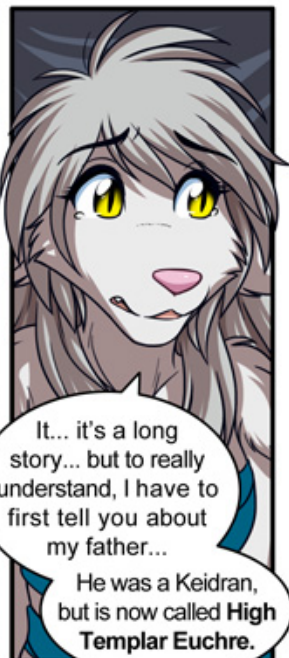
No, no, wait! That came out wrong too!
I'm sorry...



D-don't cry. Please, let me try again. Just... look me in the eyes.



It's true, this really is you, isn't it? But how?



It... it's a long story... but to really understand, I have to first tell you about my father...
He was a Keidran, but is now called **High Templar Euchre.**



Even as a young man, my father was gifted in magic. But what made him unique was not his power, but a natural ability that most mages could never hope to learn, let alone master...



Flawless Transformation.



Unlike typical illusions, his ability allowed him to physically **become** human, down to the smallest detail.



Don't move, Human!



Eek!

Rose? Roselyn!
I... I'm not a human!
It's me, Euchre!

Don't stab me!



Yeah, I know it's you, cousin. I'm not an idiot. You, on the other hand...

Why do you keep doing this? Sneaking off into that human village is going to get you collared one day.

You're not as clever as you think you are.



Oh no? I certainly seemed to fool the Templar when I applied to join their college in Edinmire.

You... *did what?!*

Are you insane? Why would you do that?!

Rose, you know how much magic means to me. Think of all the knowledge I could gain from them!

What the Humans are doing with magic is incredible. They have theories, formulae... their magic is an art! And their college is the only place I can learn it.



Now if you'll excuse me, I need time to prepare for my inauguration!



When the Templar catch you, the only thing you'll be getting is an execution!

But Rose was wrong - Euchre was not caught. In fact, I'm told he thrived at the college.

In Keidran form, Euchre voluntarily arranged to become an indentured servant on a farm at the edge of town.



This gave him a place to rest outside the college, and legitimized his presence in the village, on the off chance he was ever discovered in his natural form.

It was at the college that Euchre first met my mother, Mary Silverlock. She was not yet Grand Templar, but was well on her way.

I don't know much of their relationship. My mother never went into detail, I think it was too painful for her. All I know is that she did not know the truth of Euchre even after they had become intimate.

Hold on! You're telling me Euchre never told your mother what he was, even after they started sleeping together?!

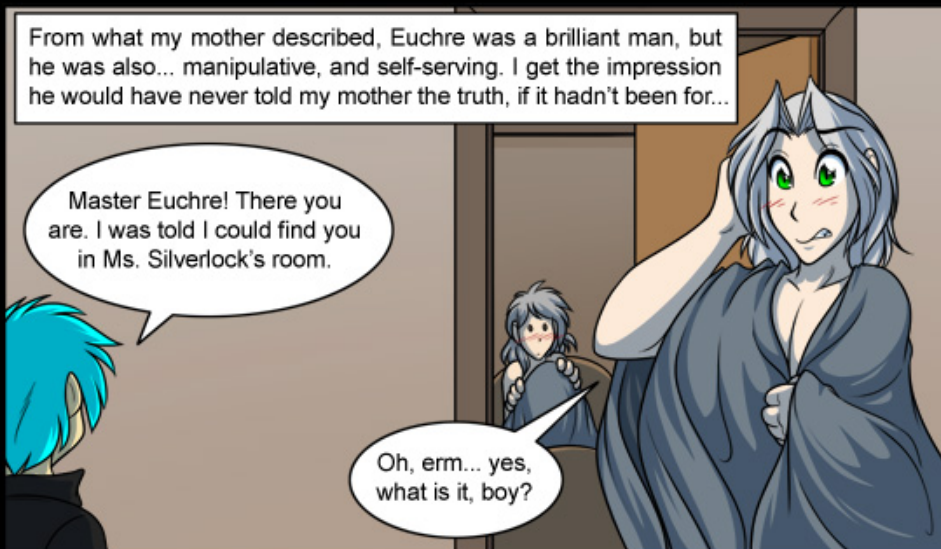
Yeah... she had no idea.



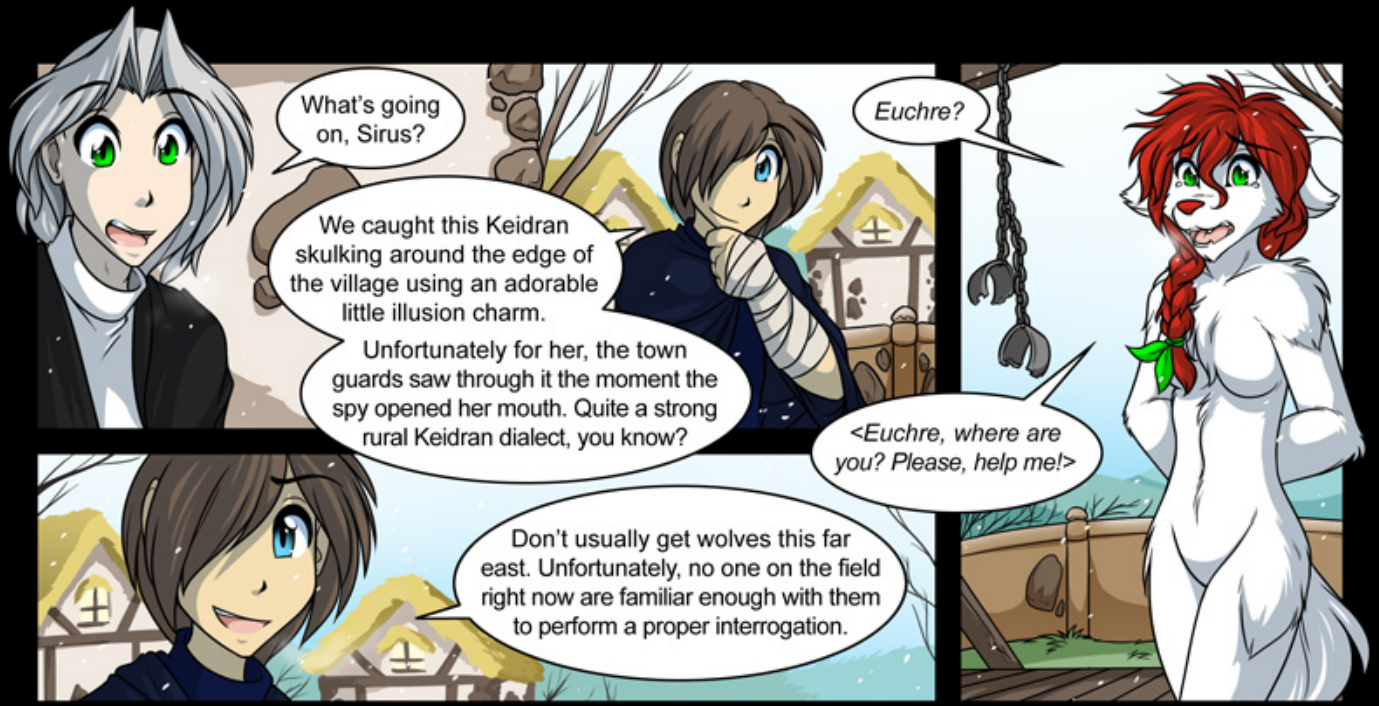
From what my mother described, Euchre was a brilliant man, but he was also... manipulative, and self-serving. I get the impression he would have never told my mother the truth, if it hadn't been for...

Master Euchre! There you are. I was told I could find you in Ms. Silverlock's room.

Oh, erm... yes, what is it, boy?



There's a Keidran, Sir. It's calling your name from the gallows.



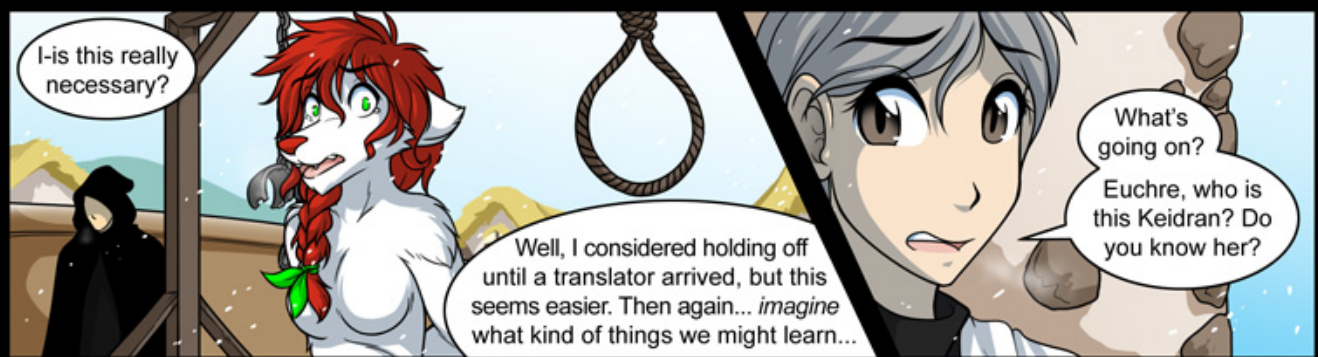
What's going on, Sirus?

