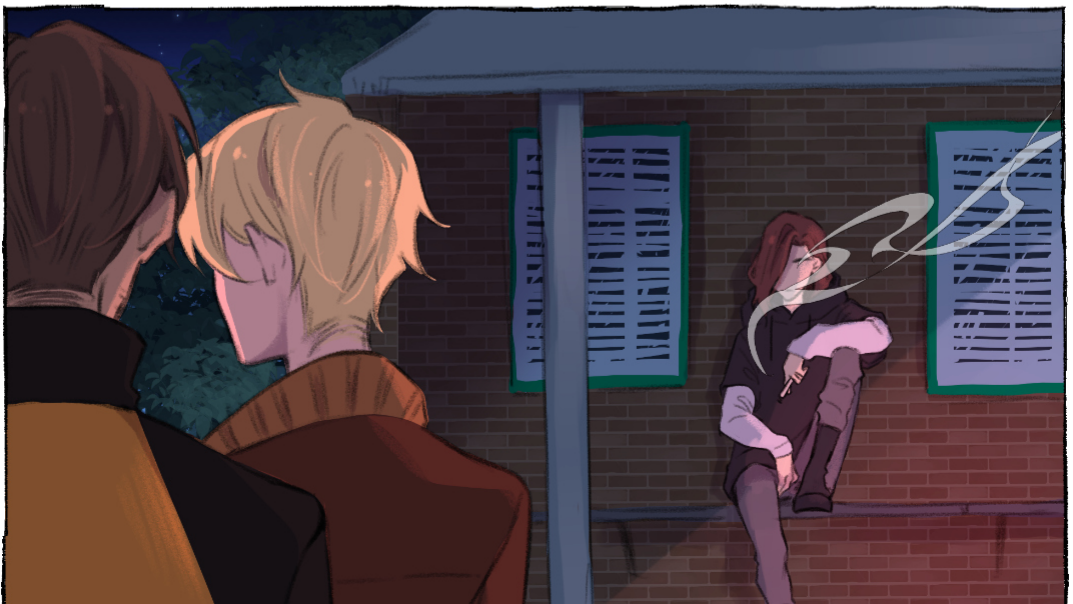
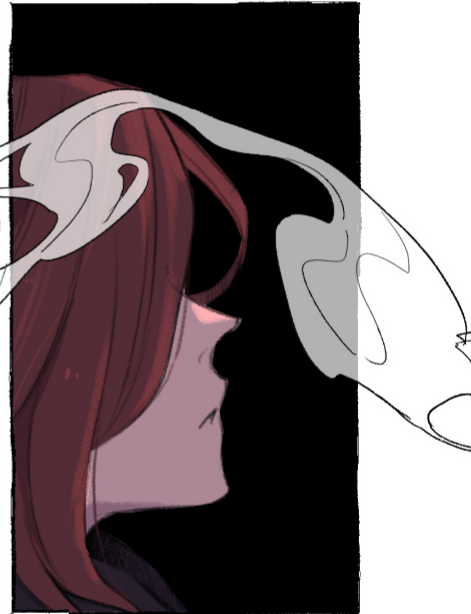


Shallow Sleep

VIII. Absence







*I don't have
anyone left
here, either.*

*I'm a
stranger*

*in this place
I used to
call "home".*





One day
...

... there'll be
no one
around
to listen
anymore.



Can I
....



open
up to
someone?



You always
seem to
know where
I am,

why is
that?



I can
always
feel your
presence.



It is...
familiar,
somehow.

Does it
make you
uncom-
fortable?





M-my brother Felix and I...

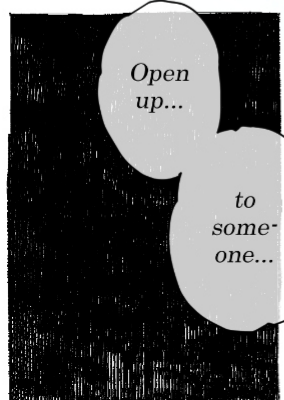
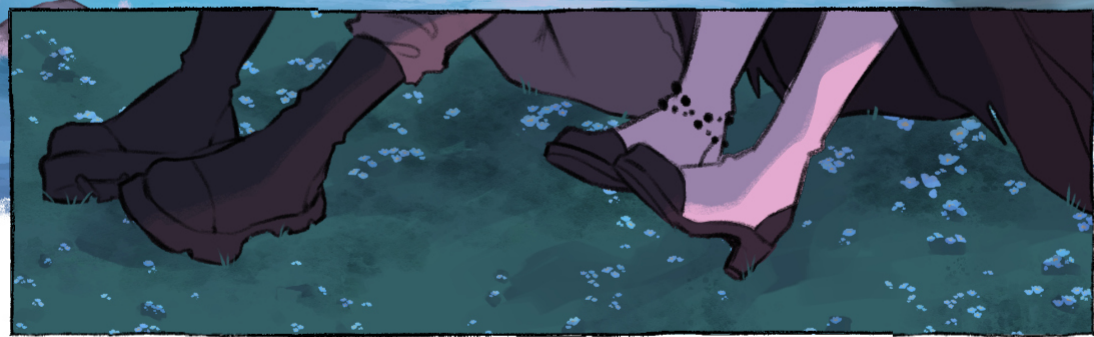
When we were kids,

this place was magical to us.



The fields had already been barren for decades,

yet this tree remained, the grass always lush and soft.

