

the GIRL from the SEA

MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG

New York Times Bestselling Author

the GIRL from the SEA

MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG

COLOR BY MAARTA LAIHO



An Imprint of

 SCHOLASTIC

For my parents and the home they
made on Wilneff Island.

And for Noelle, who came into my life
like a storm from the sea.

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Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Tue, June 11, 9:04 PM



ok ladies

now that summer vacation has officially begun...meet me in town tomorrow

it's a ✨surprise✨



i'm THERE

we have been cleaning grandma's house for a week and

i'm

so



I have to work 🐱



bored



when?



LIZ NO



12-8



ok so meet at like 10! at figgys

morgan you in?



MORGANNN



creepy ghost whisper morgan...



Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

9:34 PM



that's it she's dead

RIP Morgan 🕊️



NO don't be horrible!!



Morgan



Serena

Tue, June 11, 9:42 PM



we're meeting at figgys tomorrow at 10!

you okay?

It's true, you know.





The whole thing about your life flashing before your eyes.



I like to keep my life tucked neatly into boxes . . .



But the boxes have been dropped in the ocean, and now everything is spilling out.



One box holds everything from when I was little.

Mom and Dad still together, Aiden still fun to be around.

Everything made sense then.

Another box is my life at school. My friends, and the person I am around them.

She doesn't say things unless she knows other people will agree.

She's good at blending in.



And then there's life at home. Dad moved to the city after months of arguments he and Mom thought we couldn't hear.



Aiden started getting mad about everything. I can't even look at him anymore.

Every moment I'm home, I want to escape.



The cliffs are my quiet place, but tonight the rocks were slippery from the rain.

So I hit my head and now I'm here and I can't stop thinking of the last, secret box . . .

My big plans.



To get off this island and move to the city, ANY city.

To go to college.



And to be gay, far away from this tiny town and everyone who's known me since forever.



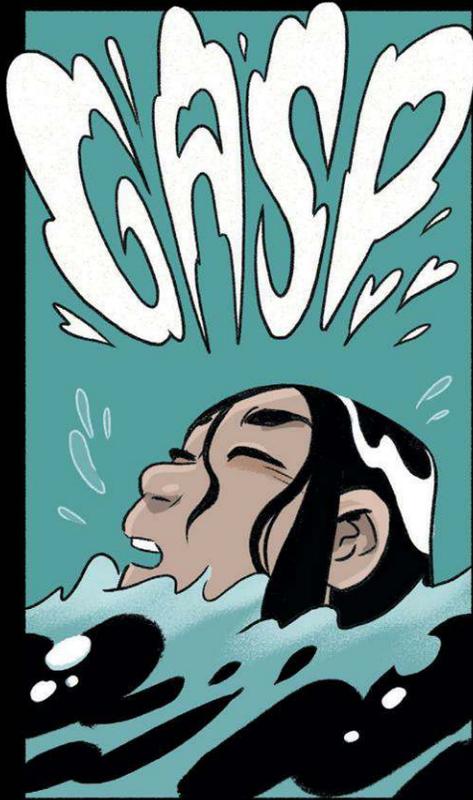


I thought if I planned carefully enough it would happen, but now —



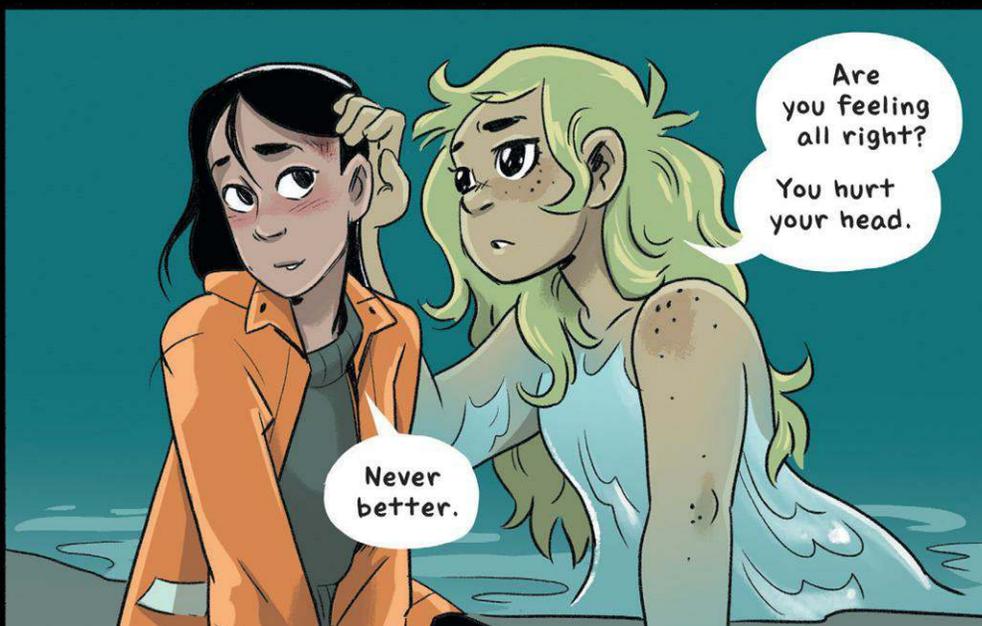
Now I'm in the water and I can see that future spinning away and I want to grab it,

but I can't tell which way is up.











You know . . . since this is a dream, it might as well be a romantic one.



Romantic?

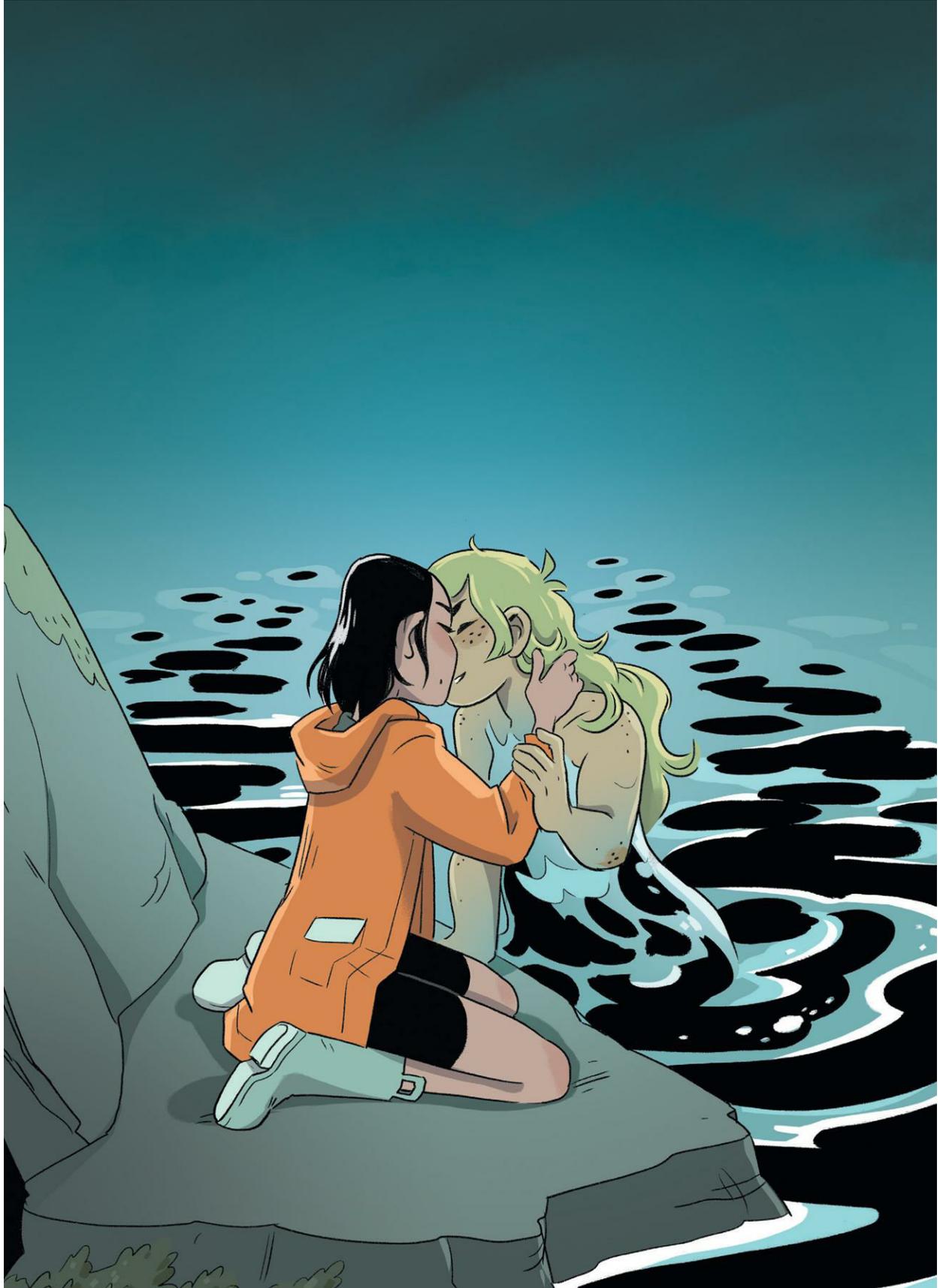


Just a thought.

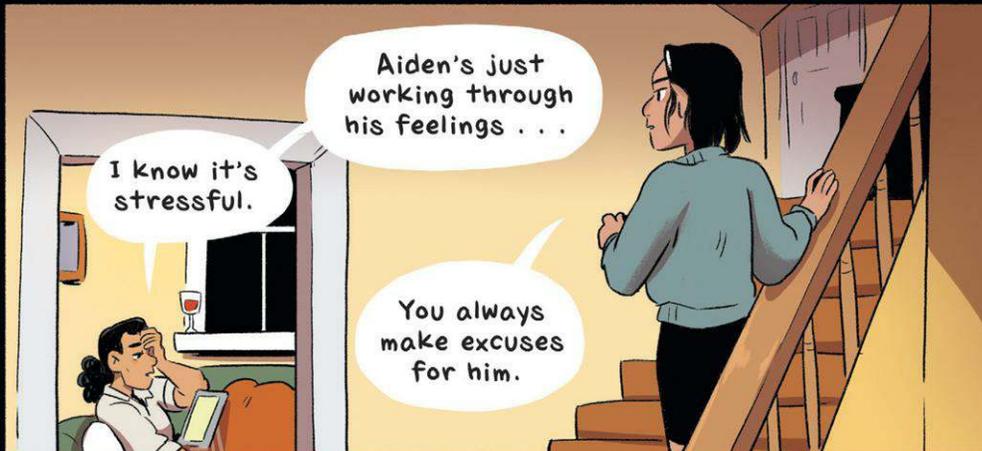
So this is all in your head, then?

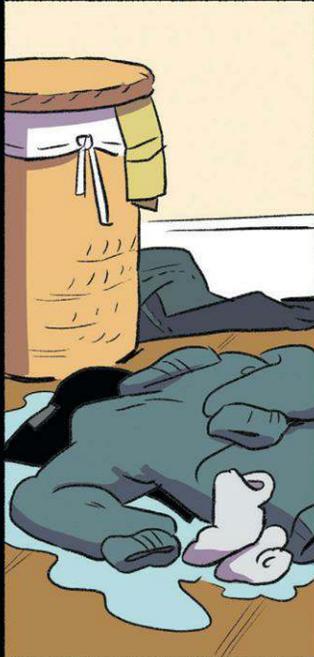


Mm-hm. You're way too cute to be real.













I was nine, so it must have been seven years ago . . .

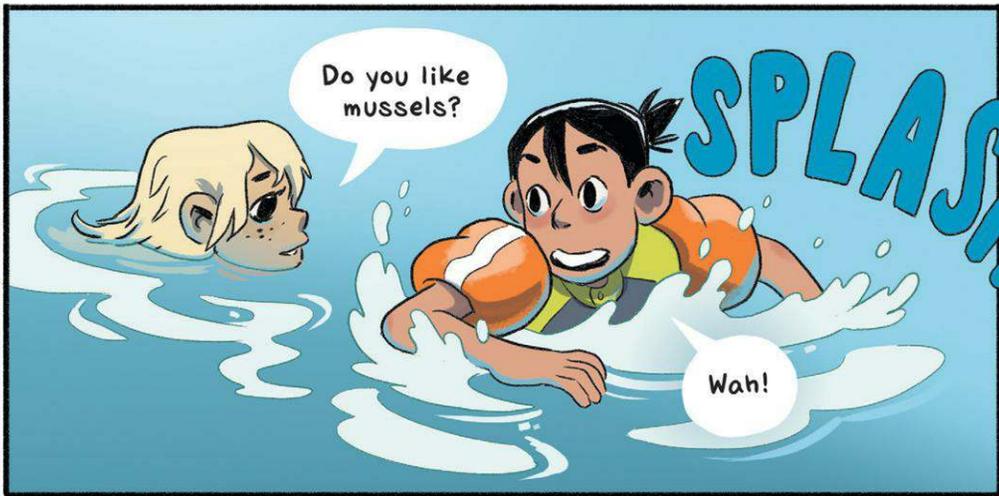
Come on, Aiden!



Kitties don't like the water!



MEOW
ha ha
HISS











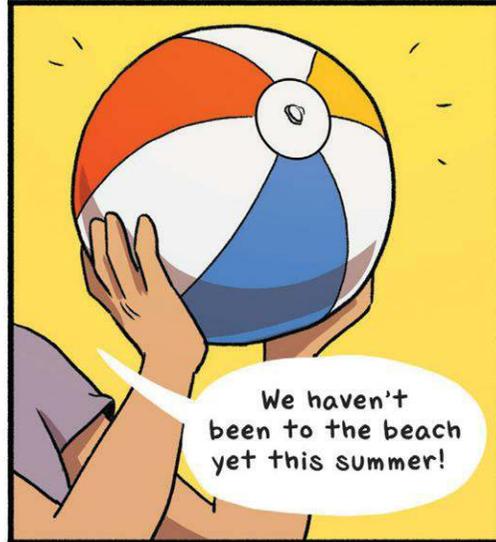














We moved to Wilneff Island from Toronto when I was little.

It always felt special.

But this is the first summer Dad isn't here, and now everything is just weird.

In a few weeks, my job with the kayak rental is starting, so at least I'll have a reason to be out of the house . . .





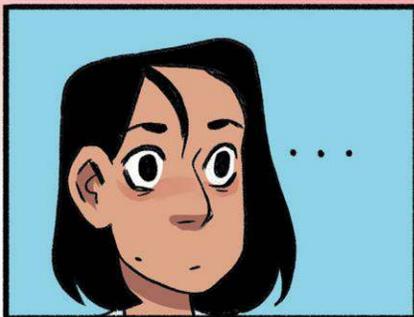


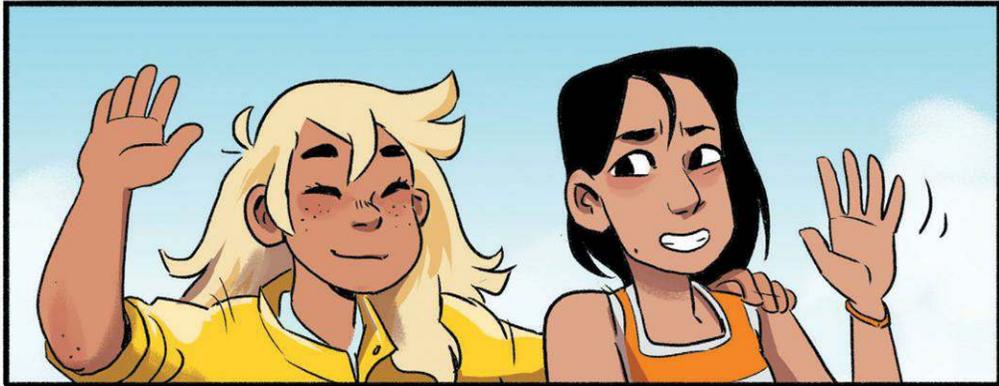


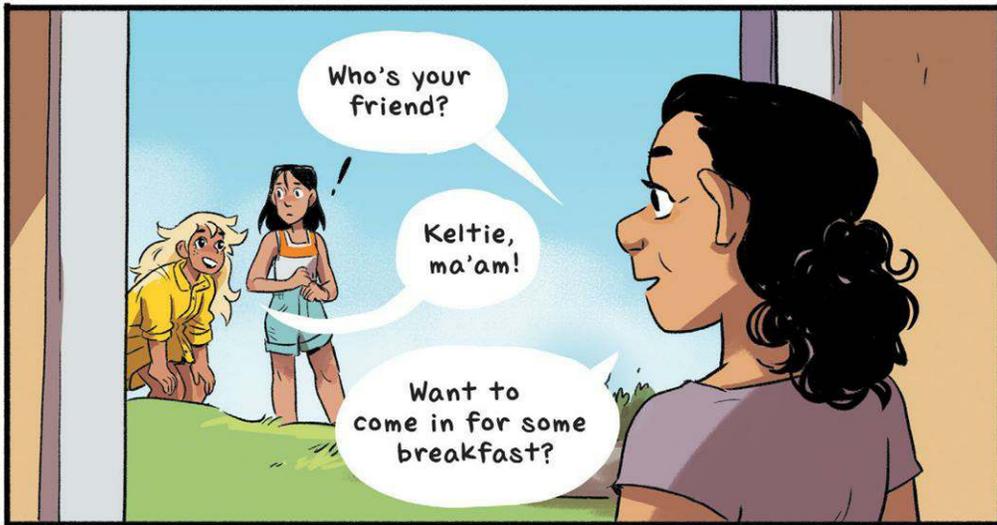
Morgan!

I am a selkie, and you are my true love, and your kiss has allowed me to transform from a seal into a human and walk on land.

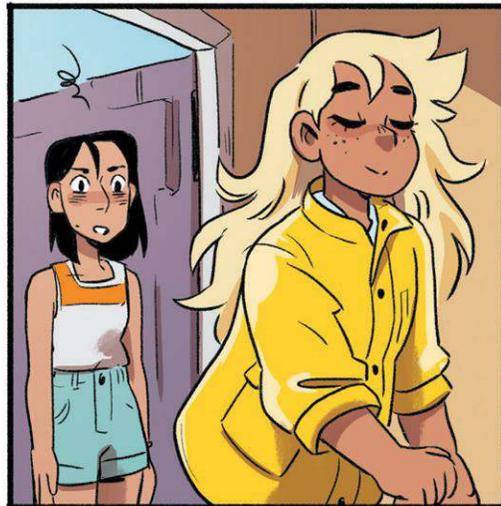
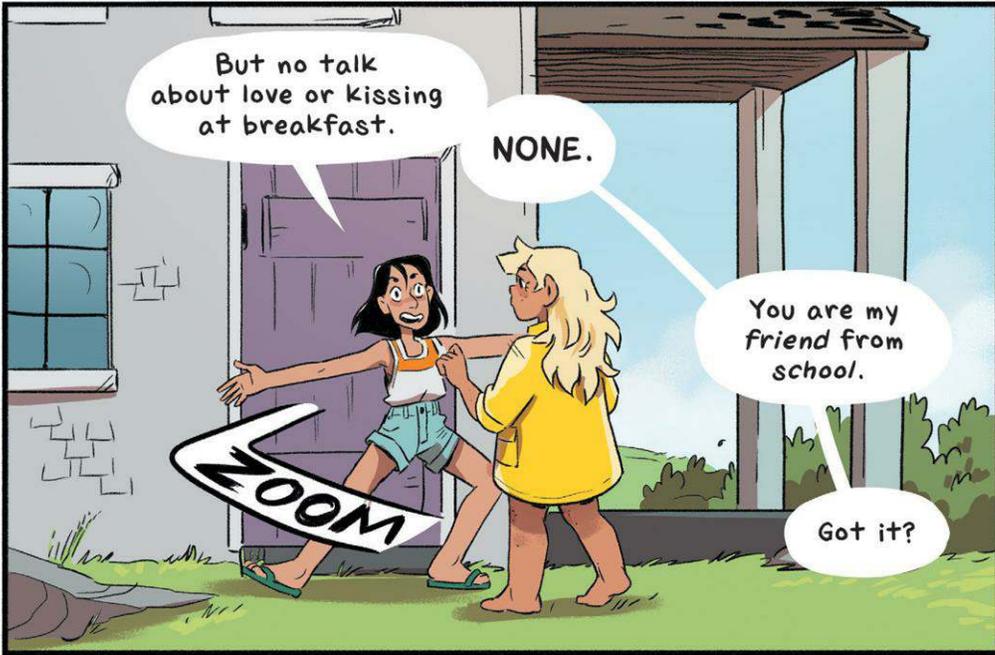
Now we can find our fortunes together!



