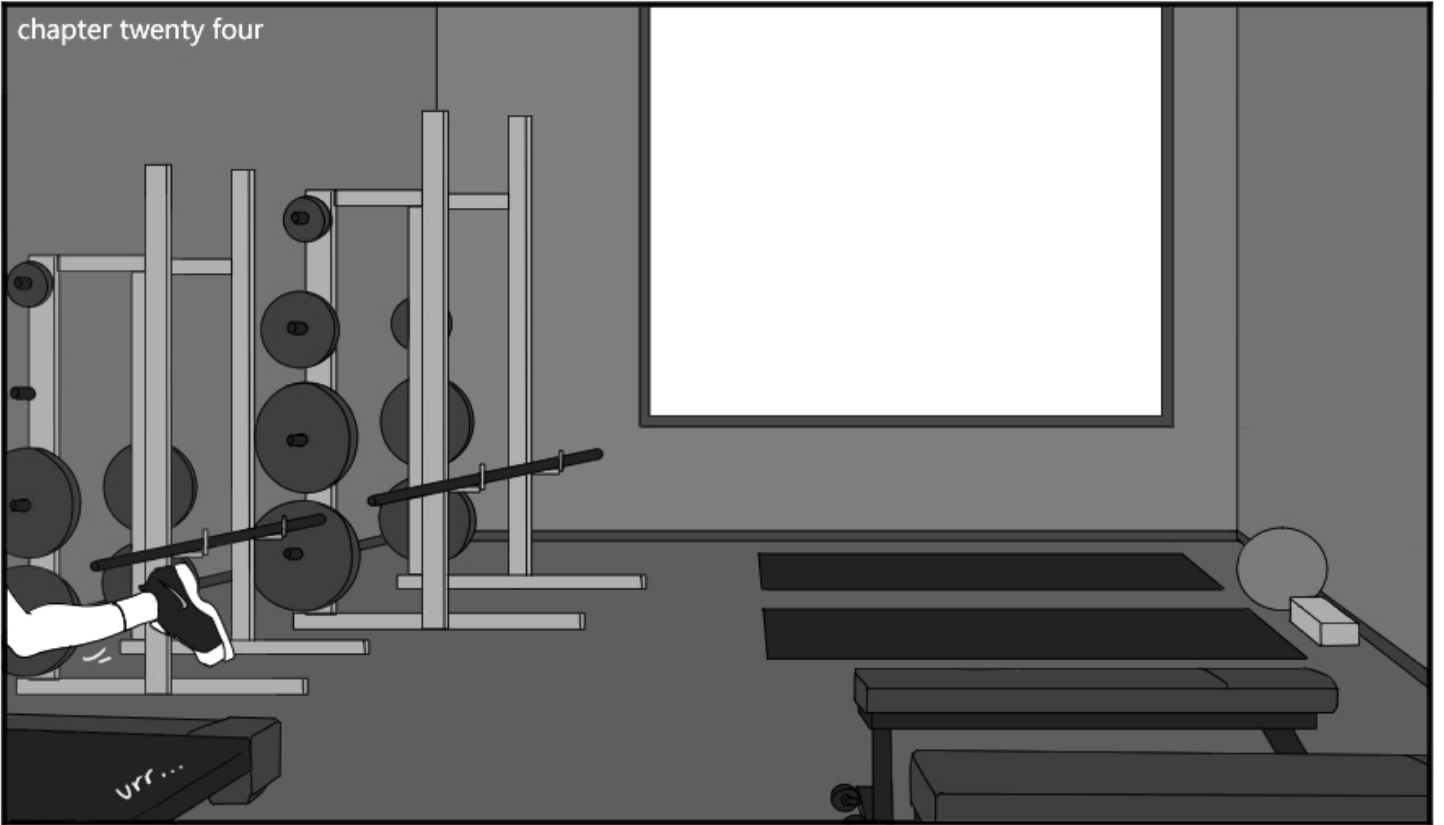


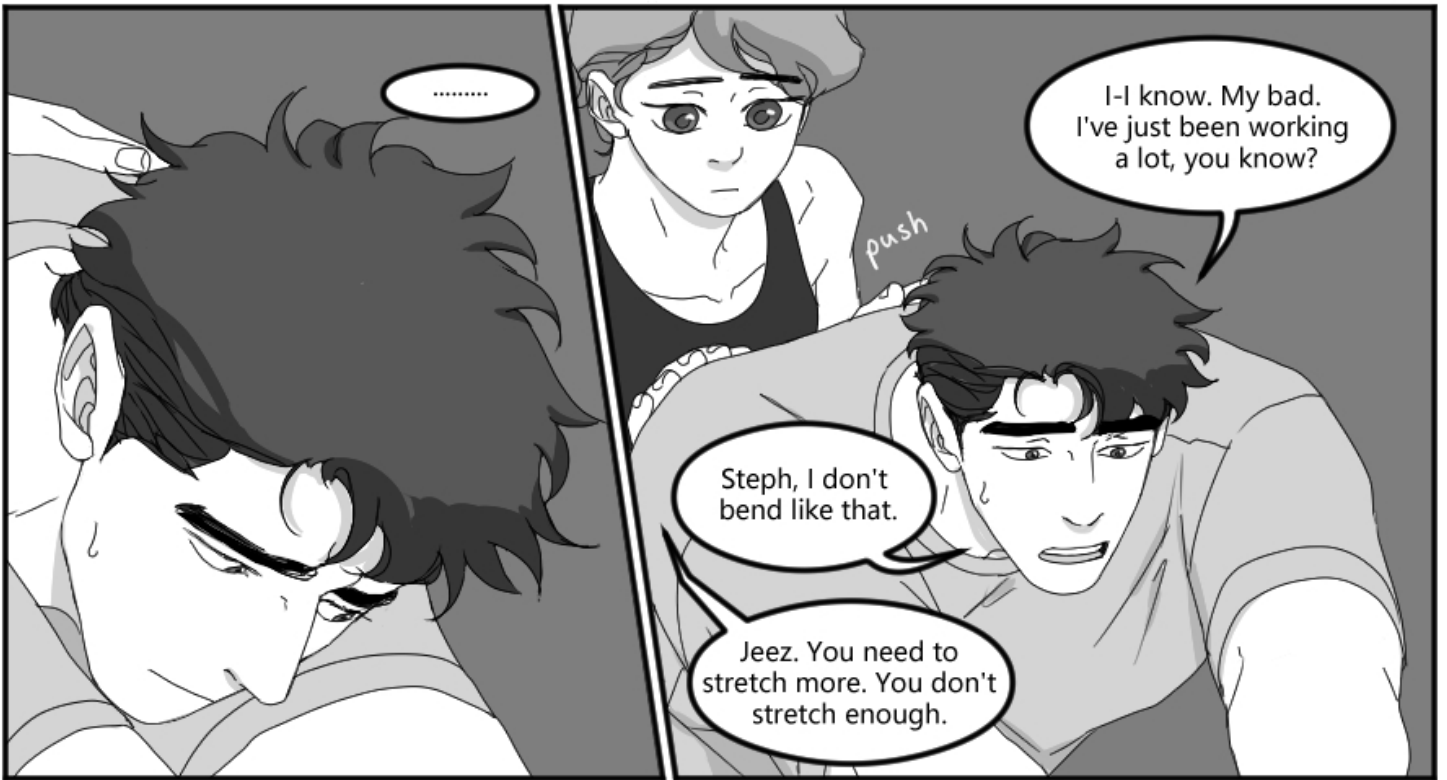
chapter twenty four

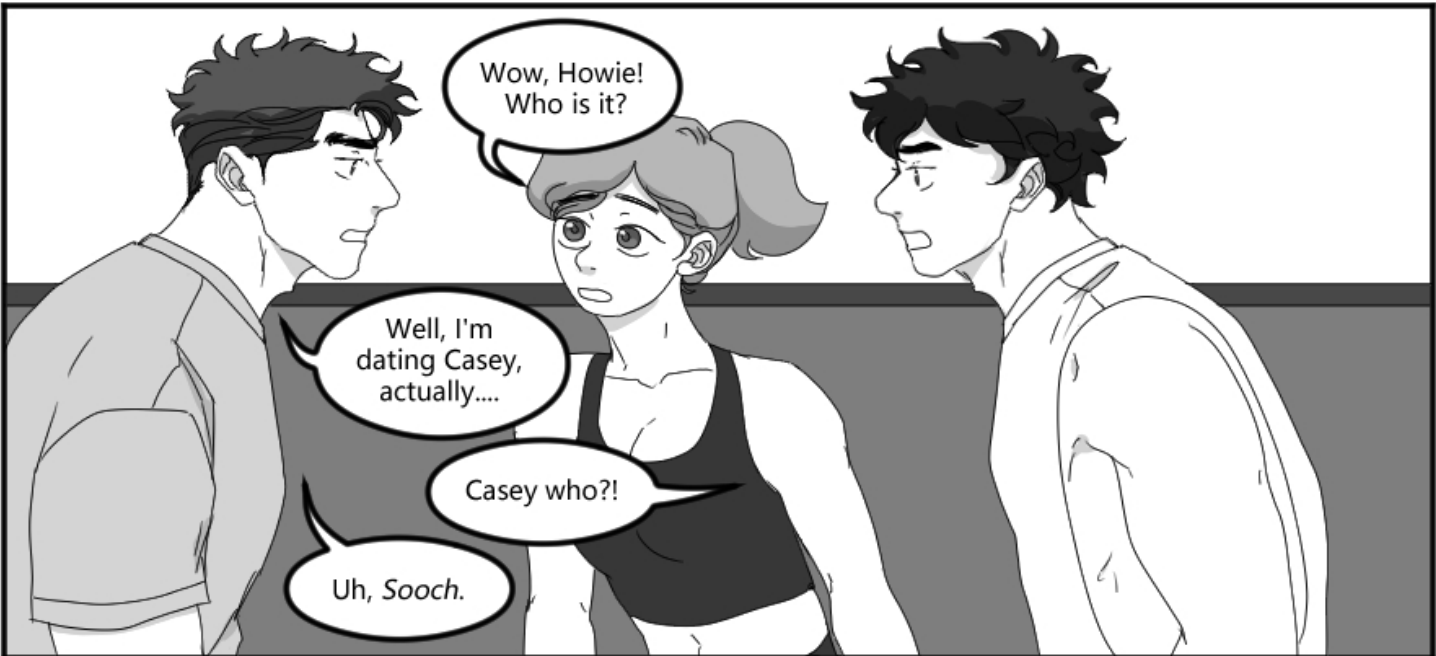
























Yes. We are.
We've been dating
for a few weeks.

It's been private until
now. I planned on telling
Ben about it tonight-



I don't want
anyone making jokes
around him.

I don't want anyone
making any sort of commentary
about it, or acting funny
around him.

This hasn't been easy for
him and I don't want him to
have to deal with that kind of
shit, too. If I can help it.



-I didn't know
you were gonna be
there, to be honest.

Oh. Sorry....

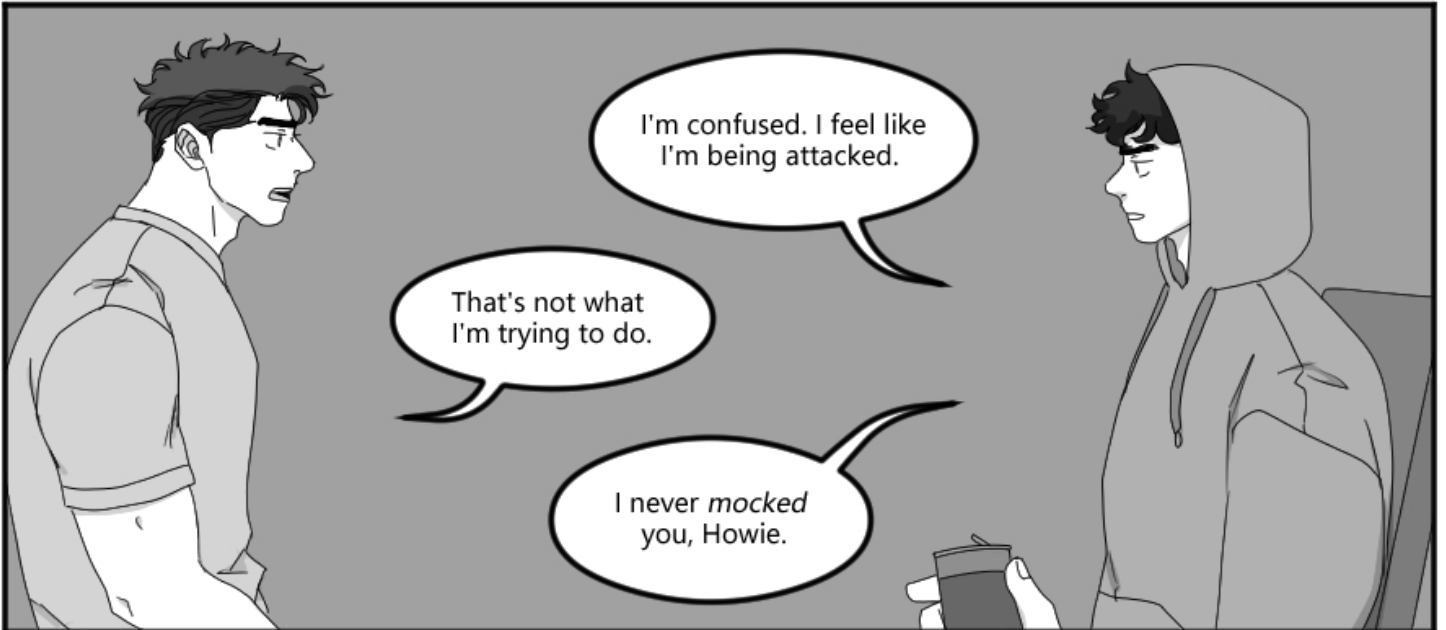
No, it's all
good. We want
you to know.



