

Chapter 1: First Impressions

“Are we nearly there?” Lupus groaned, repeating the same question he’d asked several times since they’d left Illinois.

The Ford Raptor, a beast of a truck tailored for four, gave the winter wolf plenty of legroom to sneak the tips of his shoes beneath the hood. His black with white stripe high-tops rested comfortably on the floor. Outside, the vast, empty, American open road stretched out in front, surrounded by a monoculture of towering Midwest broadleaf trees. Drivers were scarce here, allowing Rayne to test his newly installed performance camshafts. At first, it was a low rumble until it crescendoed into a powerful roar as Rayne’s exposed paw pressed down on the accelerator. If Lupus didn’t know any better, he’d swear Rayne’s grin grew in sync with the revving engine.

“Almost, dude,” Rayne answered from the driver’s seat. He used that calm tone of his, like knowing how to comfort impatient drivers.

Lupus sighed, slouching against the leathery seat as his tail whipped against the door. “Alright.”

“You, uh, wanna stop for snacks?” Rayne asked, summoning Lupus to glance over at him. “Do you want some good old American food for the trip?”

“No, I think we are good for food.” Lupus smiled, his eyes twinkling like stars. “Unless they sell some good old British food.”

“Nah, it ain’t good enough for the American Midwest.” Rayne quipped. “What did you say you prefer in the morning, biscuits and tea, right?”

Lupus quietly snarled, but with that familiar smile of his. “Biscuits and coffee. You know I can’t stand tea.”

“Don’t worry, I grabbed some coffee and sugar for the lake house.” Rayne replied with a teasing grin and averted his eyes to the road stretched out before them. “How are you even awake right now? Jet lag should have knocked you out for at least a day.”

The wolf turned to him with that ever-present grin. “Caffeine, my dear Rayne. The nectar of the gods,” he said, holding up his empty travel mug.

“I swear, your blood must be half coffee by now.”

“More like three-quarters,” Lupus replied with a wink. “Besides, I am just built differently.”

“Is that so? And how’s that going for you?”

Lupus rested his elbow on the door, and muttered, “So far, so good,” sighed, and stared out the window on the opposite side. The open fields and mountains at the beginning of his journey from Chicago O’Hare International Airport transitioned to the contiguous swathe of hardwood forest. It struck him. With the day’s end nearing, the overcast sky turned a soft indigo hue. After hours cooped up in a transatlantic flight and hours in Rayne’s car, the amazement had faded. Boredom made his mind wander back to his canine driver. “Thank you.”

“Hm?” Rayne’s ears twitched.

Lupus continued quieter, “I can’t wait to meet Deko and Snackers.”

“It’s no problem, dude,” he assured. “A camping trip would be great for both of us, especially after everything back home.”

“Yeah, I can’t wait to camp under the stars tonight.” Lupus subtly wagged his tail across the seat. “Far away from the city lights so we can see the lights of the universe.”

“Yeah, I can’t wait too. Snackers and Deko can’t wait either.” Rayne insisted. “We just want you to enjoy yourself this weekend.”

“Still, I’ll make it up to you.” Lupus reached over the headrest, stroking a claw around one of Rayne’s ears. “I promise.”

Rayne’s ear flickered. “No need.” He glanced over to Lupus and added, “I’m just excited for you to meet Deko and Snackers in person at last.”

“Me too. They must have been dating for over a year now.” He beamed as he watched the blur of forest green whizz past. The wolf’s smile faded, his voice tinged with melancholy as he turned and whispered, “Snaccy is a Vastelerian, right?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

The wolf’s fingers fidgeted nervously, pulling at the collar of his blue and black flannel shirt, as if trying to loosen the invisible grip of anxiety around his neck. His other hand extended two fingers to tap his thigh, an almost imperceptible rhythm, but it expelled a nervous tick beneath his composed exterior. He hesitated for a moment, as if weighing his words carefully, before finally speaking. “Uh n-nevermind. It’s nothing, sorry.”

The wolf-shepherd took notice of his friend’s apprehension. “You know they both love you, right? Have you not seen a Vastelerian before?.”

“I have not.”

Rayne withdrew a hand from the wheel and stroked Lupus’ thigh. “Well, there’s no need to be nervous, dude.” He muttered, returning his hand to the wheel.

Ears twitched atop Lupus’ head in mild irritation. “Nervous? Since when am I nerv-?” He cut himself off while he looked away from the window to meet Rayne. “Actually, wait, how tall is Snackers’ again?”