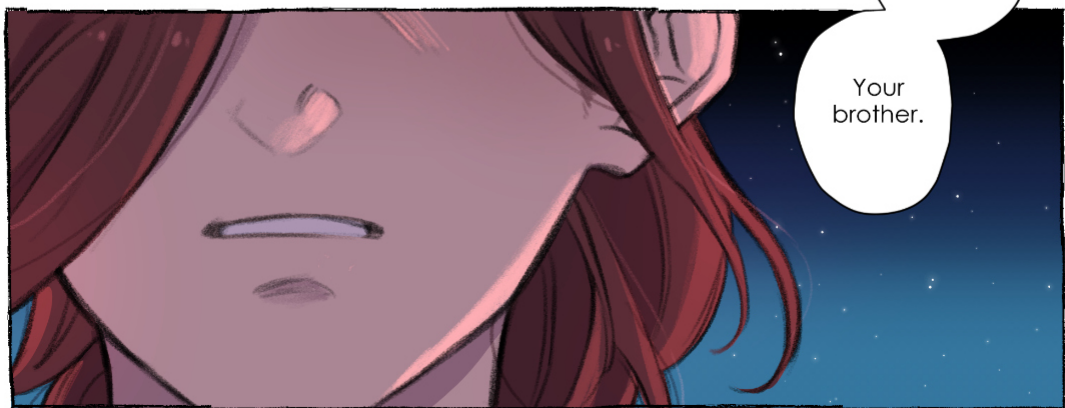
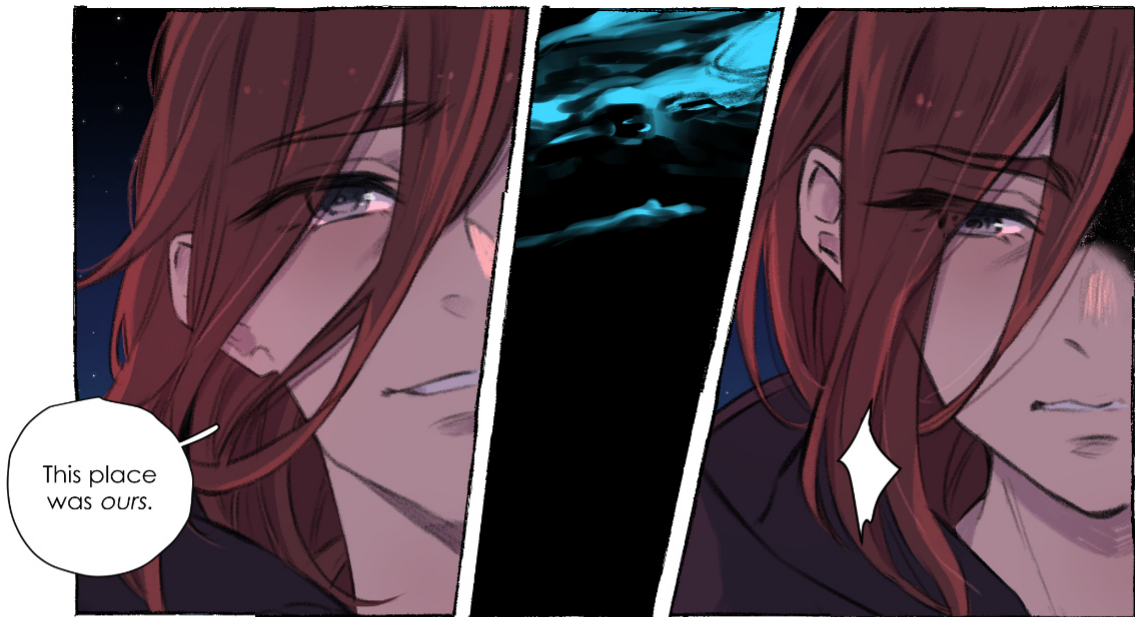


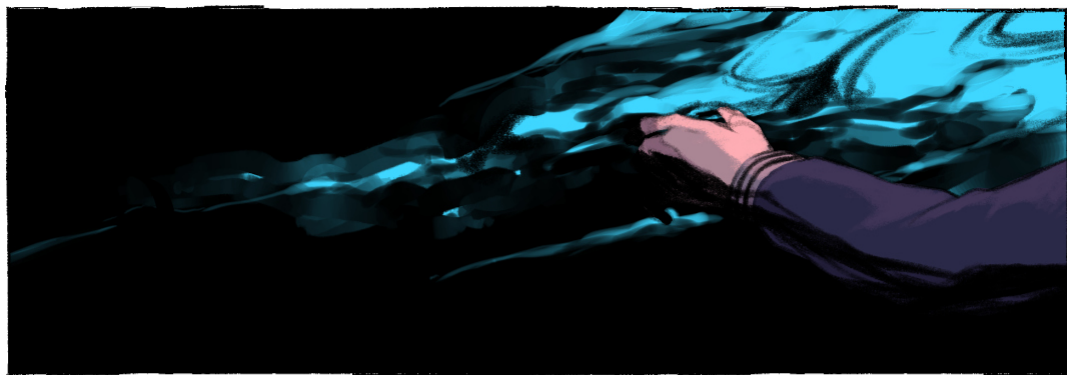
Open up...
to some-one...



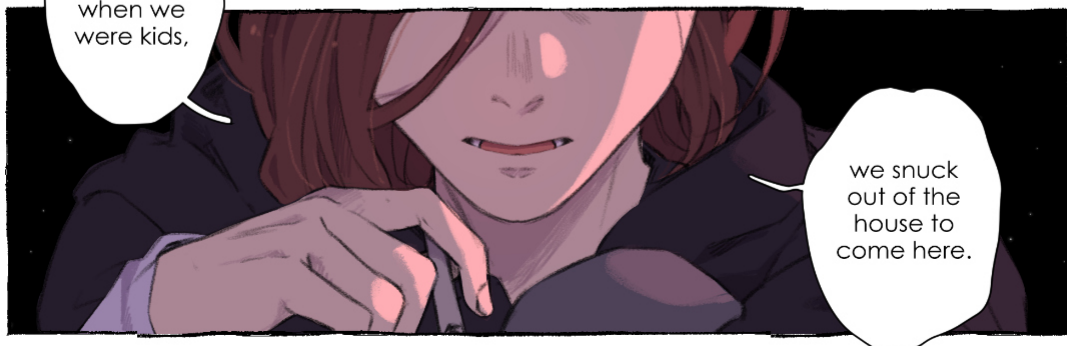
The town looks so small from up here.