Euchre?

We caught this Keidran skulking around the edge of the village using an adorable little illusion charm. Unfortunately for her, the town guards saw through it the moment the spy opened her mouth. Quite a strong rural Keidran dialect, you know?

<Euchre, where are you? Please, help me!>

Don't usually get wolves this far east. Unfortunately, no one on the field right now are familiar enough with them to perform a proper interrogation.



I-is this really necessary?

What's going on? Euchre, who is this Keidran? Do you know her?

Well, I considered holding off until a translator arrived, but this seems easier. Then again... *imagine* what kind of things we might learn...



Euchre?!

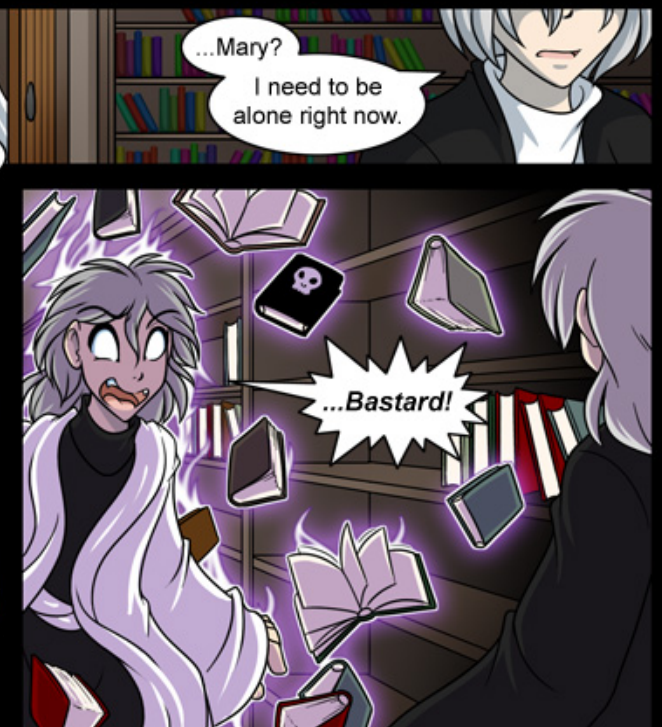
We're ready. Bring her up.

<No! I don't understand!>
<Euchre! Help me! Please!!>

She...

Euchre...?

Euchre!





You lied to me... this whole time!

I don't know what you're t-

No! No more lies, Euchre! I questioned Rose. I looked into her mind. She couldn't lie to me.



R-Rose? Rose is still alive?



Don't pretend to care now! I don't know which is more disgusting -

CRASH!

That you never planned to tell me what you really were, or that you were willing to sacrifice your own *cousin* to make sure it was never found out!



I-it's not like that!

It's Sirius! He was trying to trap me - to gauge my loyalties.

He left me no choice!

He knew I couldn't be caught connected with a magic-using Keidran.



You had a choice! You could have run! Taken her and left this place.

You used her, just as you used me.



I never meant for any of this to happen. I wasn't trying to use anyone.

Then why... why pretend to care about me, if not to use me?

I wasn't pretending! I... I just... hadn't plan for it to happen...



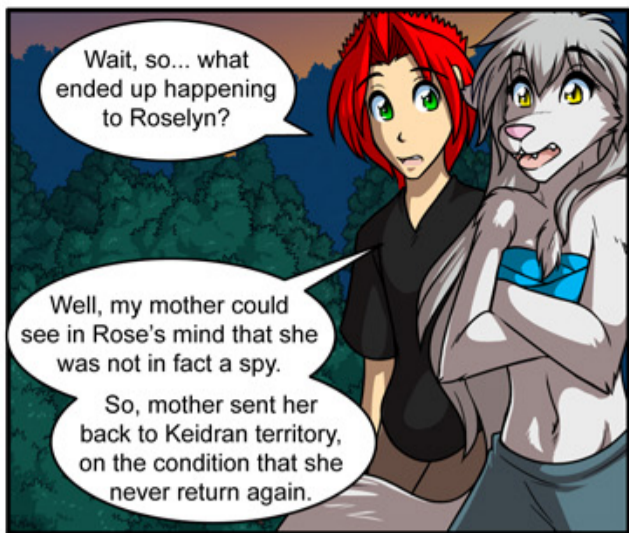
You didn't seem to care enough to tell me the truth before bedding me. All that time we were together...



Would it have turned out any better for me if I had?

It's *your* people just now who were preparing to murder an innocent girl they simply *suspected* of being a spy.

It might not excuse what I've done, but are you honestly surprised I'd keep what I am a secret from you?



Wait, so... what ended up happening to Roselyn?

Well, my mother could see in Rose's mind that she was not in fact a spy. So, mother sent her back to Keidran territory, on the condition that she never return again.



Oh, I see. That's... good. You know... it's strange. I've heard lots of stories about the Templar, but... I've never felt bad for the Keidran before.

I'm... glad Rose ended up okay, and that's weird to say.



I guess you've never had a reason to empathize with a Keidran before. Though, you should be glad she survived.

Hm? How so?



Well, you see, while Euchre was at the college, Rose had been with child.

Oh, really?

Yes. Before I was born, she had had a baby boy.



The child had red hair and bright green eyes. And although she promised not to return, the child eventually ended up at the doorstep of the Templar, where it was raised under a human disguise.

Uh... I... see. R-Raine, what are...



Tell me, "Red" - Do you happen to have any sort of memento from childhood? Something you've had with you for as long as you can remember?



N-no, of course not. I have nothing like that! Nothing... except for...



Um, well... this pendant was said to be an old family heirloom...



The fact is, you-

CRACK!

Hey!



B-but Raine, this is crazy! You aren't honestly suggesting that I'm somehow-

Yes, Red...



-have secretly been a Keidran all along, just like me!



W-what?! No... no!



Noooooooooo!



Oh, and that also makes us cousins! So, sorry, cuz, I'm off limits!



Happy April Fools!



So, then what happened?

I don't actually know. All I know is that eventually, she let him go.



What? Just like that? Why?

Well, I can only say what my mother told me.

She claimed it was because exposing him might have ruined her chances of being chosen as Grand Templar.



But... I don't know if I believe that.

If she really wanted to, I think she could have had him... "removed" quietly.

I think a part of her still loved him. But maybe that's naive wishing on my part.



No, I get that.

I mean, I grew up an orphan, but I can understand the desire of wanting parents who don't hate each other.

Though, I gotta say... I wouldn't blame your mom if she did.



Either way, I am thankful for my mother's mercy. As you've probably guessed, by then she was already pregnant with me.

It was a shock for everyone.

My conception was made possible due to my father's transformation. However... the gods do not look kindly on those who thwart their laws.



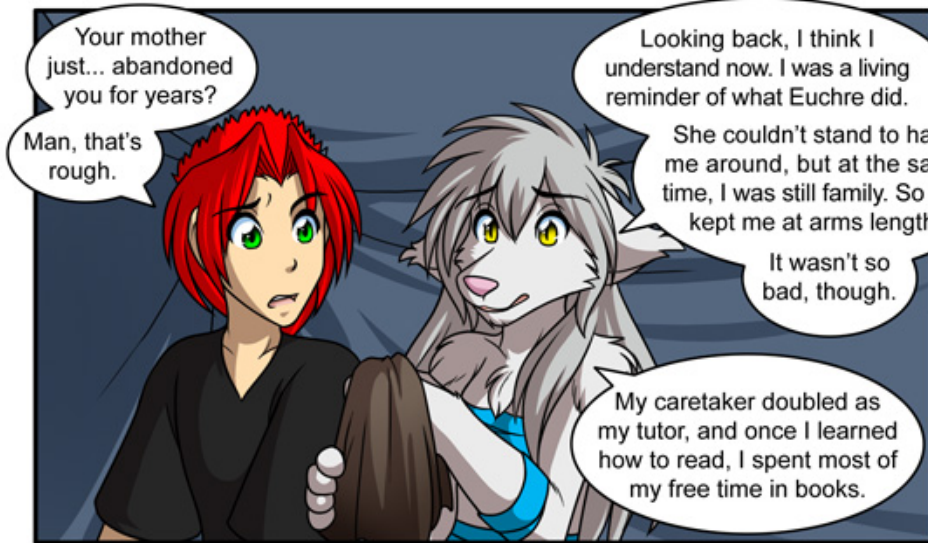
Ah!