Anyway, I wanted
to break the news to
you without him, Ben-

-Because you weren't
exactly receptive when
I came out to you.

I know you didn't mean
any harm. And I didn't tell you
how it made me feel, which
is on me. But I didn't like it.





I'm not....
put off.

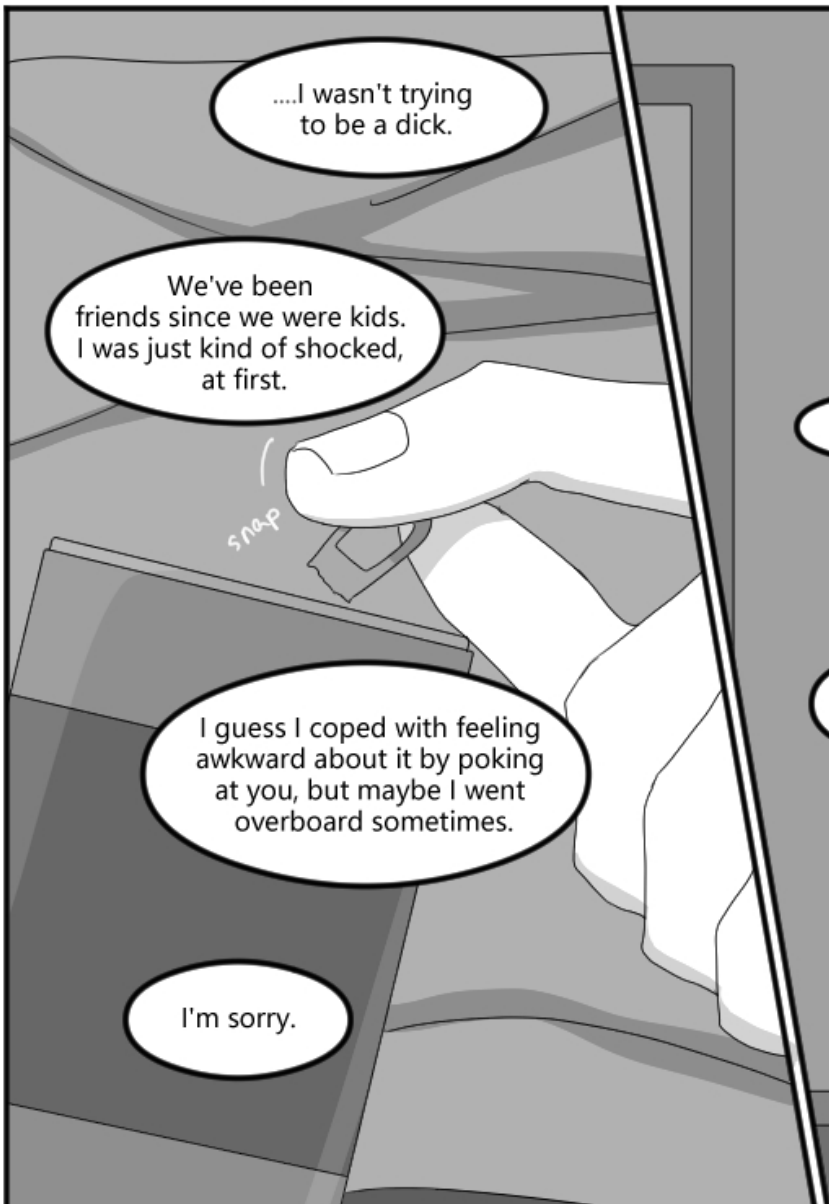
Jeez, Howie....



I mean, yeah-

In all honesty, I did
feel very *awkward*
about it, at first.

But I don't have a
problem with you
being gay.





I might not have handled it the best way.... But I don't have a problem with it. I really don't.



I didn't know you thought that way about me.

Is that why you hardly come around anymore?

.....



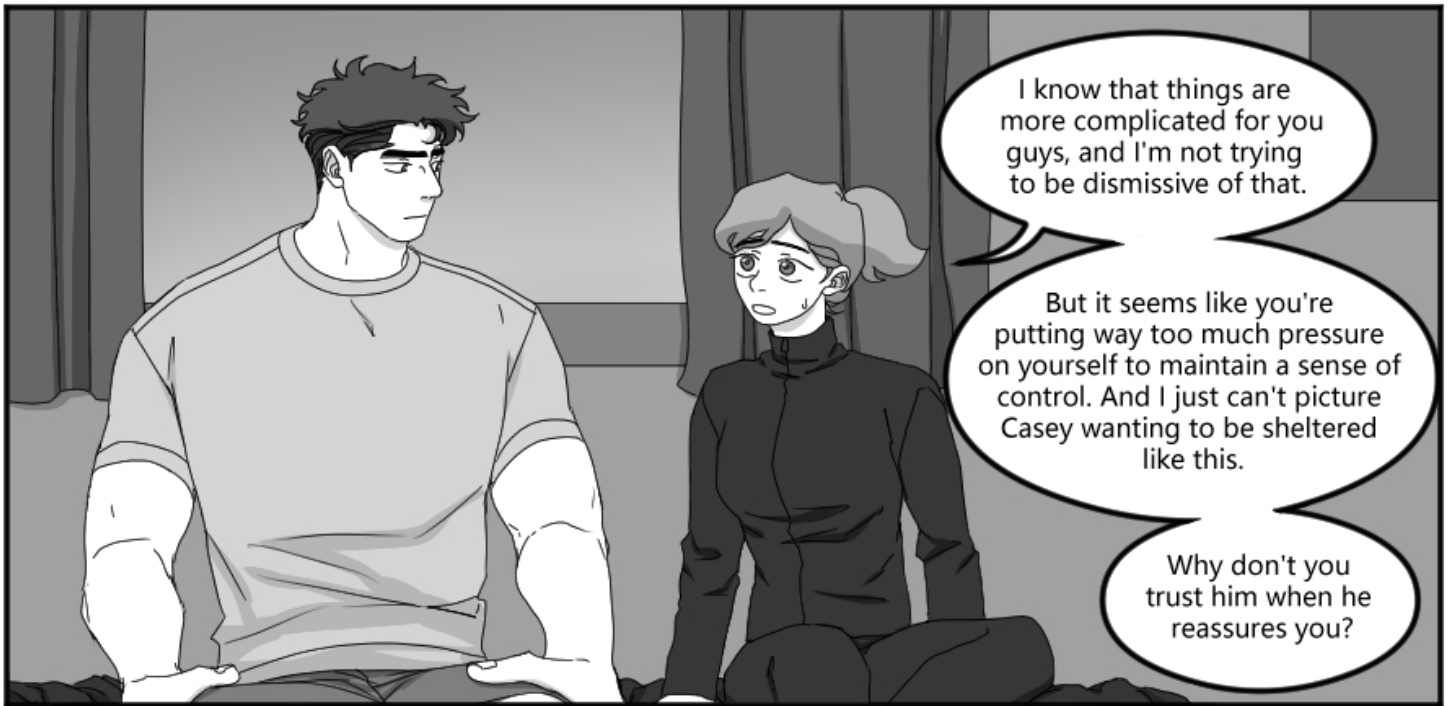
No.... definitely not. I've just been working. And Sooch was dealing with his probation, so I've been with him.

Don't get me wrong.... Like I said, I knew you never meant any harm.

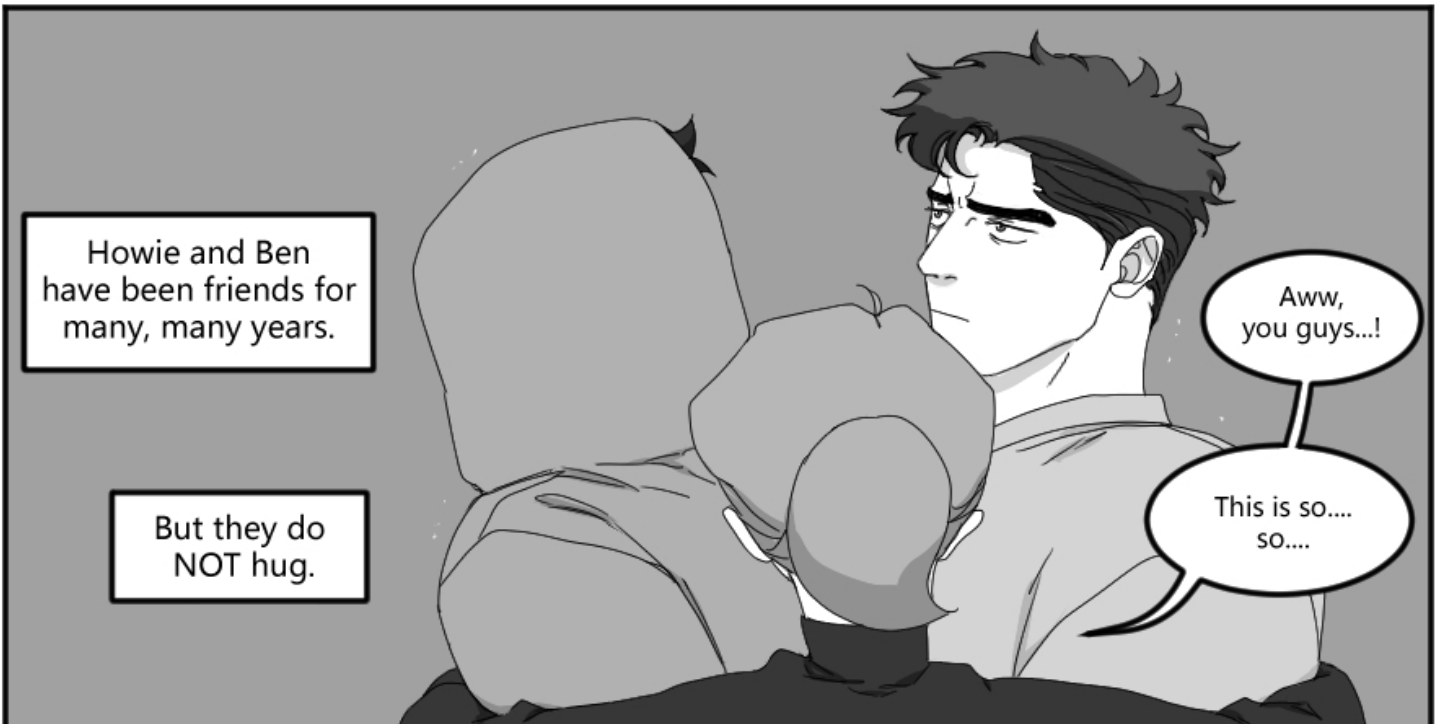
It's not like I've been secretly offended this whole time, and I'm not saying that I can't take a joke.