“Uh, about 35 metres,” Rayne said in his calmest tone. “Dude, honestly, he’s huge. Even if it’s average for a Vastelerian, he’s huge. Photos don’t do his height justice.”

“I know.” Lupus sighed his best poker face. “They never seem to.” He sank into the seat until he could barely see over the dashboard.

“You’re not getting cold paws, are you? You do know it’s still the same dude you teased on Discord, right?” Rayne turned his truck onto a dirt track. “Just relax and be yourself.”

Rayne's truck once rolled with a polite silence, but now it rumbled along the dirt road, rattling its two passengers as it trundled over the uneven terrain.

Lupus leaned back up as the truck came to a slow halt at the side of the track. Rayne manoeuvred halfway onto the grass and applied the brakes. "Anyway, we're here," Rayne sighed.

"We are?" came Lupus' doubtful response. He scoured the dirt road to the trees in the distance, the roofs of small storage sheds shrouded by bark and leaves. "Where's the lake house?"

"By Lake Glendale. About a twenty-minute walk west from here."

"Walk?! We can't carry all that," Lupus protested, but Rayne simply smirked in response.

"I wasn't talking about a twenty-minute walk for us. Just relax and keep your seatbelt on," the wolf-shepherd instructed as he leaned back into his seat.

The Raptor sat parked on an empty dirt road, flanked by two walls of trees. Inside the vehicle, the radio was off, and the only sounds were the occasional creaks of the cooling engine and their own shallow breaths.

"So," Lupus asked, curious why they stopped the truck in the middle of nowhere. "What exactly are we waiting for?"

"Well, we're getting picked up." A grin tugged at the lips of the wolf-shep. "I guess you can call it a taxi service? Yeah, something like that."

Lupus began to ask, "Huh? What do you mean by tax—" But he trailed off as he felt a low, almost imperceptible vibration travel through the car's chassis. The furs on the back of the wolf's neck stood on end, and seconds later, he felt it again. And again. His face grimaced with a flicker of concern, he knew earthquakes weren't common in this part of the country, and if it wasn't an earthquake, then... He shot a glance to Rayne, a soft smile marking the wolf-shepherd's face as he stared back, as if knowing. And as the realisation dawned on him, it was already too late.

The inside of the truck darkened and plunged into a premature twilight. Lupus glanced at the rearview mirror and his heart leapt to his throat. A large, cyan blue and white object dominated the mirror, its form indiscernible for the time being. Before the wolf could make sense of it, something thumped onto the ground beside them. A mist of dirt and rock temporarily blinded their vision, and when it dissipated, it revealed a wall of cyan blue cotton and a flat shoelace as thick as ropes rising towards a brass aglet. The iconic Converse star logo, usually small and unassuming, was now a towering emblem that wouldn't look out of place on most corporate buildings. Rising from the shoe's rim was a large striped blue and white sock, the rest of the features of its wearer obscured by the roof.

Lupus struggled to process the sheer enormity of the Converse shoe rivalling the size of the truck. A foot belonging to a creature large enough to flatten their vehicle landed only several metres away, pivoting in place as the titan takes interest in them.

"Uhh...", he mumbled, barely audible. He glanced at Rayne, who smiled back.

Rayne's voice cut through the paralysing shock. "I told you our ride would be here shortly." Lupus tore his gaze away from the mirror, looking at Rayne's calm, almost amused expression. The wolf-shepherd seemed unfazed, a stark contrast to the surreal, almost nightmarish reality outside.

“Oh, there you are!” a voice echoed from above, its owner remaining obscured, yet Rayne’s smile grew knowingly.

“Is that...?” Lupus murmured to Rayne, who nodded in response. “Snackers?!”

Leaning forward in his seat, Lupus peered out the window to take in more of the creature’s appearance. It was a raccoon with a distinct titanium-grey fur, clad in a playful ensemble that complimented an extroverted personality. The bandit-mask pattern filled his view, the darker fur covering the elongated snout and the gentle slope of his cheeks. His whiskers twitched slightly, sensing the surrounding air. Even the subtle movements of his ears, attentive and alert, were satellite dishes tuned to their voices. And hanging off his slim, but huge shoulders, were two purple straps that conjoined to the raccoon’s backpack.

It was the same Vastelerian raccoon he teased on Discord, alright. He had that same soft blue hair with that slight highlight of pink on the fringe, and mint green irises. The giant’s gaze locked onto theirs with playful curiosity. He wore a pair of blue and white striped thigh-high socks that contrasted with his fur, and had firmly fastened a set of loose pink shorts with a white waistband against his slender hips. A purple collar with a golden buckle was firmly secured around his thin neck, with a blue and white striped scarf obscuring part of it, tying the outfit together.