I was born cursed - I inherited my father's gift, but none of his control. I'm not sure which form I was born with, but I was either a Keidran from birth, or changed soon after, because I'm told the midwife fainted.

My existence was kept a secret from almost everyone. A High Templar giving birth to a Keidran would have been a scandal.



I was given a locket to wear which kept my magic at bay, and then sent to live in a cabin far away from civilization. There were years of my childhood where I wouldn't see another soul, save for my caretaker. It was a lonely time in my life.



Your mother just... abandoned you for years?

Man, that's rough.

Looking back, I think I understand now. I was a living reminder of what Euchre did.

She couldn't stand to have me around, but at the same time, I was still family. So she kept me at arms length.

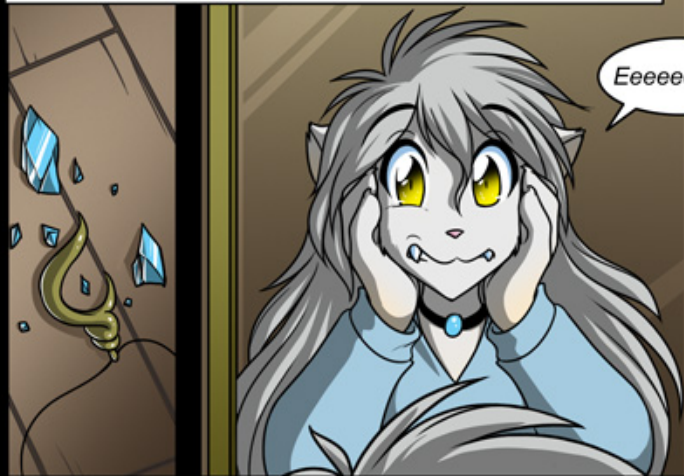
It wasn't so bad, though.

My caretaker doubled as my tutor, and once I learned how to read, I spent most of my free time in books.



You know it's kinda funny. I didn't even know about my "inheritance" until I was about 12 years old.

If you think you were surprised, imagine how I felt as a young girl when I accidentally stepped on my locket and began sprouting fur. I'd never even seen a Keidran before!



Eeeeeeee—!

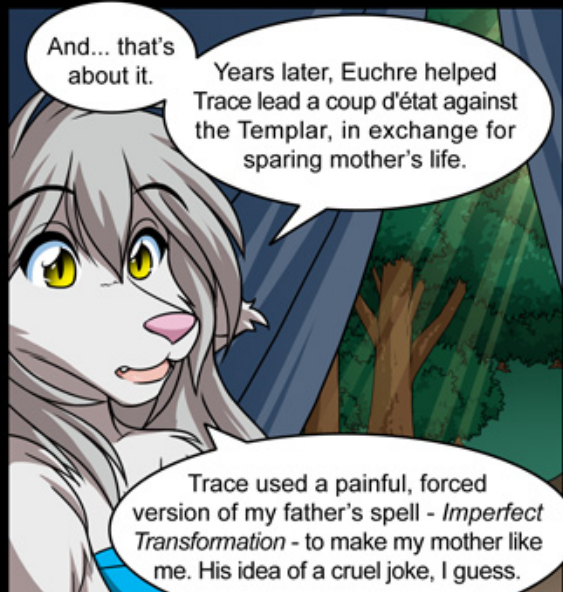


Knock! Knock!

Rainy, what's wrong? You haven't eaten anything all day. Let me in!

No! Keep away! I might eat you!

I remember being terrified, thinking I'd turned into a werewolf. I guess that's not too far off the mark, is it?



And... that's about it.

Years later, Euchre helped Trace lead a coup d'état against the Templar, in exchange for sparing mother's life.

Trace used a painful, forced version of my father's spell - *Imperfect Transformation* - to make my mother like me. His idea of a cruel joke, I guess.



Look out!

Ack!

We became separated while on the run, and... that's when I ran into you guys.



So... now you know.

I - I'm sure this must be weird for you. I'll understand if you don't want me around you anymore. I know how much you hate Keidran.



Well, hey now! I never said I... *hated* Keidran, necessarily.



No, I'm pretty sure you did. In fact, I think it was just the other day...



Tch, Keidran! I hate them all. Why can't the Templar just get rid'a the lot of them?



Well, okay! I said that. But... I, uh, didn't really mean it...

Uhhh...



I really mean it! Every last one of them. Especially the wolves!



Okay, okay! Damn it, past me, stop making current me look bad.

Erg, this is so confusing.

Sorry...

You don't have to apologize.

I'm just not used to... thinking about the stuff I say.



Alright... yes, I admit it, I've never liked Keidran. They're always, ya know... *burning down my whole village and stuff like that.*



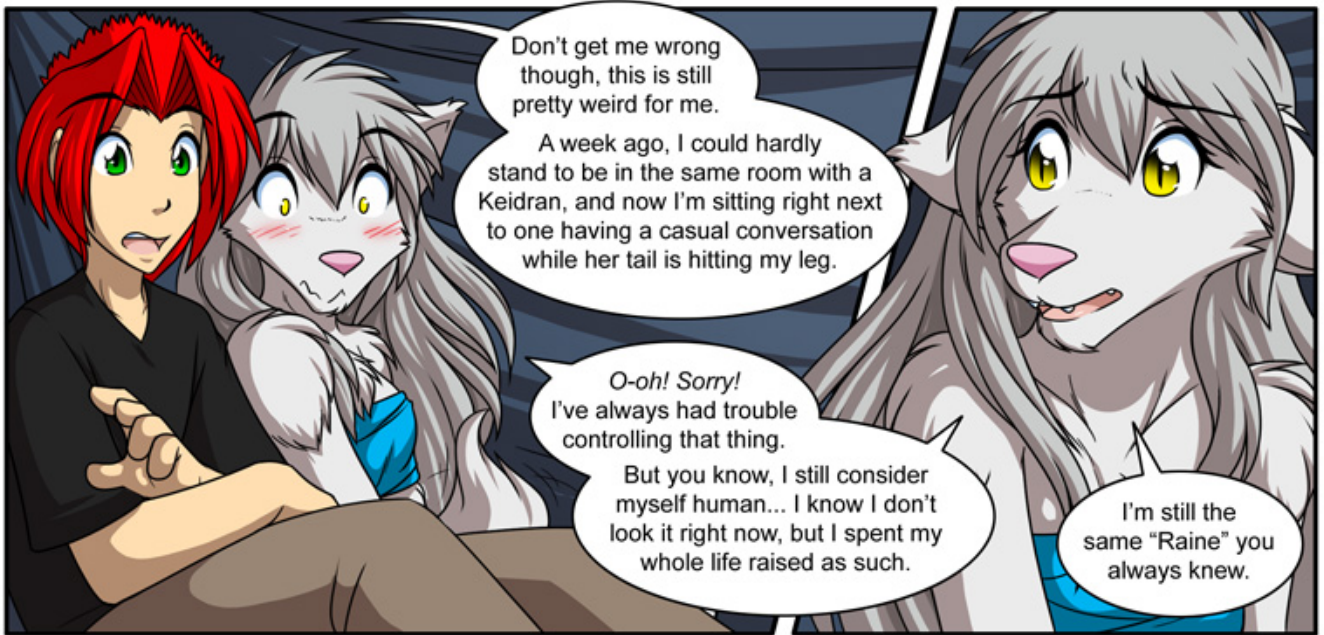
But I don't *hate* you personally, Raine. I guess you can't really help being what you are, can you?



Hey, what about me? I can't help being a Keidran either, but you still act like a jerk to me over it.

No one cares about you, Sythe.

SIGH~
I know...