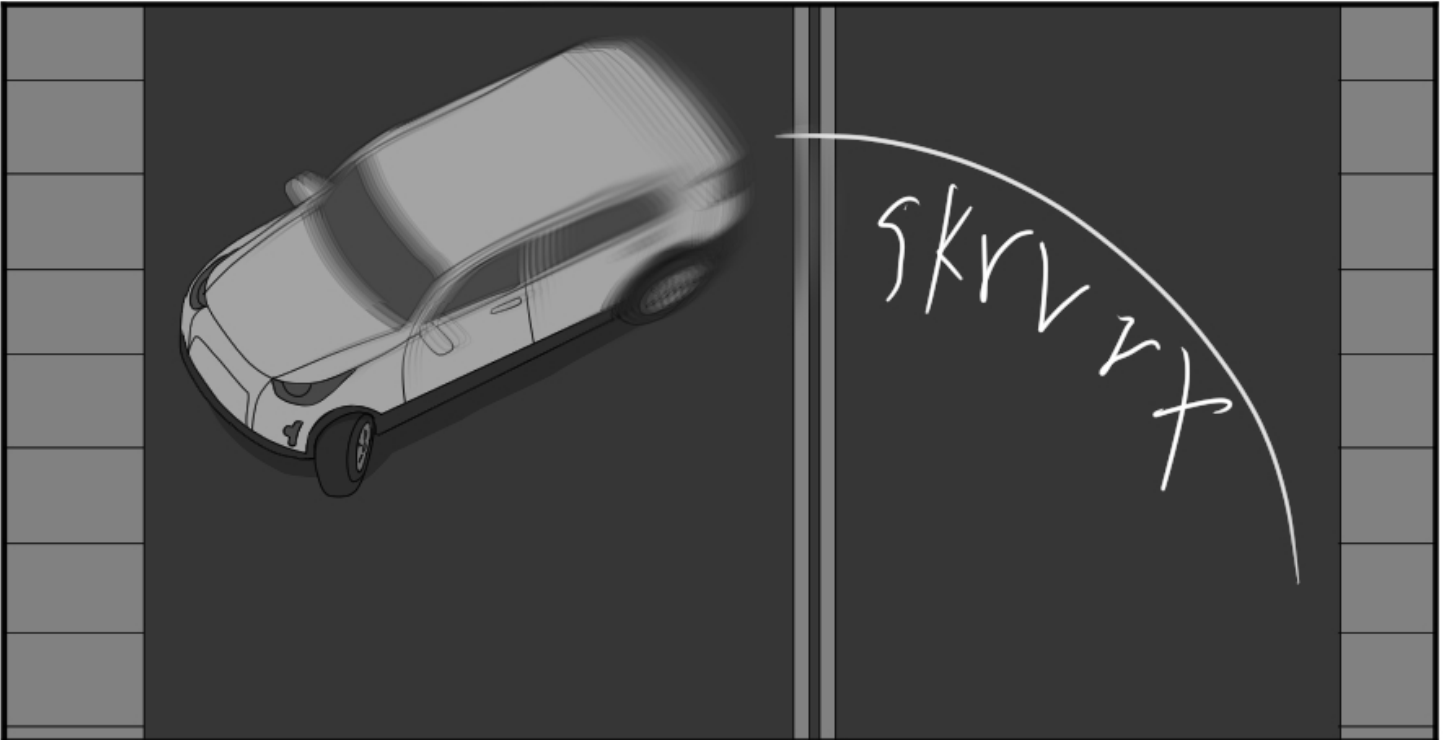


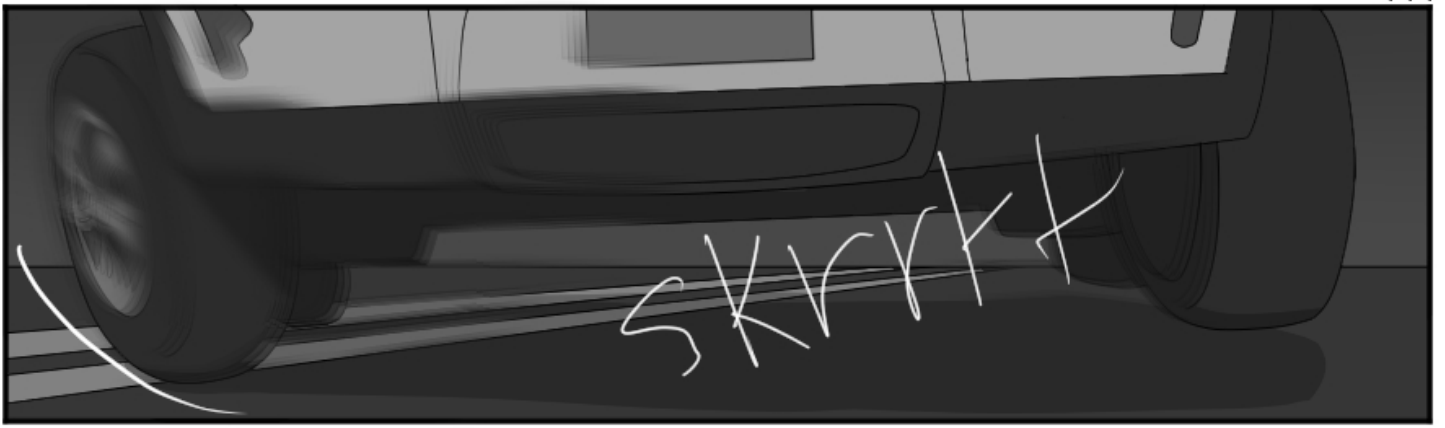














Well, yeah.
I was worried. Not just
of his reaction.

But I feel
like we're becoming
disconnected.

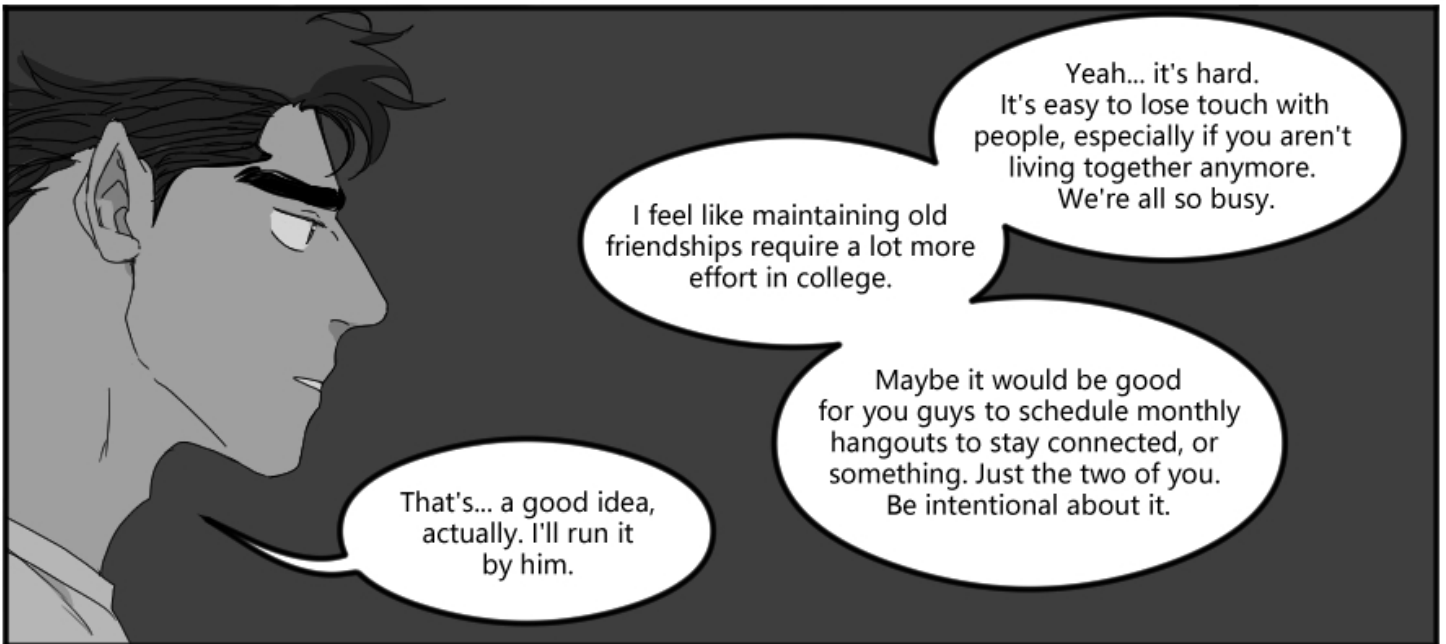
We were always so
tight, but then when we
started college he got really into
greek life.... and I came out....
Things are different.

I wasn't sure if the
news about Sooch and I
would sever us more.

I'm.... okay.

I was just really
stressed about having
that conversation
with him.

You were really
that stressed? You guys
have been friends
forever.



Yeah... it's hard.
It's easy to lose touch with
people, especially if you aren't
living together anymore.
We're all so busy.

I feel like maintaining old
friendships require a lot more
effort in college.

Maybe it would be good
for you guys to schedule monthly
hangouts to stay connected, or
something. Just the two of you.
Be intentional about it.

That's... a good idea,
actually. I'll run it
by him.



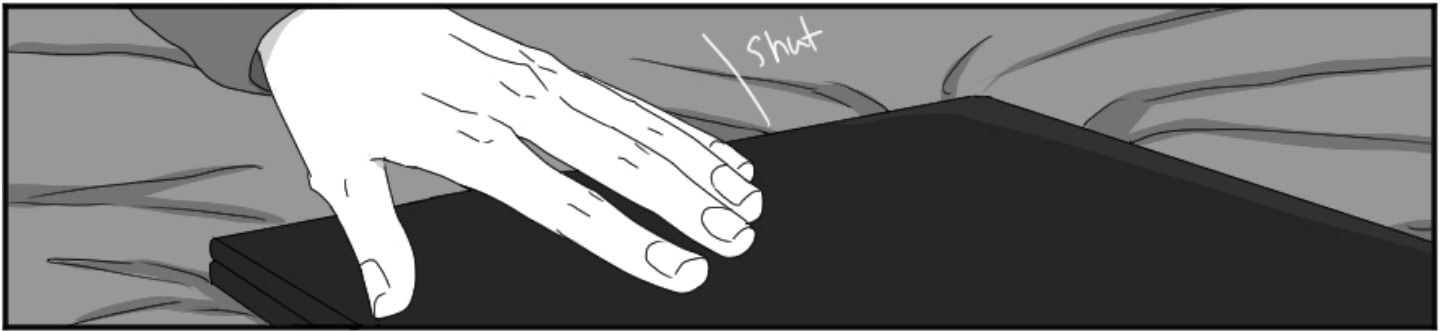
You just drove
past my house.





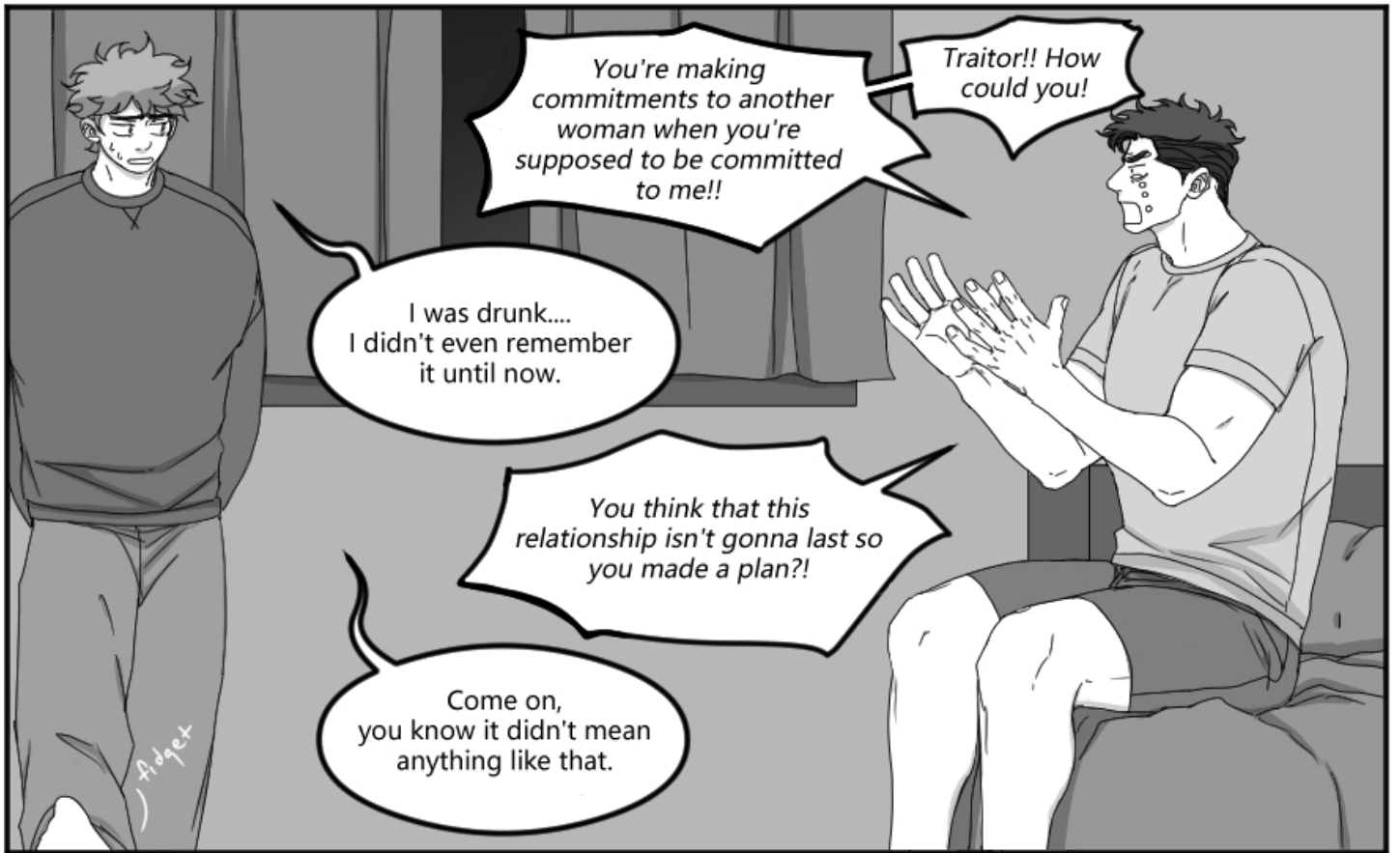
























You think the adderall helped?

Ugh. I dunno, Could've just been a placebo effect.

Oh, come on. What's your beef with the adderall?

You finished?

I think so.

I'll look at it with fresh eyes tomorrow.

That's awesome! It would be so good to finally be done with all the work.



I told you. I don't like the idea of relying on medicine.

I guess I just don't see it as a big deal. I mean, when I'm sore, I take ibuprofen.

I wanna build muscle to show off for you so I take my protein powder and my creatine.

Alright.

All I'm saying is I don't see the problem with getting help from a pill or whatever, if you need it.











....I want you to remember that we were best friends first.

If this situation's got you thinking I might feel disappointed with you, or that I may change my mind about you....

If you ever catch yourself having thoughts like that in the future....



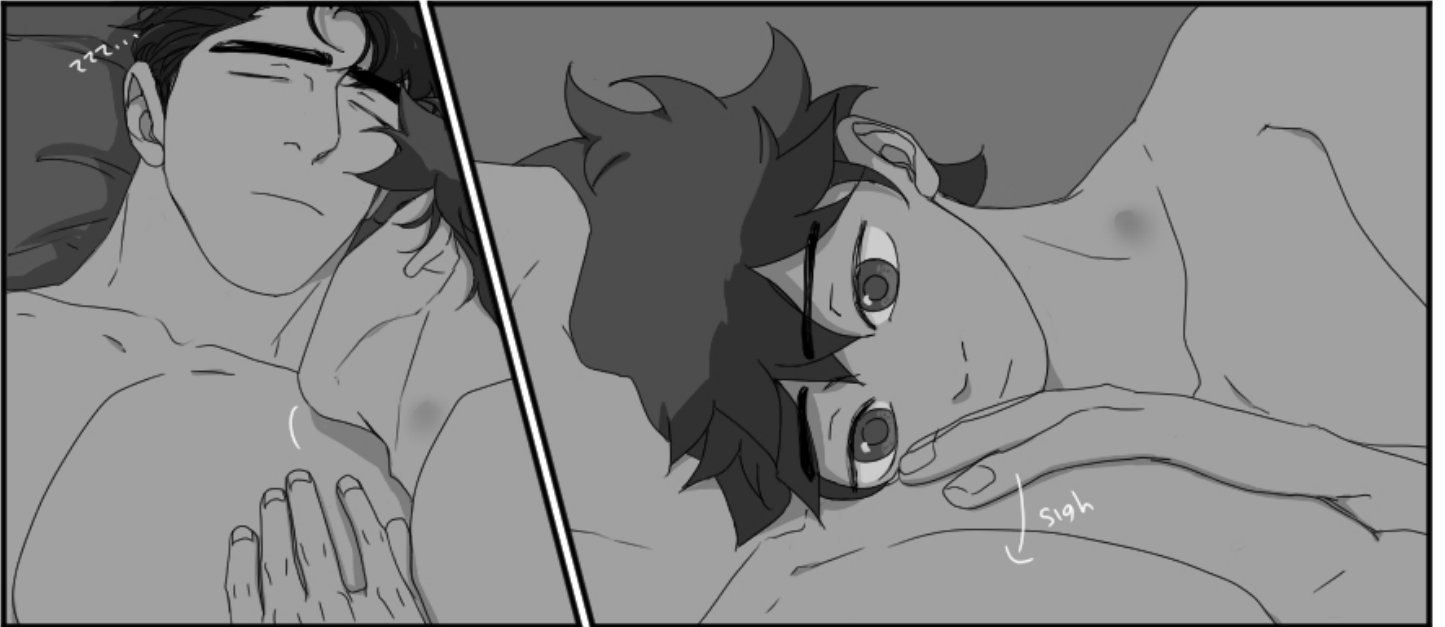
I knew you really, really well. Good, bad, ugly.