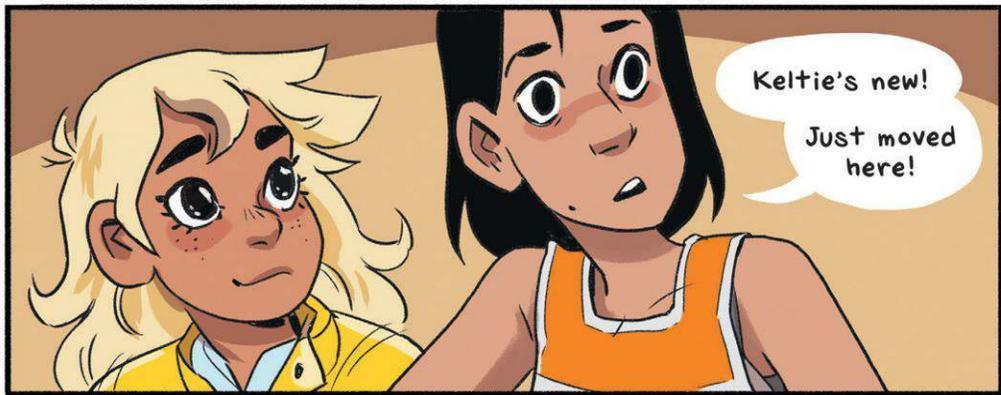
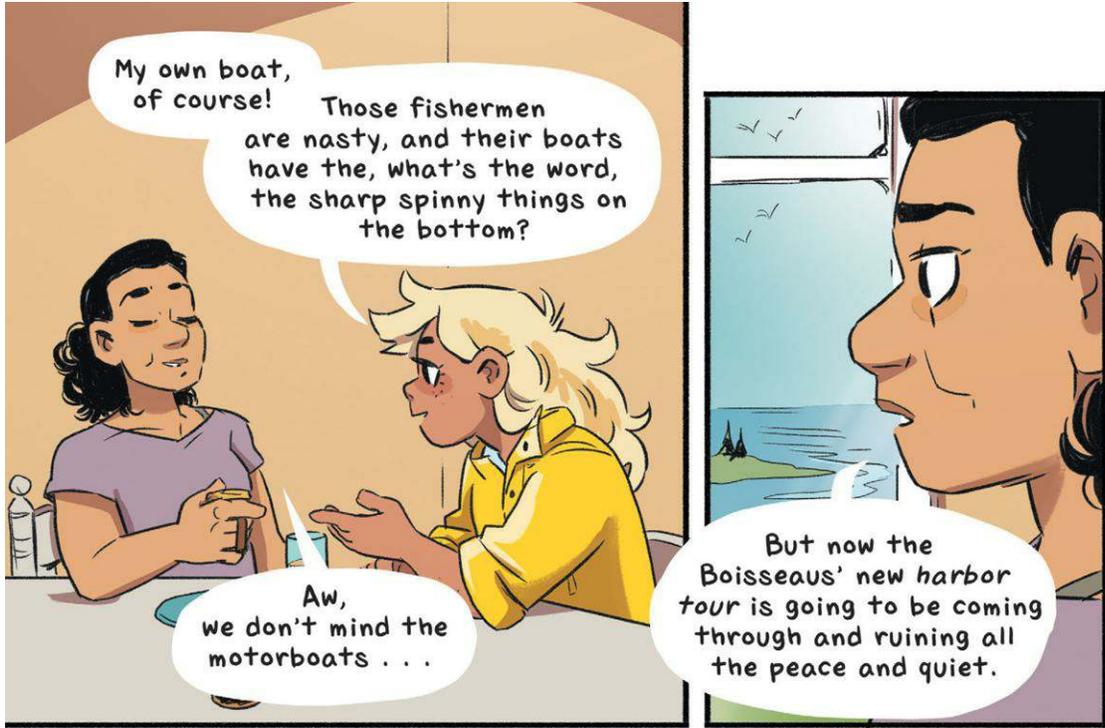




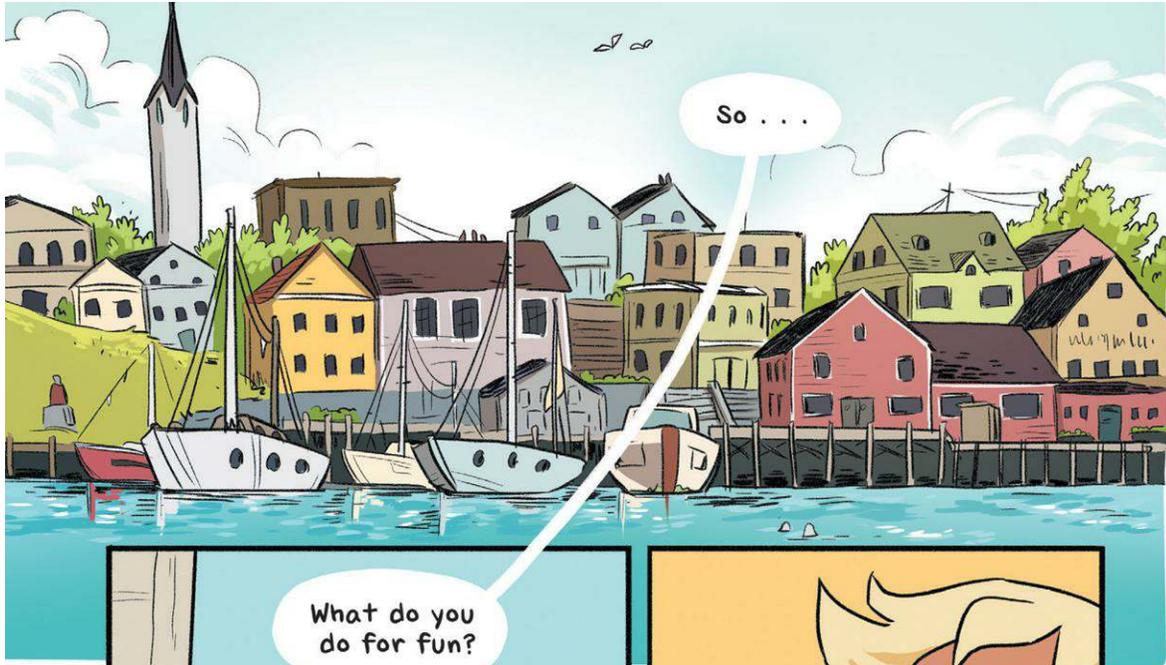










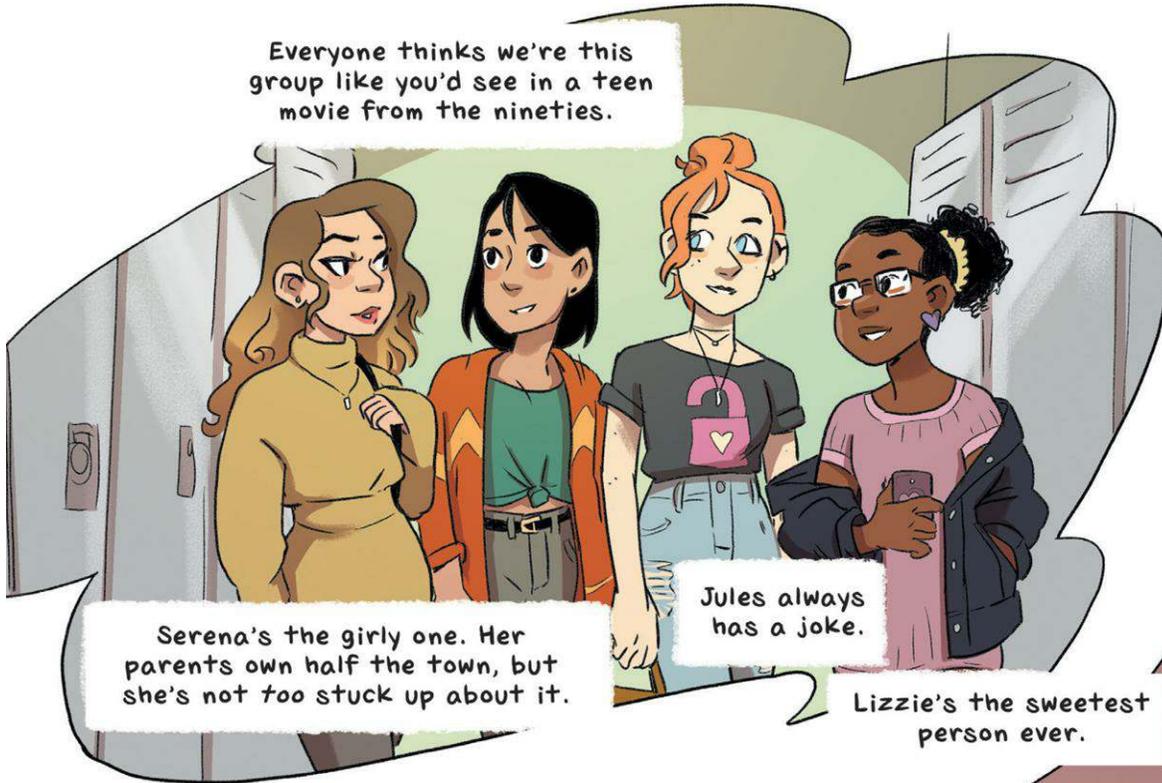








Everyone thinks we're this group like you'd see in a teen movie from the nineties.



Serena's the girly one. Her parents own half the town, but she's not too stuck up about it.

Jules always has a joke.

Lizzie's the sweetest person ever.

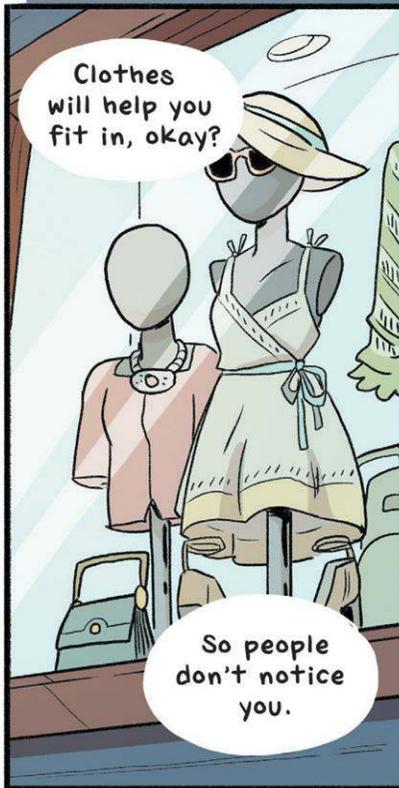
I guess I'm the artsy one, but not so artsy I'm weird.



They don't know how, for about a year . . .









The thing about those fish, though?
VERY boring lives.



They just sit in the kelp beds all day, swaying back and forth.

Little better than a plant.

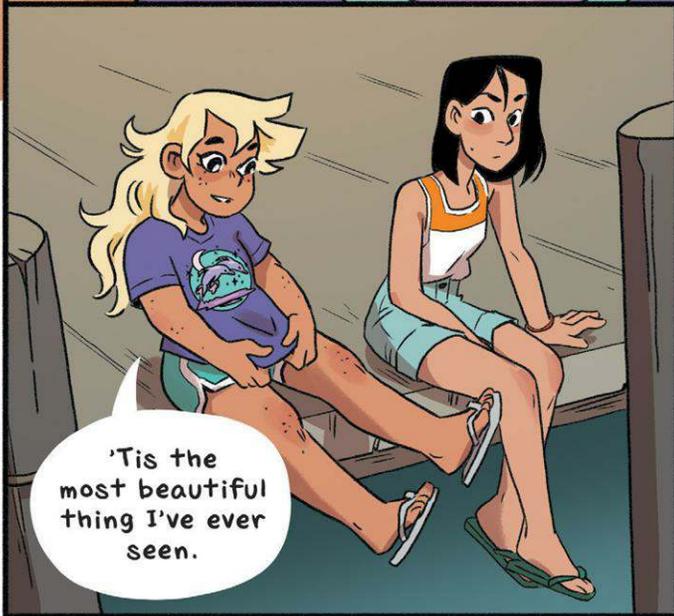
fch



Do all of your stories feature fish?

THAT.







Are they "selkies," too?

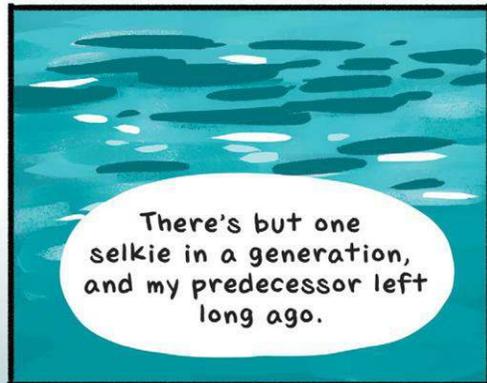
Ach, no. Just seals.

I'm the only selkie in the rookery just now.



Wait, really?

Your parents aren't —

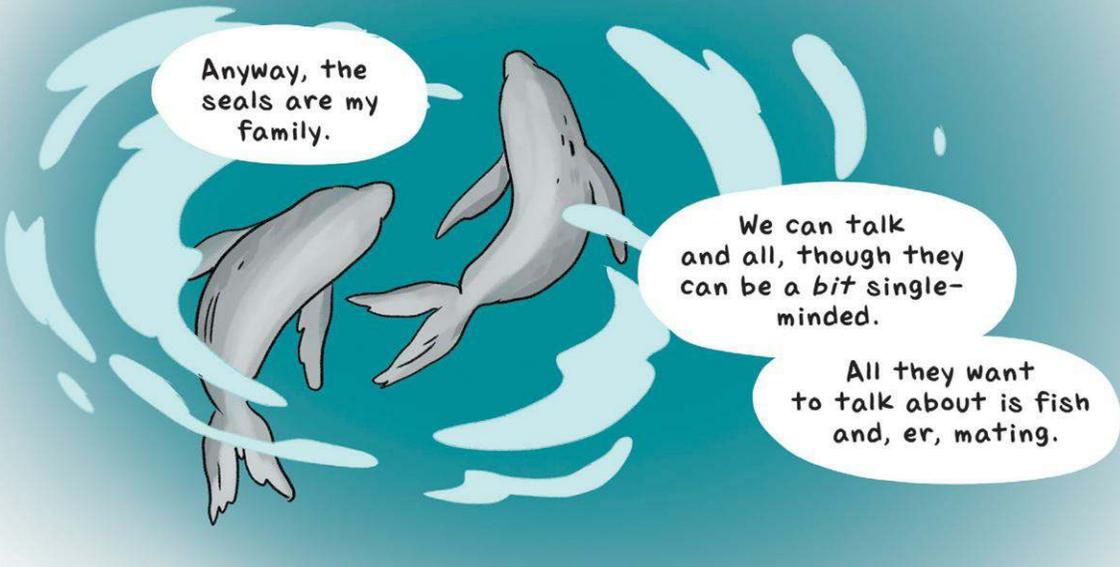


There's but one selkie in a generation, and my predecessor left long ago.



That sounds lonely.

Ah, he visits sometimes.



Anyway, the seals are my family.

We can talk and all, though they can be a bit single-minded.

All they want to talk about is fish and, er, mating.



So, let's say I believe you.

Hypothetically.

How does it work?

Thank you for your hypothetical belief.



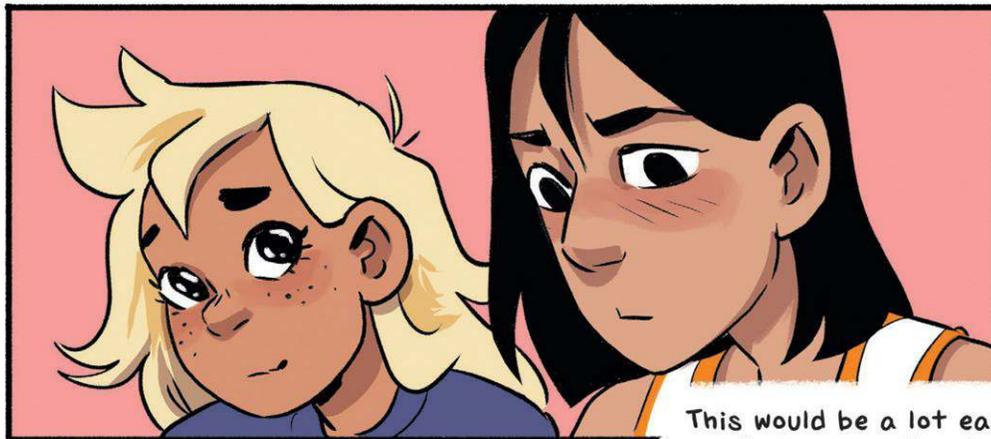
There are laws.

I care for the seals, and I look like one of them.



But every seven years . . . something changes.

My seal-skin grows loose for a few days, and I can look a bit more human.





Sorry,
touching.



No,
it's -



There it
is!

Oh no.



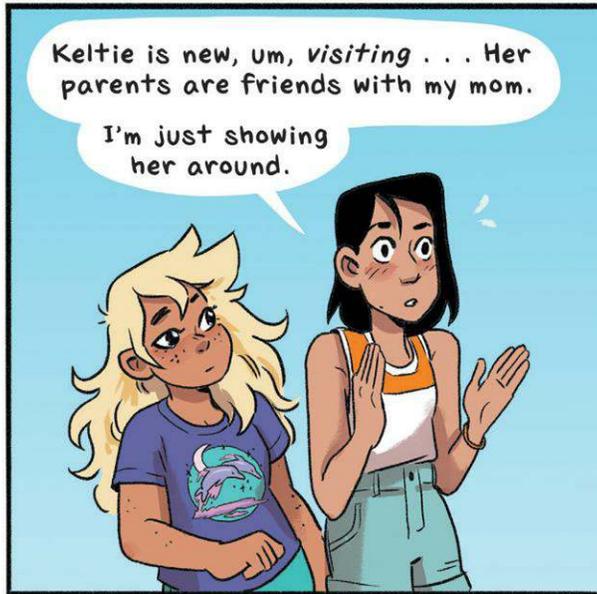
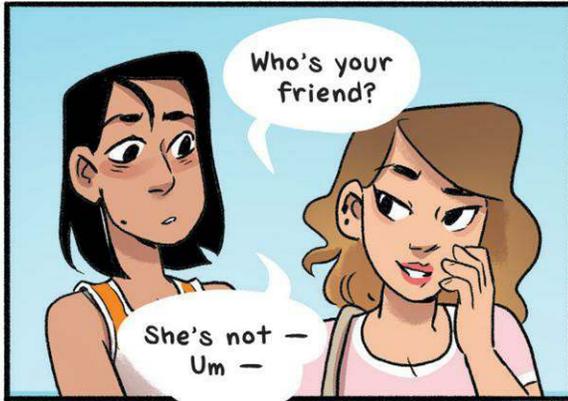
It's so
sparkly!

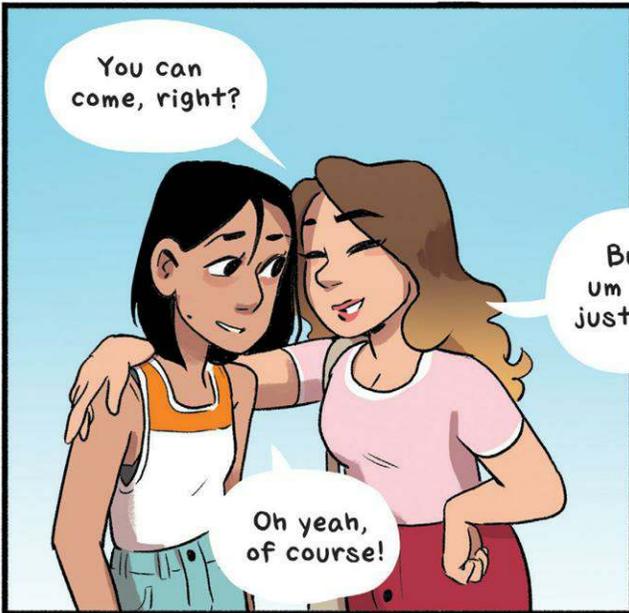
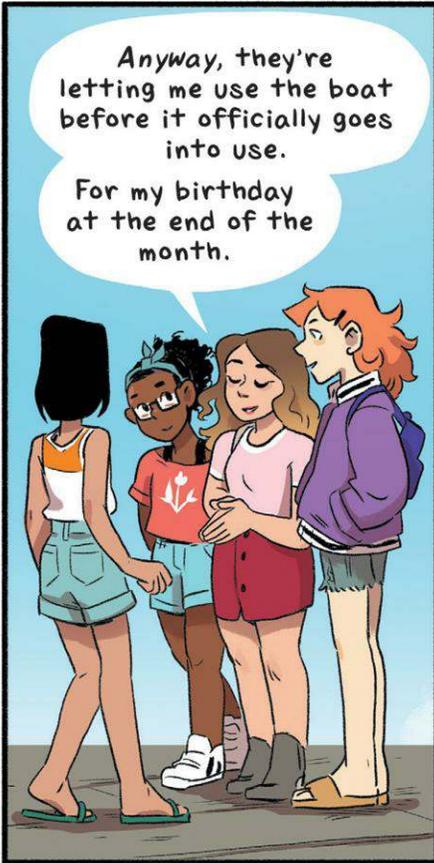
Heh, until
someone throws up
over the side.

Oh
my god,
stop!





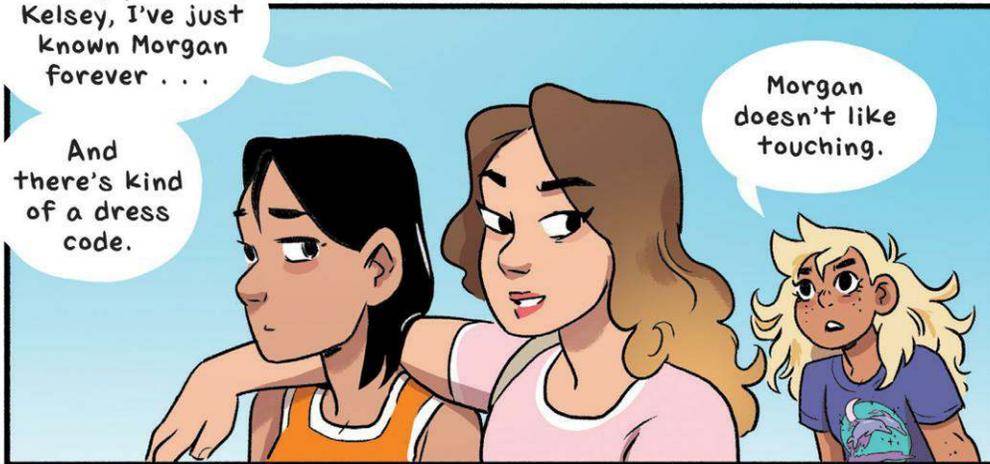




Nothing personal, Kelsey, I've just known Morgan forever . . .

And there's kind of a dress code.

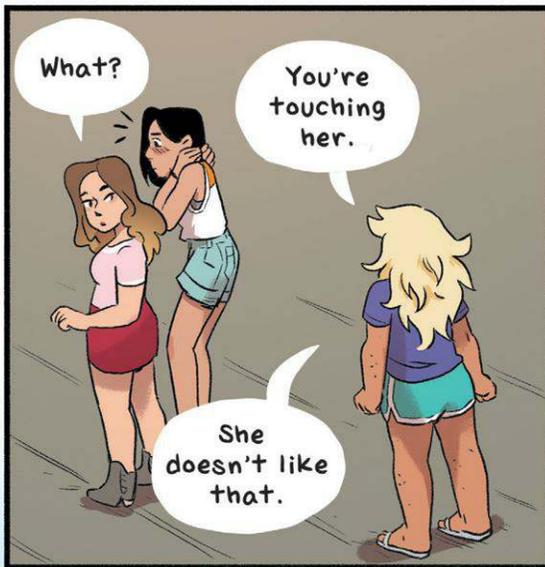
Morgan doesn't like touching.



What?

You're touching her.

She doesn't like that.



It's fine, Keltie.

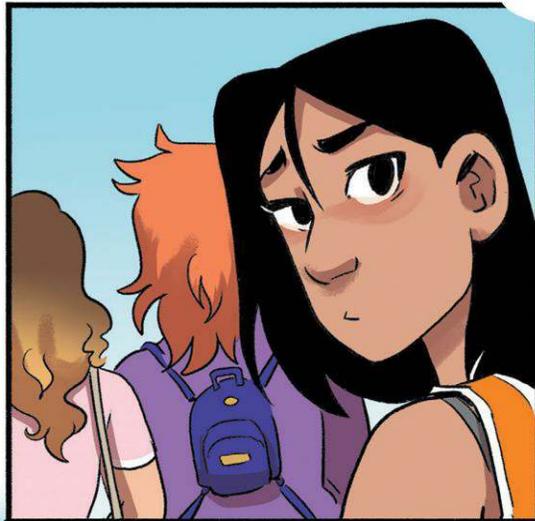


Hey, why don't you, uh, go back to the island?

I'll meet you there later.