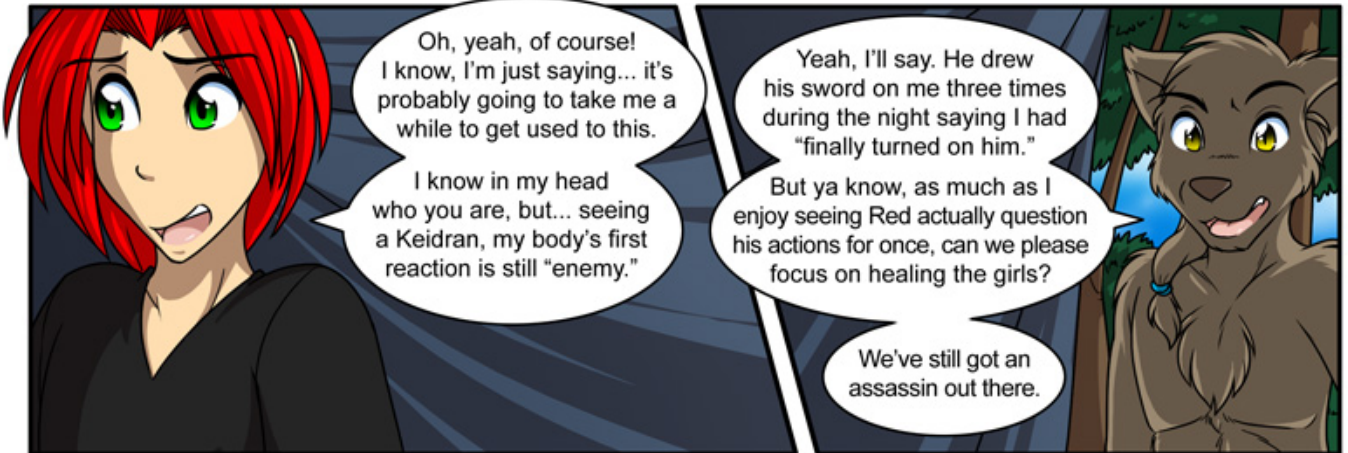
Don't get me wrong though, this is still pretty weird for me.

A week ago, I could hardly stand to be in the same room with a Keidran, and now I'm sitting right next to one having a casual conversation while her tail is hitting my leg.

O-oh! Sorry!
I've always had trouble controlling that thing.

But you know, I still consider myself human... I know I don't look it right now, but I spent my whole life raised as such.

I'm still the same "Raine" you always knew.



Oh, yeah, of course! I know, I'm just saying... it's probably going to take me a while to get used to this.

I know in my head who you are, but... seeing a Keidran, my body's first reaction is still "enemy."

Yeah, I'll say. He drew his sword on me three times during the night saying I had "finally turned on him."

But ya know, as much as I enjoy seeing Red actually question his actions for once, can we please focus on healing the girls?

We've still got an assassin out there.



Right!
Where is he, anyway?
Why hasn't that guy tried attacking us again?



He doesn't have to. He knows while there are two of us down, we can't go anywhere.

No point taking a risk and fighting us all at once when he can just wait it out.

There's only us three, and we can't leave the girls alone, so we either split up or we starve.



This guy is devious... a real professional.
He's probably watching us *right now*, just waiting for the perfect time to strike.



Snnnrrrk!



Zen? Hey, Zen!
Wake up, ya lazy sod!
I need your help!

Grrr... he's getting
better and better at
blocking my mind.

Either that, or our
connection is... no, it's
fine. Maybe we've been
seperate for too long.

Kat! Are you
in there? Open
up, woman!

Natani? W-wait,
just a minute!

Kat! I need
my robes!



What? Robes?

No, no, they're
not ready yet!



You said you'd have
them ready today!

No!
I said I'd *start*
them today! I can't
make a whole outfit
overnight!



"A whole outfit"?!
All I asked for was
simple robes!

Well, I - I may have
gotten a little ambitious.



Agh! Listen, I don't
have time for this! Keith's
life is in danger! I have to
get help from the others,
but I can't go out in a *sheet!*



I don't get it it, Natani,
what's the big deal? So what
if you look like a woman!

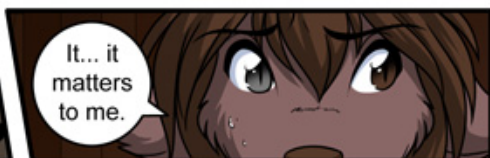
Hey, shush!
Not so loud!

If Keith really is
in danger, what does it
matter what the others
think about you?



Look, if you want my help,
I want to know the truth.

W-what do
you mean?



It... it
matters
to me.



There's no such thing as Basitin
black magic, is there?



N-no Basitin black magic? How... er, what gives you that idea?

Natani, please, I'm really tired and cranky. If you want my help, just be honest with me.
I'm not going to judge you, Natani, but don't lie.

Well, you see... I... you don't understand, it's just that... um...

A-alright, fine. The truth.
There's no Basitin magic, Keith was just covering for me.



But the... way I am *is* the result of black magic! It was just years ago...

Really? How? That's not another "cover", is it?

No, no, that's true! (partially) But I don't have time to go through my whole life story!
Keith, danger, remember?

Well, you had time to come to me. What's the matter with him?



He's not in *immediate* danger, but... a spell I cast *will* kill him eventually unless the others can help me talk some sense into the stubborn idiot!



What?! Why would you do that to him?



I wasn't trying to hurt him on purpose!
It... it was a mistake.

...I don't want Keith to die because of me.

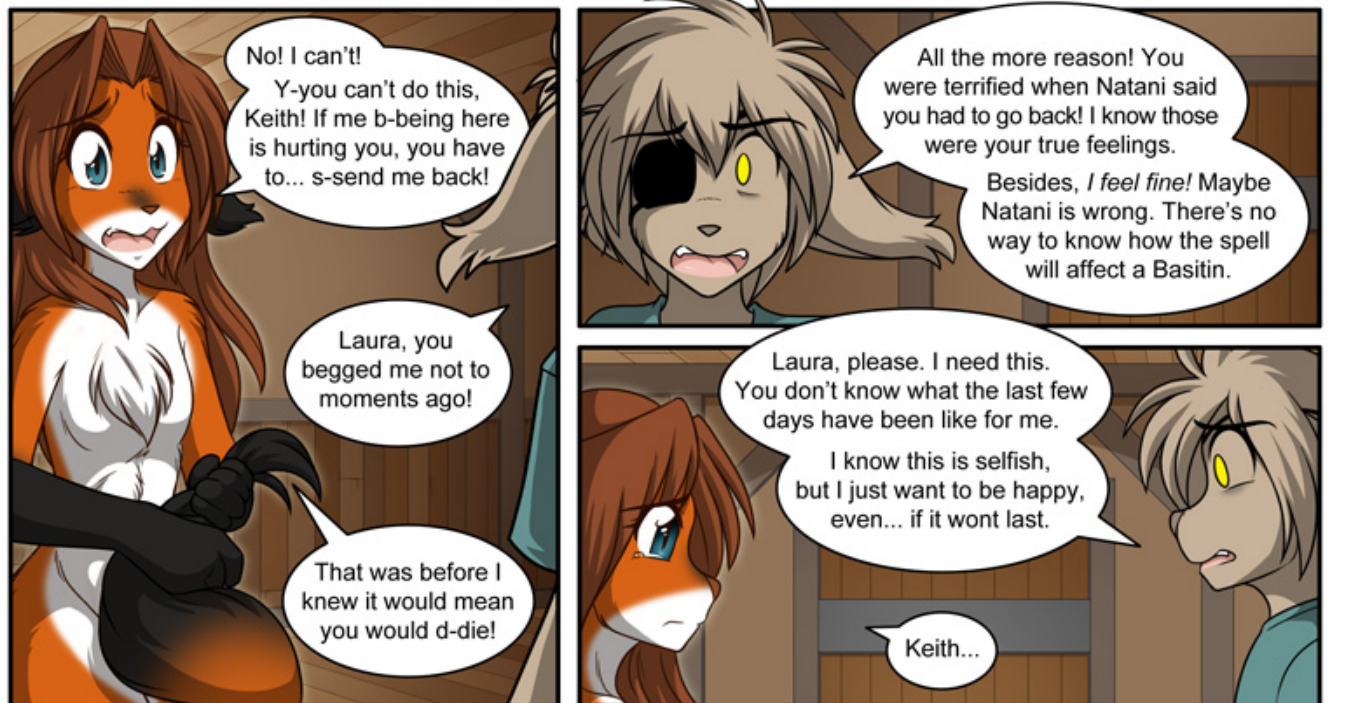


I see... well, there's no way I can finish your robes today, but I think I can scrap together something to at least cover up your... figure. I'll need an hour minimum, though.

And in return, you tell me your story. *The true one*, okay?

...Fine.

Damn it, Keith. After I finish saving your life, I'm going to kill you for this.





Listen to me, Laura.
I know you want to stay here
just as much as I want it.

You travelled across the
ocean and to the edge of the
world just to find me.

You deserve to be
happy. We both do. So
please, don't worry.

I can't help it.
H-how can you
even be sure that
I'm really... me?



I-I mean, I
know I am, but
what Natani sa-
mmph!



Forget what
Natani said.

I know it's you,
Laura. No amount
of imagination could
replace you.



You are real. I
don't know how, and
I don't care.