I fell in love with the whole picture. You understand? There's nothing to be disappointed with.

I understand the pressure you feel to be able to give your partner anything they could ever want, because I feel it too. But at the end of the day, all I want is to be in love with my best friend.





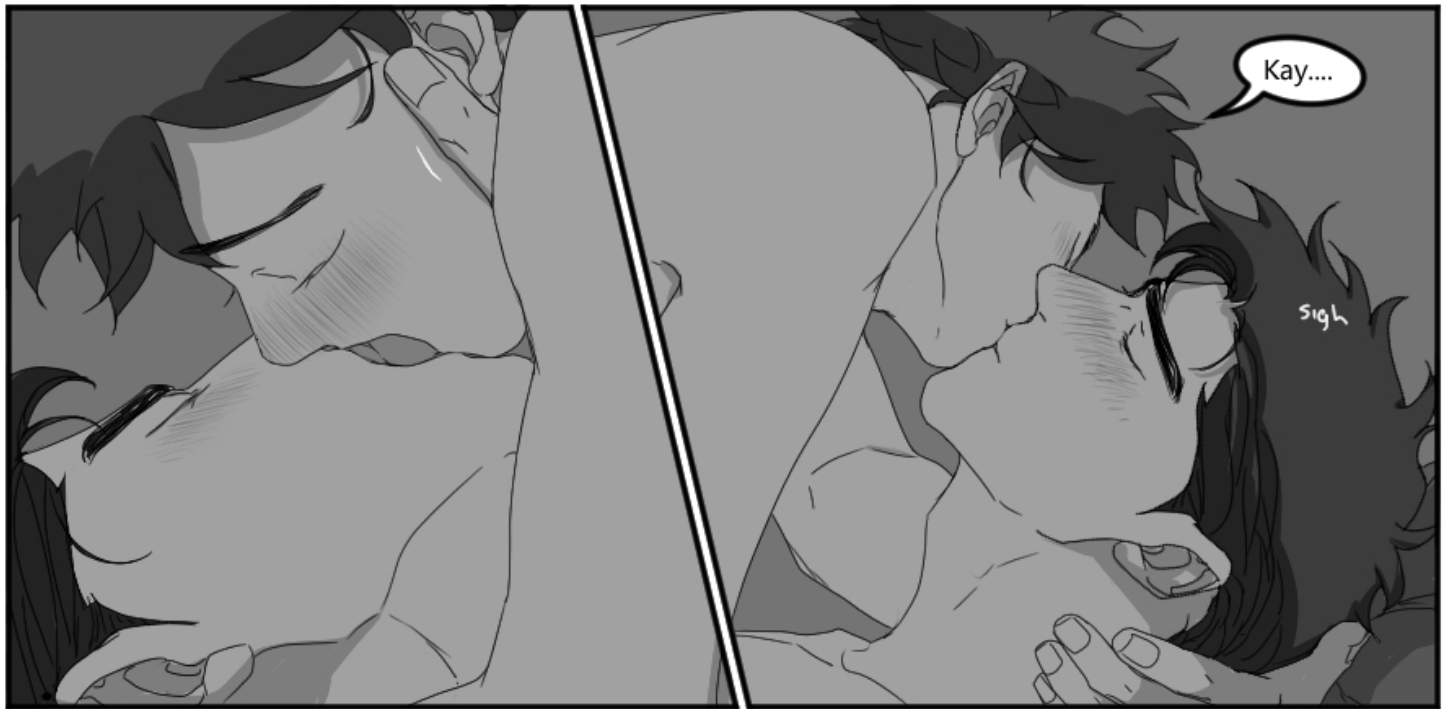


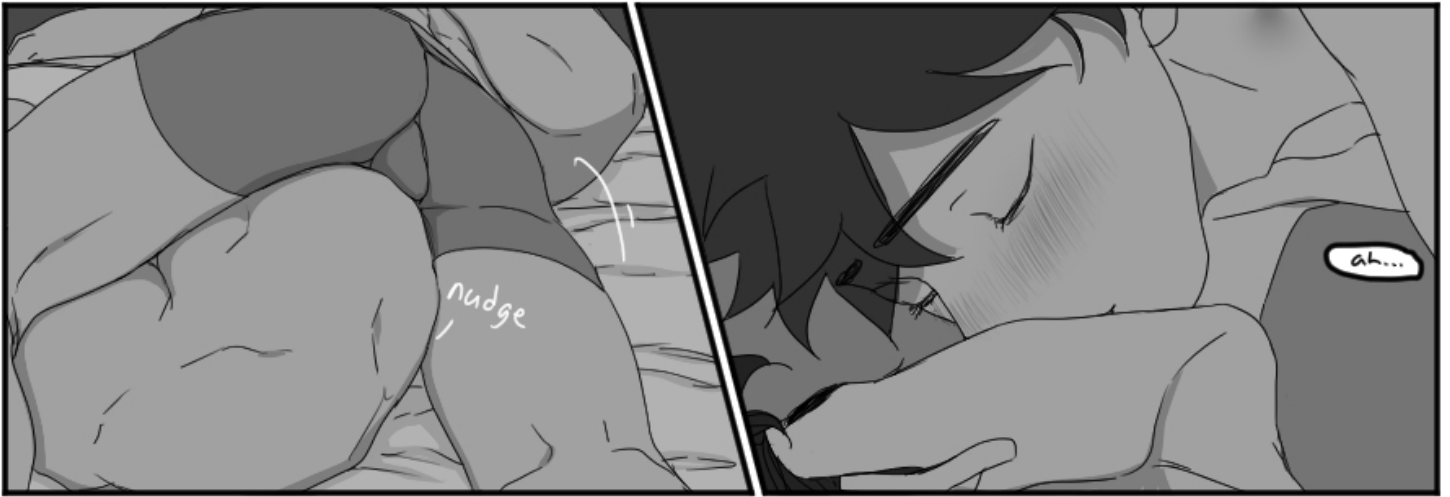


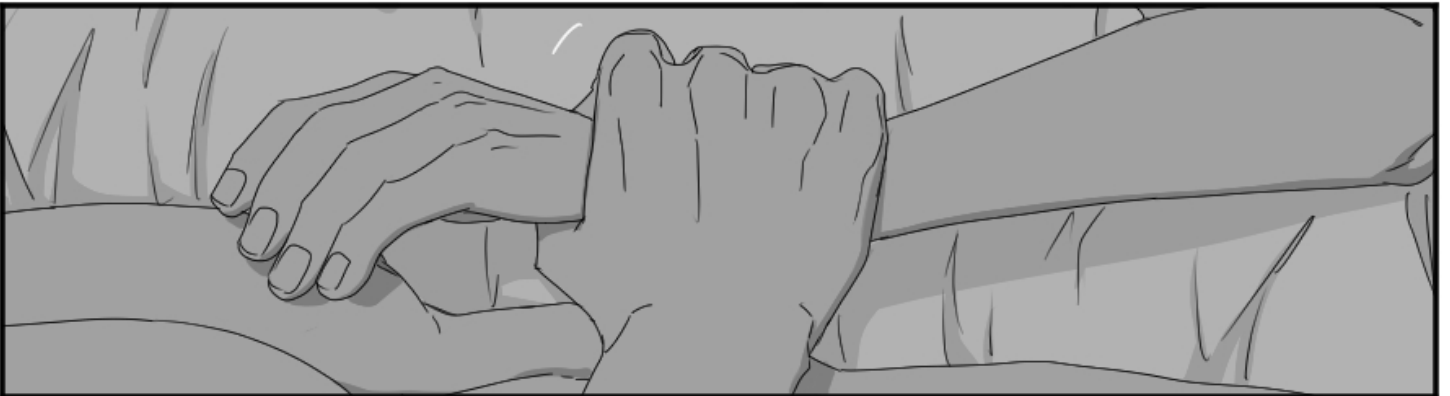
















....You don't wanna know what I want.



shake

brush
brush



If you knew the things I've been thinking about, lately...

....you wouldn't say that.

hah

hah

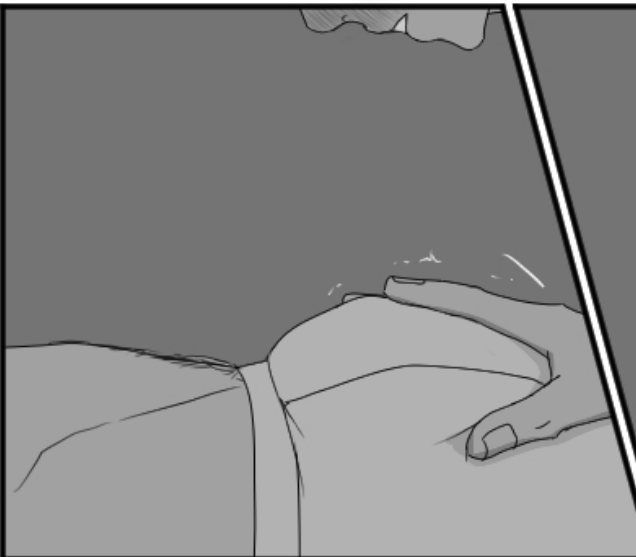
stroke



I want to go down on you again.