Only he and I existed here.

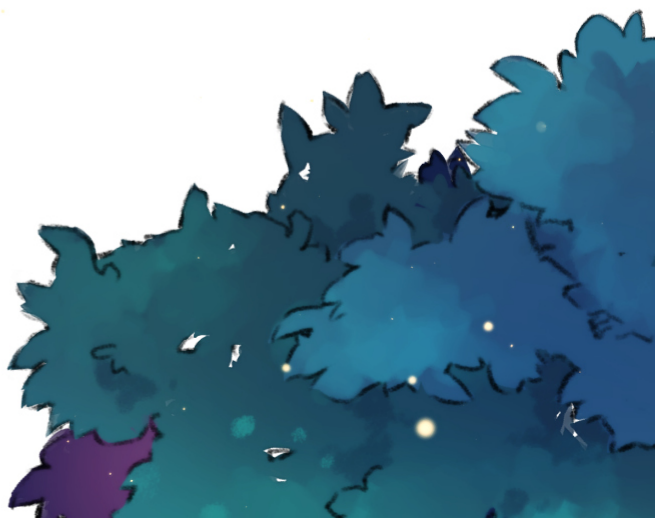
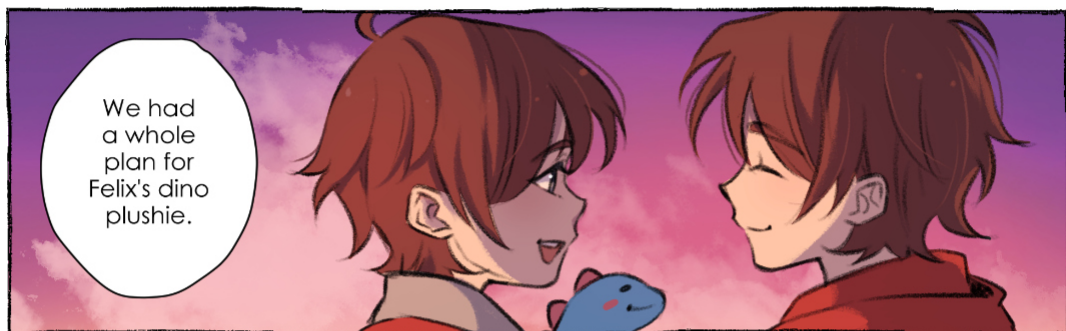




One morning, when we were kids,



we snuck out of the house to come here.



We had built
little furniture
for him out
of clay and
building blocks,



and we wanted
to start building
a real house
for us and Dino.





and I heard a splashing sound at some point but I didn't think much of it.

Until...

I suddenly felt like something was off.

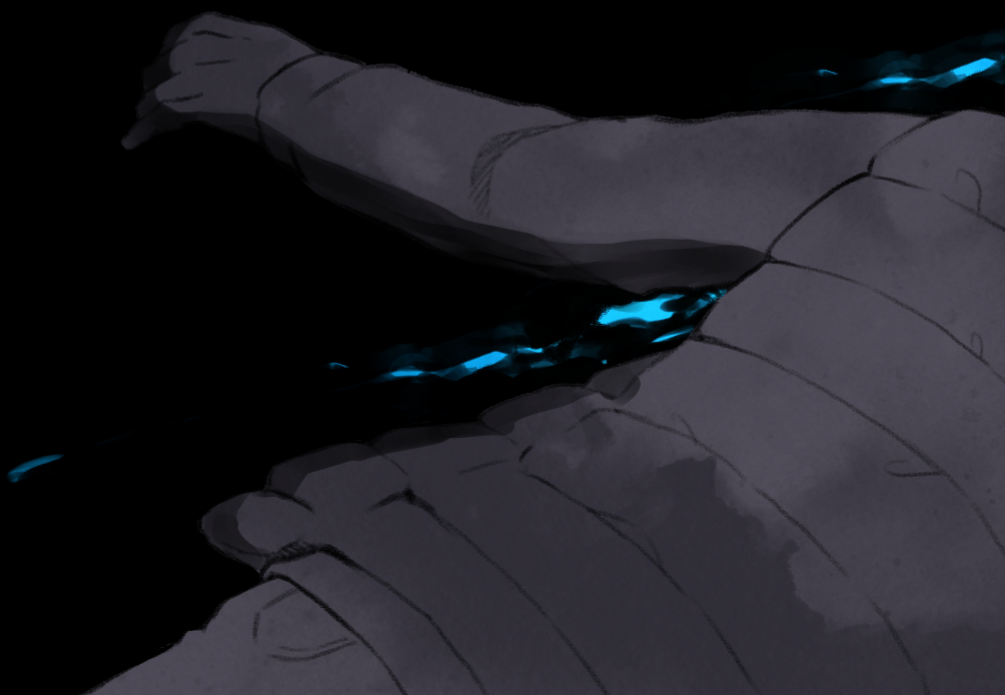


A breath
that left my
lungs wrong,
somehow.