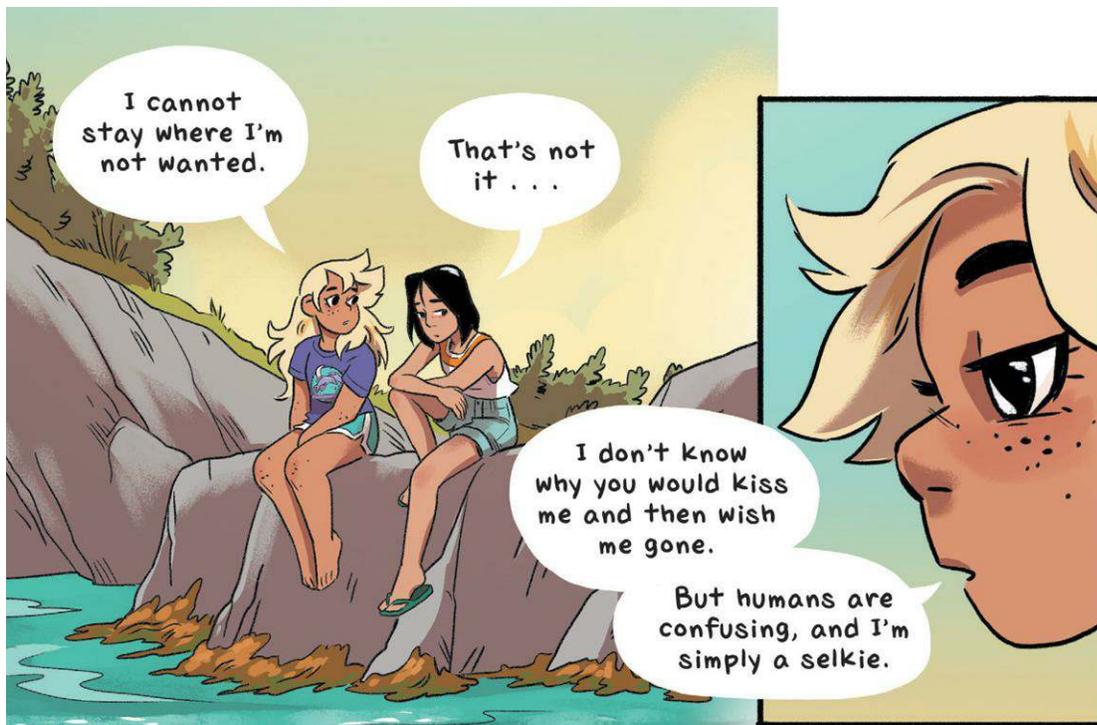










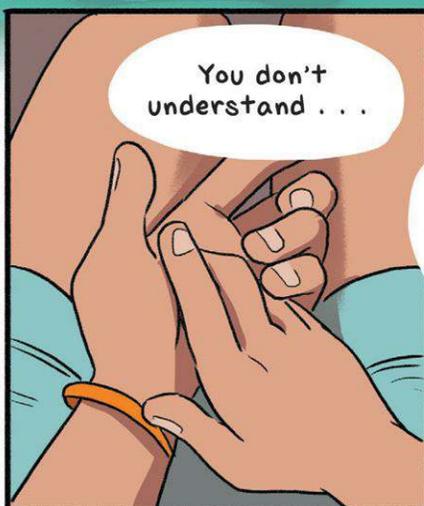


I cannot stay where I'm not wanted.

That's not it . . .

I don't know why you would kiss me and then wish me gone.

But humans are confusing, and I'm simply a selkie.



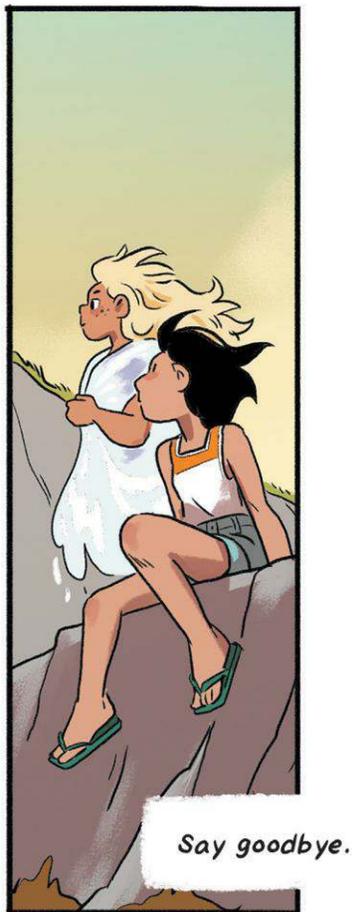
You don't understand . . .

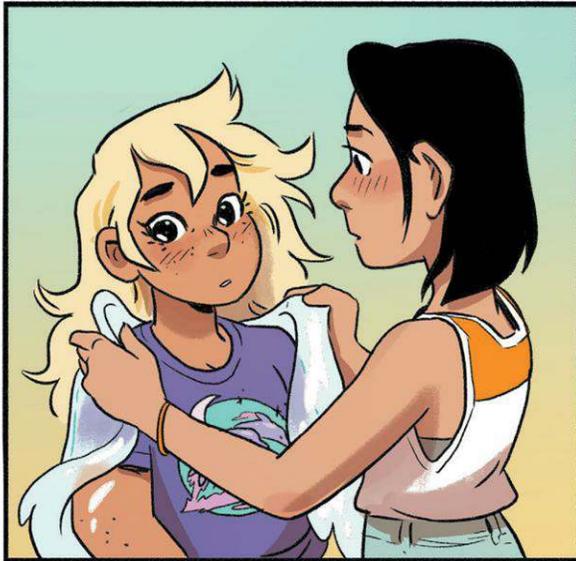
What I understand is that I was wrong, and now the day is over.

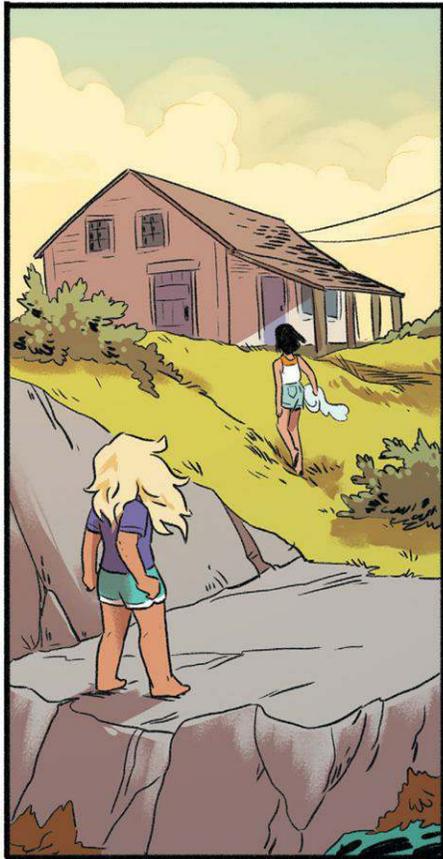
I must leave you.



Maybe you could come visit later?









Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Wed, June 12, 10:14 PM



Have you guys ever done something really dumb



literally never

Morgan.....what did u do



did you eat shellfish again. sweet foolish morgan, we tried to warn you. so, so many times



What's up, Morgan?



nevermind



???



why the mystery



nvm sorry i'm being stupid!!! ignore me!



did you get a bad haircut

because if so you are legally obligated to show us



the worst

goodnight guys <3 <3



Morgan



Serena

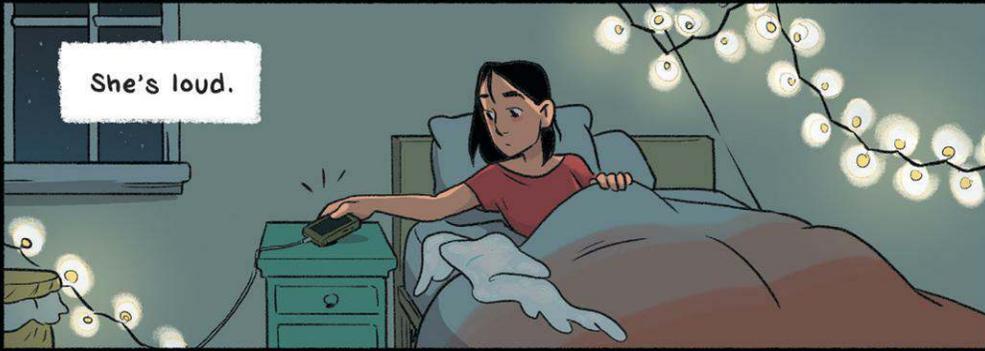
Wed, June 12, 10:32 PM



what did you do??!



NOTHING goodnight!!!

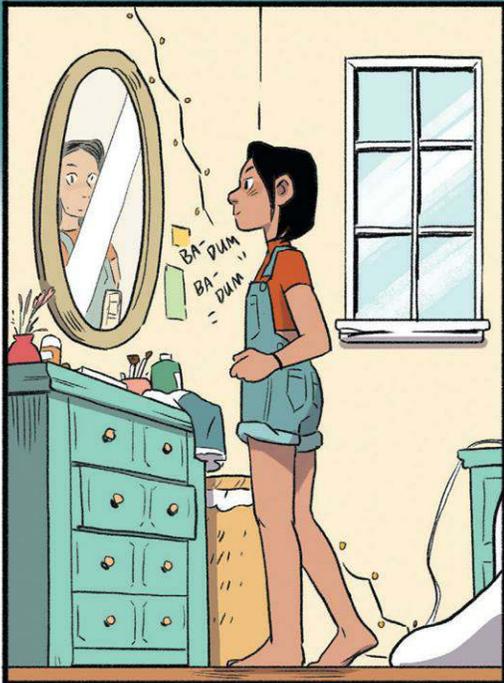




But the thing
is . . .



I'm glad I didn't.

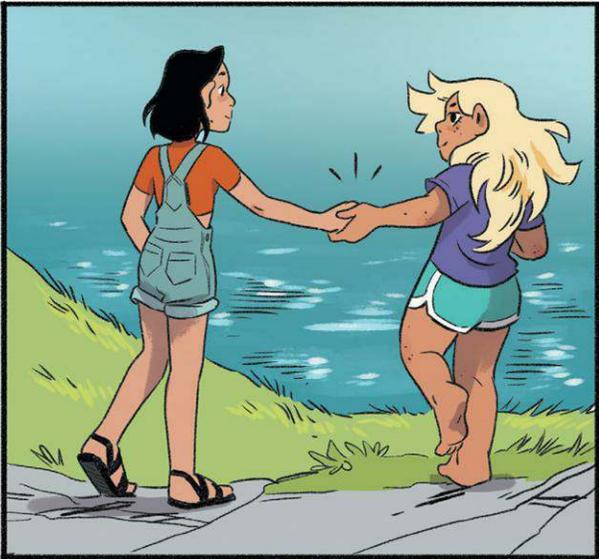
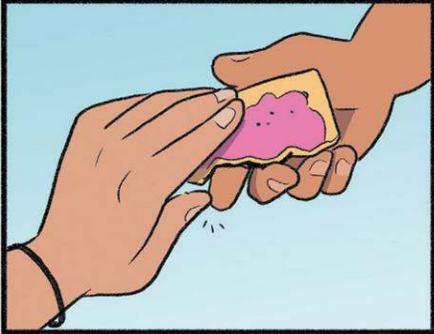






I owe you a do-over of yesterday.

Truly?







The rookery.

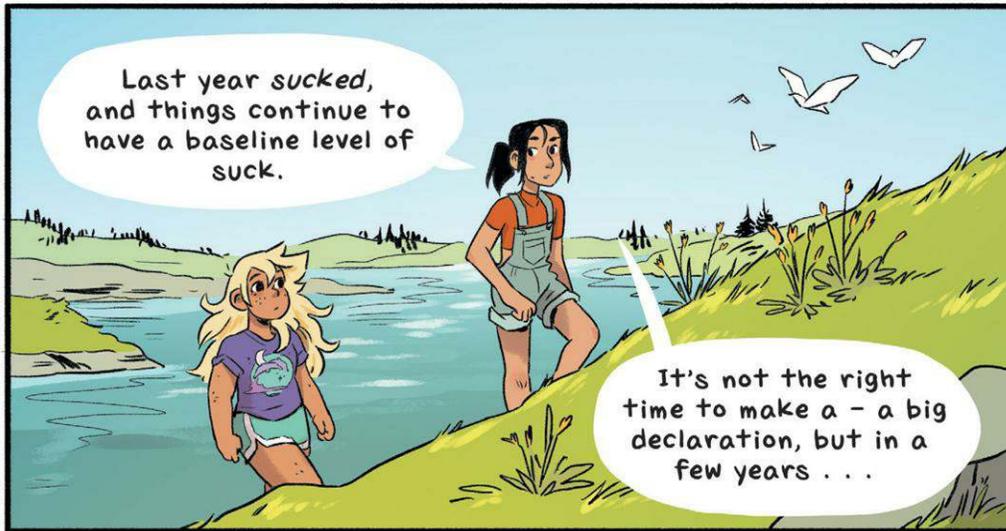


BABY.
SEALS.



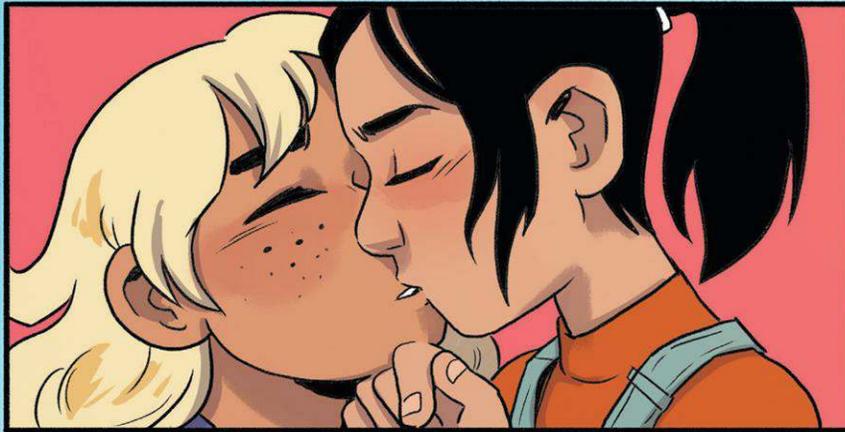




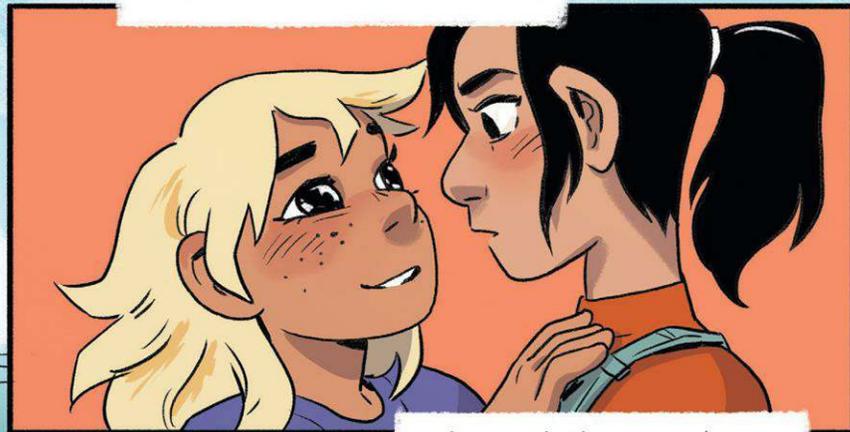








When we did this before . . .



I thought it was a dream.





This time, I
know it's real.

And I don't care.



Why do you like me?



SNRK!!



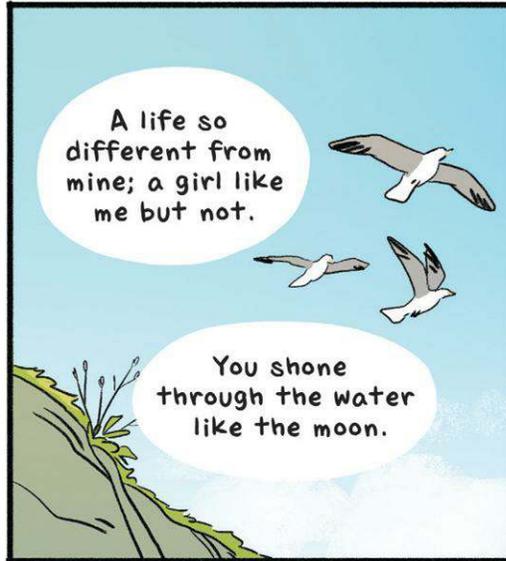
Is that a serious question?

Mm. Yes.
Compliments, please.



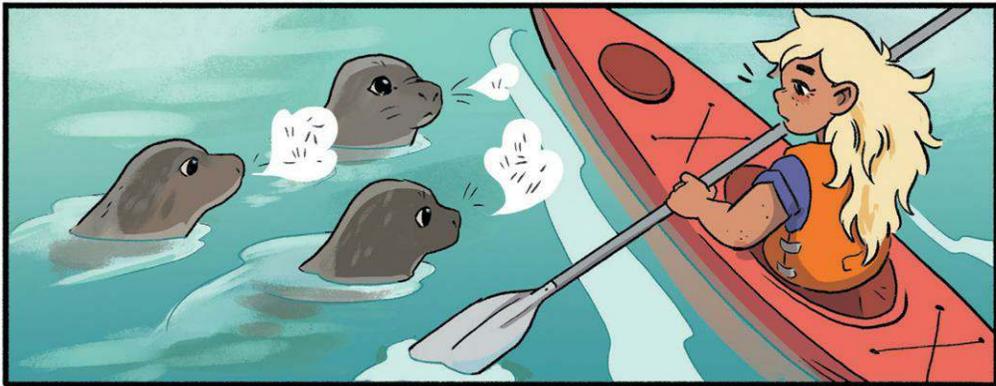
I remember when your family moved to the island. You all seemed so happy together.

We're not like that anymore.













Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Fri June 14, 1:23 PM



Morgan i am dying. what was the dumb thing you did

i do dumb things all the time but you don't so this is News

2:46 PM



LOOK AT HIM



aw a big boy!

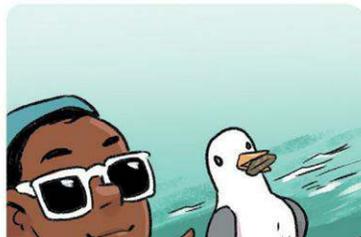


GERMS

Lizzie they have germs



He ate my cliff bar







Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie



they are like sky rats omg



He can be our group mascot!

What should his name be?



Franklin



ooh



garbage boy



Maybe Snowball



Morgan what should we name the bird?

7:17 PM



i still like franklin...





Morgan



Serena

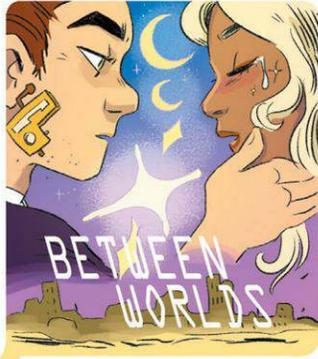


Jules



Lizzie

Sat, June 15, 11:02 AM



wanna go tonight? 6.15 or 9.20



i'm broke



I'll spot you



Ahhh Finn is in it!



you mean my future husband?



i love



I can do 9:20!



me too! serena i will bring candy



yay! I heard it's funny





Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

2:11 PM



Morgan are you coming?

7:29 PM



i already saw it sorry!



oh really? by yourself?

9:19 PM



running late WAIT FOR ME



it's about to start!!

Sun, June 16, 1:12 AM



okay but that scene where Finn was wearing a tank top



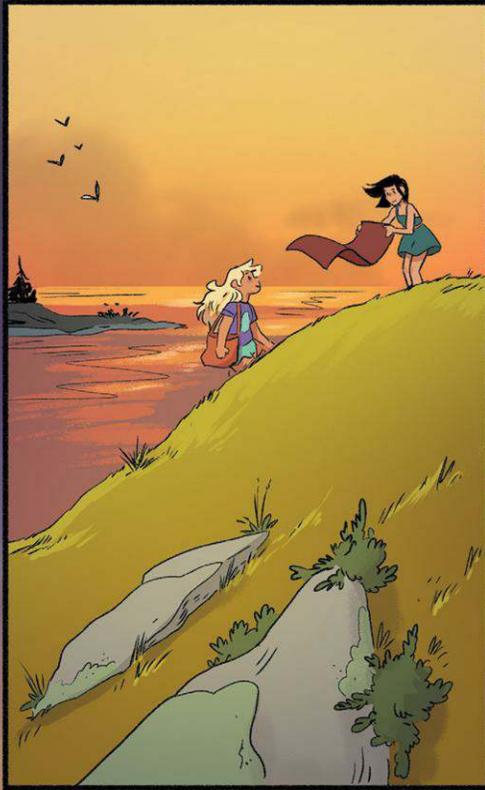
go to sleep serena



and he caught the girl and his arms were like 🐼 🐼



GO TO SLEEP SERENA





Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Mon, June 17, 3:42 PM



help me pick



Aw they're both cute!



red! I like the top

WAIT i thought you were broke!!



i am but also i need to look hot



I like red too



and to make tyler jealous



oh no...not Tyler



You guys get together ev
don't you want a change



ouch

and, no. familiarity is comforting

going with the black, thanks ladies

Tues, June 18, 12:15 PM



Morgan

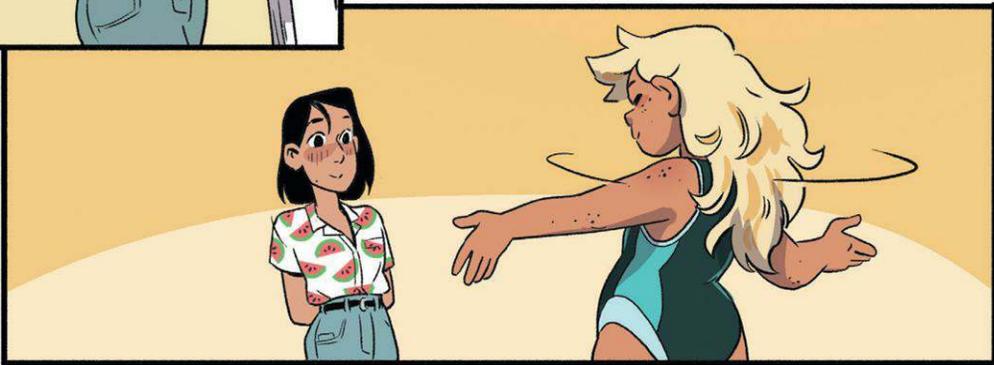


Mom

Mon, June 17, 6:24 PM



Hon you home for dinner?
-Mom





Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Wed, June 19, 2:12 PM



Serena did you invite Josh to party?



.....maybe.....



NOOOOOOO



you're welcome! 🙏



seriously how many people



ugh, a lot...my parents want to go. So like. Everyone.



but i don't like everyone



neither do i haha



we'll have fun though!



What are you gonna wear?



well there IS a dress code

ooh actually, do you wanna go to Halifax on Friday and get some stuff? my dad's driving in for the day

Jules i will not spot you



cold

but yes

I'm thinking something like this



Morgan



Serena

9:18 PM



hey is your phone working?