I won't abandon you again.
I'll find help. One of my friends
must be able to do something.

I'll do whatever it
takes to save you.

So please, don't
worry. Let's just enjoy
the time we have.

B-but...

O-okay, Keith.
I'll try, for you, if...



...if that's really
what you desire.



Admit it, Trace. She's a cute kid.

I suppose. In a manipulative sort of way.



Have you ever thought about... having kids?





Oh, yeah, well...
It only happened once
this morning while I was
cooking breakfast.

I'll be honest,
a freaky voice in my
head *is* pretty unnerving,
but I'm hoping it was
just that once.



And I didn't listen
to it, obviously! I might
be a little naive, but its
attempts at manipulating
me were transparent.



Manipulating?
What do you mean?
What did it say?



Well, it seemed to
think you were keeping
something from me.
And that when you told
me what it was, that would
somehow make me go back
to my "old ways."



So you see,
it- wha-?! Hey!
Don't be like
that, Flora! I would
never do that!



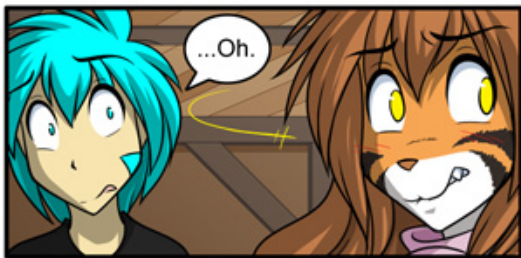
Besides, it's not
like you *really are* keeping
some life-changing secret
from me anyway.
...R-right?



W-well, that's okay!
I'm sure whatever it
is, I'll understand!
There's absolutely
nothing you could tell
me that'll just make me
flip out, I swear!
Hey, maybe if I
just guess, it'll, um...
soften the blow.



No, Trace, wai-
Is it your health?
Y-you're not dying
are you?!
No, no! I'm fine.
Listen to me-
Is... is it about
our relationship?
W-well, yes,
sort of...
Is it... t-that
you want to start
seeing other p...
No! It's not
that! Please, no
more guessi-
**Is it that you're gunna
be a mama tiger?!**



...Oh.



Sigh...
 Look, Kid, I appreciate that you're trying to help, but this is an adult conversation.
 We don't need your silly, nonsensical suggestions.
 Now come on, out! We'll figure out what to do with you after we're done talking!

Aww... I was just trying to help!

Trace...



She's right.



"Right?" A-as in... *correct*?
 But she... she was implying that... you were...



Trace. I'm pregnant.



Snerk!



Ahahaha!
 Wow, you two really had me going there for a second!



Did you two plan this out from the beginning or did y-eeeeeee-!



Trace, you promised not to freak out.
 I consider falling unconscious to be a form of freaking out.
 ...Trace?



Trace, are you alright?

Yeah - I mean no! I mean... when? How?!



I don't know! I really have no idea!
I only found out the day we left the island, and even then, I wasn't sure I believed it!
I just always assumed it wasn't possible between a human and a Keidran!



THAT'S BECAUSE IT ISN'T POSSIBLE.



SHE'S LYING...



T-Trace, I know how it might seem, but I swear! I've never been with anyone else since I've been with you!



That's why I've been so distant with you lately, and wearing this all the time.
I didn't want to keep it a secret, but I had no idea how to explain it!



YOU KNOW WHAT SHE'S SAYING IS IMPOSSIBLE. SHE'S BEEN SLEEPING BEHIND YOUR BACK.



I-I'm telling the truth!
OH, I'M SORRY. AM I SPEAKING OVER HER WORDS? THEY AREN'T IMPORTANT ANYWAY.
DO YOU SEE NOW WHY KEIDRAN CANNOT BE TRUSTED? NO MATTER HOW HUMAN THEY SEEM, THEY ARE ANIMALS.
MAYBE IT WAS THE WOLF? SHE WAS ALL OVER HIM AT THAT FESTIVAL, REMEMBER? IT'S NO SURPRISE SHE'D BEND OVER FOR HI-
I'm scared. Please, Tr-



Shut up!!





THIS ISN'T OVER.

Yes, it is. *I'm* the only one in control of my thoughts.

FOR NOW...



That smoke thing still worries me. Is it still talking to you?

It was, but I think it's gone now.

Oh, good. I'm glad.



I know I said it before, but it's such a relief to finally be open with you again, even though I'm still unsure *how* it's possible.

I think the stress was starting to make my fur fall out.

...Or maybe I'm just shedding my summer coat. Either way, it was making a mess of our bed.

Yeeeah, I wasn't going to mention it...



And speaking of the bed, I'll finally be able to sleep without wearing this thing!

I can't tell you how frustrating that's been!

With our fight on the island, and then me avoiding you ever since, it feels like it's been forever since we just...



Just...



Actually, know what, Trace? Bed sounds pretty good right now.

I think I'll head back there now.

Huh? But it's still morning. We just got up two hours ago.



Suit yourself. But if you need me, you'll know where to find me. *On the bed.*



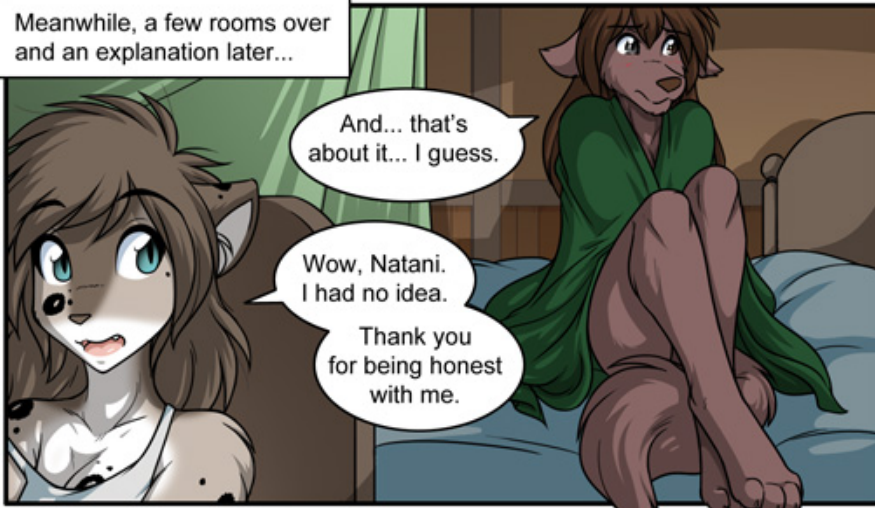
...Oh. Oh!



Right, uh, stay out of trouble, Squirt. We'll be back... later.

Huh? Strange time to sleep...

Meanwhile, a few rooms over and an explanation later...



And... that's about it... I guess.

Wow, Natani. I had no idea.

Thank you for being honest with me.



Yeah, well, you kinda blackmailed me. It's not like I had a lot of choice.



I'm sorry.

I know now why you're so uncomfortable with people knowing.

I understand very well the desire to not be judged by how you look.

We're more alike than you might think, in that regard.

...How so?



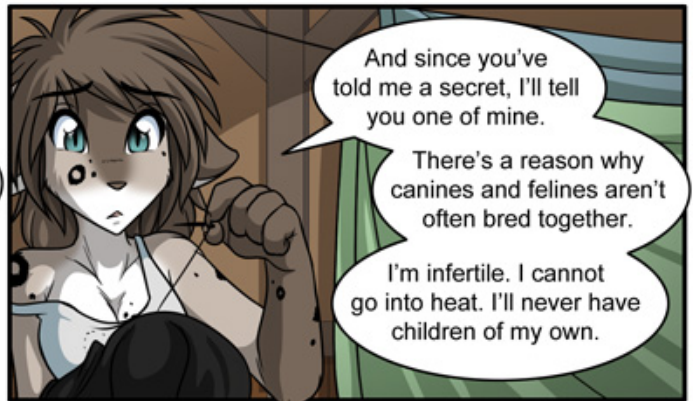
I don't look like this by accident, you know. I was bred this way.

As were my parents, and theirs, and so on.

I know what kind of expectations people have about me.

It doesn't help that they're right – it's exactly what I was bred for.

So I understand.



And since you've told me a secret, I'll tell you one of mine.

There's a reason why canines and felines aren't often bred together.