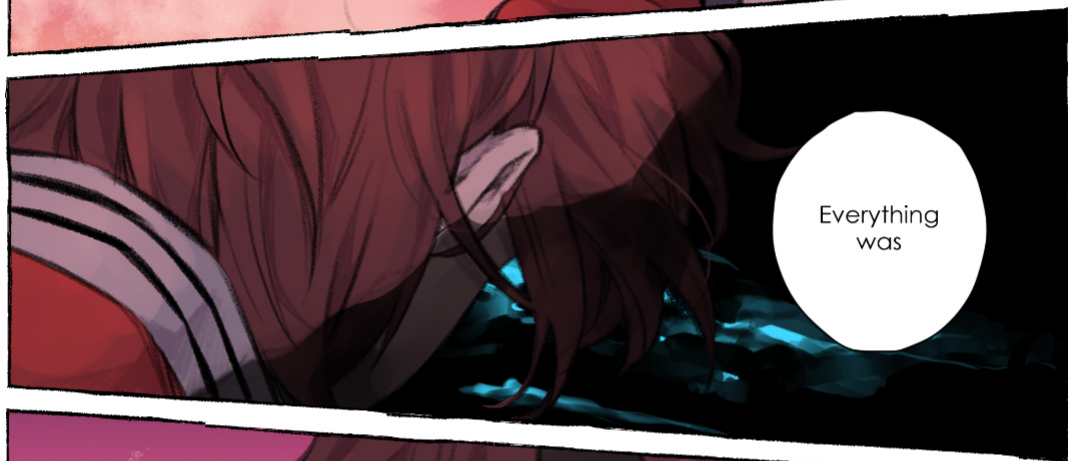
Like something
small was being
ripped out of
my very core.



And then
I saw him.











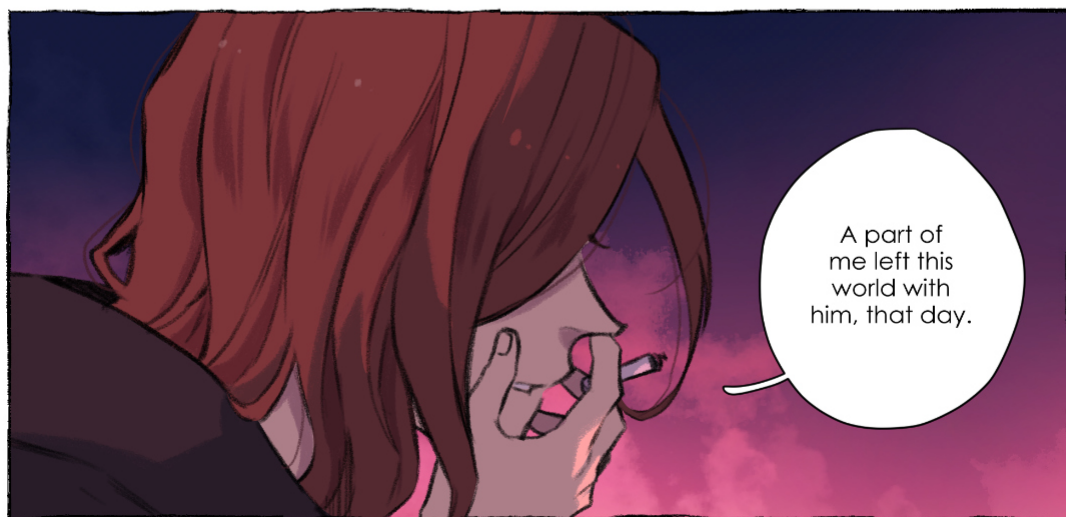
He must
have tripped
and fallen,
hit his head.

He didn't
scream.



He couldn't
get up and
I couldn't—

*He couldn't
breathe.*



A part of
me left this
world with
him, that day.



I dream
of him
sometimes.



I'm here,
but instead
of a stream,
there's an
ocean.



There are
small, bright
lights
everywhere,
like millions of
fireflies,

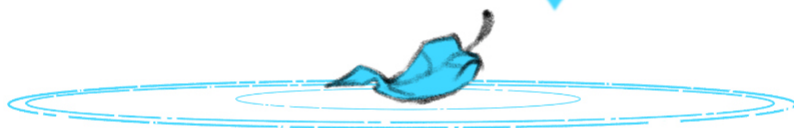
gently
moving
in the
breeze,
like wind
chimes,

creating
the most
soothing
sounds.

Felix and I
would sit
together and
listen to the
lights in silence

until I'd be
alone again,
feeling his
absence even
stronger than
before.

*This place
Leo is
describing...*



*could it
be....?*







"Keep your distance."



Anyway.

"Stay away."





Thank you for
listening to
my story,
Charon.

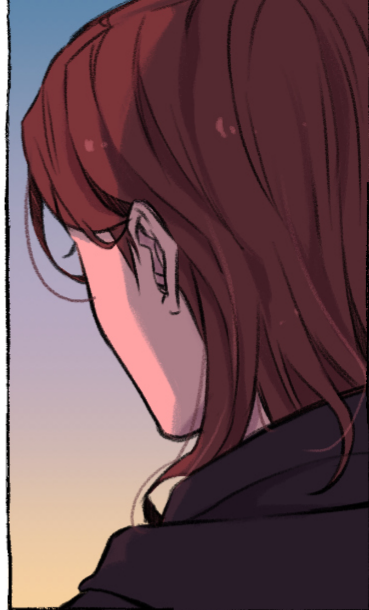
I have never
talked about
this before
to anyone.