Yeah!



oh i wasn't sure! Did you see we're going to Halifax friday to shop for party?



oh sorry i missed that

11:01 PM



so?? Coming??



ahhh I'm sorry i think i'm busy! I have family stuff



aw okay...





Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Fri, June 21, 3:59 PM

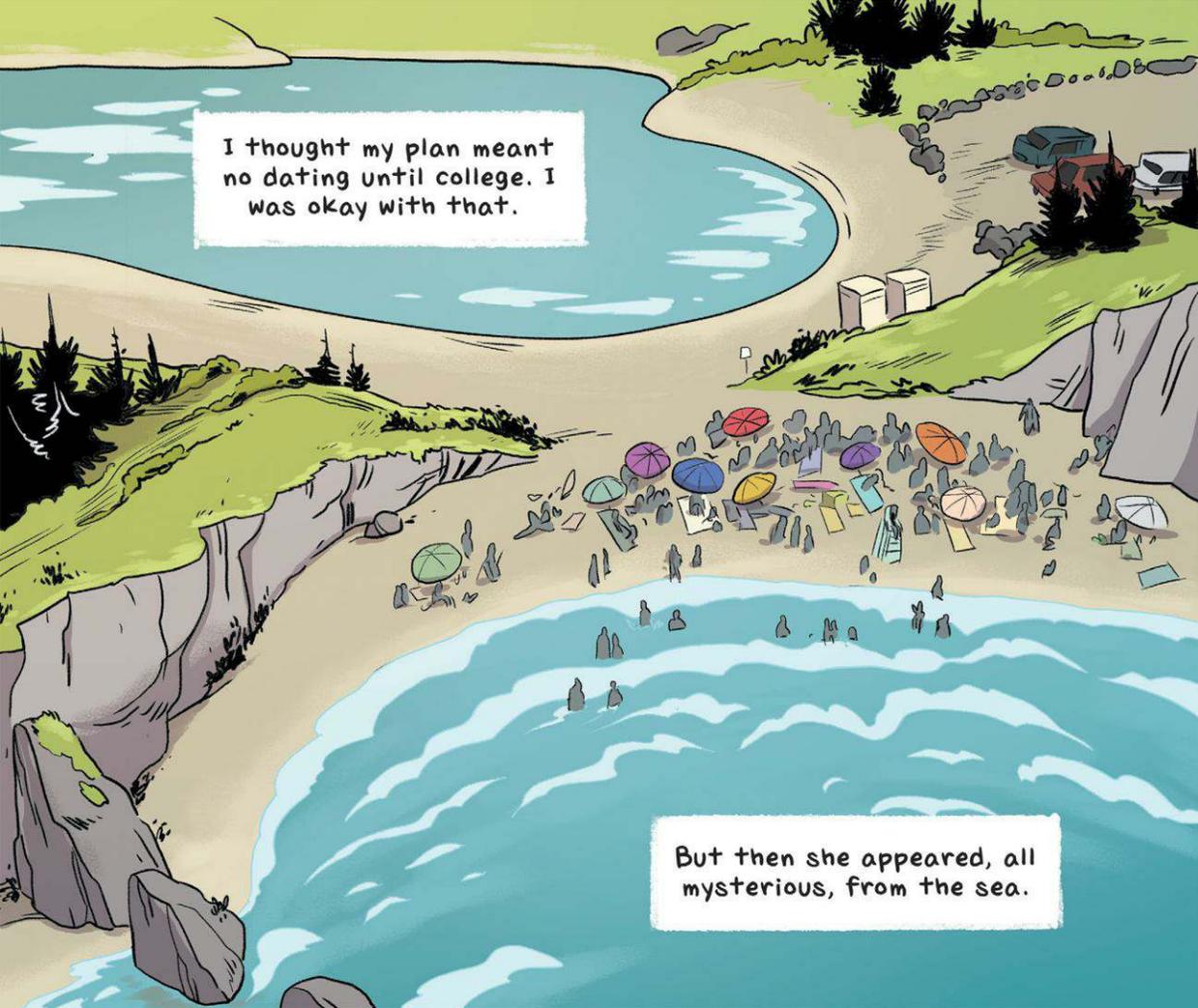


MISS YOU MORGAN



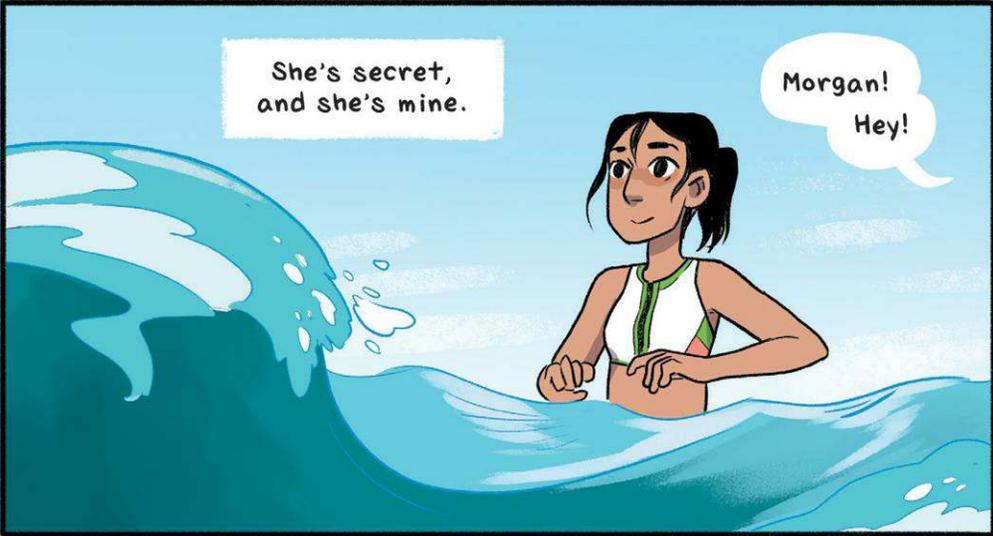
love you guys ✨💖✨





I thought my plan meant no dating until college. I was okay with that.

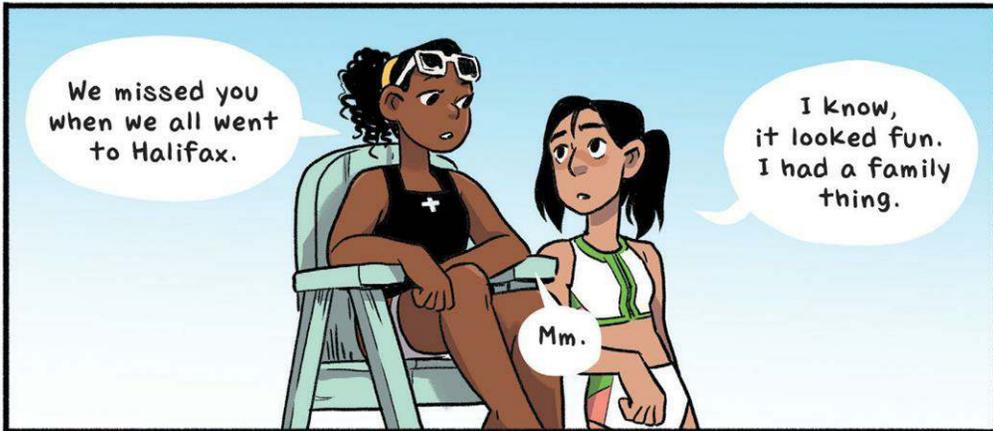
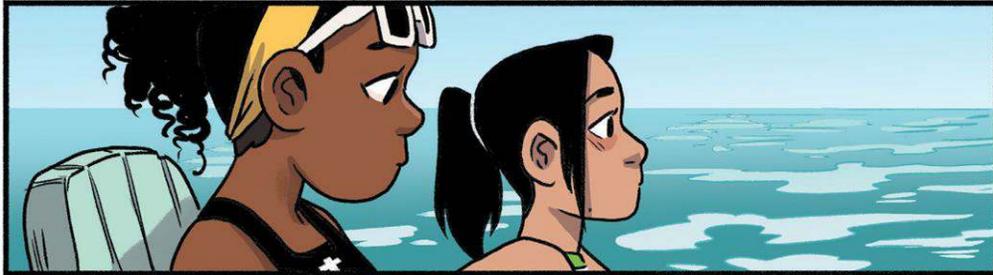
But then she appeared, all mysterious, from the sea.



She's secret, and she's mine.

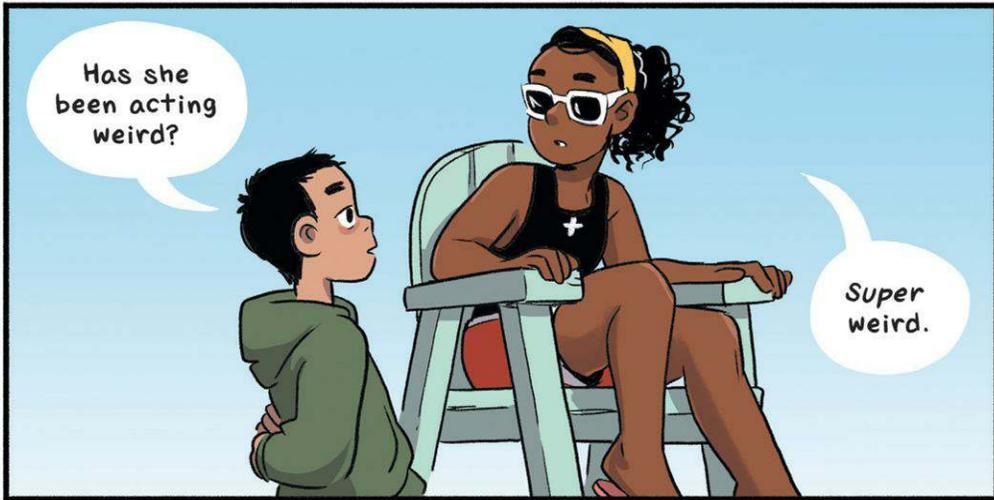
Morgan!
Hey!

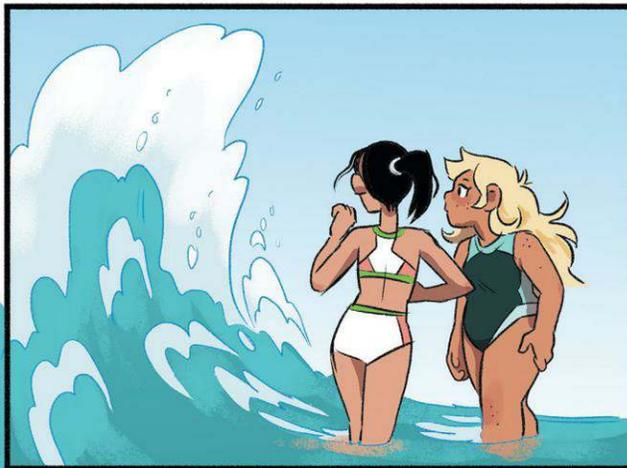
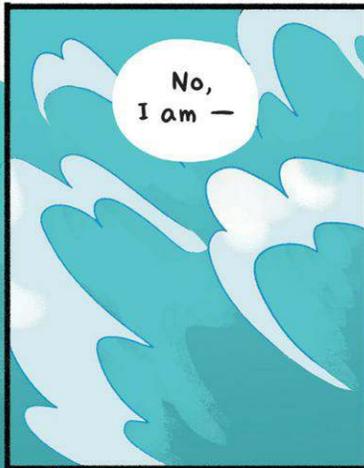




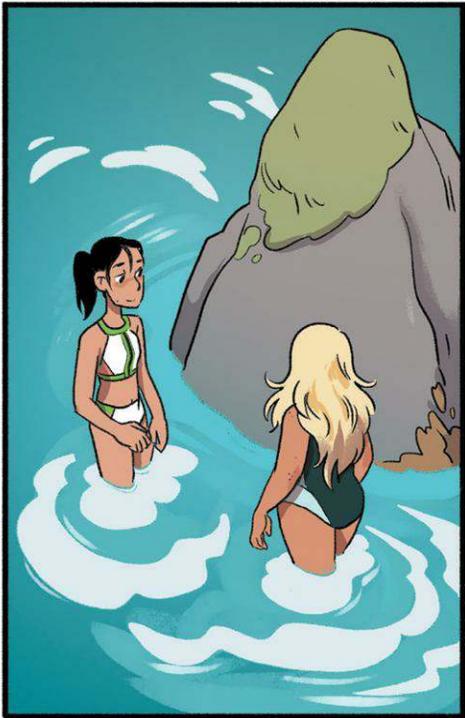




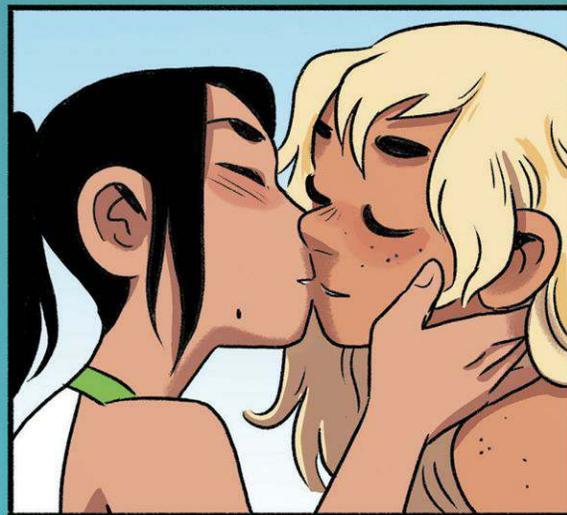
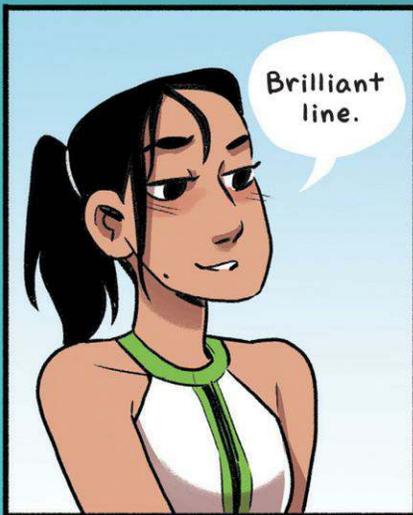


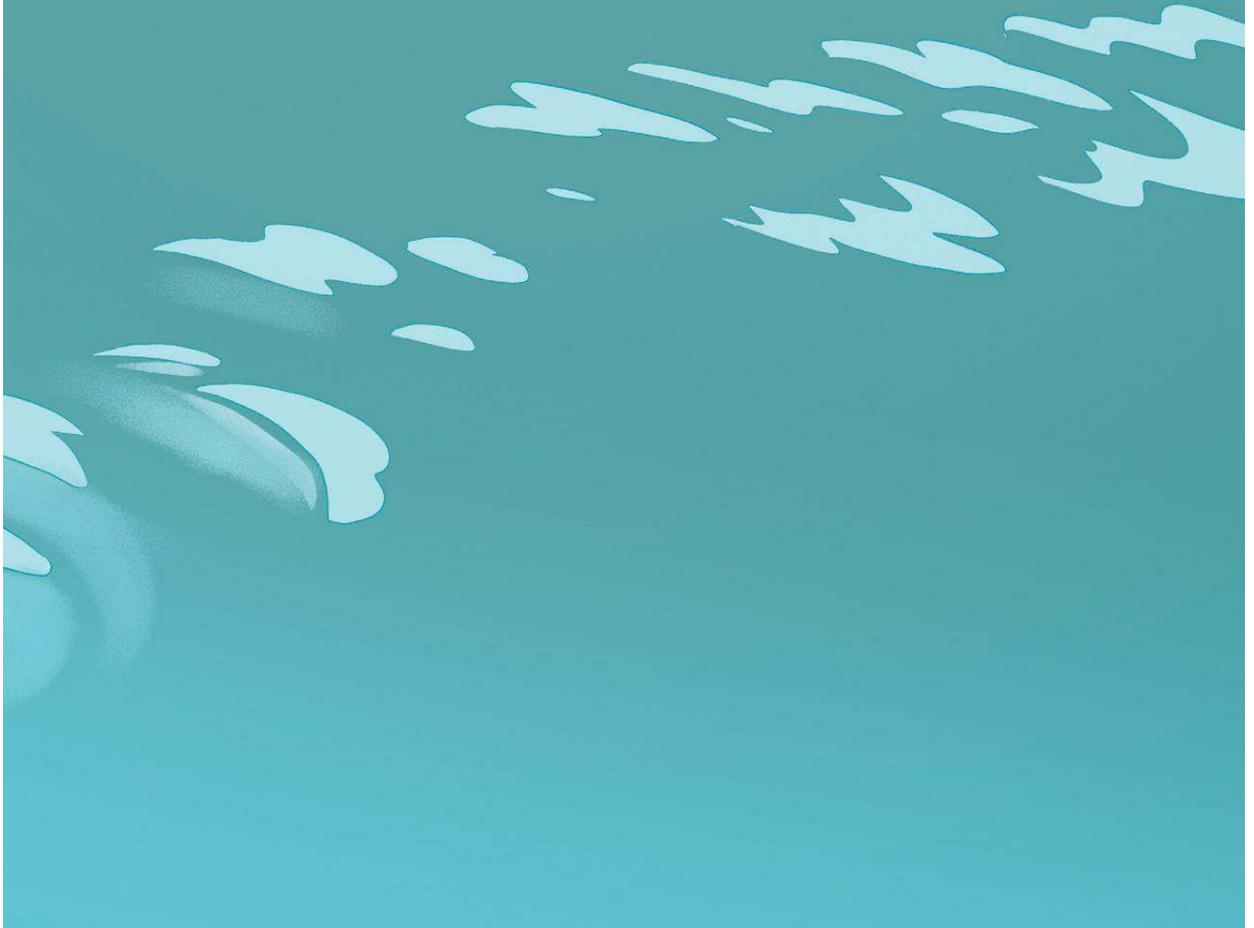














Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Sun, June 23, 6:57 PM



my mom is washing the dishes but she's like
CLANGING them because she is mad my dad
parked on her flowers



riveting



i know...I'll try to get a video



Aiden does that every time he does dishes...
he is in a permanent state of mad



Aw poor baby Aiden



NO



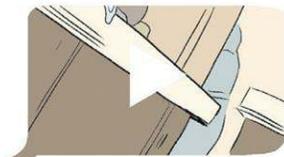
he's cute!



NOOO



NOT LIKE THAT



LITTLE KID CUTE



Liz.....



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Sun, June 23, 7:02 PM



Do you remember that girl at the sock?

DOCK



??



With the hair?



YES lol

and the lisa frank looking shirt



OH yes



So I think she's like? Stalking Morgan? She showed up at the beach today and Morgan freaked out and ran off.

idk



huh



morgan has been kind of weird lately



i thought it was maybe because of her dad

you know?



yeah me too :/



that makes more sense



Earl! Val!

I just took the fish out.

Evening, Min!

We brought dessert.

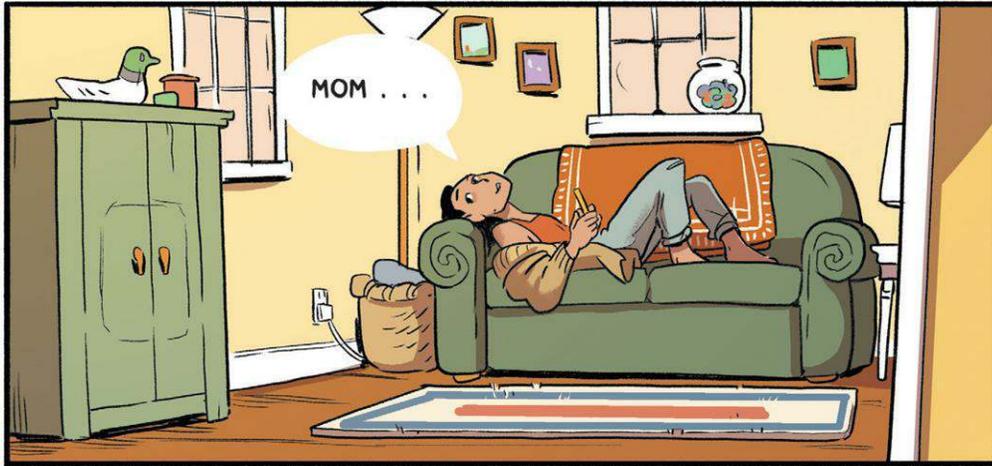


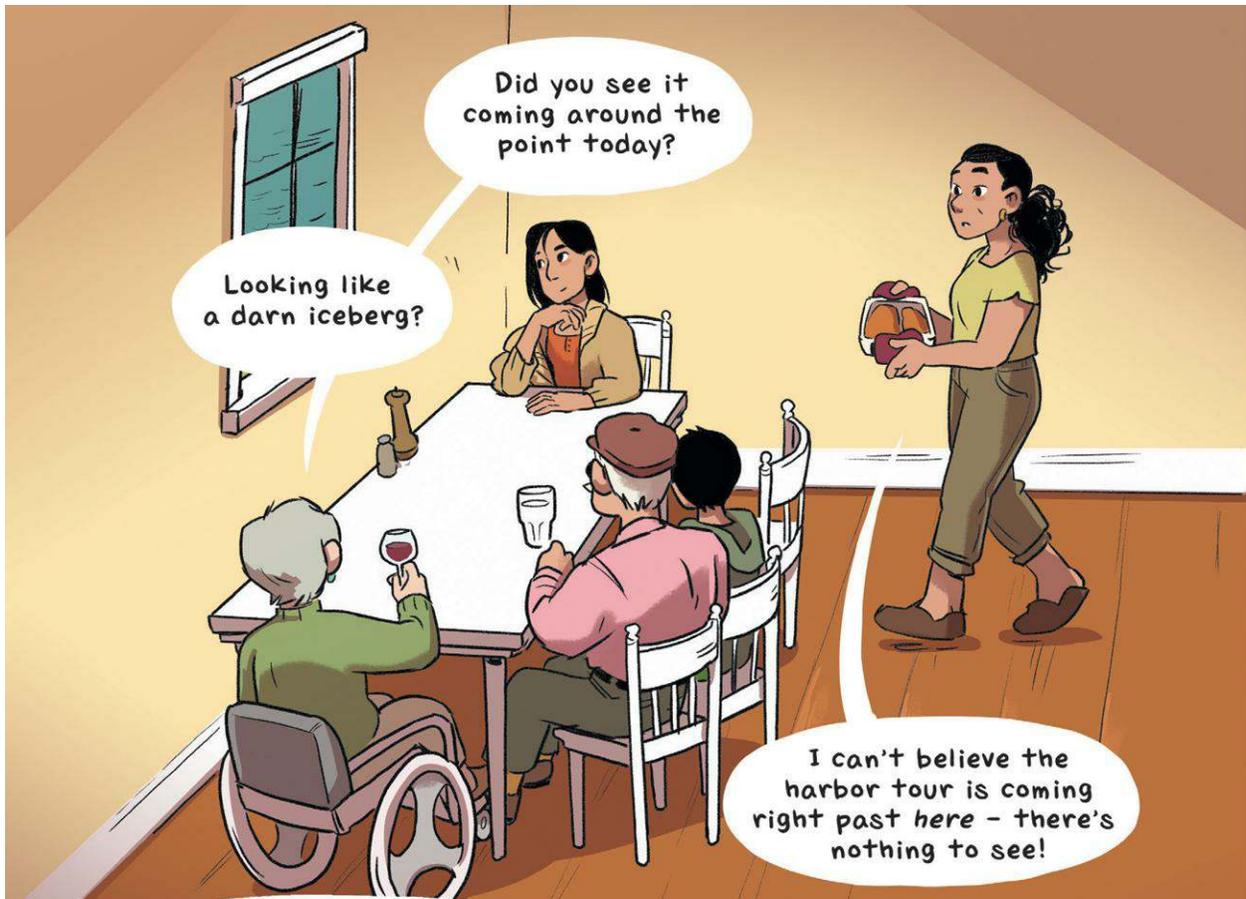
Key lime pie with cayenne meringue, and you **MUST** eat it all or he'll sulk all night.