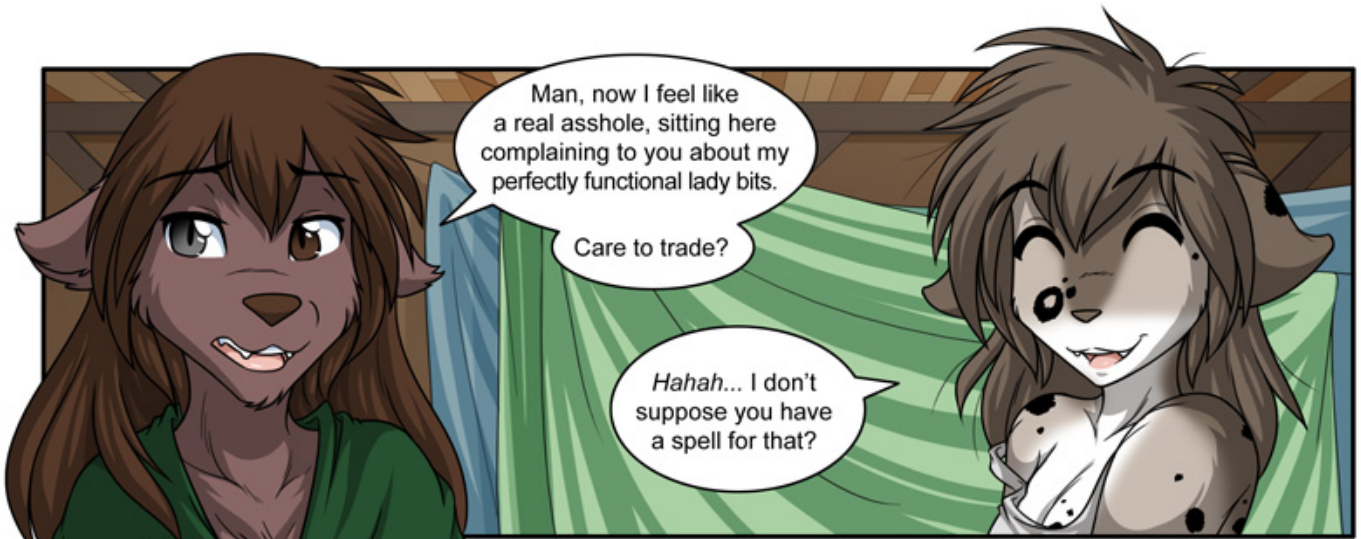
I'm infertile. I cannot go into heat. I'll never have children of my own.



Oh... I'm sorry.

It's alright. It's thanks to that I was allowed to be sold to Eric, after all.

I can't imagine where I'd be right now otherwise.



Man, now I feel like a real asshole, sitting here complaining to you about my perfectly functional lady bits.

Care to trade?

Hahah... I don't suppose you have a spell for that?

No, but if I ever find one, you'll be the first to know.

I'm certainly never going to use mine.

And believe me, you're not missing anything when it comes to estrus.

It's the one thing I hate most about being stuck in a woman's body.

It's the only time where I feel like I'm being controlled by my body, and not the other way around. I... don't like being controlled.

Yeah, well, thankfully my brother's always been there for me; making sure I didn't do anything stupid I'd regret.

That first year was bad, though. We... hadn't learned to completely block each other out yet.

I hadn't thought of it like that.

I'm sorry. That must be awful.

Oh... wow... poor guy.

"Poor guy"?! He only had to deal with it *once!*

This guy's had to deal with it his whole adult life!



Are you almost done? I feel bad enough waiting even this long.

Just about.
Just need to make sure this doesn't fall apart like last time.



Okay, good.
As I said, Keith's not in danger of just dropping dead or anything, but...

I don't know how long it'll take to make him see reason.



You really care about him, don't you?

W-what do you mean? Of course... We're... friends.
And I owe him a debt. That's all there is to it!

A debt, hm?



Yeah. You probably already guessed, but Keith's been covering for me.

I assumed so. from all the talk of "Basitin black magic."



And there was also that time I caught the two of you in the baths together. I didn't know it at the time, but in hindsight...



Woah woah woah! I wasn't implying you two were doing anything! I just meant it's obvious he'd known then.

Oh...
Right... well...



Anyway, Keith's stuck his neck out for me a lot. He protected me when I wasn't... in control.

He even risked his own life for me.
And what have I ever done for him in return?

H-hey! That was a misunderstanding! We ended up in the same bath by accident! And he was washing my back! It wasn't what it looked like! I don't even know why I let him—



Ugh... I can't believe I'm talking about this stuff.

I was never so mushy with Zen around.



Well, you're in luck! The robes are finished!

So, you won't have to put up with all this "girl talk" for much longer.



...You know, I really hate to admit it, but...

This... wasn't as terrible as I'd imagined it.



I mean, don't get me wrong. This has been... weird.

But... it's kinda nice to be able to talk about this... girly stuff.

My brother's - erk! - great. He's always been supportive, but...

There's just some stuff I can't talk to him about!

Like... these things! When they started... becoming a problem, Zen just pretended like they didn't exist.



I don't blame him. But I couldn't ignore them like he did.

And... sigh, I'm just rambling now.

No, no, I understand.

I'm guessing you haven't had a lot of women in your life.

Not really.

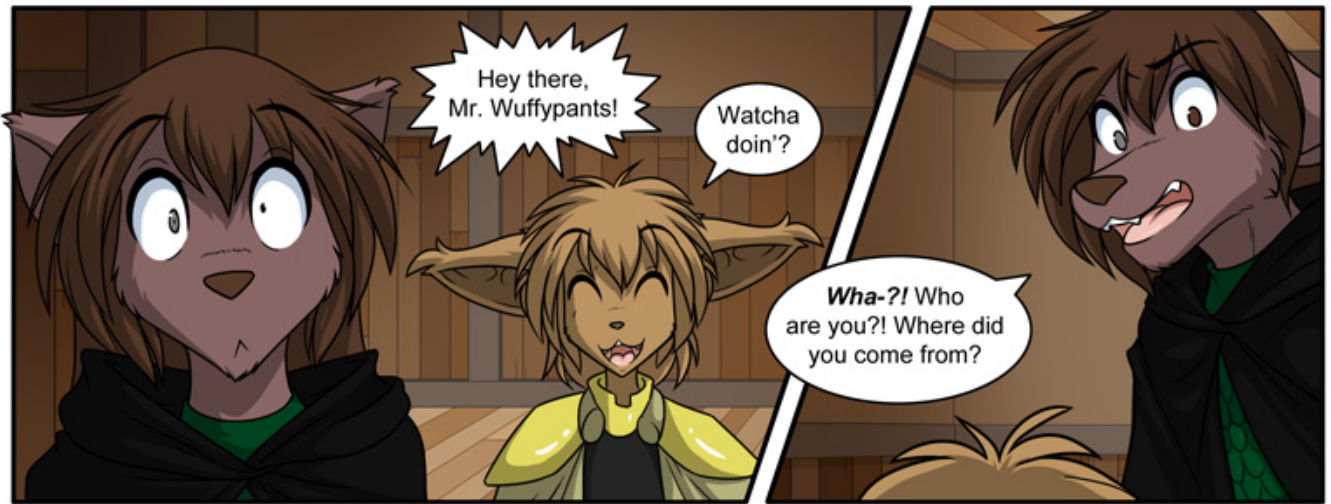
Well, I know we need to go help Keith, but...

After this is all over, if you ever feel like you need more "girl talk"...

I'll be here.

...Thanks, Sp-Kathrin. I'll... think about it.

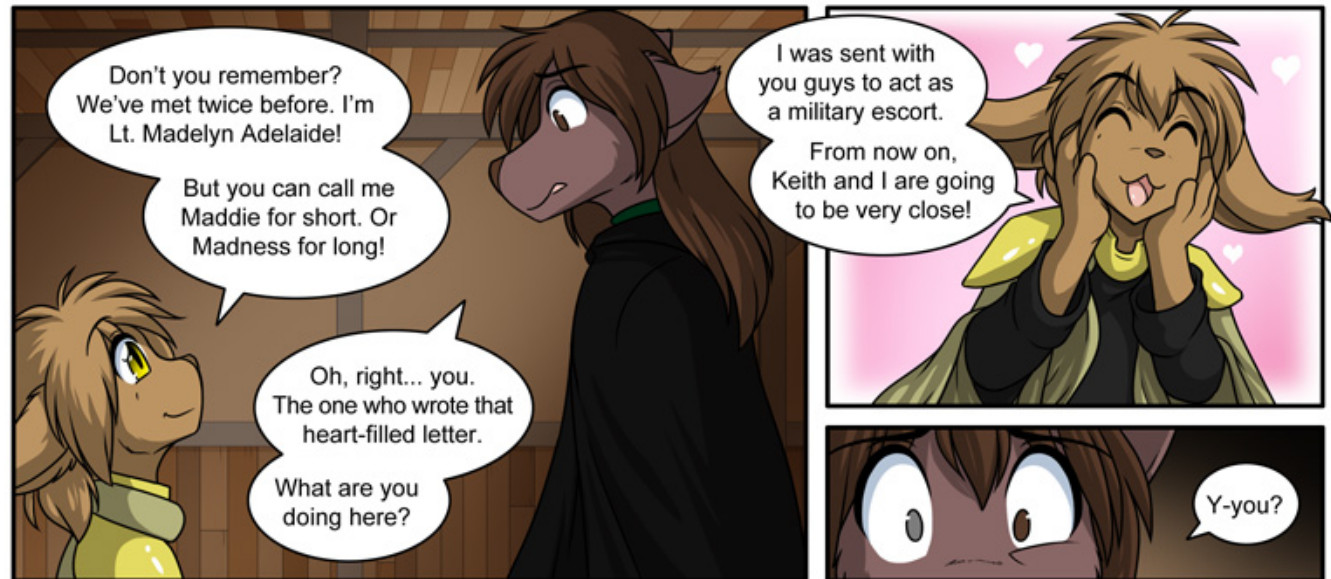




Hey there, Mr. Wuffypants!