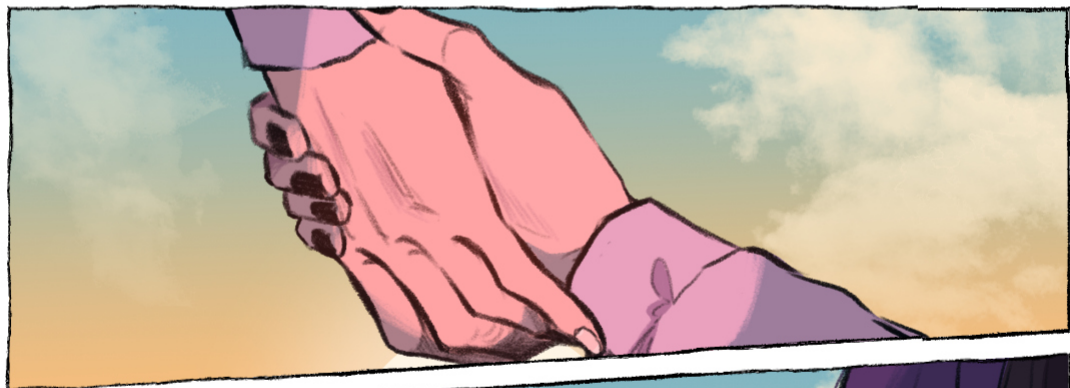
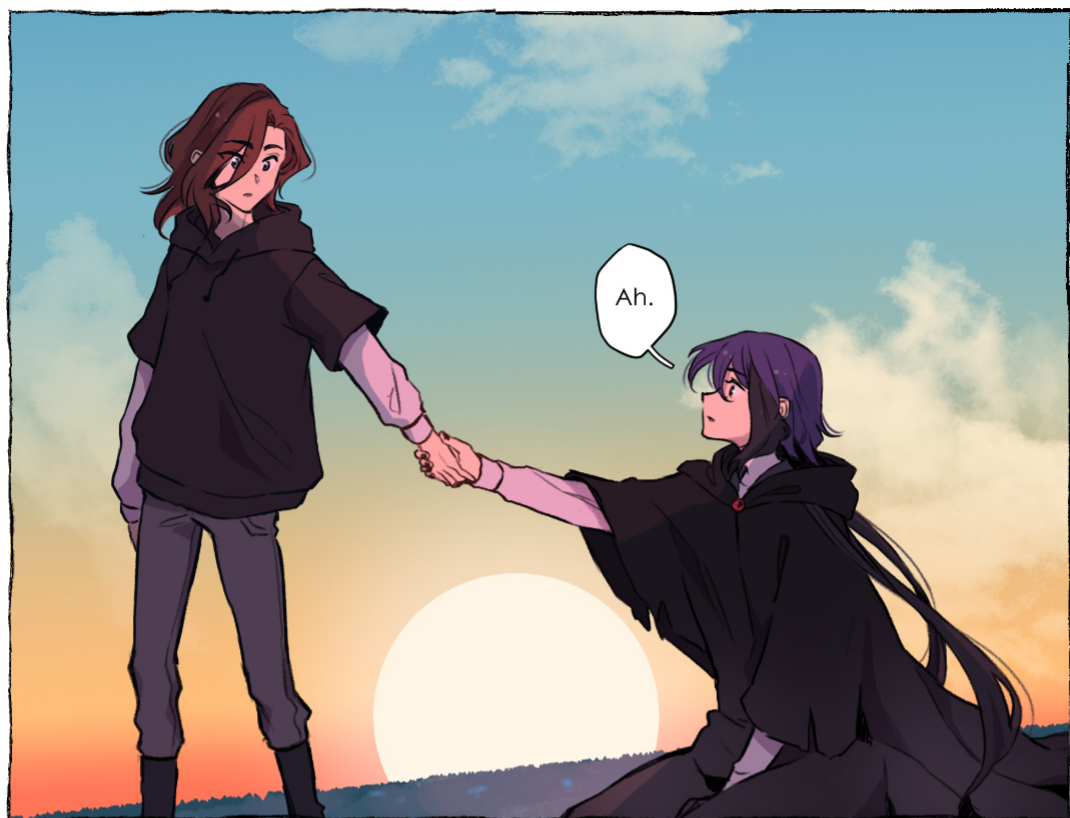
I might
actually be
able to sleep
well tonight.