It's an experiment!



Well, you've come on a night where the stars have aligned and my teenagers are magically in a good mood.





Did you see it coming around the point today?

Looking like a darn iceberg?

I can't believe the harbor tour is coming right past here - there's nothing to see!



How does Serena feel about her parents, what did it say in the paper,

"bringing the historic village of Lunenburg into the future"?



Oh!
Um.

She seems pretty excited.

She's having her birthday party on it this weekend.













Morgan



Serena

Sun, June 23, 7:36 PM



hey

8:15 PM

ok so I'm sorry if this is rude but, what is going on with you??? It's like you're ignoring us all the time and I miss you. I really wish you had come to the city with us

i know my parents are together so i can't really understand what it's like to have divorced parents but you could still talk about it to me. My parents fight a lot too you know

sorry if that's insensitive but like you CAN talk to me about it



I just have a lot going on ok? I don't want to share all the time.

honestly you do not know what any of it is like and i don't want to talk about it.

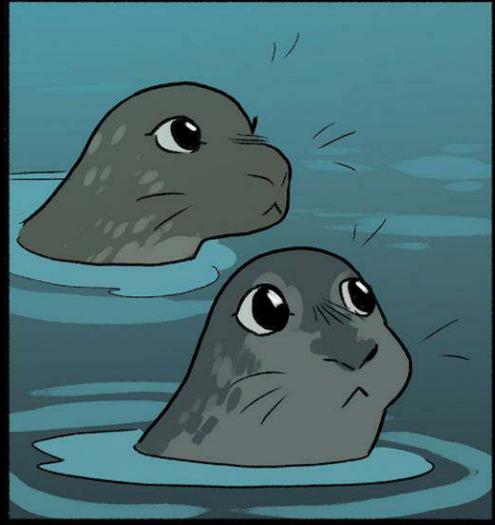




You're right.



I must tell her.
This party is my best bet, and I cannot do it alone.









You want to keep me a secret.



That's not it.

All I want is, is to keep things separate. Family and friends and you, all in different boxes.



I love you dearly, Morgan, but I cannot be kept in a box.

I have important things I need to do on land. Things I need your help with.

And . . .



If your secret is out, then I must tell you mine as well.



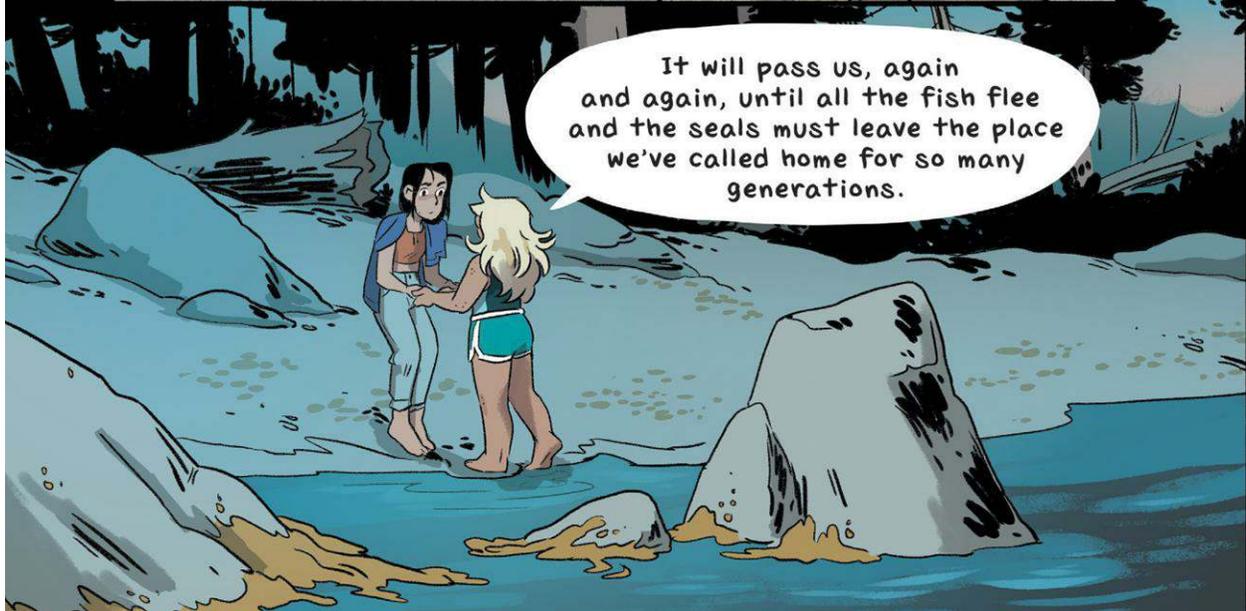
What are you talking about?

I told you a selkie's job is to protect her family.



Well, the seals and I have learned that *La Reine de la Mer* has charted a course past the rookery.

With all its noise, and stench, and the poison that seeps from its belly and into our seas.



It will pass us, again and again, until all the fish flee and the seals must leave the place we've called home for so many generations.



Unless we can stop it, the seals will have nowhere to go, Morgan.

We've been searching, but if this goes forward, it will be the end of the rookery.



Of my family.



Wait.

But I thought —



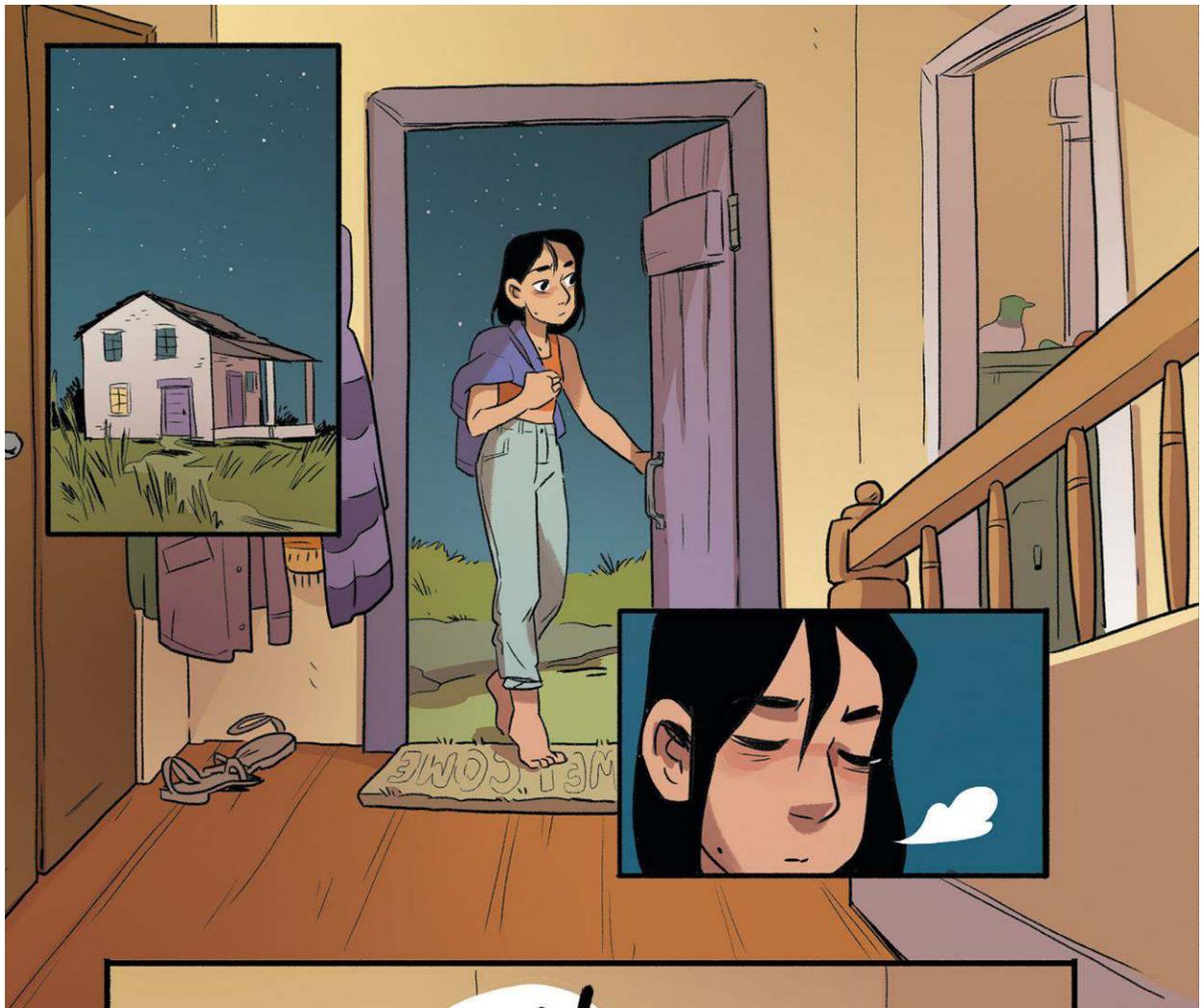
I thought you were here because of me.



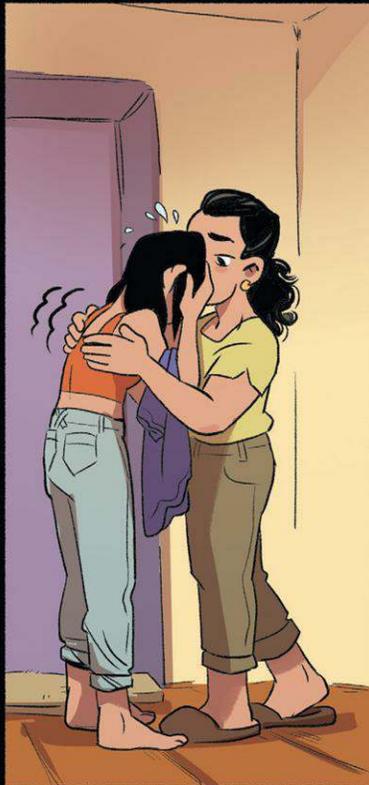












It's okay if you don't want to talk . . . but why didn't you tell me?

Your grandparents might need some explaining, but you know I've always been an ally.

I knowww.

I . . . I wanted to.

Really.



But then you and Dad . . . you know . . . and Aiden's been so nasty, and it just seemed like it would be one more stressful thing.









Oh.

He misses his dad.

It's not an excuse for how he's been acting.



But he misses his sister, too, you know?



That's not fair.

He's been so mean.



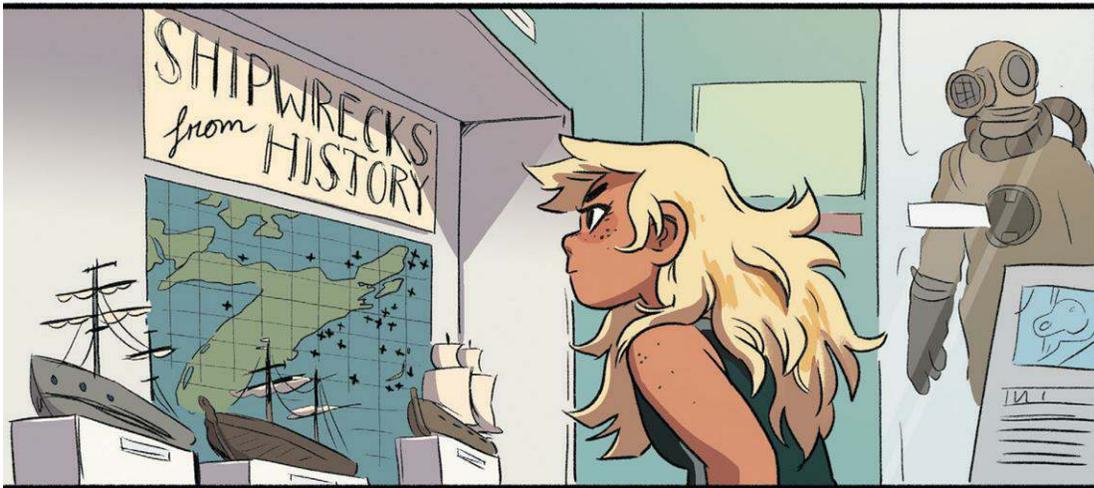
I know.

It's been a tough year.



But, Morgan?





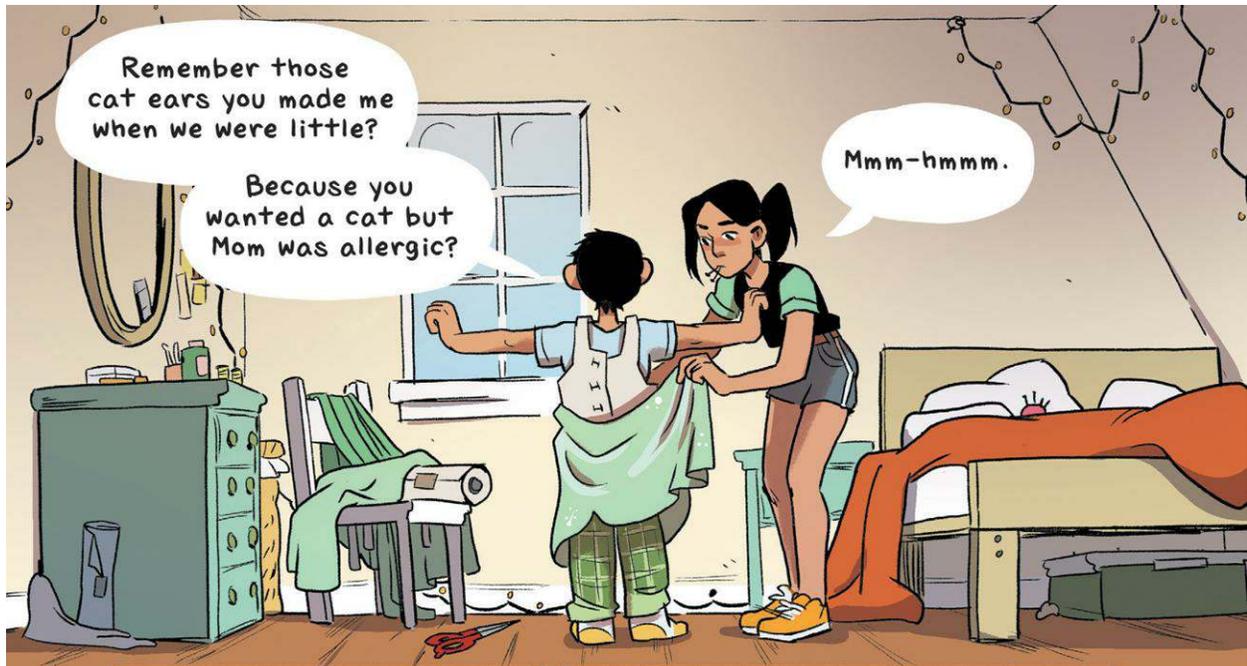


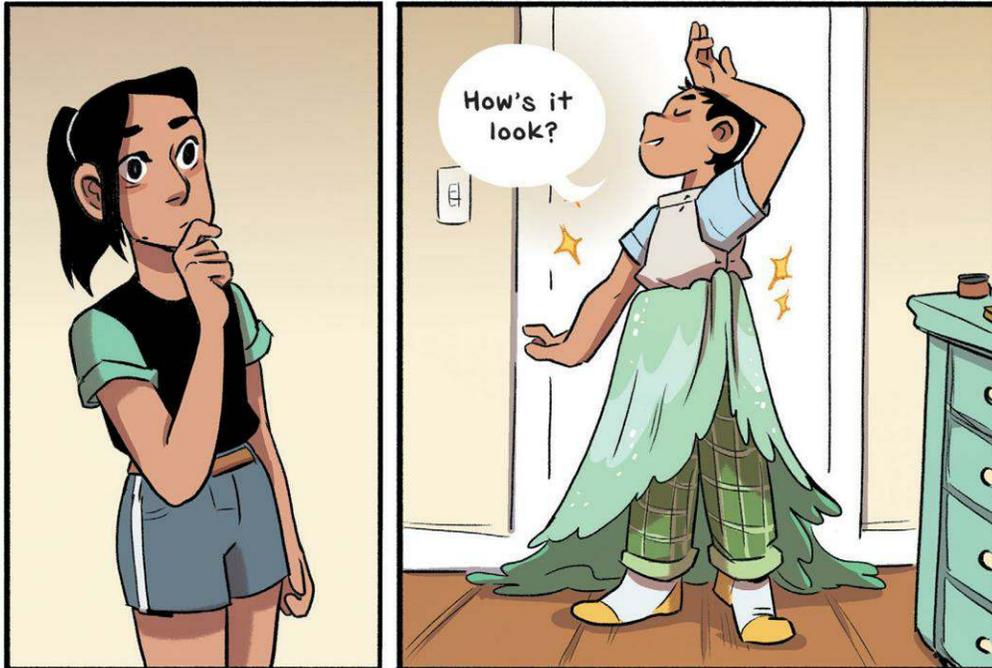














I cannot swim out there, not in this body. I'll surely sink.



And I don't even know what I'd do if I could.



I'm sorry. I just don't know how to do this.

THUMP

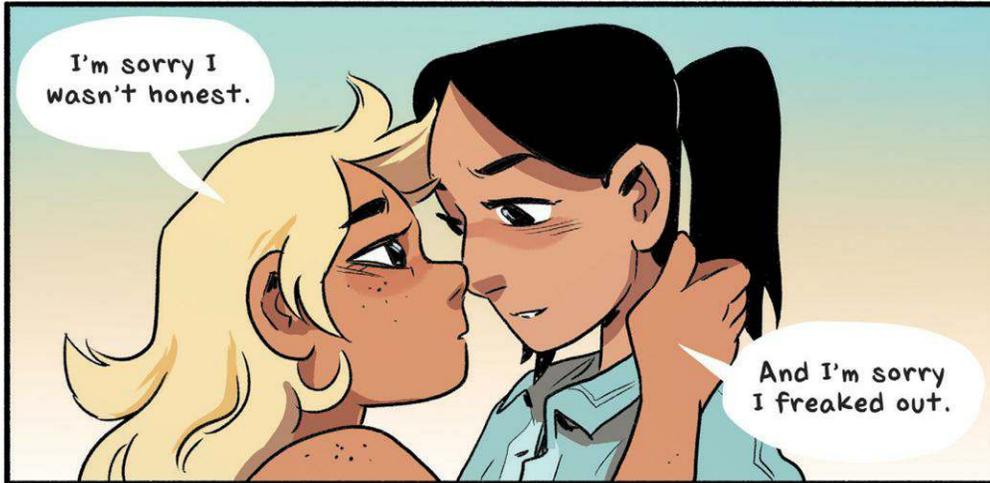


Keltie.



Thought you were done with me.











Morgan



Serena



Jules



Lizzie

Fri, June 28, 2:12 PM



look who i saw



GOREGOUS JOSH NO

Did he see you taking his picture??



yeah i told him it was for your murder wall



I HATE YOU

what should I wear tomorrow



Liz they look...very similar.....



No the second one is like a lot sexier!



if you say so



second one!

but wear those wedges you have



That would be TOO sexy



don't be afraid of your own power



Morgan



Serena

Fri, June 28, 3:15 PM



hey

are you coming tomorrow?



Would that be okay?



i mean

yeah, of course



Then yeah! I'll be there



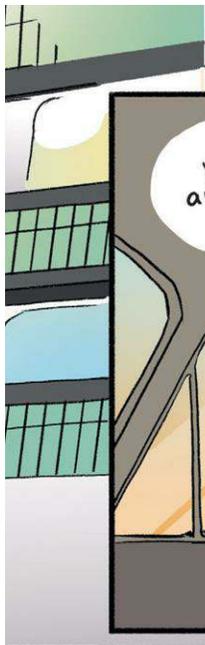
...ok.



Not a bad turnout.

La Reine de la Mer

Not that I actually like most of them . . .



Oh, poor baby, your horrible parents are throwing you a huge birthday party.



With balloons and everything, lucky me!



It's a good advertising opportunity. And of course we love you and want you to have a good time.

I know, Mom.