He was breathtaking, a living monolith that made Rayne’s five-figure truck look like a toy. And Lupus had a front-row seat to this spectacle playing out before him.

He didn’t have time to react to the creature’s towering stature before the truck rattled anew, with fluffy fingers as thick as tree trunks curling gently around the Raptor, precluding any escape.

“Gotcha!” came the rolling thunder of the titan’s voice.

This raccoon. This *Vastelerian*. Was his friend.

“Oh no,” Lupus muttered, his voice barely above a whisper, his eyes wide with a mixture of awe and concern. Rayne remained remarkably composed beside him, his gaze fixed on the unfolding spectacle.

“Relax, will ya?” The wolf-shepherd goaded his friend. “He’s just in one of his playful moods today. You’ll get used to it.”

The Raptor swung gently in the air. Both grasped onto the armrests as they looked out the windshield to watch the world rush past. When the elevator-like ascent halted, they found themselves face-to-face with that all too familiar visage that filled the window.

“Well. Look what we’ve got here,” Snackers’ silky smooth, yet loud voice boomed. “I hope I wasn’t interrupting anything, cuties.” He snickered down to the truck, a mere toy to him that was no larger than his hand.

As Lupus and Rayne exchanged glances, Snackers brought his other hand and face closer to the truck. The raccoon’s emerald eyes sparkled with playful curiosity, while his warm, moist breath started to fog up the windscreen. Slowly, he slipped a dagger-like claw under the handle and unlocked it with a soft click.

The door swung open, revealing Snackers’ inviting paw below the car. “There we go,” Snackers’ voice rumbled with a chuckle.

“Thanks, dude,” Rayne barked at Snackers.

Rayne was the first to move. With an eager smirk, he unbuckled himself from the driver's seat and slid out to land on Snackers' waiting palm. The raccoon's smooth pad comforted his landing. He looked up, meeting Snackers' amused gaze, and gave a casual nod.

“Come on, Lupus,” Rayne called with that same steady voice. “It's safe.”

Lupus took a breath and steadied himself. He carefully manoeuvred out of the passenger seat and over to the driver's seat. His feet touched Snackers' paw pad as he slid out to stand beside Rayne.

“**Welcome aboard,**” Snackers giggled, his voice a gentle rumble that resonated through their innards.

Standing side by side on Snackers' massive hand, Lupus held tightly onto Rayne's arm for support. Then Lupus hesitantly said, “He's... huge...” and the raccoon's smile exploded out.

“**Huge, huh? What if I'm normal sized and you two Petritans are just small?**” Snackers chuckled, his fingers curling to create a bannister of bone and sinew for his passengers.

“**But you're Lupus, right? The sugar cube? Nice to meet you in person,**” the raccoon said in a friendly tone, flexing his thumb closer to Lupus as a gesture of kindness. Although hesitant with the offer, his paw grabbed onto Snackers' thumb tip and he shook as best as he could.

The wolf briefly turned away to conceal a shade of crimson on his cheek, muttering, “please don't call me sugar cube.” Lupus mumbled it beneath a breath, but the raccoon's satellite-dish sized ears still picked it up.

“**Come on, Lupy, you know why I love calling you that,**” Snackers sang down in his affectionate voice, causing Lupus to roll his eyes but also slightly wag his tail at the raccoon's calming voice.

“Because it's embarrassing?” Lupus mumbled, pretending to focus on something else other than this topic to give him time to compartmentalise.

“**No, silly. It's because you're like a little sugar cube,**” he explained, raising his palm closer to his maw. “**Your fur is snow white, you're small and just as sweet. How could I not?**”

Lupus' ears flicked, and he looked up at Snackers' lips, trying to hide a smile beneath his tail. “I still think it's a bit much,” he murmured, but there was no real protest in his voice.

Snackers grinned wider. “**Maybe, but it's true! You've always been so kind to me since we met in Rayne's group chat. Despite my size, you comforted me like a sweet little guardian angel.**”

The wolf huffed, but his cheeks flushed slightly under his white fur coat. “Well, you've helped me,” he said, though his tone was lighter now.

“**And that's why you're our sugar cube,**” Snackers declared triumphantly.

Lupus finally let out a soft laugh, slipping his tail out from his hands to sway behind his legs. “I do my best, but thank you.”