Watcha doin'?

Wha-?! Who are you?! Where did you come from?



Don't you remember? We've met twice before. I'm Lt. Madelyn Adelaide!

But you can call me Maddie for short. Or Madness for long!

Oh, right... you. The one who wrote that heart-filled letter.

What are you doing here?

I was sent with you guys to act as a military escort. From now on, Keith and I are going to be very close!



Y-you?



Now listen Pipsqueak, Keith doesn't need you, he's got me!



Gah! I don't have time for this! Where is everyone? I need them here!

You do? Hm... oh! I think I know a way to get everybody's attention!



How's that?

Just watch!



T-to protect him!

...Just as soon as I stop killing him.



CLACK!

RUMBLE!



Sigh...

I've missed this.
...I'm still surprised
how well you've been
taking the news.

Well, don't
get me wrong,
Flora...



But it's the
normal kind of freaking
out, I think.

Not the...
crazy evil type.

Good! I don't
care much for
that one.



...I'm still kinda
freaking out about
the whole "being a
dad" thing.



Actually, I've been
thinking about this whole
situation, and I figure...

A lot of people can't
read or write, right?



So maybe it
isn't as impossible as
everyone thinks.

Maybe hybrids are
just so rare that they've
gone undocumented?

It must be... but
I'm not sure if the others
will accept that.

It's common know-
ledge that humans and
Keidran can't breed.



What if they
all think!

I told you,
I don't care what
anyone thinks!

If they can't
accept it, then it's
their problem.

Come on, let's not
worry about what
might happen.



You're right, Trace.
Let's just enjoy the peace
we have right now.

I'm just glad there's
nothing **else** for us to
be worried about.



CRASH!

Why! Why
did I say that
out loud?!



Well, we'd better check it out.

That crash sounded like it came from the kitchen, and Eric's sure to have heard it.

Yeah, I suppose.

Hey, aren't you going to get dressed first?

Oh! Right...



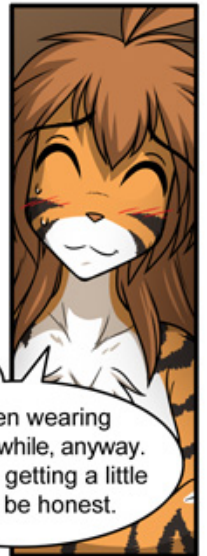
Actually, you know what? I think I'm good.

They have to find out sometime, and you're right, it's not worth the stress of keeping it secret.

I think that's a good idea. As long as you're sure.

I'm sure.

I've been wearing them for a while, anyway. They were getting a little rank, to be honest.



Meanwhile...

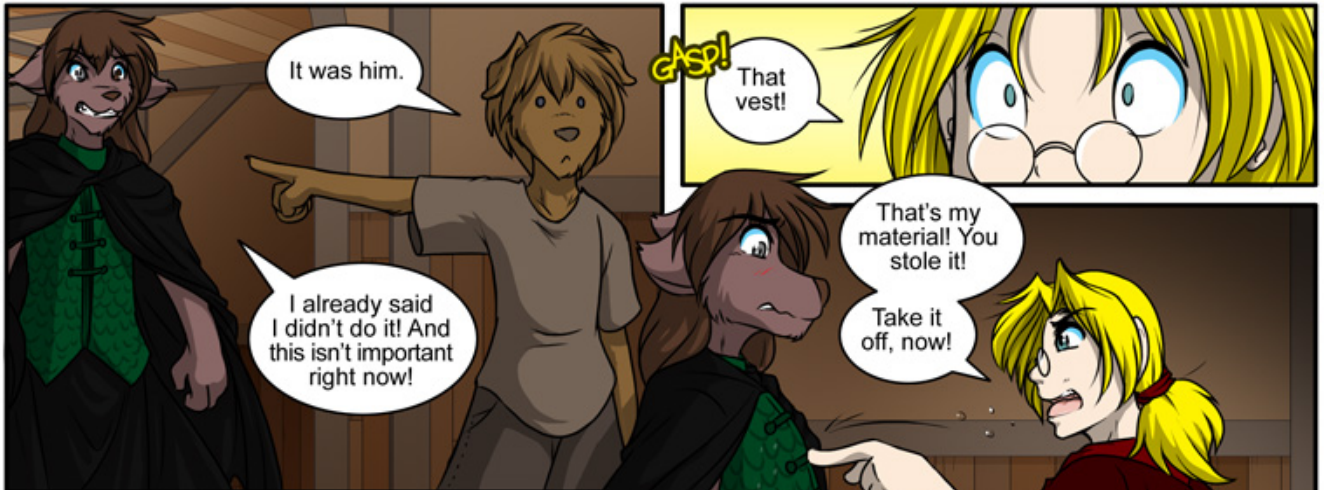
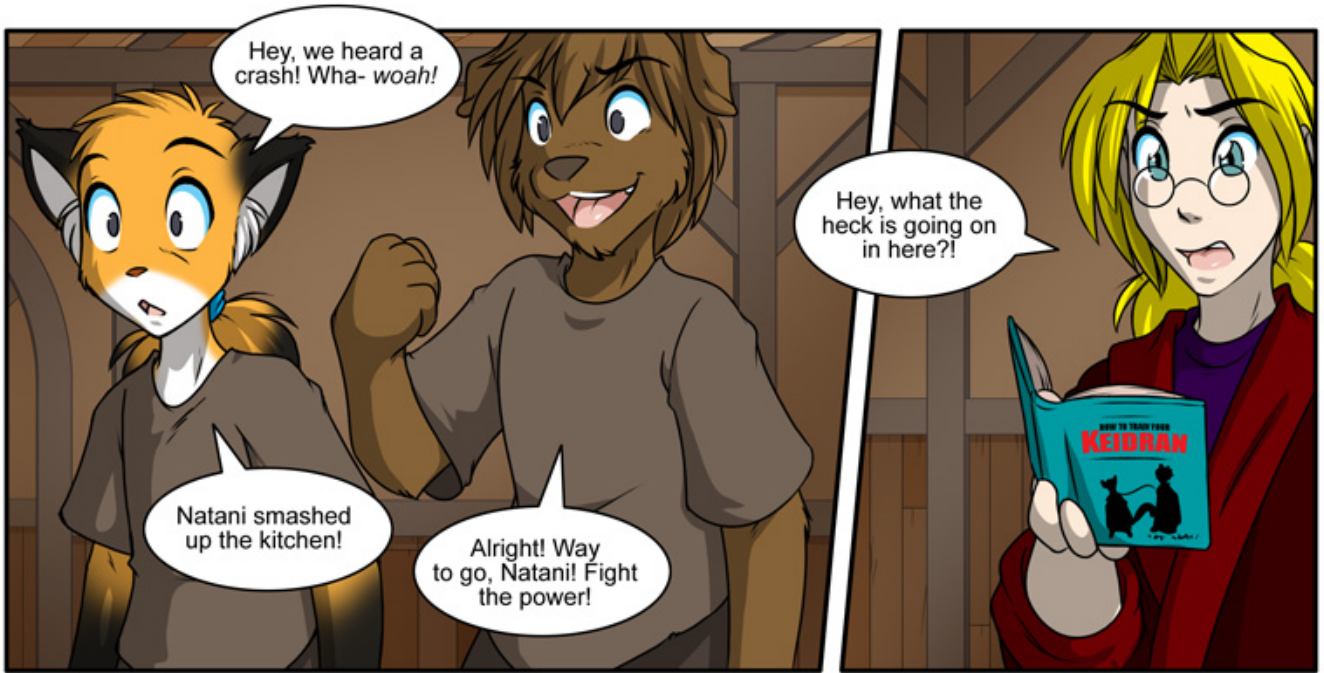
Natani! I heard a crash, is everything—

What did you?!



Wha—? Me?! I didn't do anything! It was *her* ide—

W-where did she go?! She was right here!