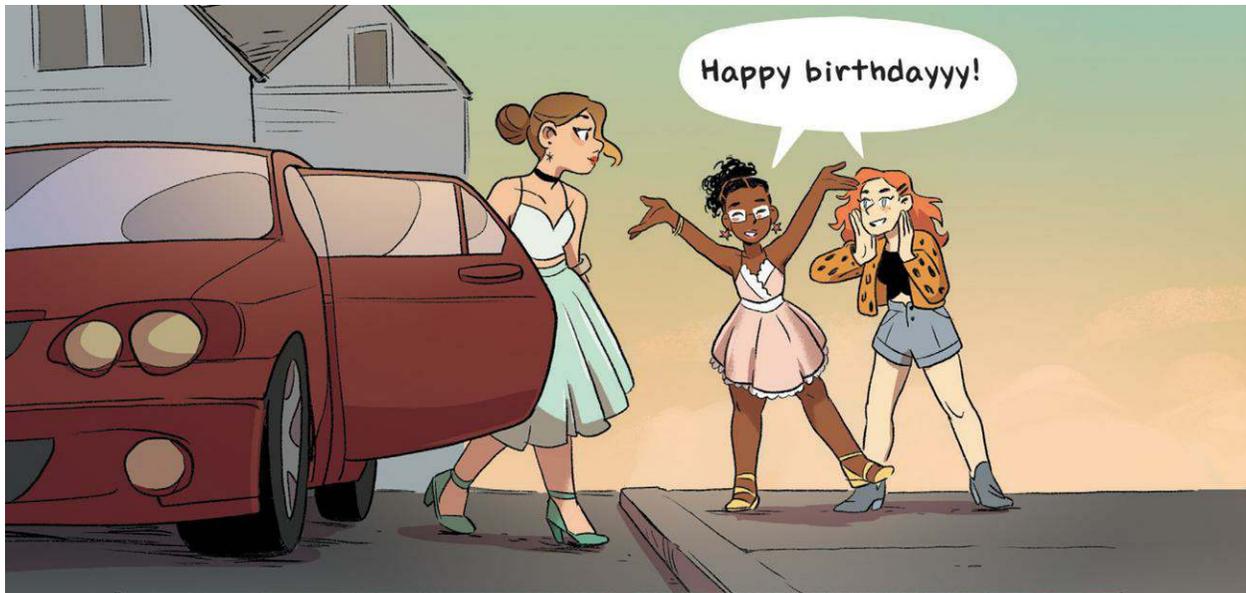


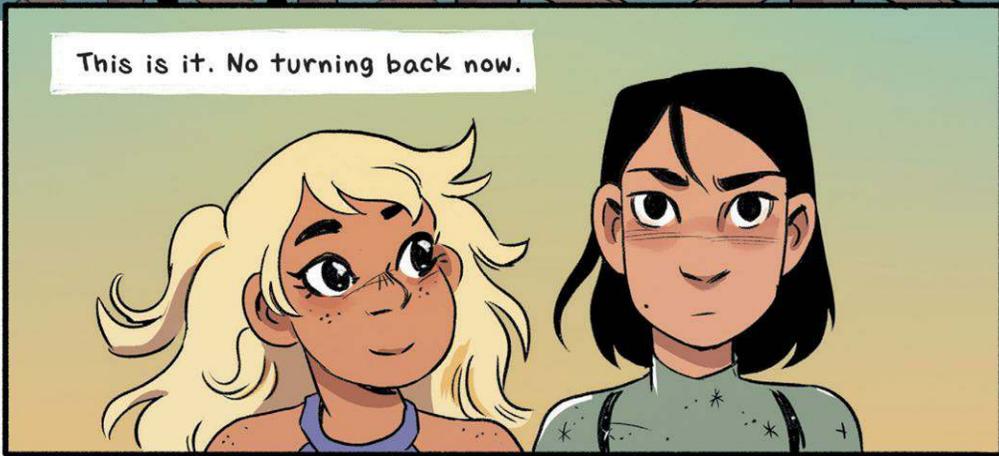
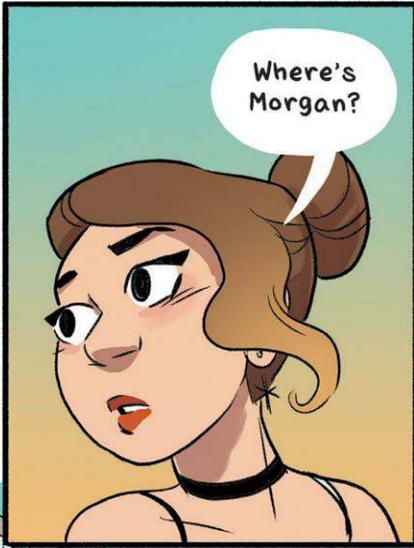
Have fun, sweetie. And don't forget to let everyone know —

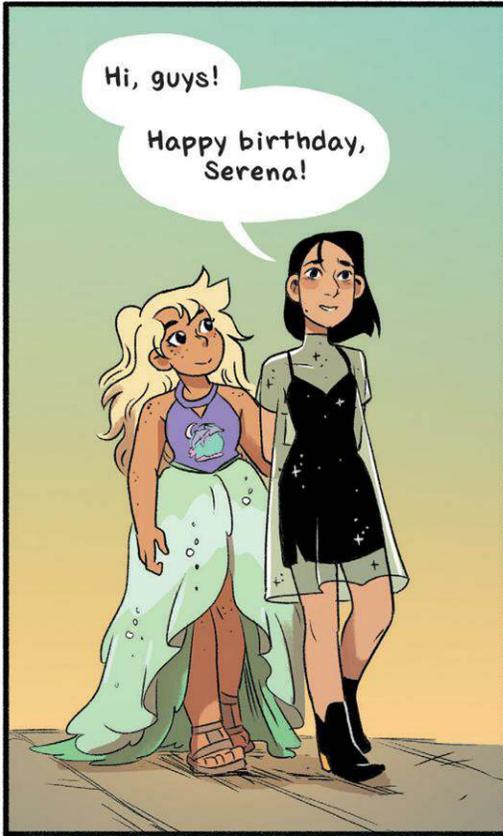
Fifteen percent off harbor tours and rentals for everyone who books before July first?

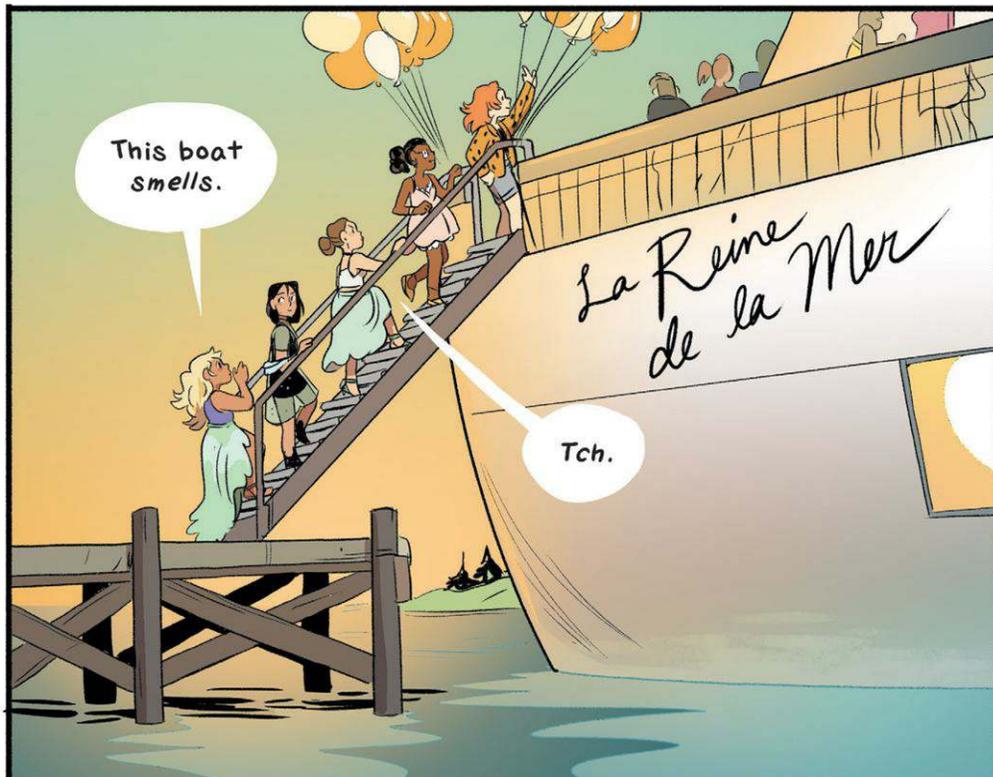
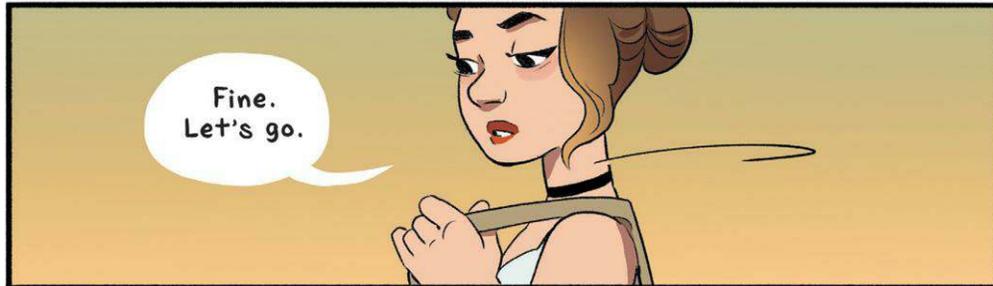


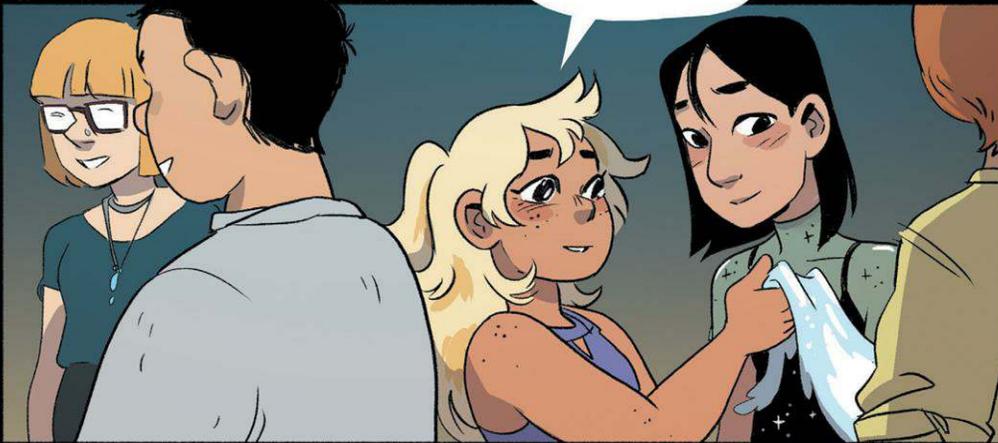
That's right.

















Did either of you know Morgan was into girls?



I always suspected . . .

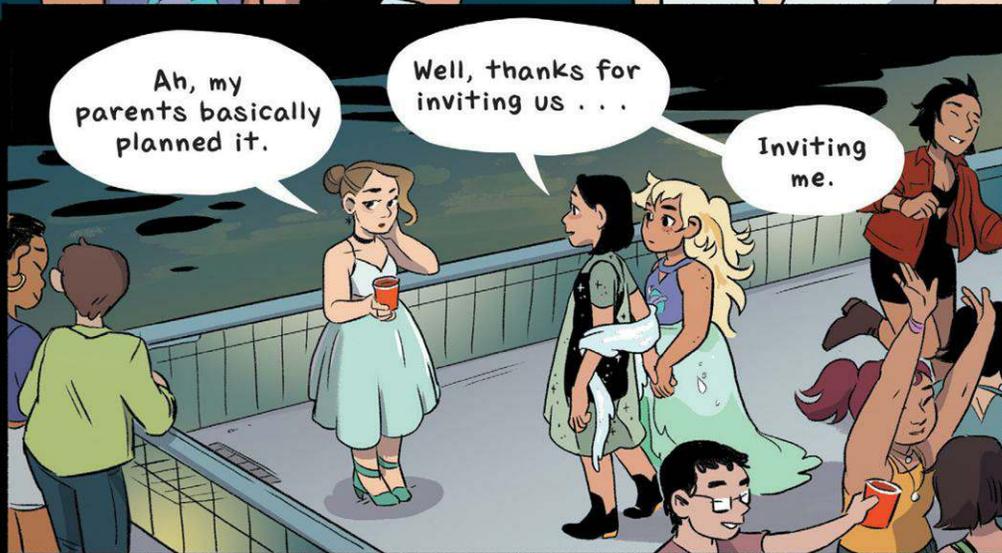
Really?

Uh, no, not even a little bit.



It's weird she didn't tell us.









Actually!

Keltie works for an, um, environmental organization.

And, I don't know if you know this, but the course your parents plotted for the harbor tour is going right past this rookery of seals —

And your loud, stinking boat is going to scare all the fish away!



You know, you didn't have to come if you hate it so much.

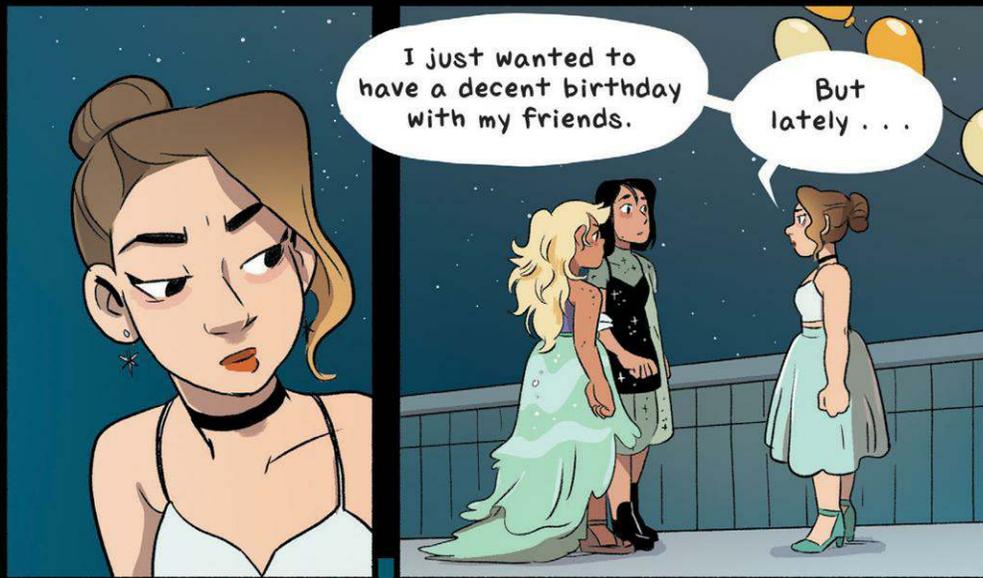
You weren't exactly invited.



Hey! She's my girlfriend. If I'm invited, then —

Yes. I get it.

But your girlfriend? Is kind of a jerk.



I just wanted to have a decent birthday with my friends.

But lately . . .



You don't seem like one of them, Morgan.













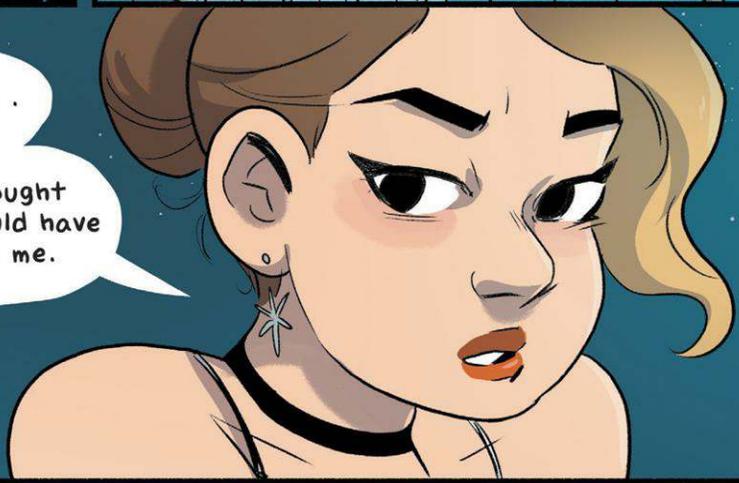


You know I don't actually have a lot of friends.

But you and Lizzie and Jules . . . I thought we talked about everything.

I thought . . .

I thought you would have told me.



I didn't tell anyone.



That's not . . .

It's my choice when I tell people.

I didn't want to be different from you guys.









Quiet except
for you kids.

We'll be
heading back to
town soon.



Think I could
have a hand at
the wheel?

Party isn't
your scene?

Nay.





You've piloted boats before?

Just keep on the course.



Definitely!

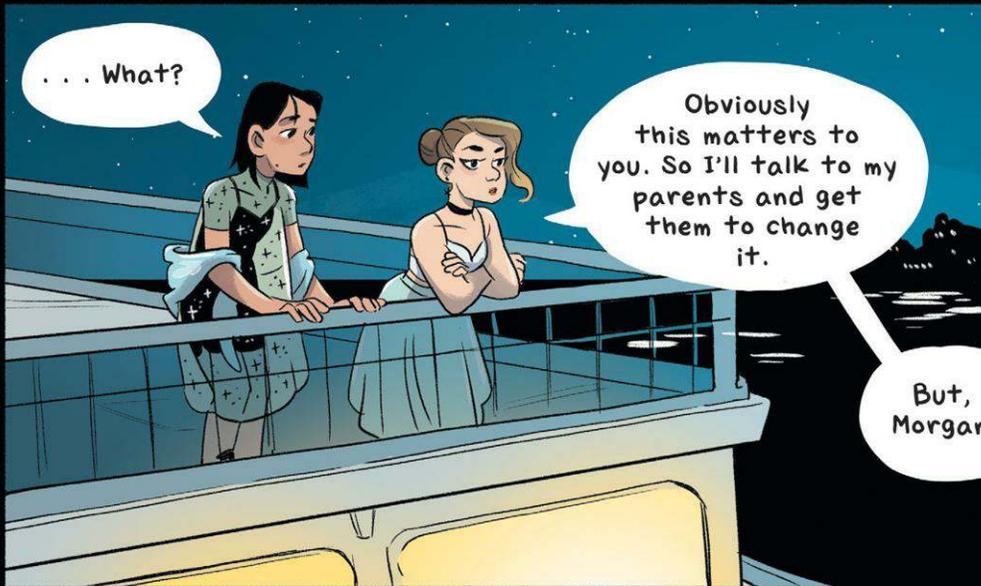


Actually, you wanna watch it for a minute?

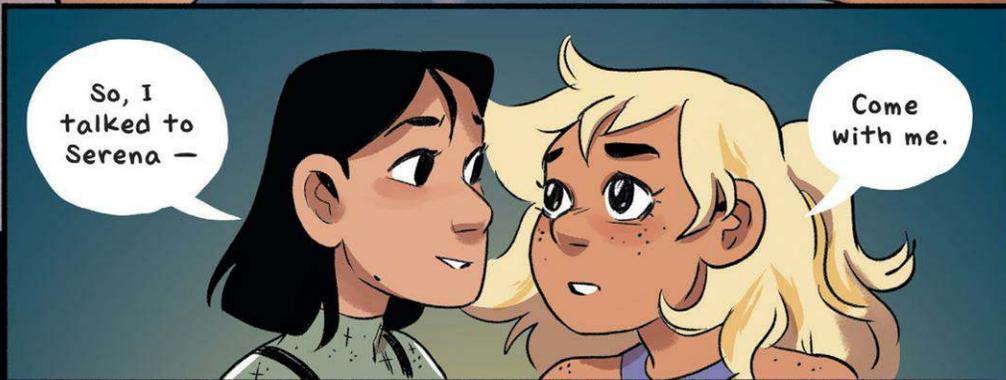
I wouldn't mind visiting the head.



I've got it!









Hold onto this.

Tight.



There's a hidden reef very close to here. The seals told me.

I got the pilot to leave, and -

Wait, wait, listen.



I talked to Serena. She's going to change the route.

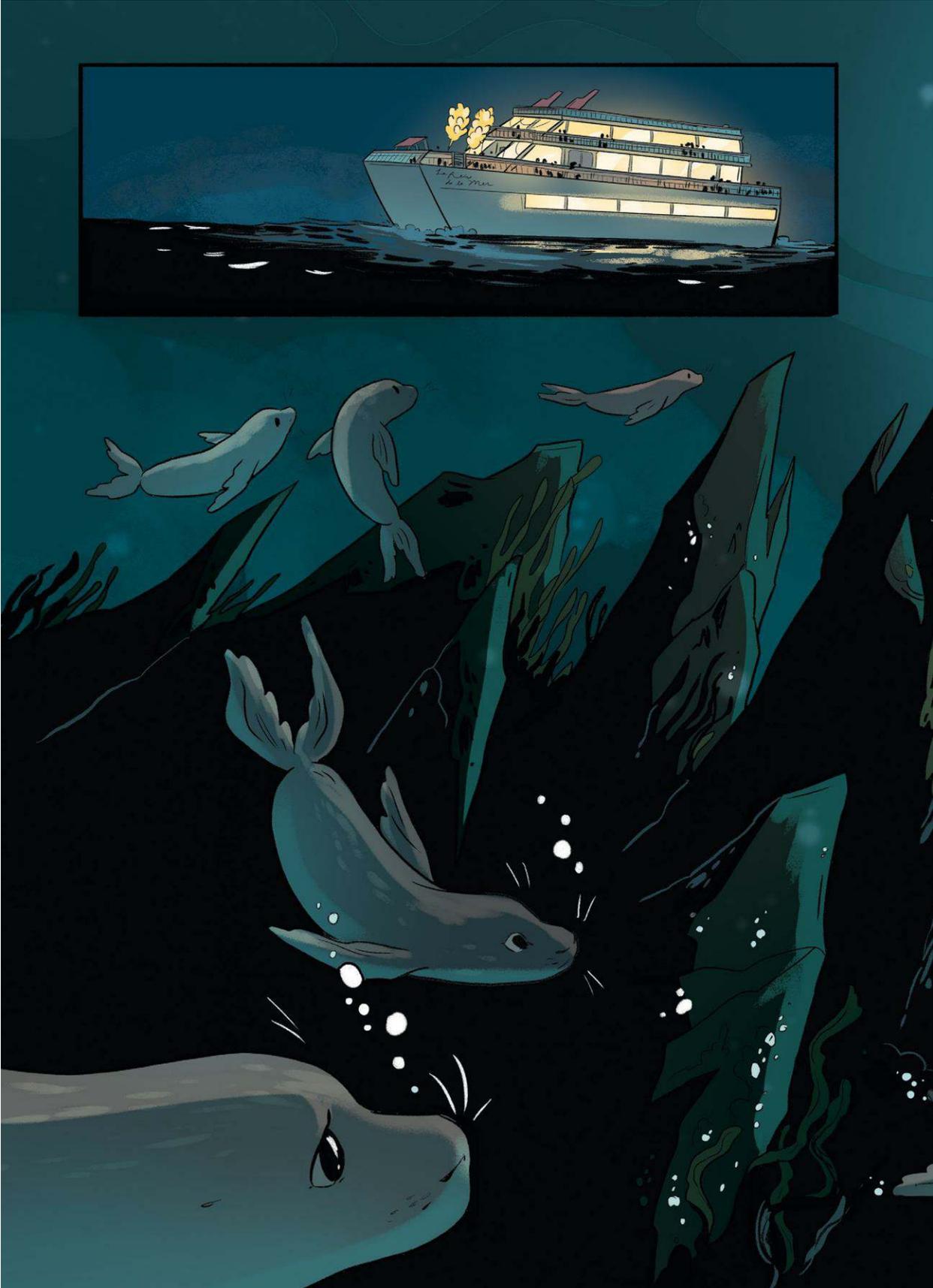


Ohhh. Um.

Oops.









Hey kid, you didn't push any buttons when you were up here, did you?









When we get back to shore you are **PERMANENTLY** banned from this vessel!



All good!



You are crazy!



ha ha ha
aha
heh
heh
ha
ha

heh...

Why are we laughing?



GASP

KOFF
KOFF

Hey!
Help!

KOFF
KOFF

HELP!





Things will be okay now, hm?



Now that you narrowly avoided shipwrecking us.

Uh . . . it was a bit of a desperate plan.

Serena!



I'm going to keep you away from boats for the rest of the summer.

You cannot be trusted.



I can think of some activities that don't involve boats . . .



Everyone knows about me and you, and . . . it's fine.

We can actually be girlfriends.