“**D'aww, you are even more adorable in person, Lupy! It's so epic to finally meet you!**”

He put on a smile, looking back to the raccoon, answering back. "Same to you, big guy." The wolf's hand retreated, but the thumb didn't follow. Instead, the tree-stump thick digit brushed down his arm.

"Daw, see?" Rayne teased. "The big racc likes you!"

Despite Lupus' pounding heart, a blush started to creep up his face. Still standing in the centre of Snackers' enormous palm, he couldn't resist a curious peek over the edge to get a better look at his towering friend. The wolf dropped to his knees and stomach, peeking his head past the raccoon's palm.

Most of the trees around were shoulder height, reduced to mere shrubs and bushes. Above the treetops, the woodland was a vast carpet of green that stretched to the horizon. The hilltops that they drove past were once again visible to the little canine. Far below, a perfectly straight trail of shoe prints marked Snackers' path, each one large enough to swallow Rayne's truck with room to spare.

Just as the pair settled on the raccoon's hand, they both noticed a small movement near the raccoon's neck. Nestled comfortably within the folds of Snackers' purple scarf was a tiny figure. When they squinted to get a better look, the figure shifted, revealing itself to be Deko, the raccoon's ankle-high boyfriend.

Deko's sky blue fur contrasted with the raccoon's grey strands. The little folf snuggled into the scarf, with only his head and shoulders visible above the soft fabric. Clad in a black crop top and thin, tight shorts. His bright eyes sparkled with joy as he waved to Lupus and Rayne.

"Hey there!" Deko's voice was surprisingly strong for his size, carrying easily to the two canine's ears despite the distance.

Shyly, Lupus grinned, the surreal nature of where he stood momentarily forgotten. "Good to see you at last, Deko. Quite the view you must have up there."

The folf chuckled and adjusted his position slightly within Snackers' scarf. "Yeah, it's pretty cosy. Snackers made sure I got the best views, and he walked very carefully."

The raccoon's eyes crinkled in a smile, while he sticks his tongue tip down to blep towards his lover. "**My lil' blueberry wanted to take me for walkies,**" he said with a hint of pride.

"Do you always carry him like that?"

"**Not always,**" the raccoon replied. He pulled at his collar to let the folf slide down momentarily and let it go, securing his boyfriend to the base of his slim neck, pinned close to his pulse.

"You're quite stunning." Lupus' remark sparked a light grin from Snackers.

"**Thanks, Lupy! I thought they added a bit of flair to my look.**" He wiggled his toes inside the shoe, stretching the socks in the process. "**You know, even Vastelerians like to dress for the occasion.**"

Rayne, with Lupus, nodded in agreement. "It suits you, Snackers. Very stylish."

The raccoon beamed at the compliment. "**Aren't you two just the sweetest?**"

"But where did you get clothes that big? Do you have growth tech in the US too?"

Snackers smiled. “Well, yeah. I had to pay for the clothes to be enlarged twenty fold.” He swung his hips for show, vibrating the ground. **“There’s this company, Concordia Couture, that specialises in catering for Vastelerian femboys like me.”**

Deko interjected. “Well, Vastelerians in general, really. They use technology that works on the same principle as upscaling images. Most high street retailers wouldn’t cater to big folks like Snackers because it doesn’t make any commercial sense to stock sizes that high. So what Concordia Couture does is upscale mundane materials at the molecular level using a recursive logic algorithm.”

“So in English: ‘Teeny thing goes in, normal size thing comes out.’”

Rayne and Lupus’ eyes widened in curiosity. “Concordia Couture? That sounds fancy.”

Snackers nodded. **“Oh, it is. They’re amazing. However, I had to get my shoes custom made since growth tech is still in the developmental stages. The best it can do is grow objects with one, at most two materials.”** Lupus looked at Snackers Converse, speechless. **“I sent them my paw measurements, and they crafted my Converse to fit. I’m a size two hundred and eighteen, apparently.”** Snackers continued.

“Size two...hundred...?”

“And eighteen, yes! Deko adores my two hundred and eighteen sized paws.” Snackers added. **“Custom made, just like my phone.”**

Lupus tilted his head. “A custom phone too? I can’t even imagine how that works.”

Snackers reached into his pocket and pulled out a phone the size of a cinema screen. **“Yep! I had to commission a tech company to design it to match my outfit. It’s functional, just like a regular-sized phone, but huge.”**

“That’s incredible. Wow, the amount of work, resources, and labour invested in creating a single phone is astonishing!” Lupus said as he stared at the mobile. “How do you even charge it?”