Kat! How could you?!
You have no idea what that material was worth!



I knew exactly how much that material was worth, Eric!
I'm not as dumb as you might think if you bothered to notice!

What?!

So if you're going to yell at anyone, it should be me!



But after all, what's yours is mine, isn't that right, Brother?



<Listen here, Wolf!>
<I'm captain of this ship and I don't appreciate being threatened!>
<Now those robes were not Kat's to give, so either you pay for the damage or you hand them over!>



That doesn't excuse you from taking my things without asking me!

What's gotten into you, Kat? We're going to have to have a talk later about this.

But for right now...

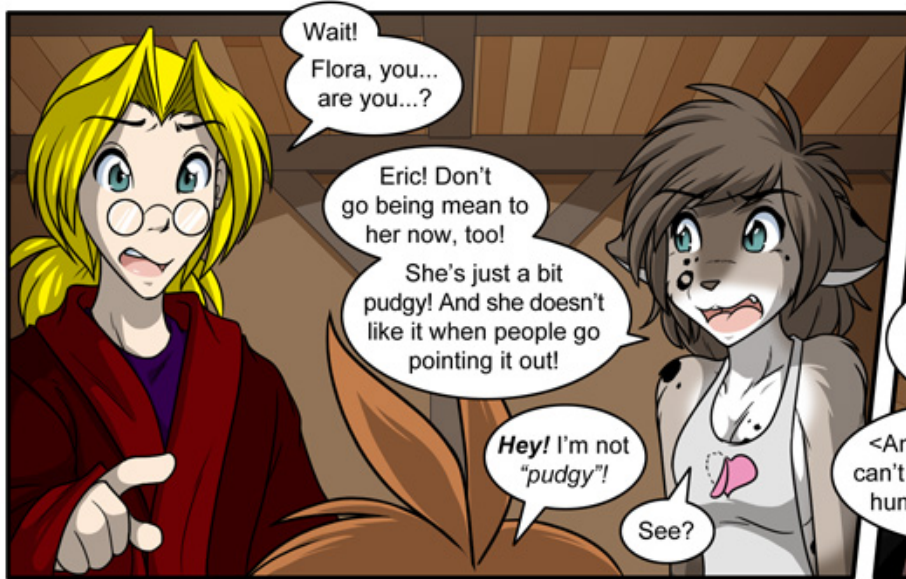


H-hey!

What's with all the yelling, you guys?

Did something happen?

...What?







<I'm not letting you take Laura away from me again, Natani!>

<Why won't you just leave us alone? What do you have against her?>

Keith...

<"What do I-"?
"Again?!">

RRRGH!



<I'm doing all of this for **you**, ya moron! And you know it!>

<Well I never asked you to! So why can't you just leave me in peace?!>



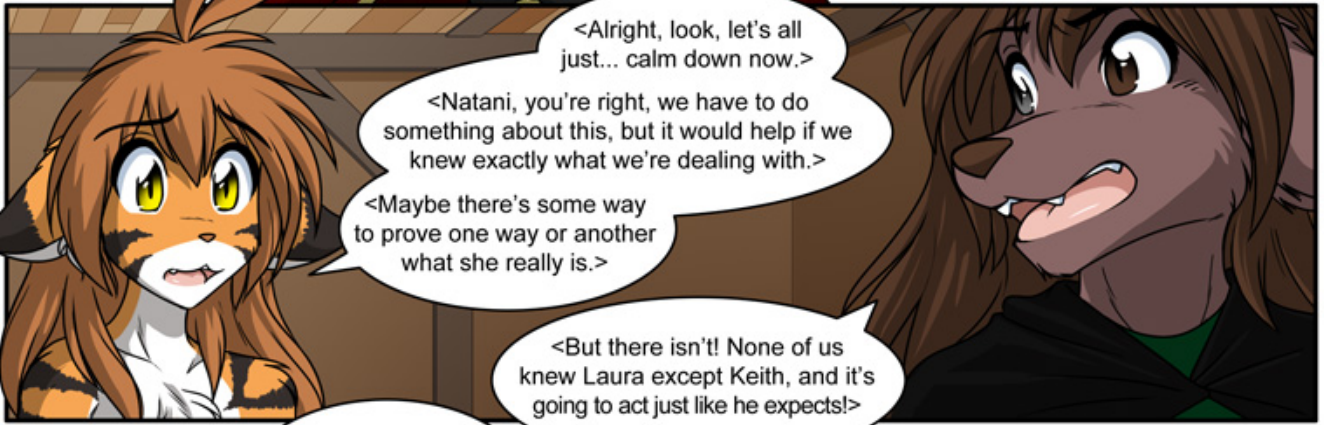
<Because I care about you, you idiot!>

<Do you really think what happened at the tavern meant nothing to me?>

<Well it did!>

<And you know how hard it is for me to say stuff like this – especially in front of everybody! But... I... I need you, okay?! You're the best friend I have on this stupid boat!>

<And right now, you need me, too. I won't let you destroy yourself, even if it means you hating me!>





<But... then that's it, right? She looks young, s-so illusion, not ghost, yes?>

<You would think, but it's not that simple...>

<The illusion claims to be a spirit using the spell as a means of... manifesting itself.>



<So, okay...>
<If it really is an illusion, and it's only made from memories that Keith has...>

<Well, then it is simple! We just ask it something only Laura would know!>



<Yes, but...>
<Who else knows anything about Laura that Keith doesn't? None of us really had enough time to... get to know her.>



<No...>
<There is someone else.>

Keith?



<Trace was there, before she...
...At the beach. He was holding her, and she was awake.>

Keith, wait...

<If he can prove to everyone what I know she is, then do it.>



Trace?
Did you speak with Laura while you were carrying her?

Huh? Uh, yeah, I did, why? What's going on?





Well... t-the first time we met was at the inn, wasn't it?
I fainted... but Keith was there.
I don't know how that proves anything.

It does, because that isn't right.



What?

We met once before.
Something only the real Laura would know.



I'm sorry, Keith, I know this is hard. No!
No, she's lying!



You're lying to protect me, aren't you?!
Tell them!

I - I can't!



Laura, don't do this to me!
Tell the truth!
Keith!
I don't know it!

Tell them!!

Please... just show them...
Please... I need you to be real.



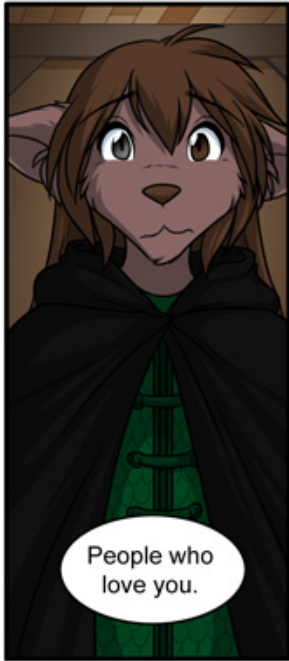
Laura... I need you. I have nothing left...

...
But you do.



You have them.

Your friends.
People who care about you.



People who love you.



Even if I were the real Laura, she wouldn't want to see you wasting away for a few more days of life.
She would want you to live on.



You have to, Keith.
With them, I know you can.



I don't know if I can...





No?



I'm sorry. I've been so stupid.



No, Keith. You're just in pain. You've been in pain for so long. And I'm so sorry I added to it. But your friends can help you.



Please don't stay bitter with the world. It's not what I... Laura would want.



Keith...



Yes, I get it. It's time. I'm not ready, but... I get it.



Laura... you don't have to pretend anymore. I understand now.





I'm so glad.

I think you've helped me too.

As long as I know I'm not holding you back, I can be content.



Laura...



La- uhh...



Woah!
Hey, gotcha!

The drain of the illusion is catching up with you.



Come on. I'm taking you back to your room.



Man, am I glad all of that's sorted now.

Ghosts, that's just what we needed. Hopefully, no more drama crops up.

Yeah...
->SNIFF->

I hear ya.



Well, on a lighter note...

I meant to say earlier, but I see you decided to open up about the baby.

Congrats!

Wait... what?



You're pregnant?!

You mean you... really didn't figure that out already?

...um, surprise?



Dang it, Mike!

FwAp!

Yip!



Alright, here we are. Uh... sorry about smacking your head on that door frame earlier.

Yeah, thanks. I... think I can take it from here.

Hey, I wasn't exaggerating when I said it was killing you.

Just let me take care of it. You'll need help getting that fancy armor off, anyway.



There. You're gunna feel like crap for a while, but you'll be okay.



Sleep. Tomorrow will be better.



Natani... you do realize Basitins consider ear-rubbing to be... an intimate gesture?

Oh... Do... do you want me to stop?



No.

End.