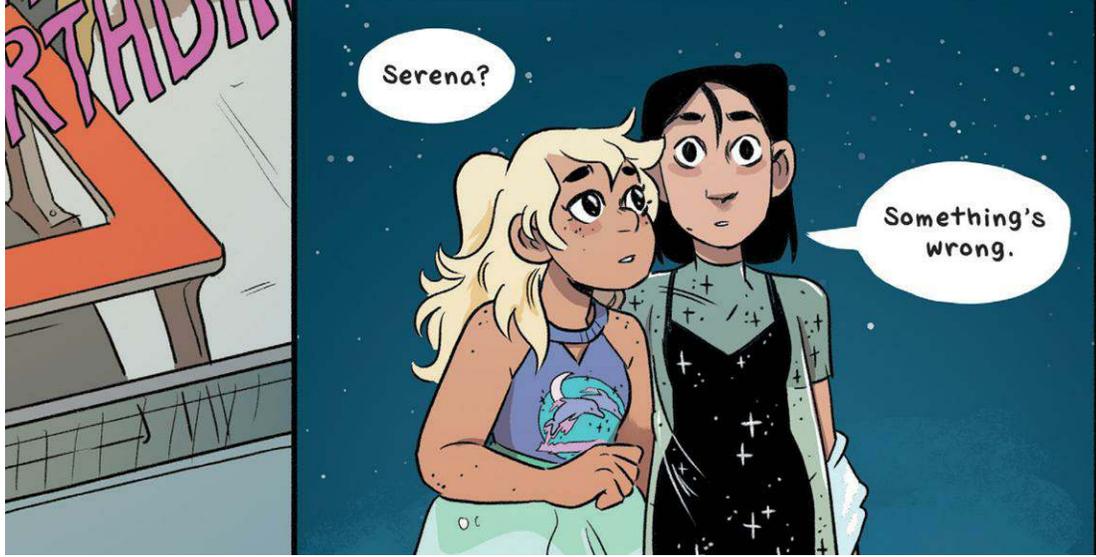
I'm yours, Morgan Kwon.



Serena!

Wait . . .

Cake time!



Serena?

Something's wrong.



No.

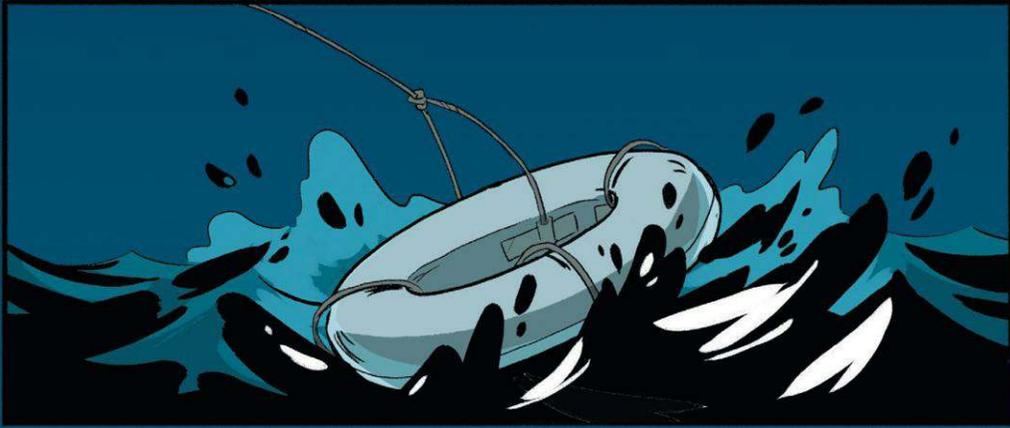
Oh no.

She was sitting on the back rail -

What?









I have to save her.

How?!

You said at the beach, you can't swim like this —



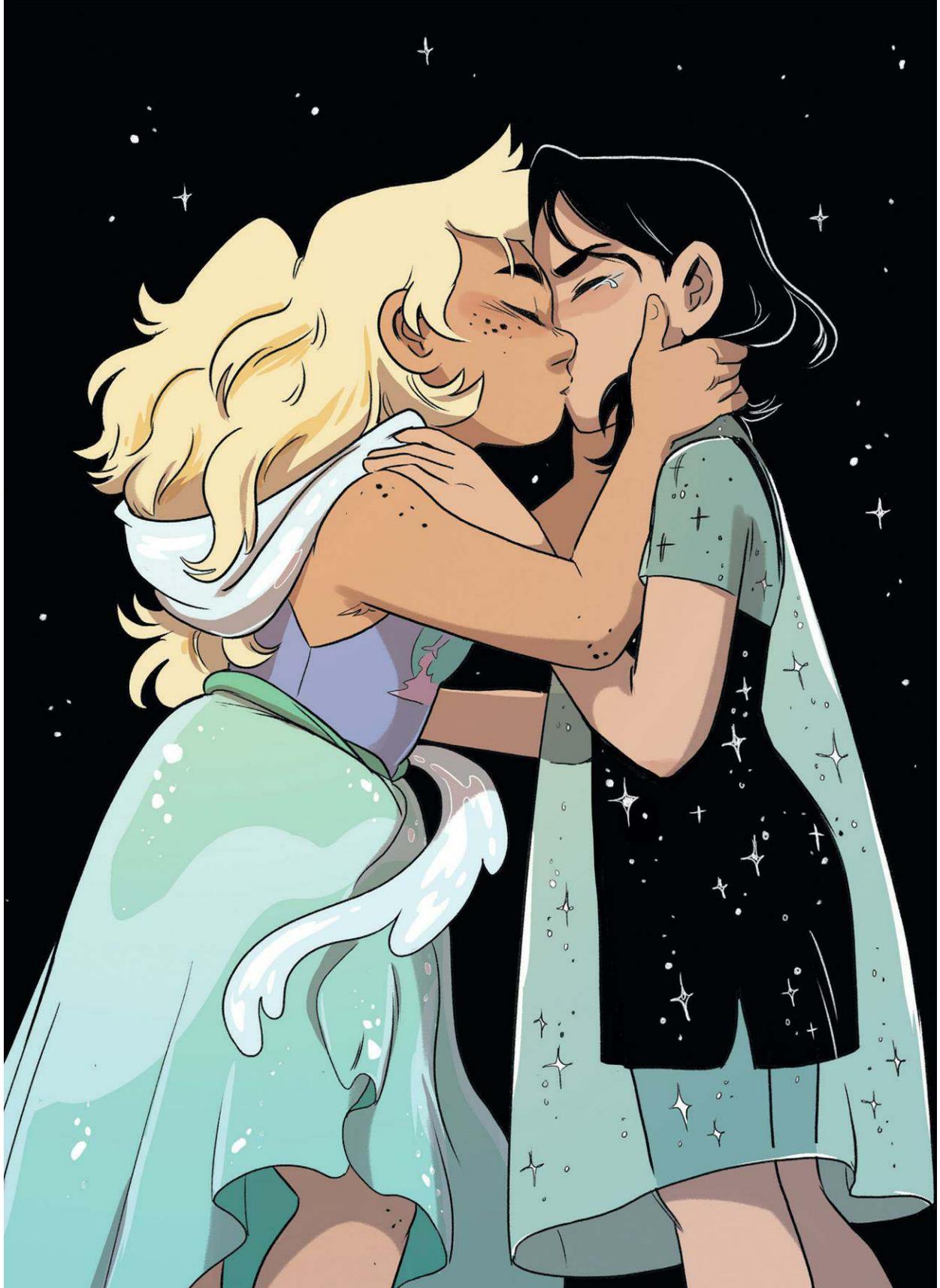
I need my seal-skin.

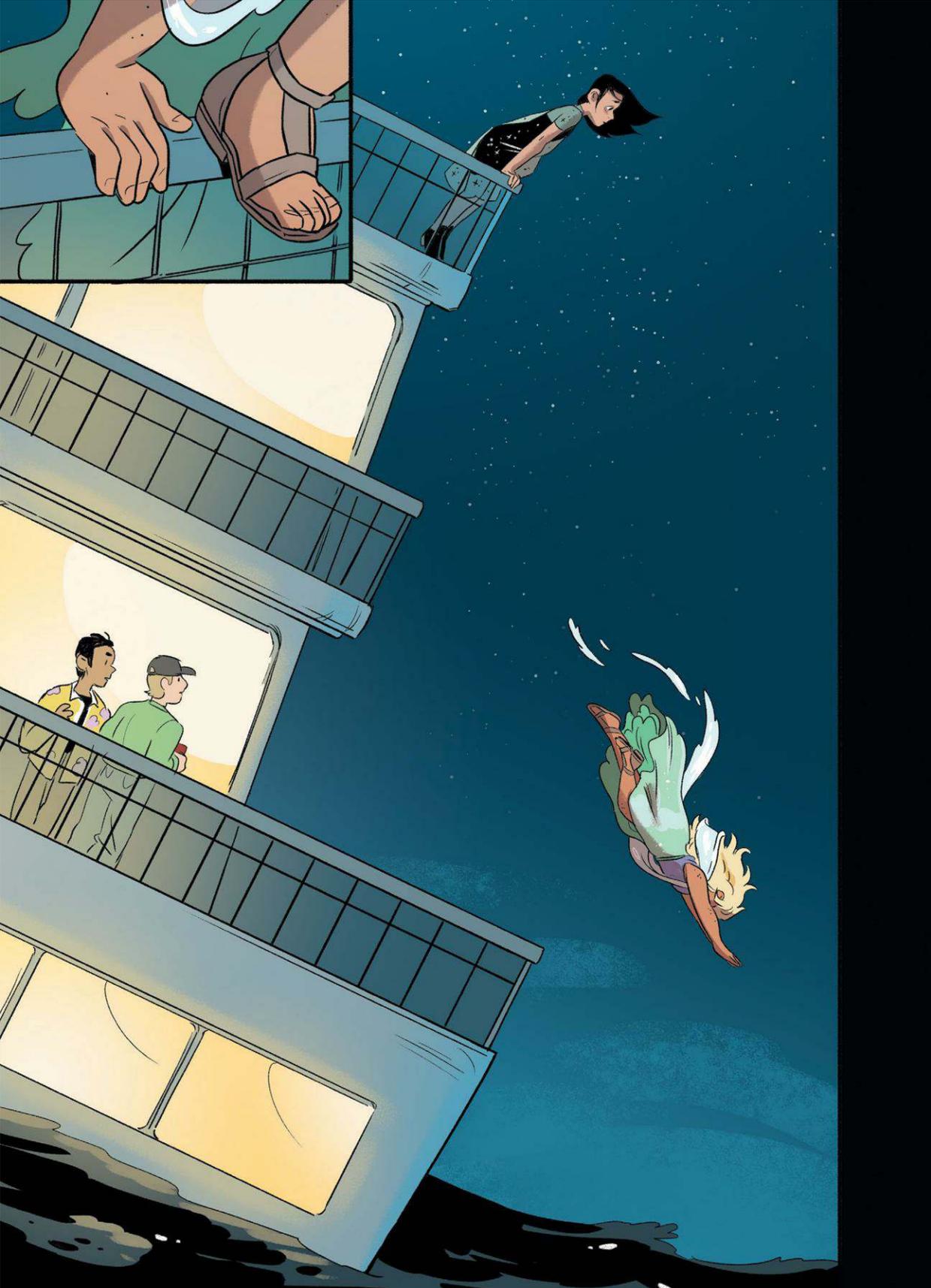




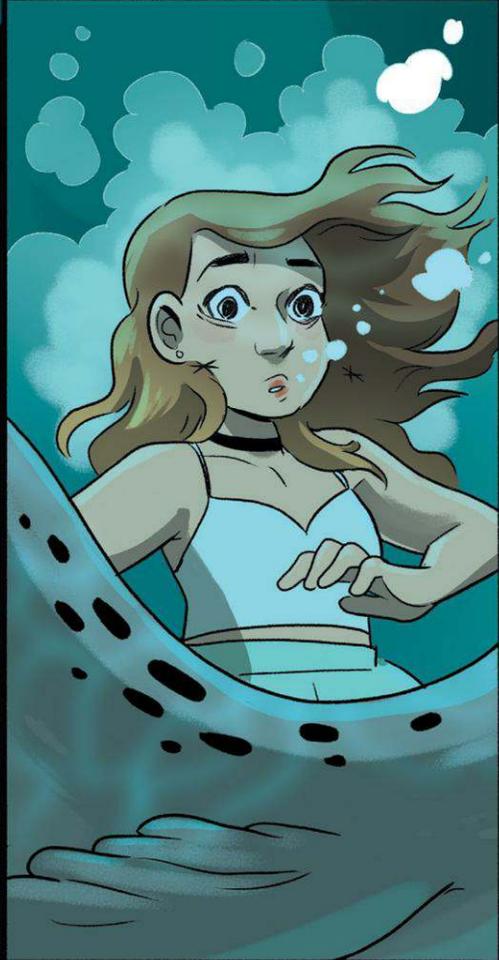
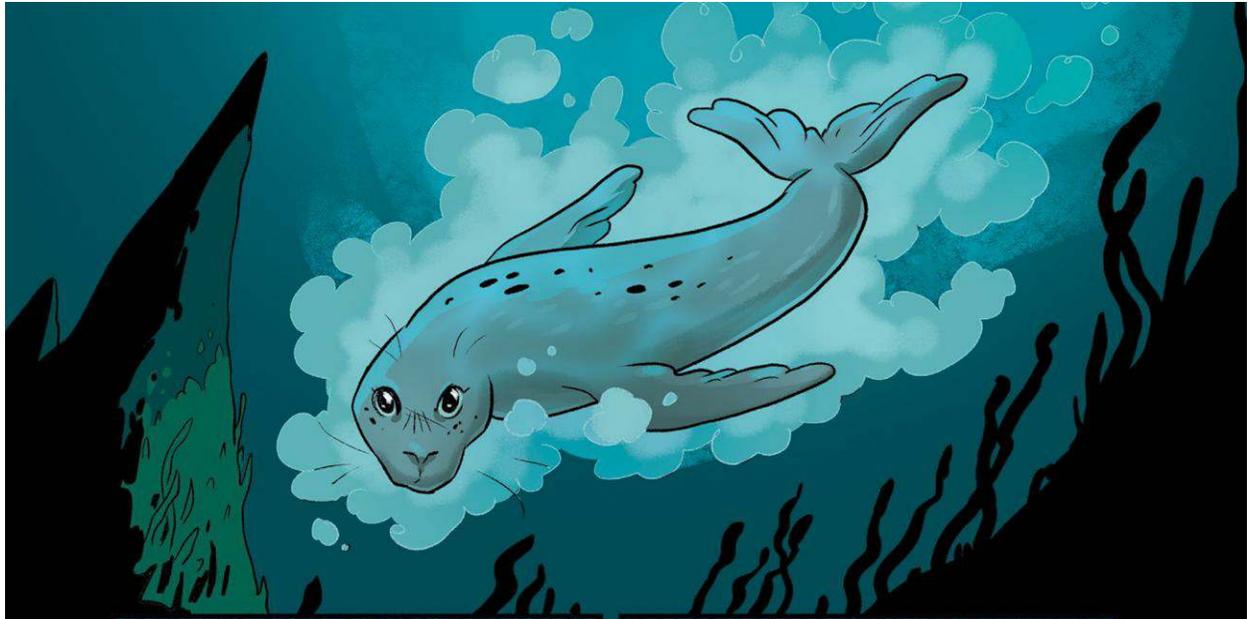
You'll put it on
and come right
back, okay?

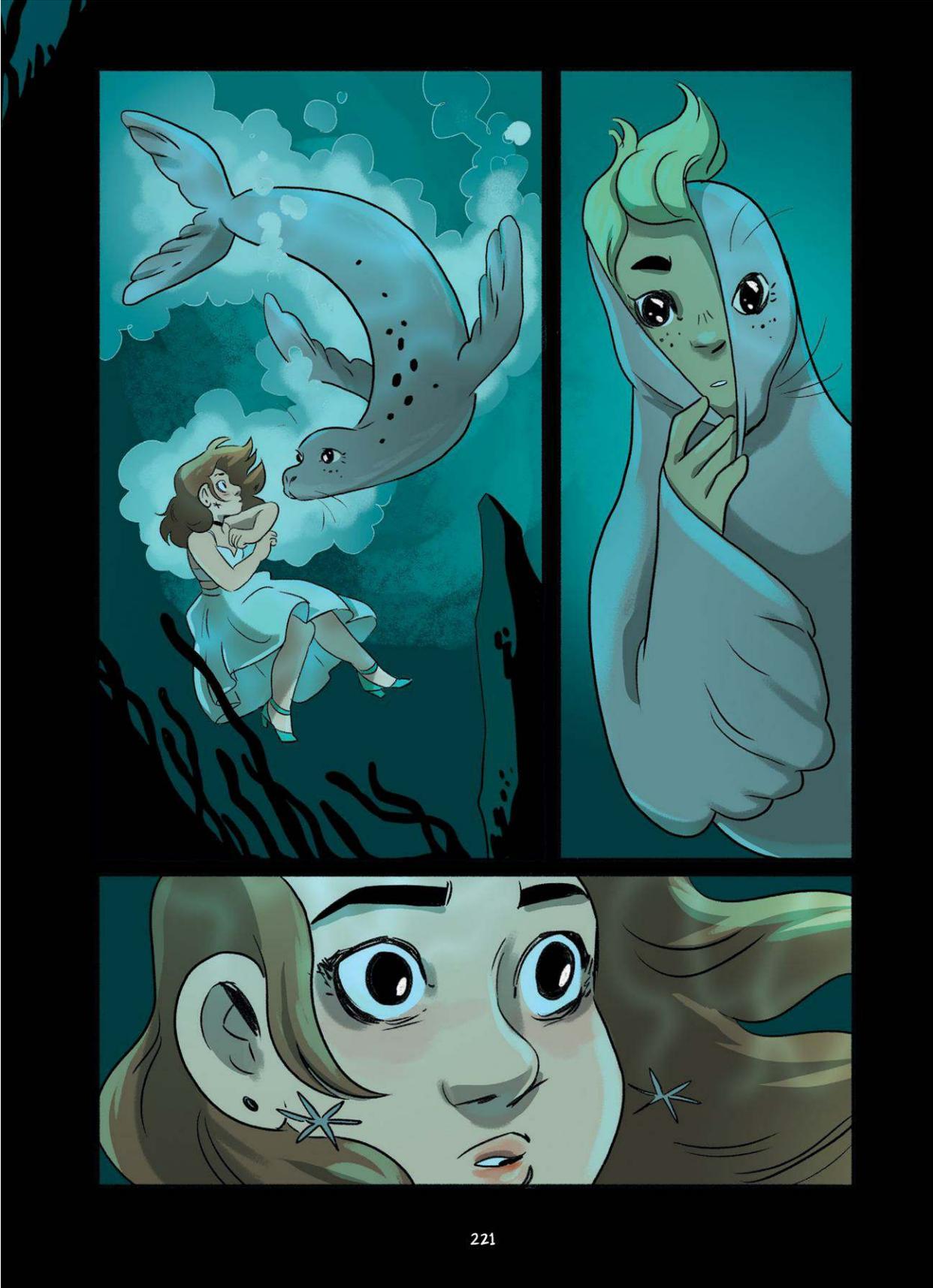
I...





















You're here.

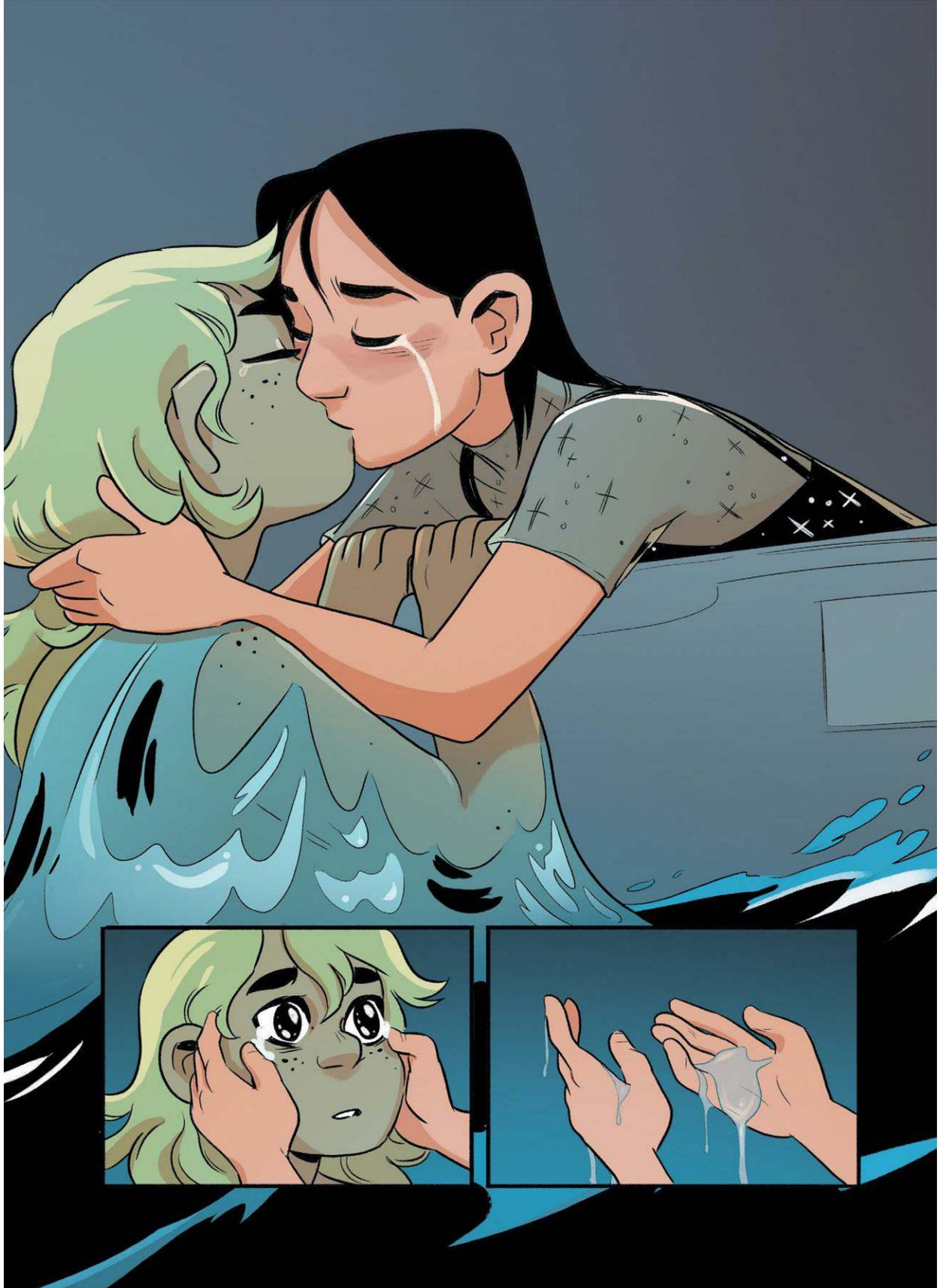
Come back to shore with me.