“With my battery pack, silly.” After snickering, the raccoon tucked the phone back into his pocket. **“It is. But it’s worth it. I mean, just because I’m a Vastelerian, it doesn’t mean I don’t want to enjoy the same things as everyone else. Plus, it’s nice to have some semblance of normalcy, even if my ‘normal’ is much larger than most.”**

Rayne smiled. “Everyone deserves to feel comfortable and stylish, no matter their size. I’m glad there are companies out there catering to your needs.” He insisted and looked at Lupus. “Do you have that in the UK?”

Lupus pondered as he scratched his chin. “Not a big enough market. I know there are some specialty stores, but the Vastelerian population is small in the UK.”

“I mean, you live on an island, to be fair.” Snackers jibed, while his eyes surveyed the wolf’s reaction.

Lupus shrugged. “I guess. But we have an enlargement tax, so it’s pricey.”

Snackers raised an eyebrow. **“An enlargement tax? That’s a new one. How does that work?”**

“Tax applied to scaled-up goods or services for Vastelerians. It makes everything even more expensive for them, sadly.”

Rayne frowned. “That sounds unfair. It’s like they’re being penalised just for being big.”

Lupus agreed. “It’s one reason there aren’t many Vastelerians in the UK. It’s a real barrier.”

“Our government does the opposite. They encourage Vastelerians in the US,” Snackers commented in a bodacious manner, compelling Lupus to face him.

“That’s right, you’re one of those emotional support Vastelerians!” Lupus blurted out in realisation, sparking a nod from the raccoon.

“Yep!” The raccoon responded in pride as a smile tugged his lips. “I help people overcome their fear of being stepped on by us.”

“That’s so cool!”

“It is. I wanna help people conquer their megalopateophobia, ya know?” He took a breath before continuing. **“The government pays for my clothes, food, and accommodation. Society can’t be scared of a portion of its population.”**

“A larger portion of the population,” Lupus spoke jovially with a beaming smile. “How do you cure them? Is it like shock therapy?”

“Exactly! They stand on the floor, while I stomp around them. Show them the power of my big, size two hundred and eighteen stompers—” he stopped for a moment to gaze down at Deko with a playful grin. **“After our session, I muzzle them and let them go on their merry way.”**

“Damn, that’s so sweet!” Lupus commented.

“It’s fun. I practised on Deko to prepare for the interview, and sometimes to test different approaches. Right, Deko?”

“Y-Yeah, you do—” Deko soon flustered, until he shook his head. “Anyway, enough of that. Should we get going?”

“Sure sweetie,” Snackers nodded thoughtfully. **“I hope you’re ready for a wild ride to the lake house. We don’t wanna miss the sunset and stargazing!”**

Snackers then turned his attention to the Raptor, still in his grasp. Delicately, he plucked the truck between two fingers, handling it as though it were a piece of jewellery. He carefully slipped it into a large pocket on the side of his pink shorts, ensuring it was secure and tucked away.

“The pocket will keep your lil’ hot wheel truck safe, Rayne. The other pocket’s reserved for Deko’s stuff and my backpack for mine.” Snackers said with a satisfied grin. **“Now you two.”**

With the same delicate precision he had shown the Raptor, he brought his hand closer and carefully plucked Rayne up first. The wolf-shepherd felt a gentle yet firm grip encircle him as he was lifted into the air. Then Snackers slotted the canine beside Deko within his purple scarf, ensuring he was secure inside.

“There you go,” Snackers spoke softly, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth as Deko welcomed Rayne with a hug.

Next, Snackers’ emerald eyes turned to Lupus. This time, the raccoon’s slender fingers curled around him, securing him in place within a loose, meaty fist. Lupus sighed as he melted into the smooth, pliable, and warm raccoon pad. The squishy beans supported his body, both front and back like a mattress. Just as his anxiety dwindled away little by little, Snacked placed him beside Rayne and Deko.

Deko grinned at Lupus. “Lupy!!! Welcome to the best seat in the house!” The scarf was warm and cosy, its fabric enveloping them in a protective embrace.

Lupus, Rayne, and Deko wiggled comfortably into the raccoon’s neck fur. The giant scarf billowed and swirled through the air as it wrapped snugly around the three figures within. It was a protective cocoon of fabric that held them against Snackers’ slender neck. The strong scent of Snackers’ coconut deodorant enveloped them.

“There we go,” Snackers said comfortingly. **“Everyone’s safe and sound. Let’s go camping,”** He cooed towards his stored friends and flexed his calves as he marched off again, his strides vibrating the pathway.