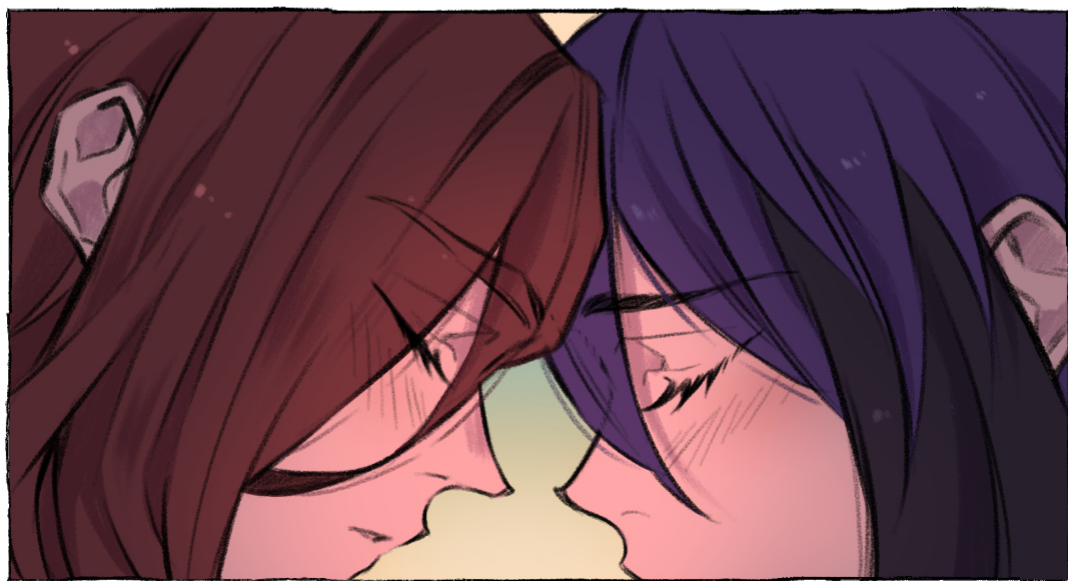
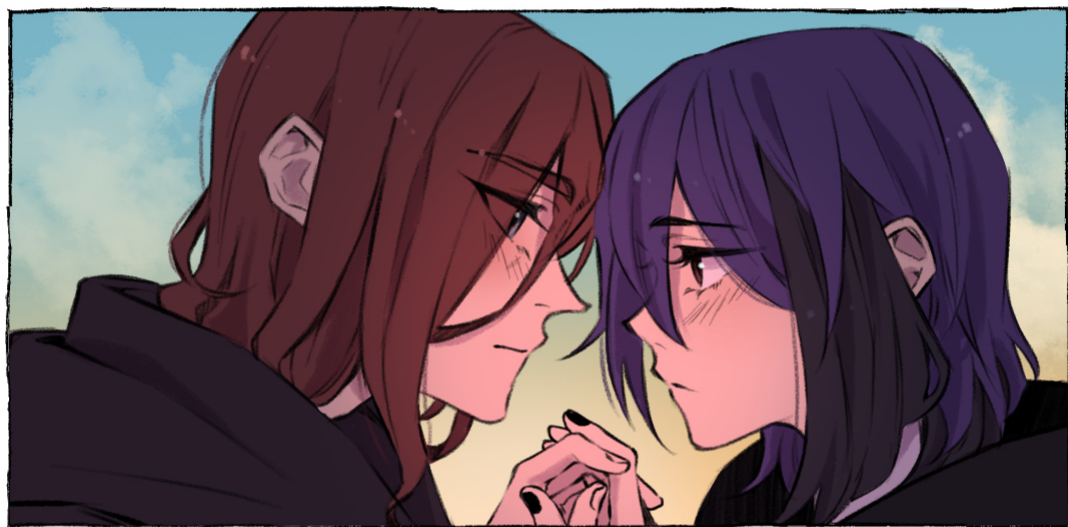
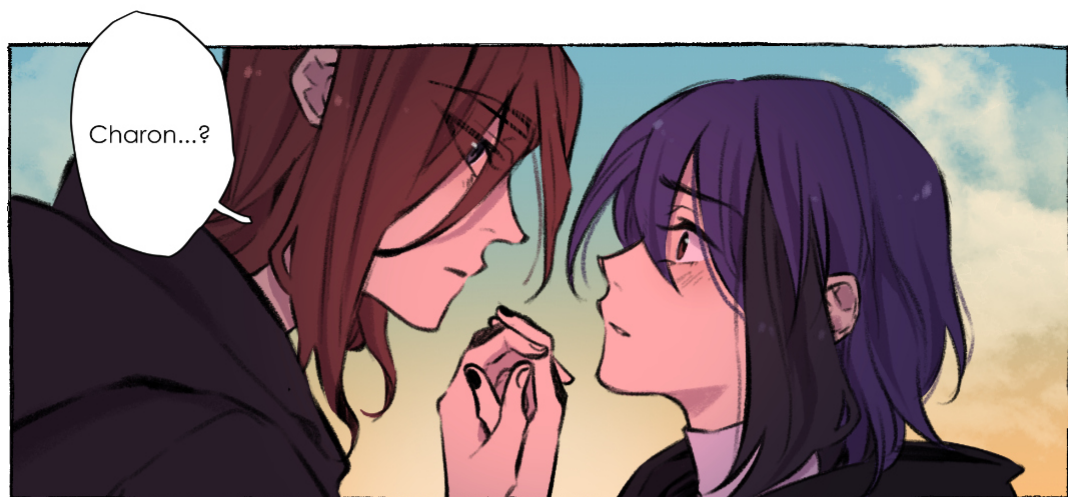


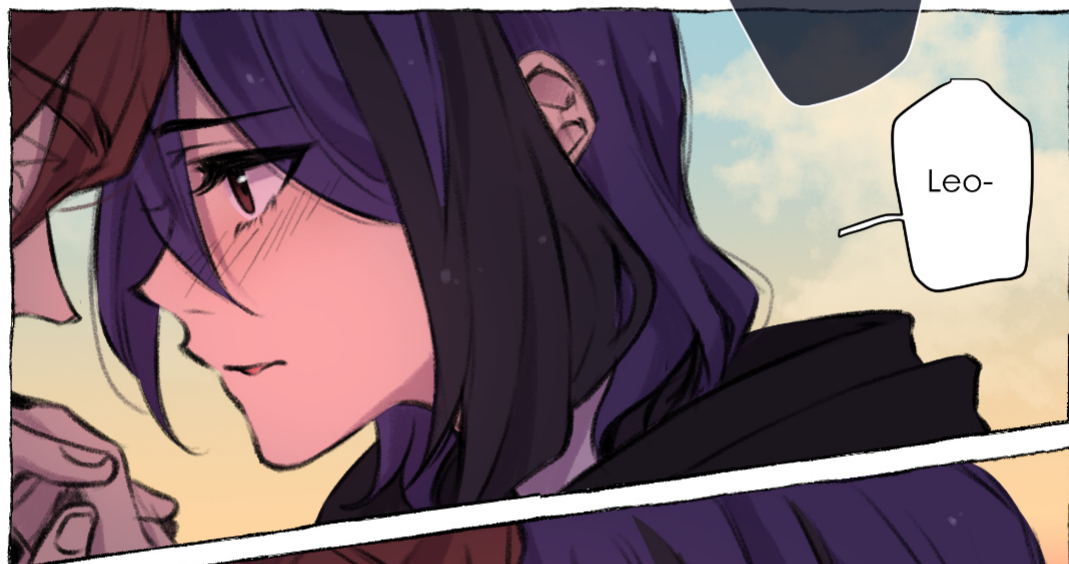
STAY AWAY.
STAY AWAY.
STAY AWAY.