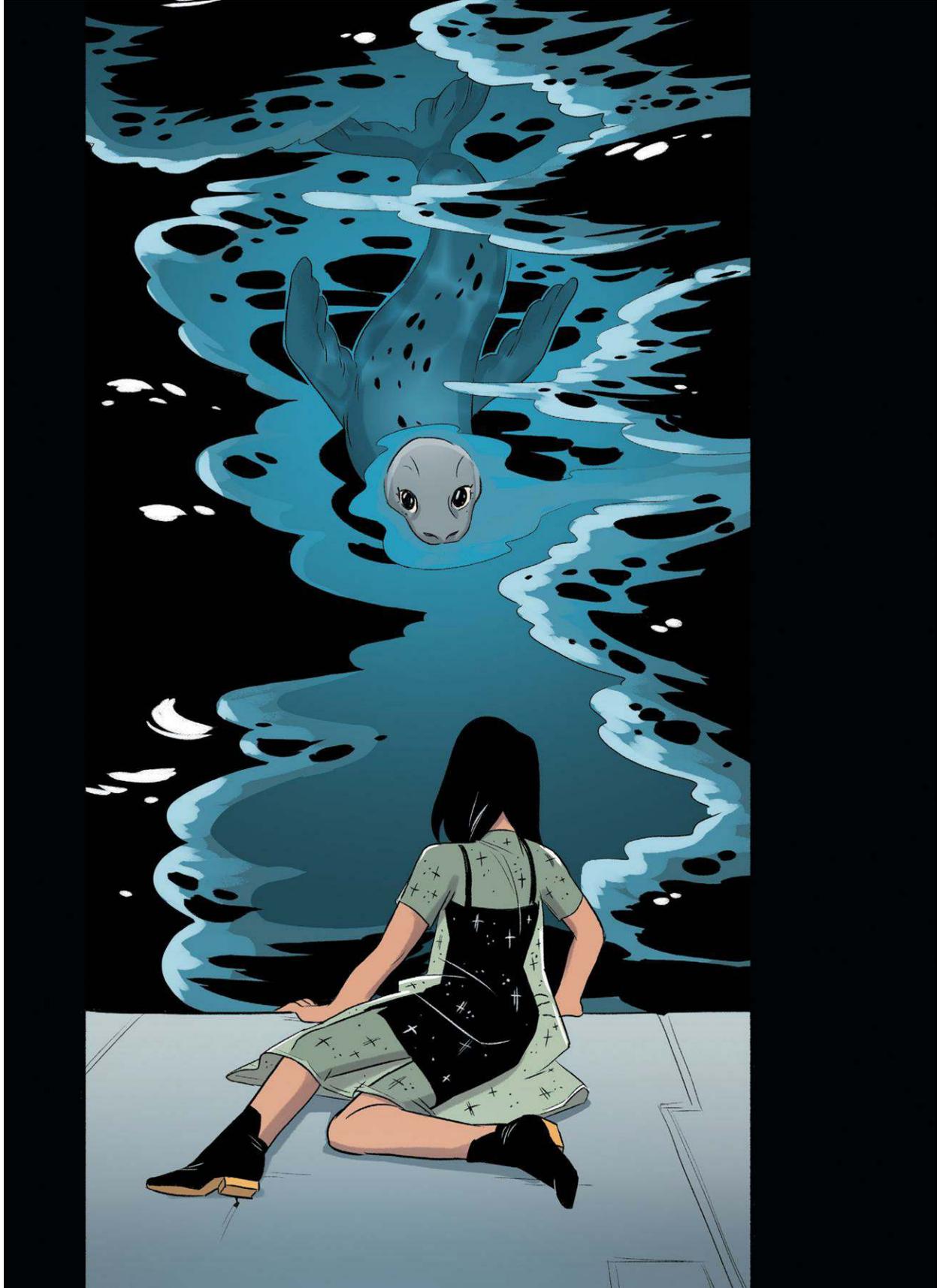


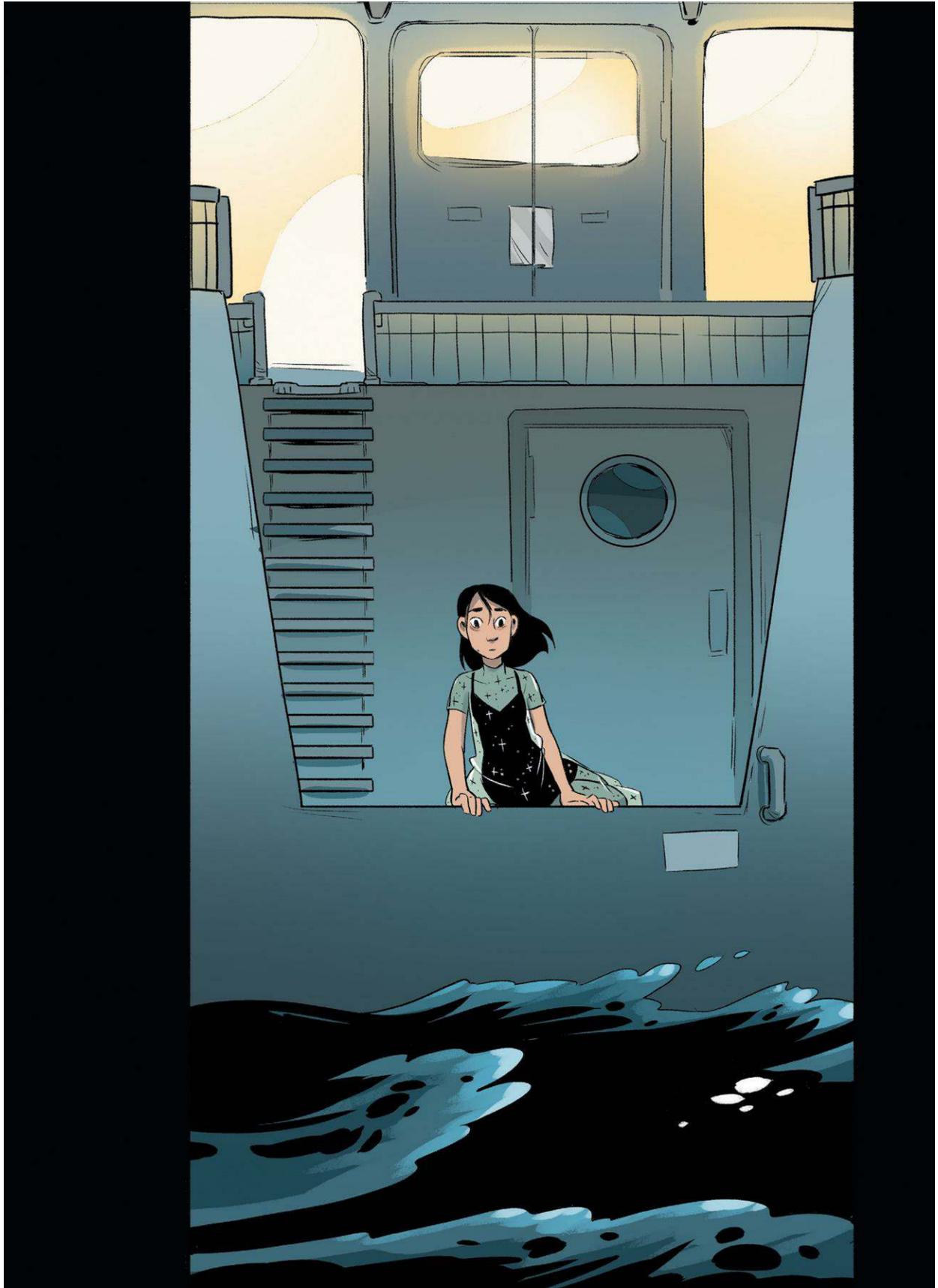


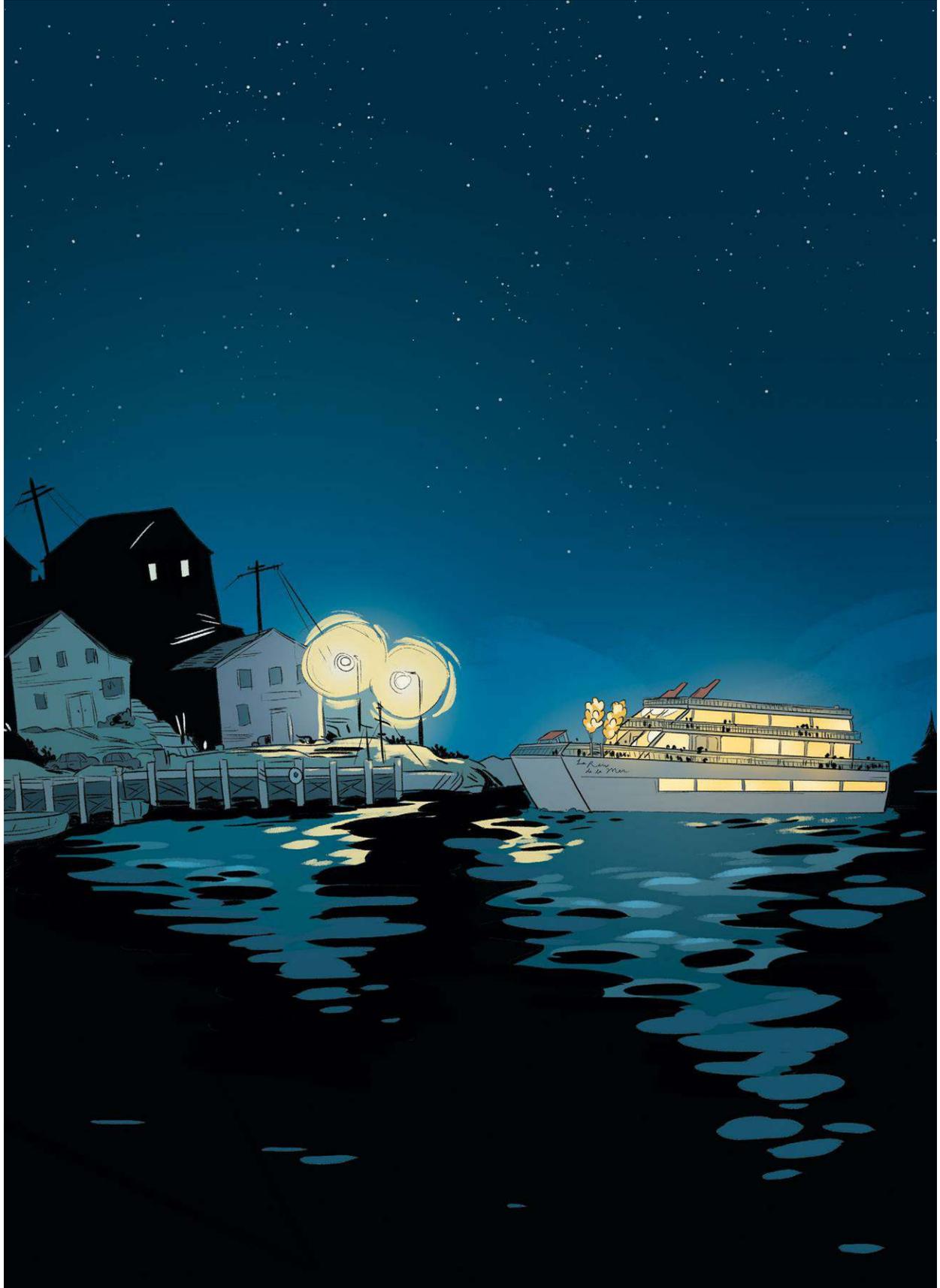


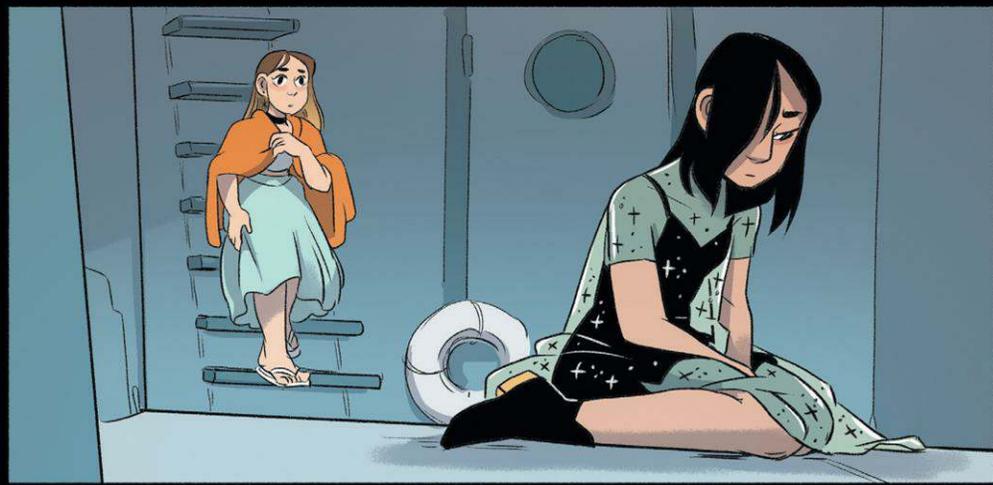














I . . . wasn't sure if I believed it either.

Until tonight.

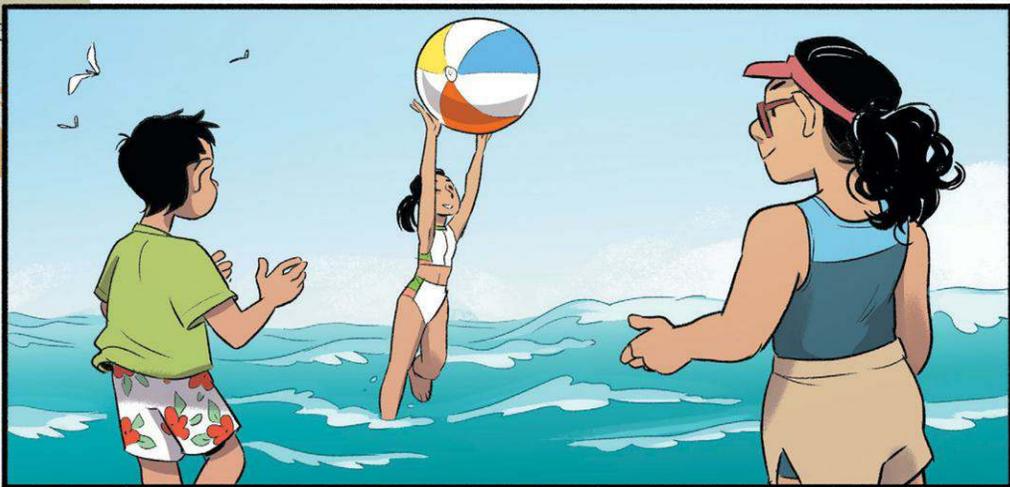
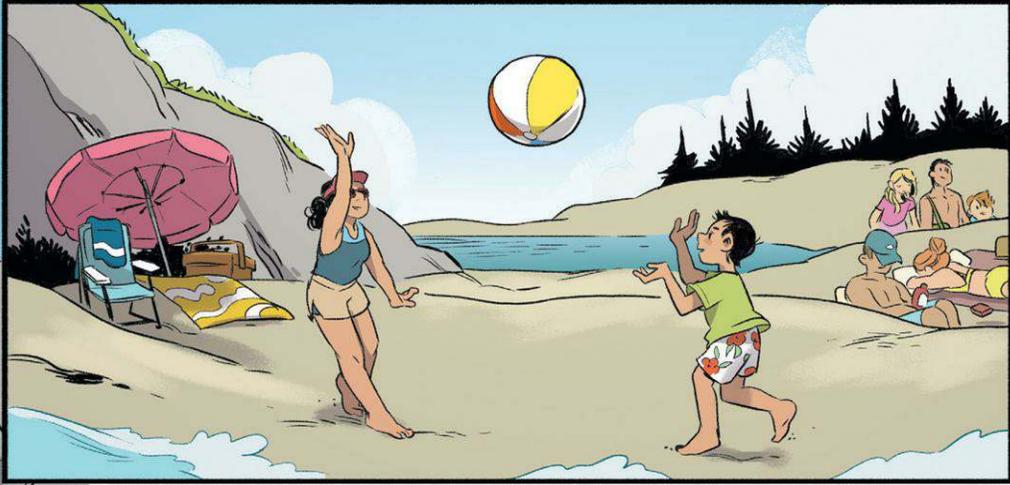


She saved my life.

She has a habit of doing that.









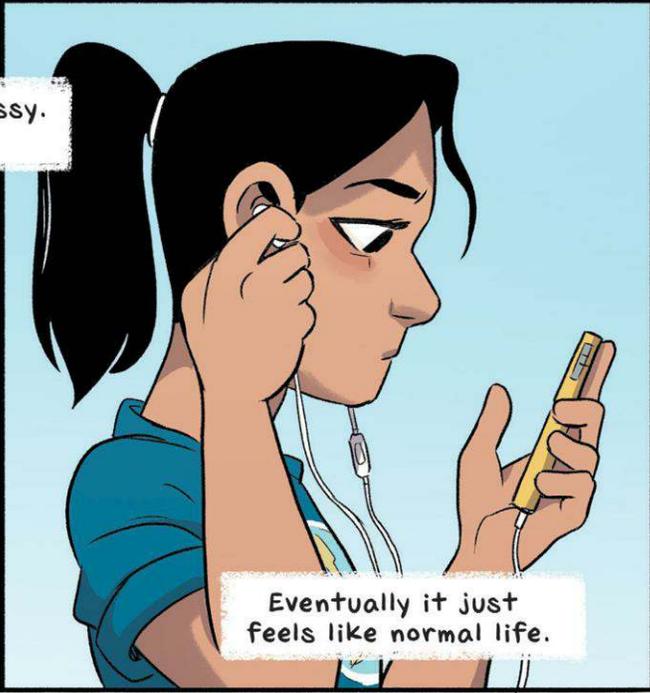
The seals were safe, and the rest of us got used to the boat.



It's funny how quickly something new can become normal.



Even when it's messy.
And confusing.



Eventually it just
feels like normal life.



Dad?

I'm good.

Hey, I . . .
I wanted to tell
you something.













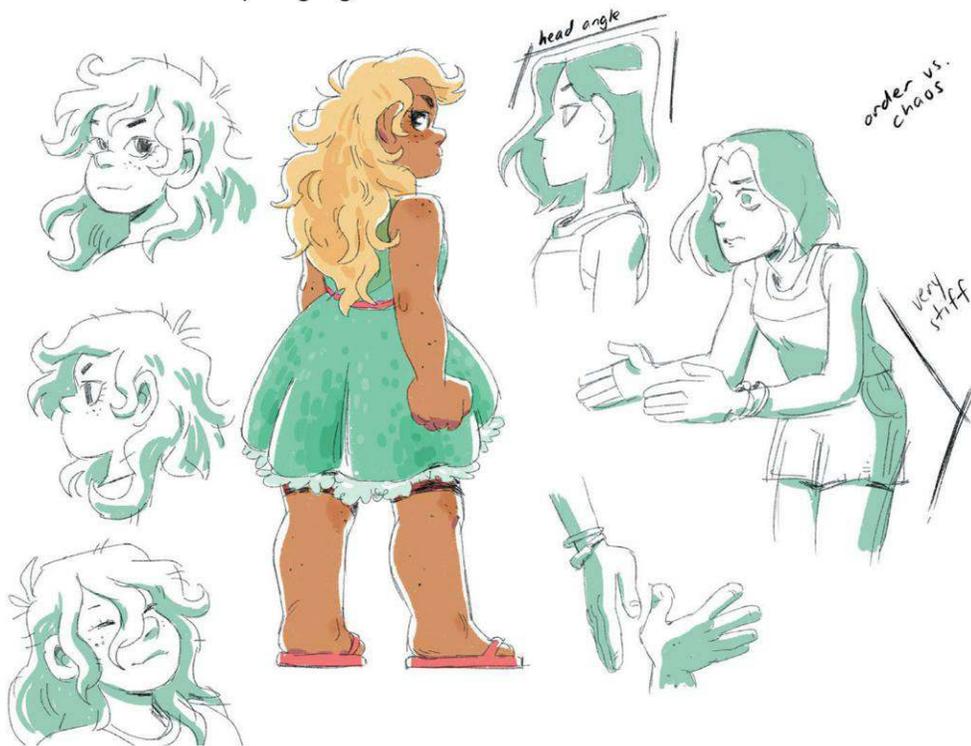
EXTRAS

These images are from my original pitch for the book. The character designs changed in subtle ways as I got used to drawing them, but the basic concepts stayed the same!

Morgan



When designing Keltie's human form, I went for a surfer girl look—tangled, sun-bleached hair, and a tan from being outside all the time. Her freckles are reminiscent of patterns on seals. Unlike Morgan, she expresses her big feelings in her face and body language.





Morgan is a contrast to Keltie — she’s very put together, very neat and precise, someone who cares about being in control of situations. Something I really loved exploring was Morgan’s body language — the way she holds herself when she’s around her friends and family is very different than when she’s around Keltie.

In one draft of the script Keltie gave Morgan a seal-tooth necklace rather than her seal-skin, but a seal-skin is a classic part of selkie mythology, so I decided to rewrite it.

In another draft, Keltie has never heard music before, and Morgan teaches her to dance when they pass a street busker. I had to cut the scene eventually, but the sketches are nice!



Playing around with different fashions for Keltie, including a few that she doesn't end up wearing. I think Keltie doesn't really understand the concept of clothes, but she's trying!



Contrary to Keltie, Morgan cares about clothes a LOT. It was fun looking up different outfits for her (thank you, Pinterest) and figuring out her low-key, carefully curated sense of style.



I like to doodle on my iPad as I watch reality TV in the evening (shout out to *Project Runway Junior* for inspiring Morgan's interest in fashion design). This was one of the first times that I felt like I really "got" the character designs and their personalities.



These are more iPad sketches that helped me design the character's clothes in the party scene. Morgan's dress was hard to figure out — it's more out there than what she usually wears, but by the party she's feeling more confident in herself!



A few alternate covers and color schemes.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is very close to my heart, and it's exciting and vulnerable to have it out in the world. I'd like to thank my agent, Jen Linnan, and my long-time editor, Amanda Maciel, for believing in this story and shepherding it through many, many drafts. Phil Falco and Shivana Sookdeo made it look beautiful, and Maarta Laiho brought a sense of life and place that literally made me cry the first time I saw the colored pages.

My wife talked through story points, encouraged me when I was anxious, and was the first person to read it. This is a story about queer romance and transformation and finding oneself through loving someone else, so in many ways it is a story about the two of us. Thank you for all of it, my love.

Wilneff Island is where I spent every summer as a kid. My parents made a home out of a tiny fishing shack on an island without plumbing or the internet, and it was perfect. Thank you for kayaks, and stories about talking seals, and letting me run wild and barefoot across the island all summer long. It will always be the most beautiful place I know.



Photo by Noelle Stevenson

MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG

is the *New York Times* bestselling author and illustrator of the acclaimed Witch Boy trilogy: *The Witch Boy*, *The Hidden Witch*, and *The Midwinter Witch*, as well as a writer for animation. A graduate of the School of Visual Arts, Molly was featured in the *Forbes* 30 Under 30: Media list in 2020. She lives in Los Angeles with her wife, two cats, and a very cuddly dog. You can visit her online at mollyostertag.com.