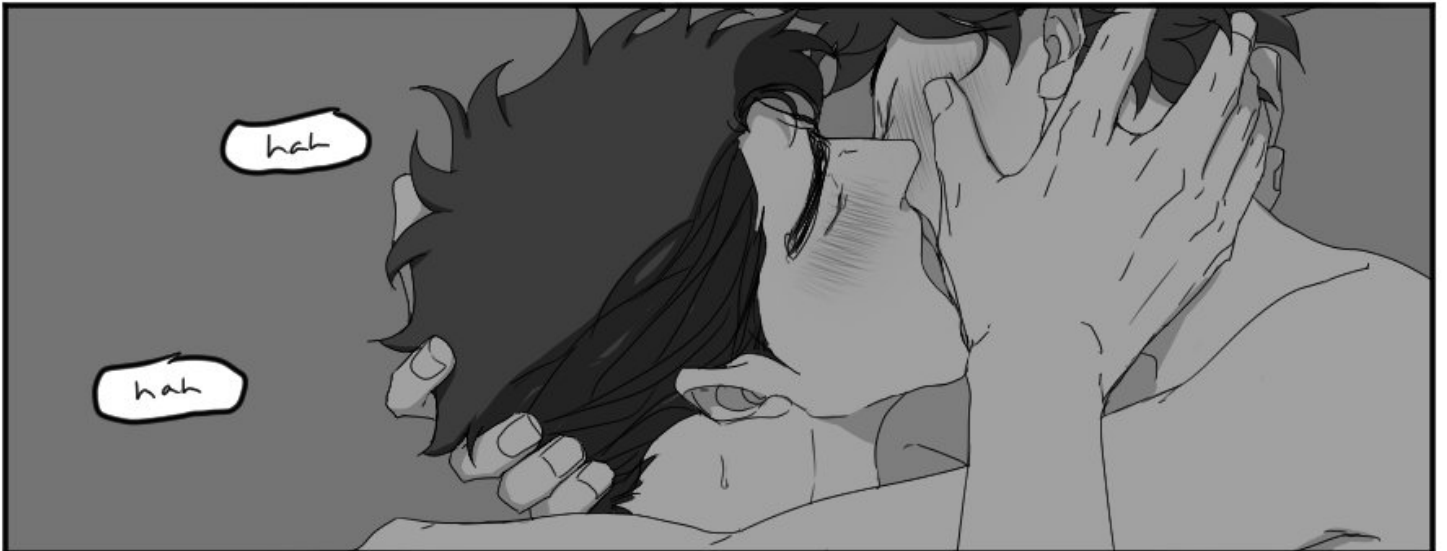










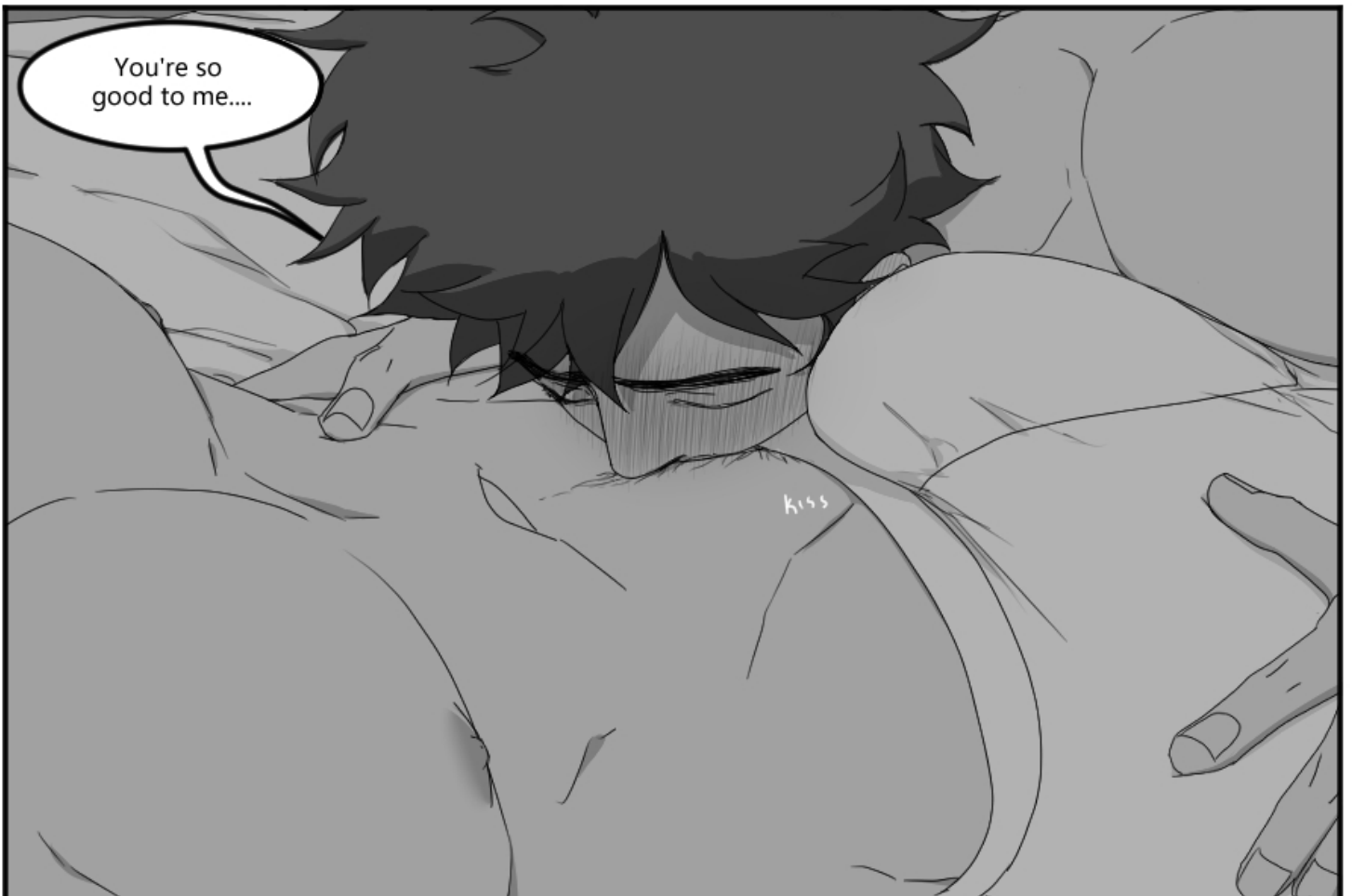




I'm lucky.



I'm the lucky one....



You're so good to me....

kiss



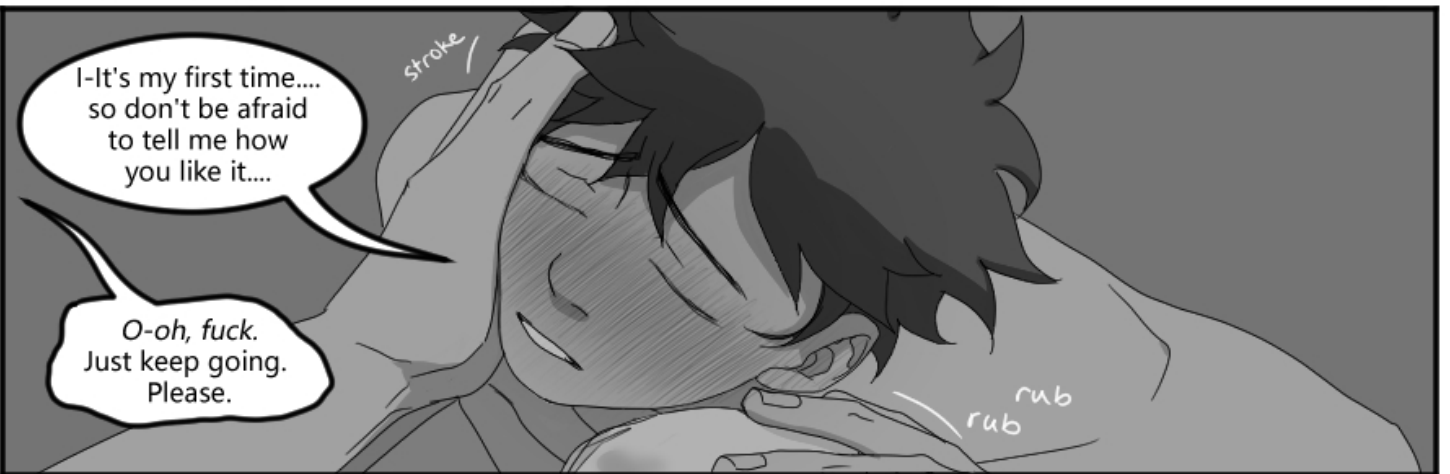
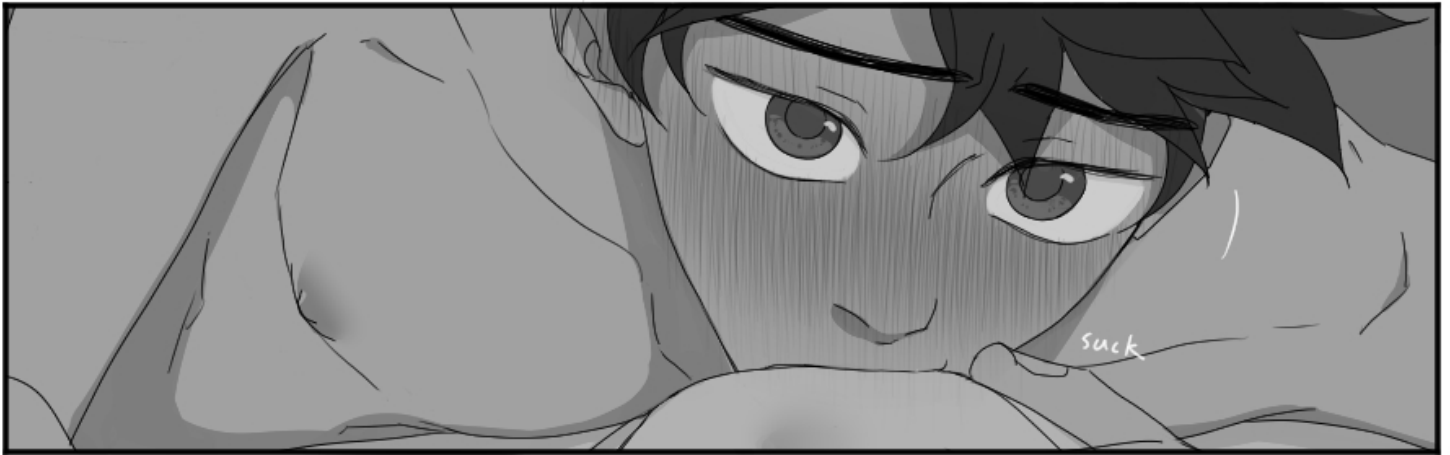
Oh god....

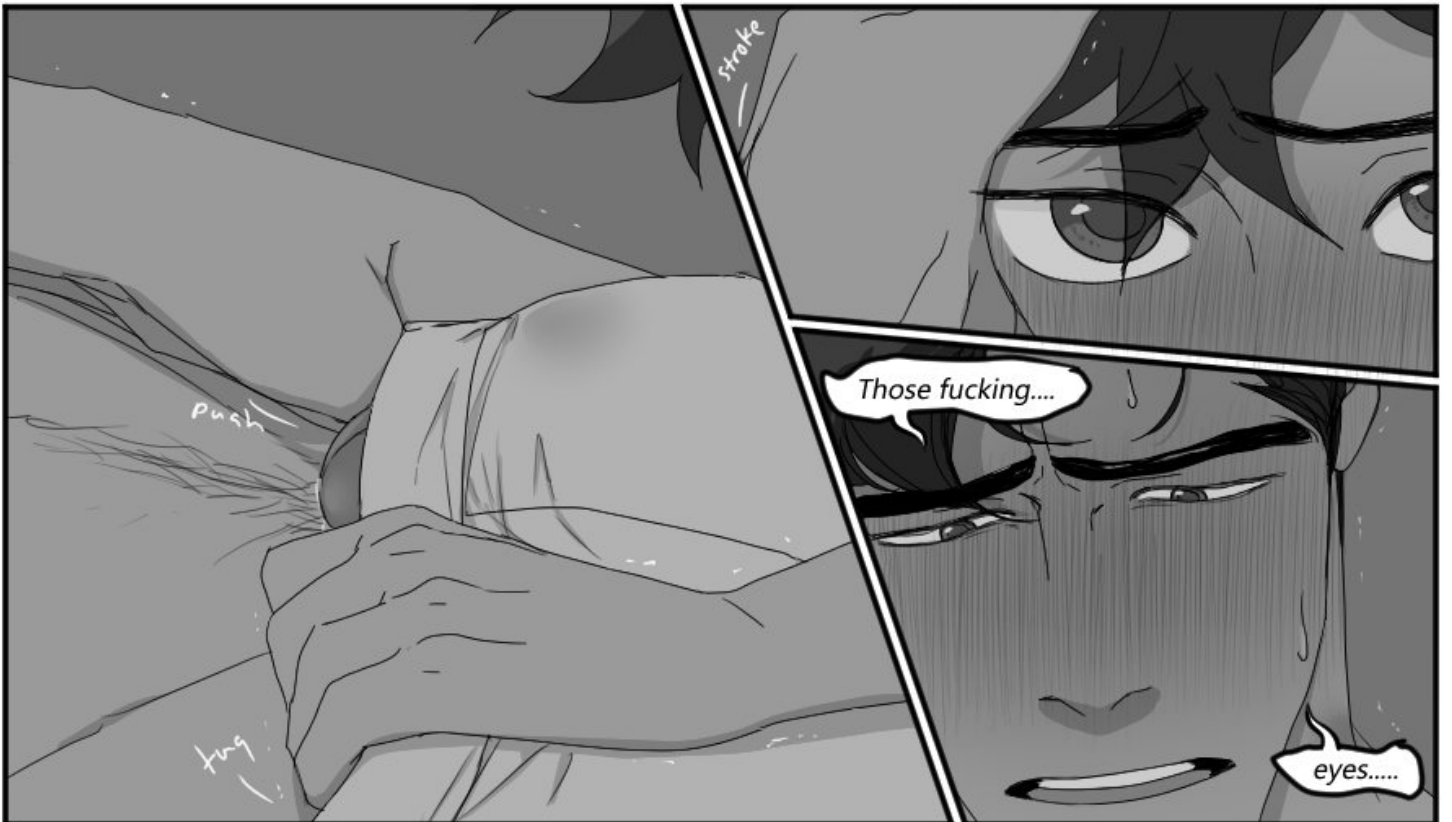
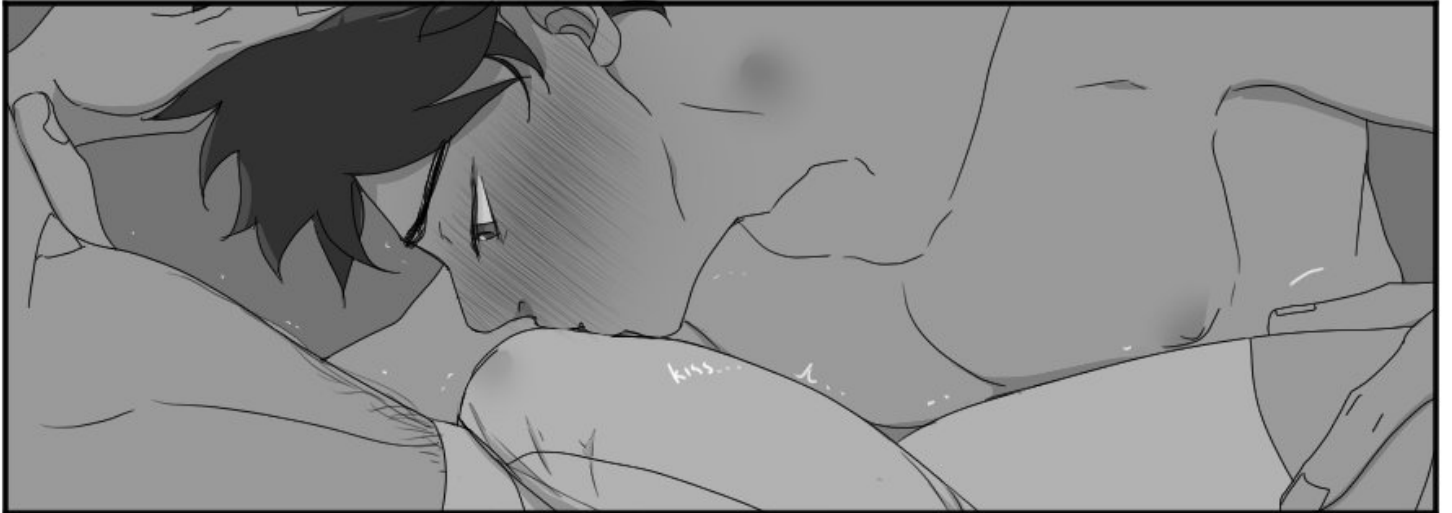
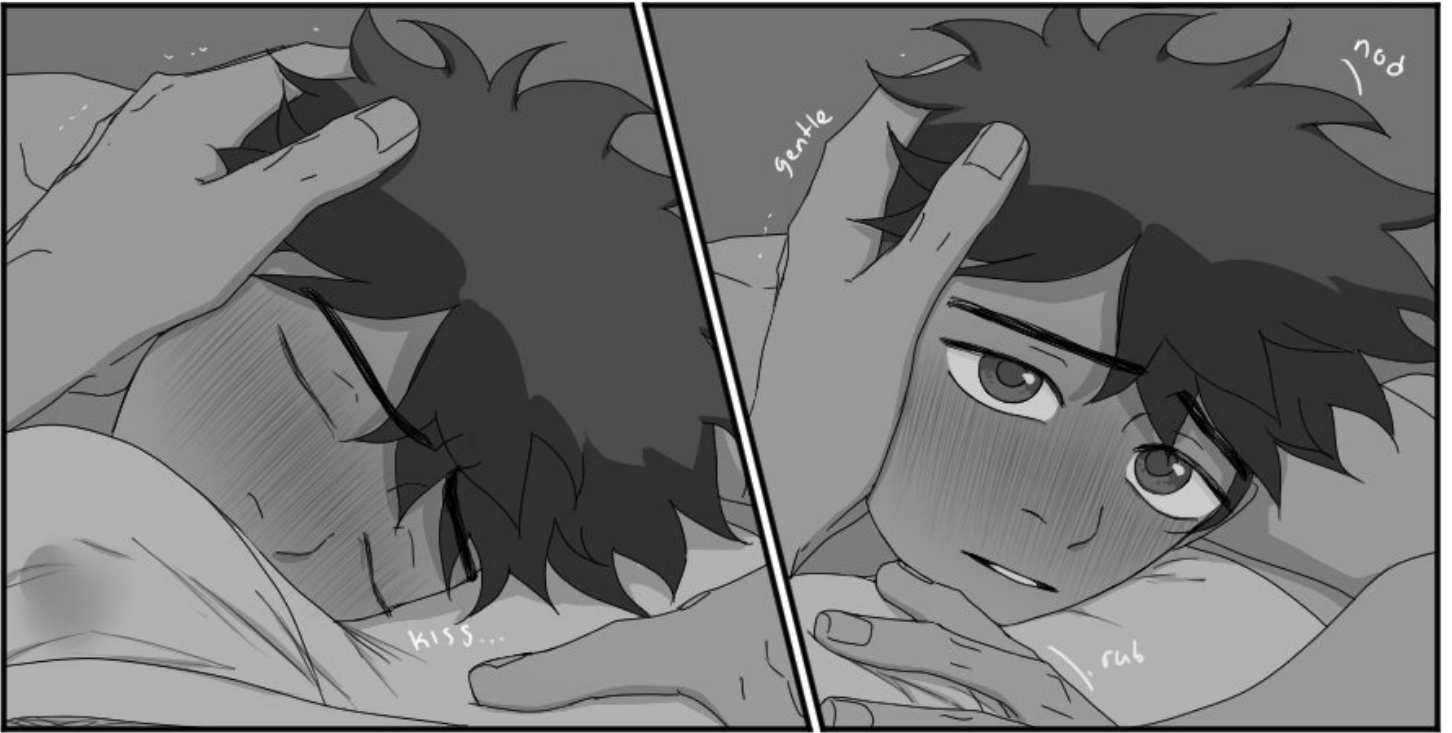
I don't know what I'm doing....