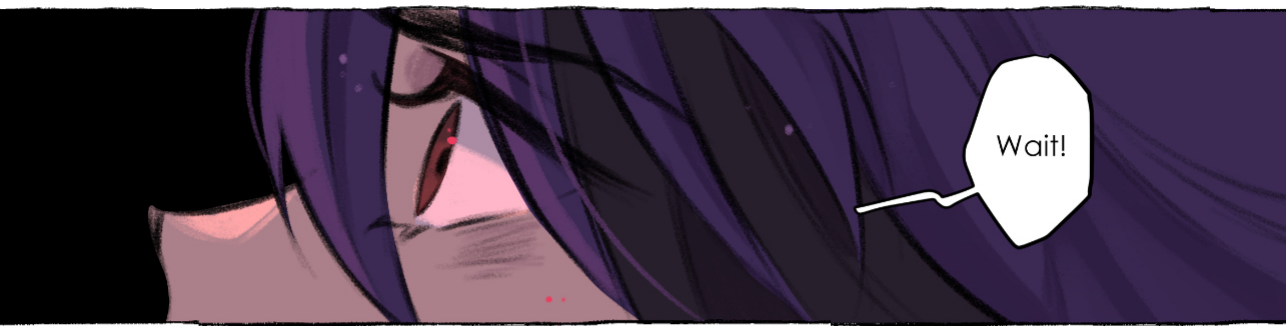


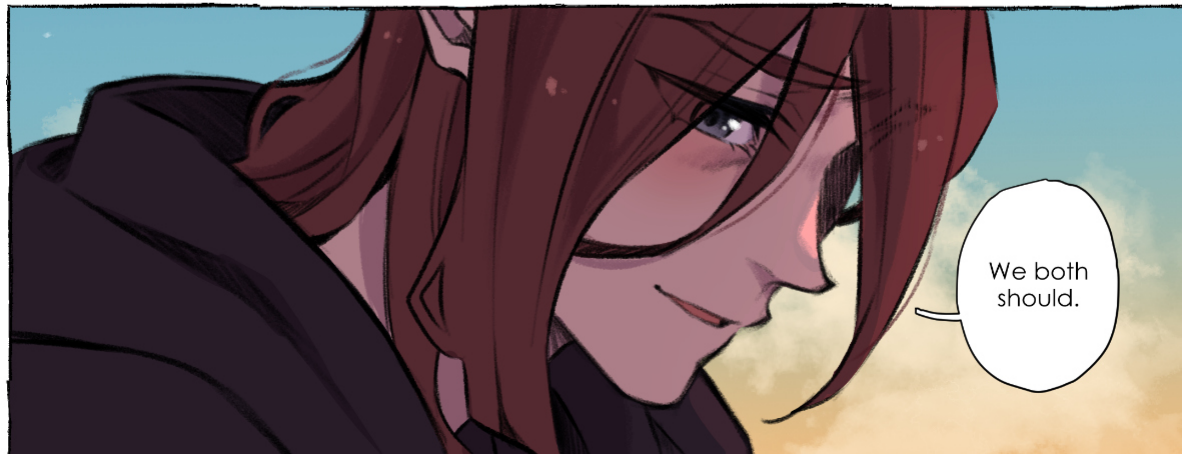
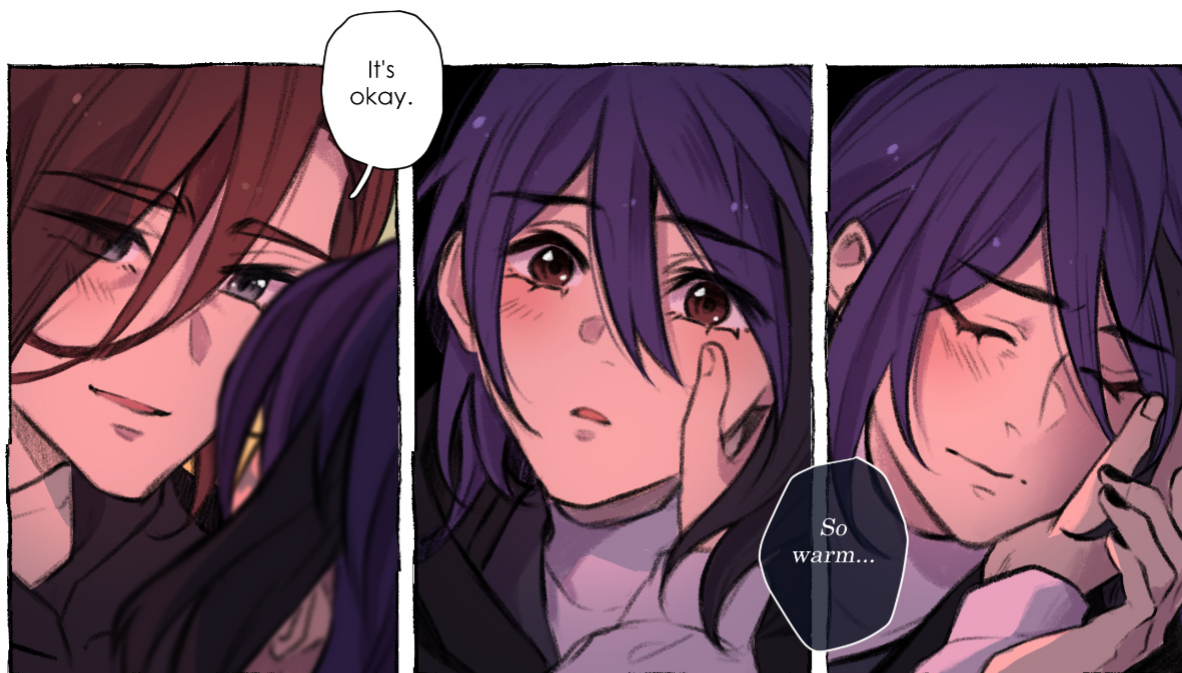