gasp

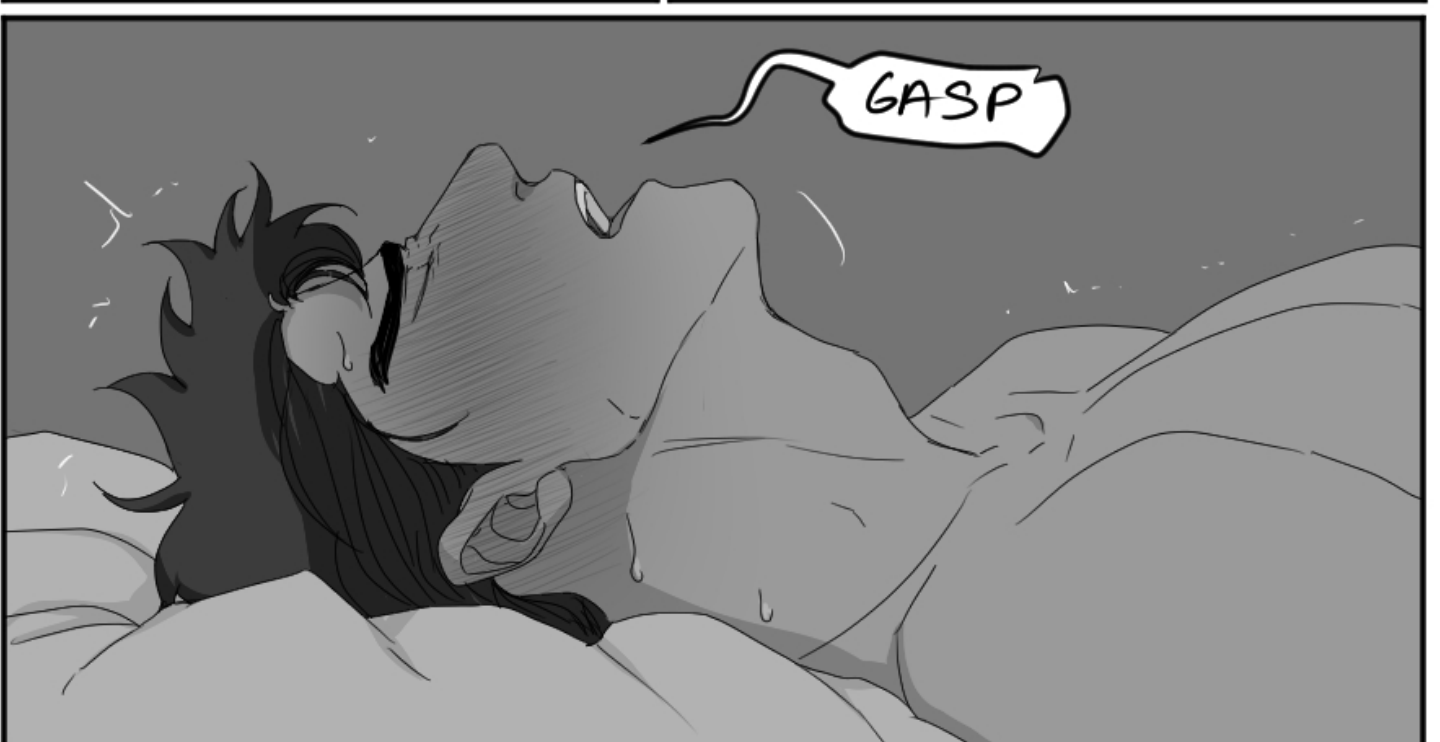
salt

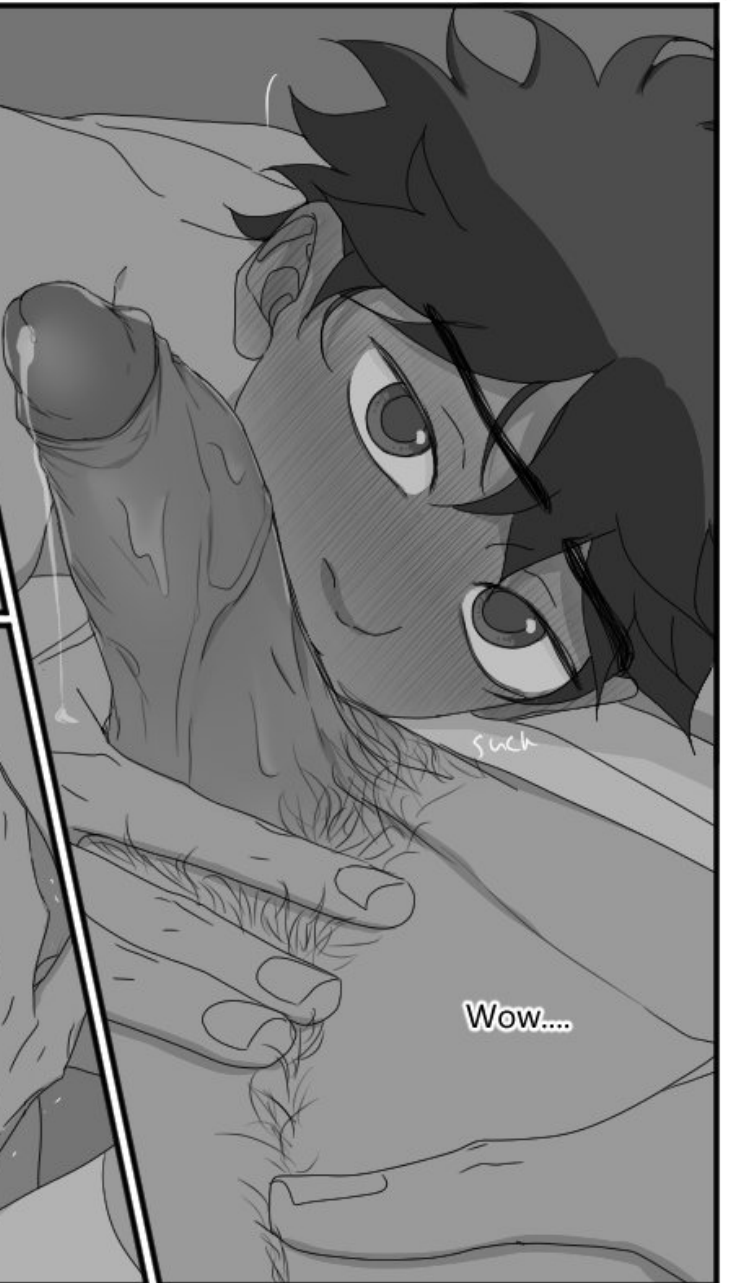


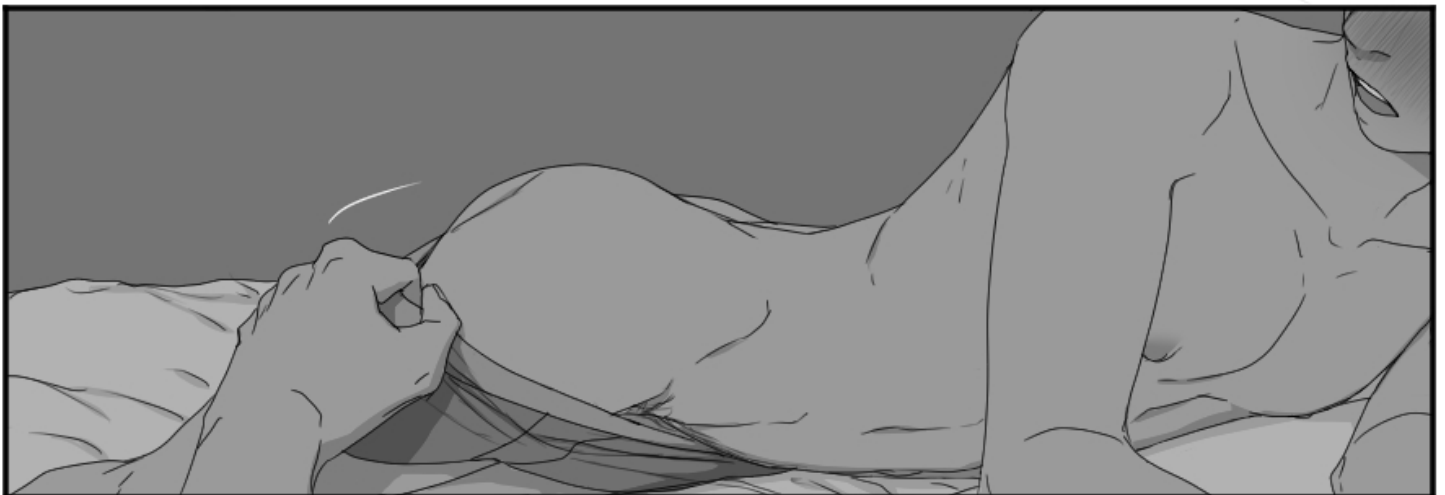
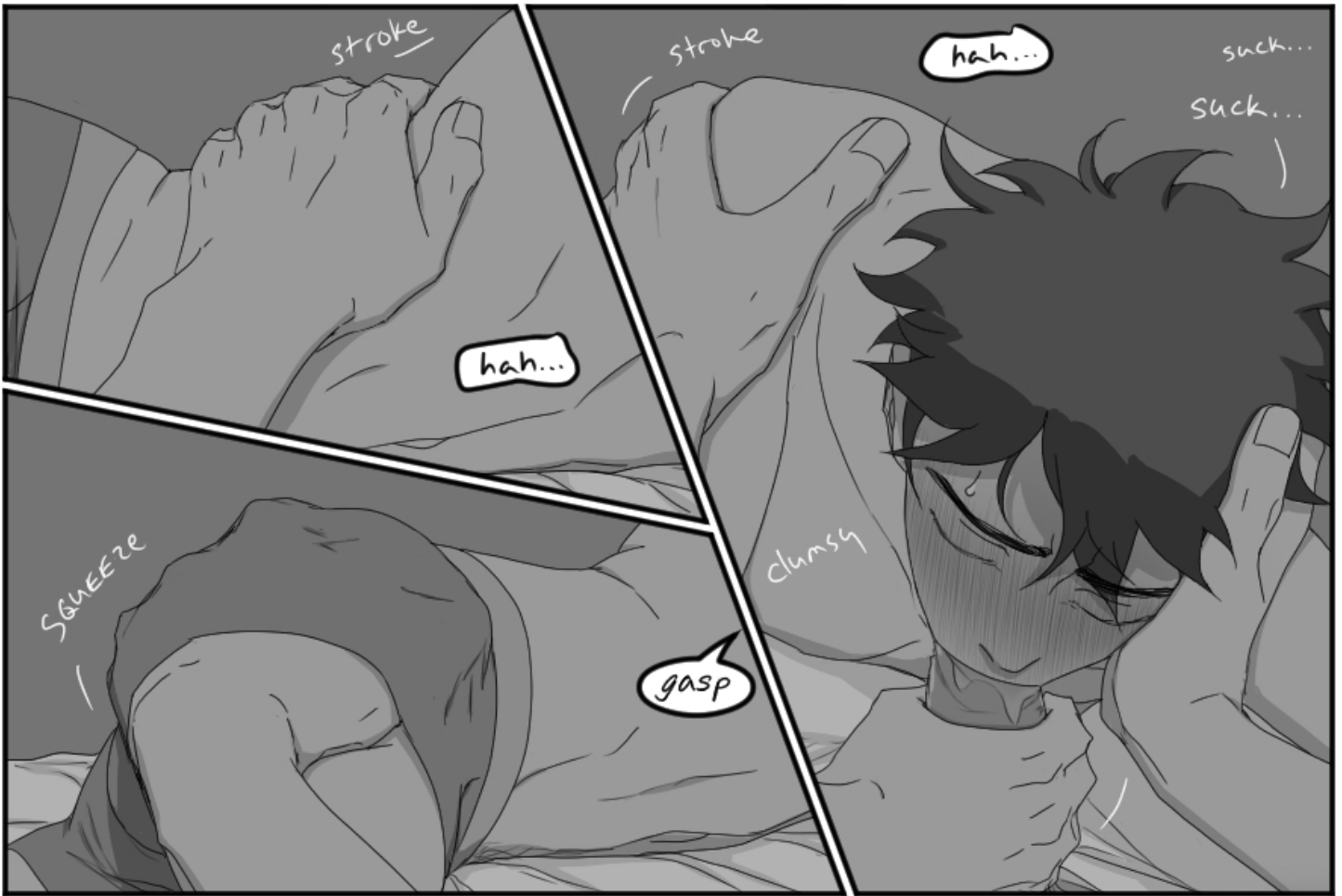
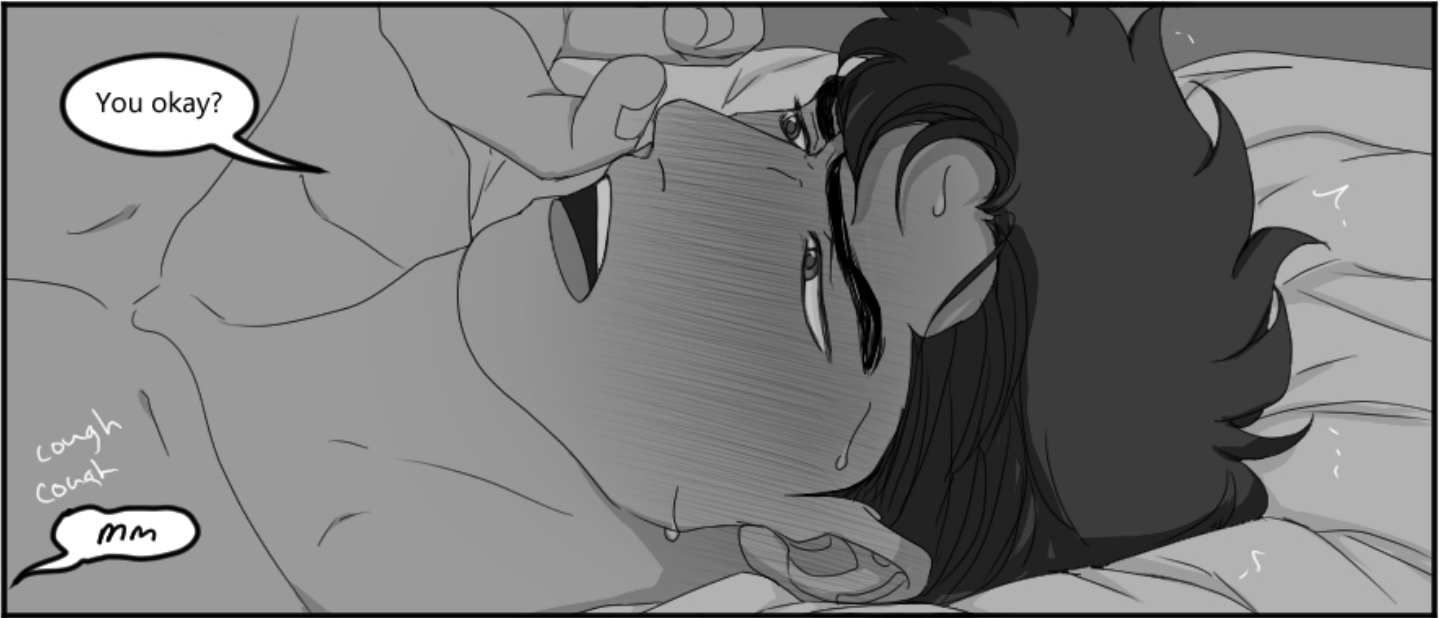