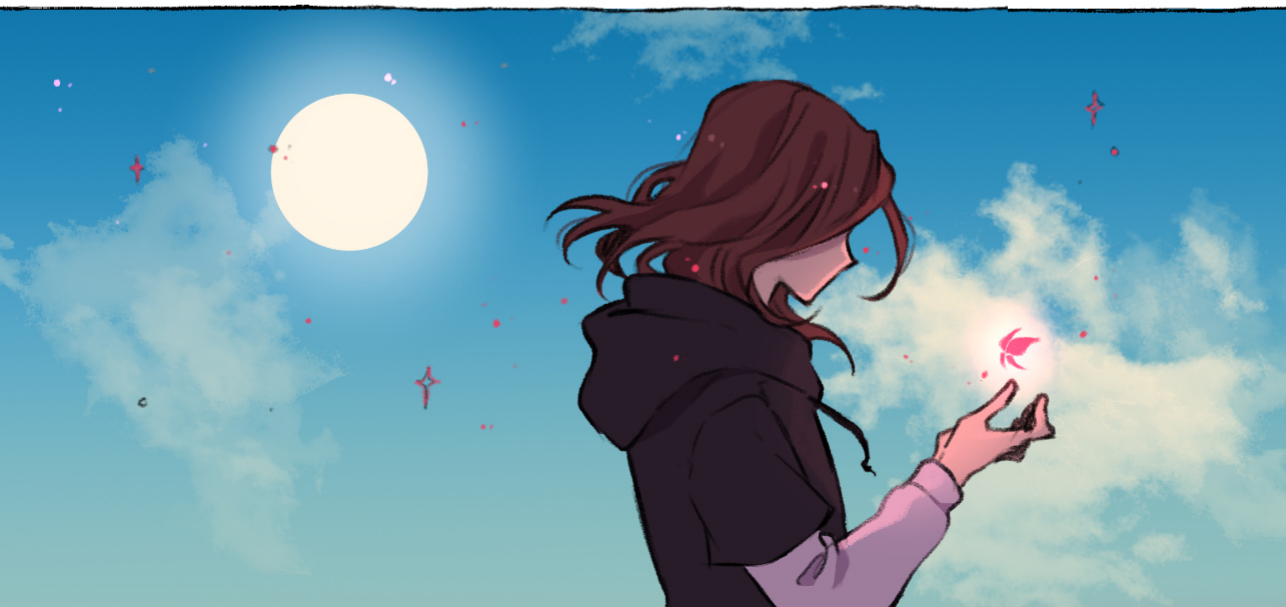
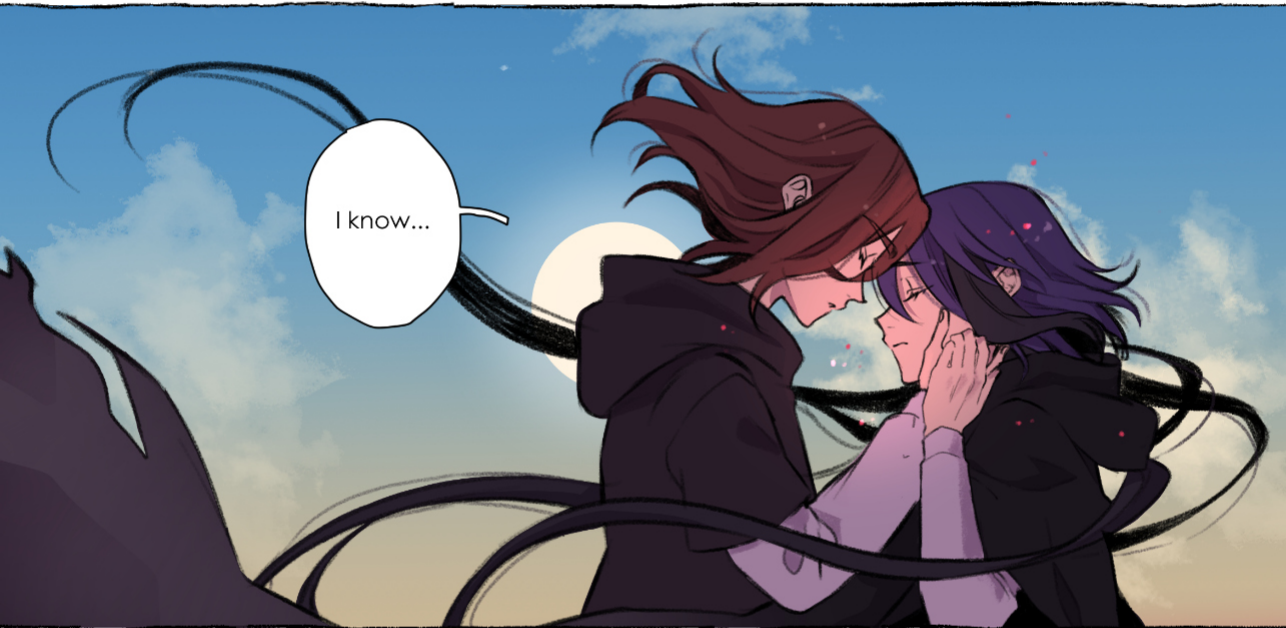


Charon,











Me, too
...