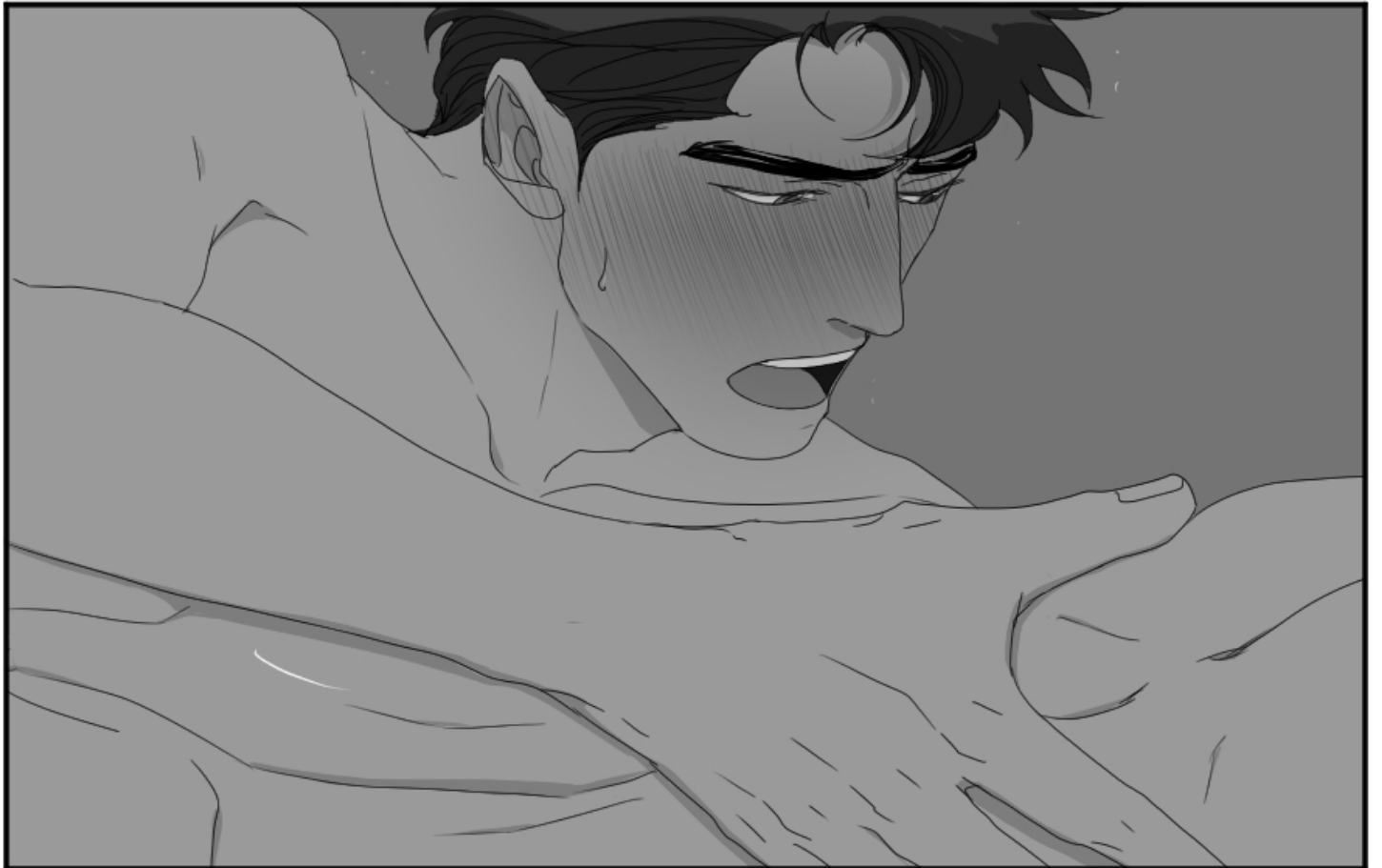


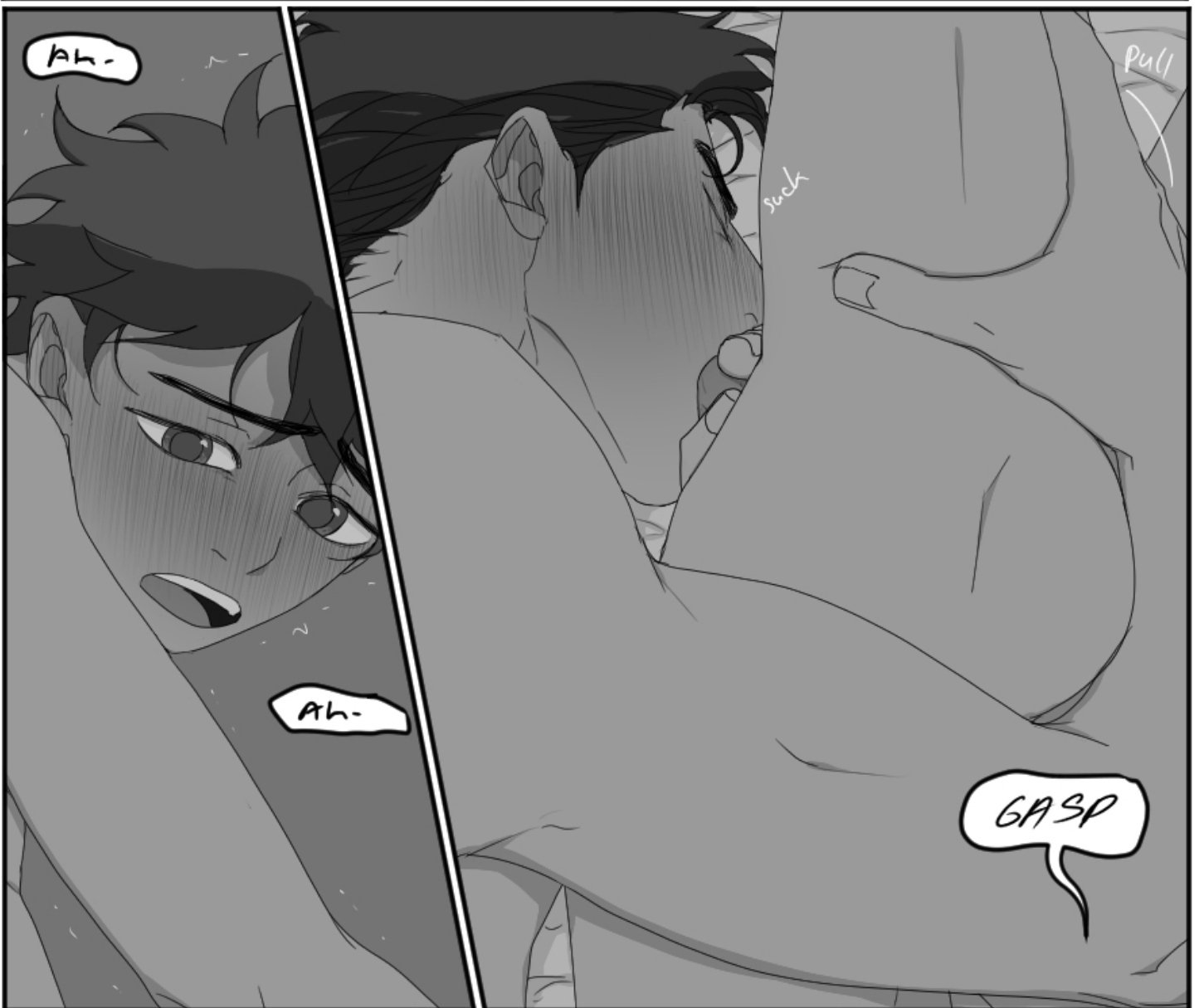






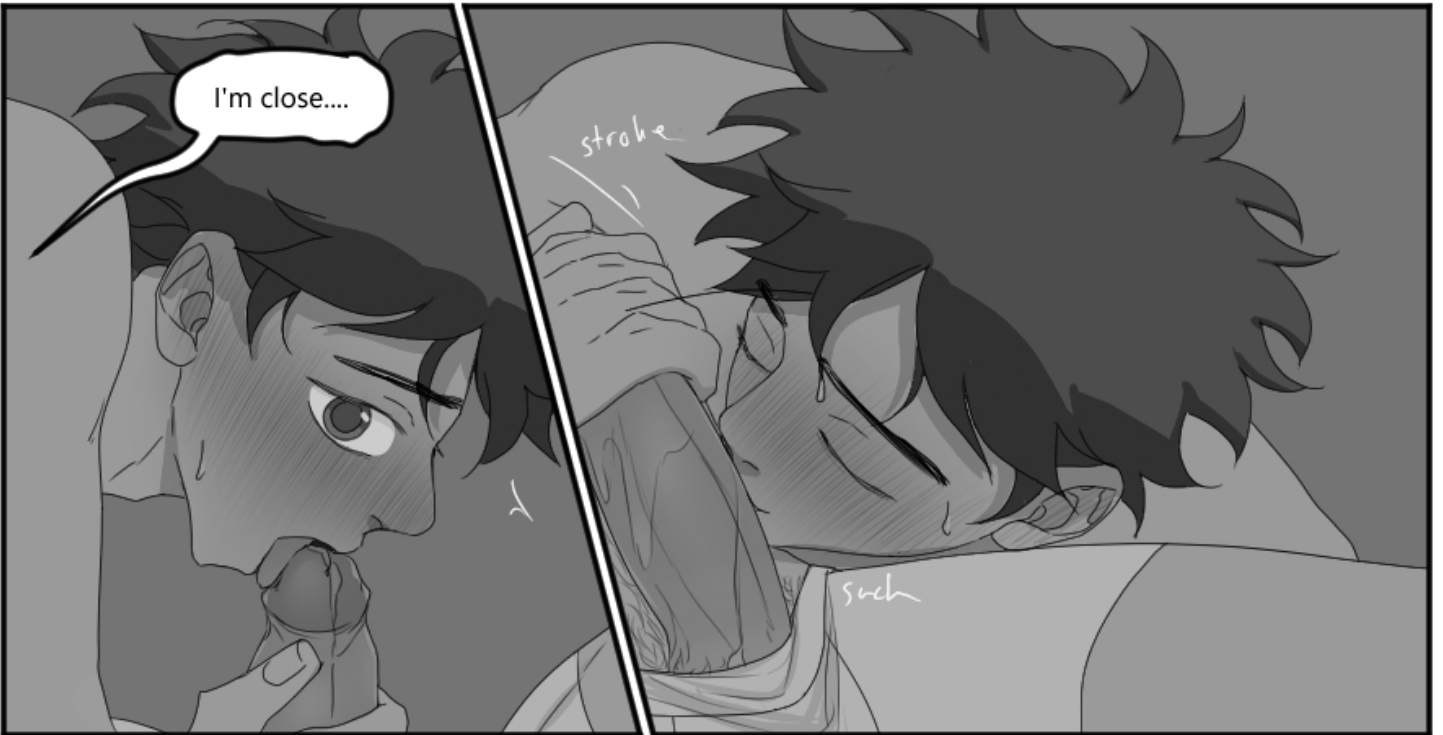




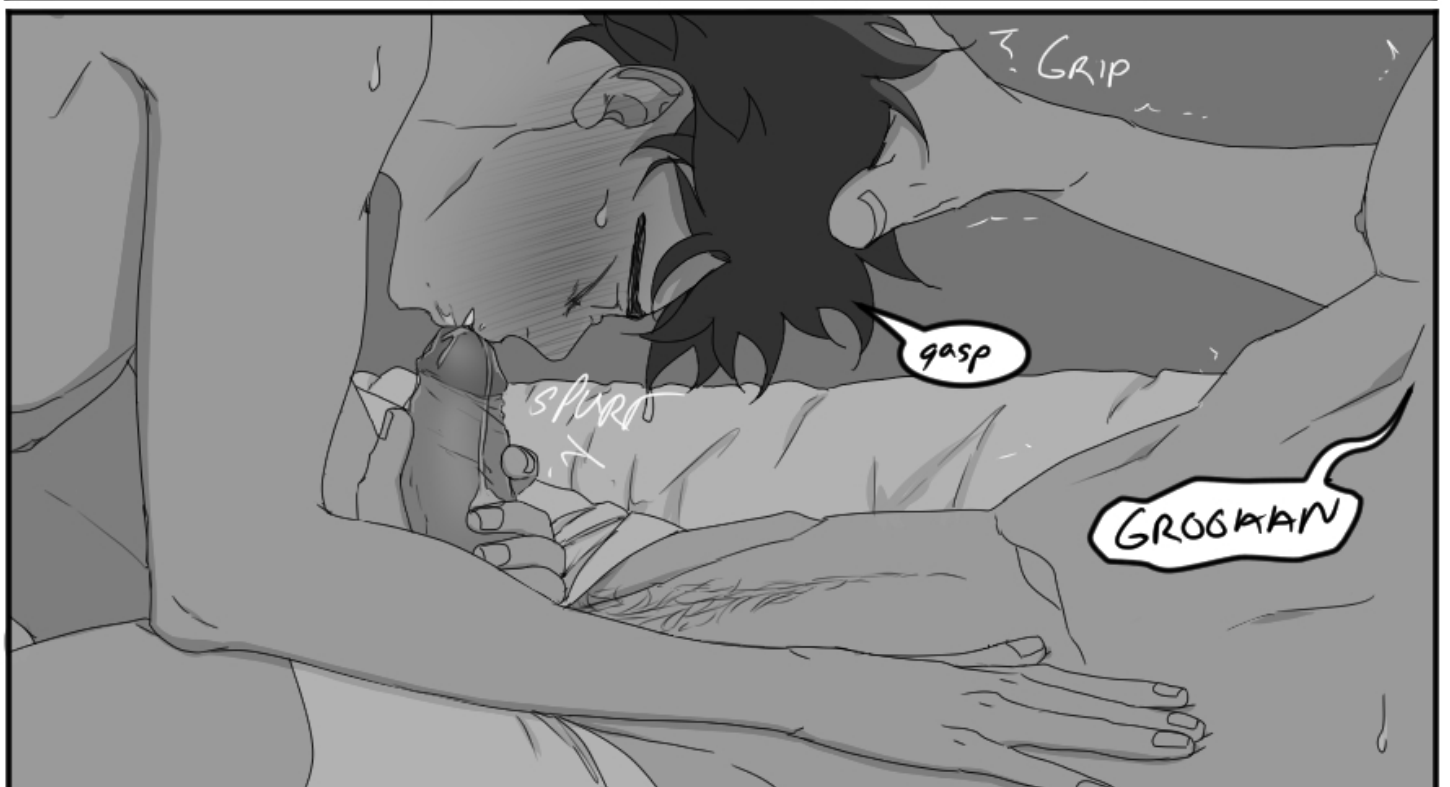


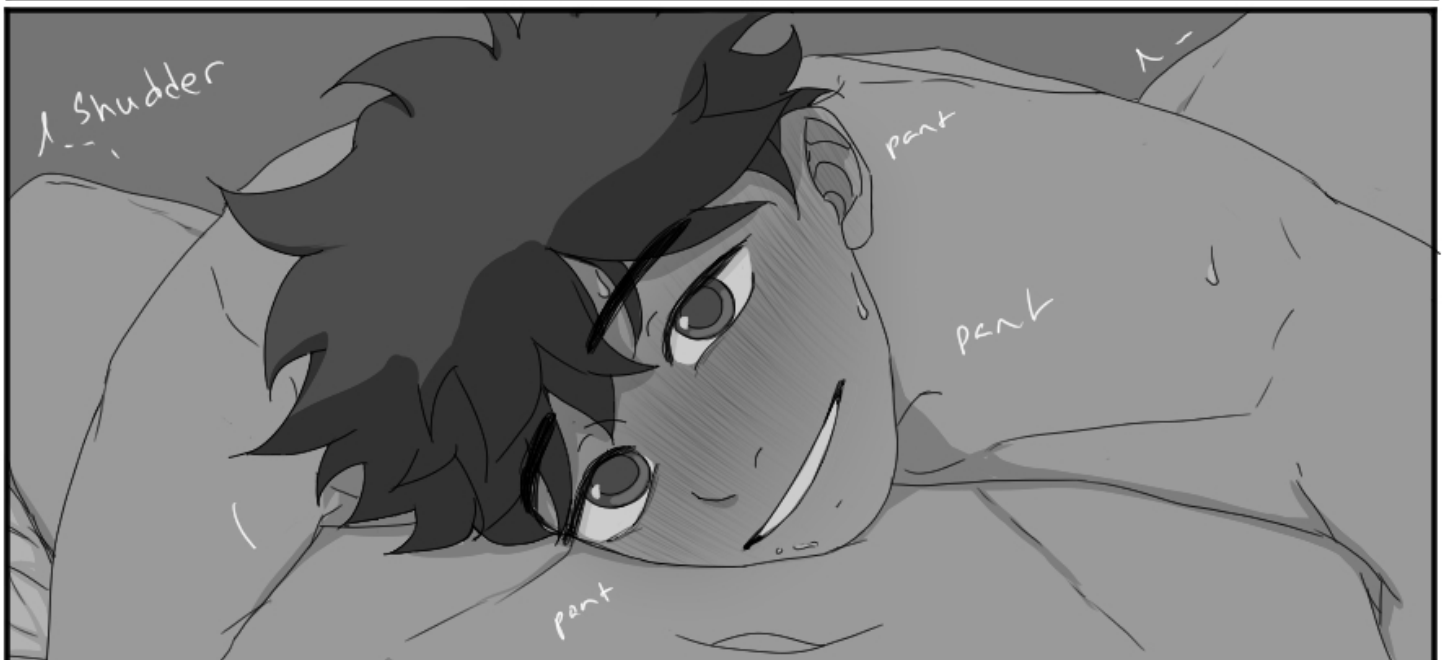
















Yeah. Baby, that was.... I loved that.

....I did, too.

I really, truly, actually did love that. What the hell.



There was a part of me that was a little worried that doing this might make me feel... subservient, or emasculated, but I feel the complete opposite.

I love the feeling of knowing that I made you feel this good.

This was one of the most sexually gratifying experiences I ever had in my life.



No.

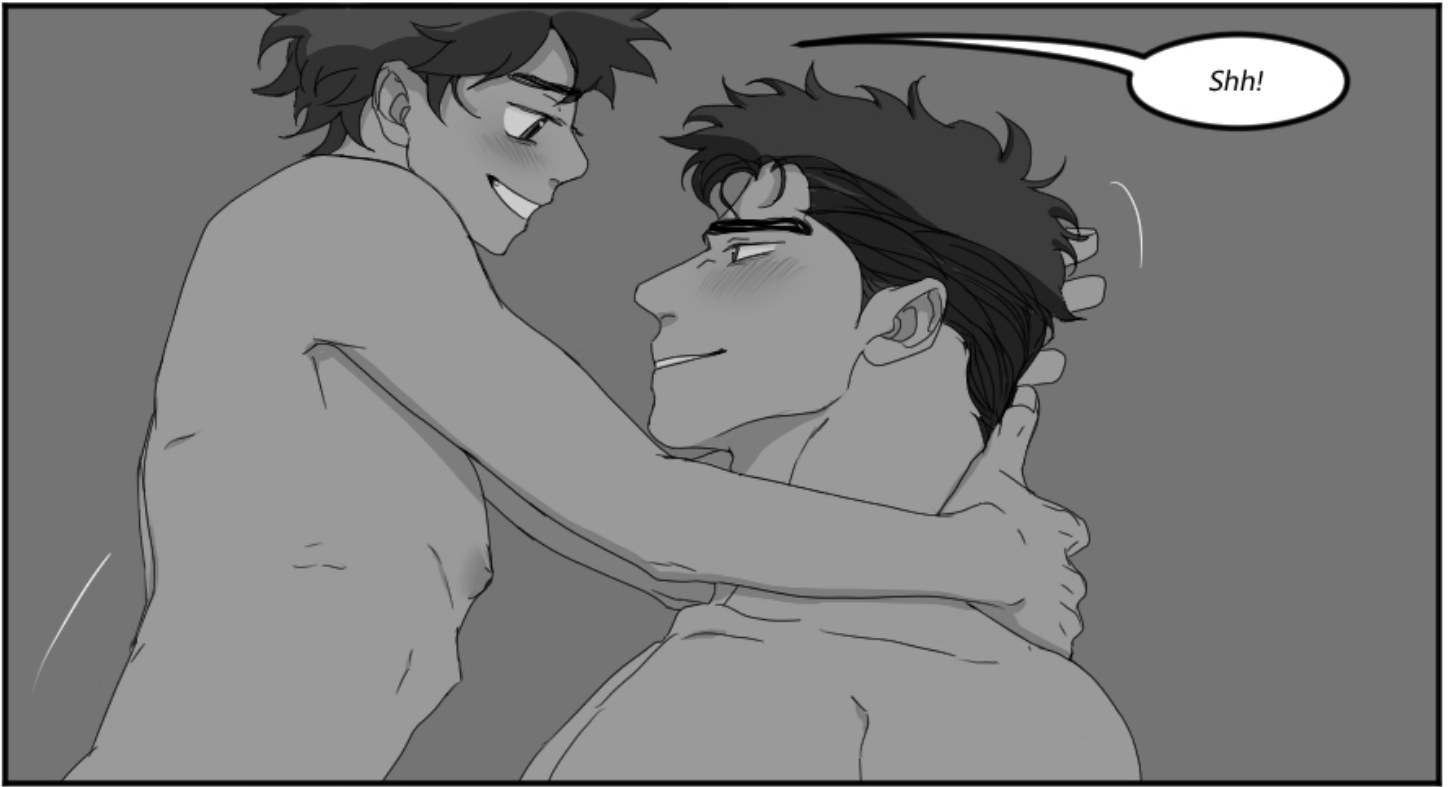
What do you mean, "no"?

No.

Are you telling me.... after all that you still won't sit on my lap?

Come up here.



















But it's.... you know.
Intimidating.



You said you've
done it before,
right?

It would be my first
time, obviously. You know
what you're doing...?



.....

.....Yeah, I do.



So....

would it hurt...?



But, baby.... I don't want this to stress you out.

....No.

We can talk about it. We can research together.

I'm in no rush. We have all the time in the world.

It's more tricky, and we have to be careful. But if it's done right, sex isn't supposed to hurt.



But... that's the thing.

I'll turn in my writing thing soon. And then the fall semester starts in less than two weeks. If I passed my classes.

And I'm exhausted after this summer, so I know the next semester's gonna kill me. And you'll have your classes to worry about, too.

I feel like we just have a small moment to breathe.... so.....