Calmly, Snackers started to follow the narrow dirt road towards the lake house, enjoying the slight tickling of his tiny compatriots against his neck. The blue striped scarf gently shifted with each stride, creating a gentle rocking sensation to comfort the little creatures inside. He couldn’t resist releasing a harmonious purr that massaged his little friend’s backs, while they peered out from above the fabric folds to watch his movements.

“T-This is...,” Lupus breathed with an expanding smile. “Amazing!”

To the wolf’s left, Rayne brushed his shoulder against Lupus’ arm. “It’s incredible, isn’t it? Snackers even comes with his own massage chair.” The wolf-shepherd asserted and stroked a palm down the length of the raccoon’s chattering neck.

Held in the cosy perch within Snackers’ scarf, they both admired the femboy’s movements and scenes below. They watched the raccoon’s hips sway in a hypnotic fashion as he walked between the trees that struggled to surpass his collarbone. His arms swung lightly at his sides, and each step he took sent his Converse shoes thumping softly onto the soil. Each footstep was conducted with grace and precision to avoid agitating the local creatures. That massive, ringed, traincar-long tail followed behind, swaying elegantly behind him.

Snackers spared a glance down to his neck, his emerald eyes sparkling with amusement. **“Enjoying the view, boys?”** he asked, his voice a rumbling purr that vibrated through their bodies.

Lupus shifted behind the scarf and turned up to meet Snackers’ cheerful gaze. “Absolutely! It’s so beautiful from up here.”

“Only the best for my tiny friends,” Snackers insisted and raised a finger to press into Lupus’ abdomen gently. **“I’m so happy to finally see you.”**

As Snackers continued his graceful strides through the forest, the trees gradually started to thin out and make way for a green field. Lupus, still admiring the view from above, noticed a shimmering light in the distance. He squinted, trying to make out the source of the glimmer.

“Look!” he exclaimed, pointing excitedly. “I think I see the lake house!”

Rayne and Deko craned their necks to get a better view. Rayne, his voice calm and loud, confirmed, “Yep, that’s it. It’s all ours for the weekend.”

It didn’t take long for Snackers to resume their conversation. When he did, he smiled at the trio. **“Hold on tight, guys. We’re almost there.”**

No sooner did the raccoon pick up his pace slightly, bobbing along the dirt path, the ground flying beneath them as the femboy beelined for the lake house. As they neared the building, the dirt path widened, revealing a picturesque view of a house overlooking Lake Glendale. It was a rustic, two-story building constructed of wood and numerous small box pane windows with vanilla curtains concealing the interior.

Snackers started to slow down as he neared it, while he raised a hand to fish out Deko, Rayne, and Lupus from his scarf. **“And we’re here!”** Snackers sang, curling his fingers around them into a fist. **“I’ll set you down here, if that’s okay?”**

Lupus and Rayne nodded, while Deko replied, “Sure babe!” as the raccoon bent to his knees.

Unlike earlier, when it came to placing his friends down, Snackers was a little more firm. Often, he’d hold his friends in a fist between fingers and palm pad, rather than a flattened palm. When the raccoon’s hand met the ground, his fingers loosened and gave them space to slide onto the grass next to his left foot.

“Let me grab your stuff,” Snackers whispered. His upper-body shifted and paws slipped into both pockets.

Lupus watched, entranced for the moment by the gigantic creature above him. The raccoon’s muscles bulged as he dug into his pocket, his fur ruffling along his arms like bushes caught in a breeze. Whether or not it was intentional, Snackers gave his little friends a show.

“Thank you, dude,” Rayne responded. “Just be gentle with my baby.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be gentle—” a muffled clunk came from the pocket.

Rayne’s ears perked. “Ahhh, be careful!”

“I am, I am,” Snackers insisted, withdrawing the pickup and Deko’s suitcase to place it next to the quaint lake house opposite the garage door. **“See? No harm done to your lil’ hot wheel,”** he announced to the wolf-shepherd.

Without hesitation, Rayne ran to his truck and checked it to ensure it was in good condition. No bumps, not even a scratch. “Phew—” he exclaimed with a sigh, while he ran his hands over the hood.

“So dramatic,” Snackers grinned at Rayne. His emerald eyes sparkled with amusement.

Rayne turned and looked up, his tail wagging. “Hey, can you blame me? This truck is my baby.”

Deko and Lupus, still standing next to the raccoon’s left footpad, laughed at Rayne’s antics. The folf leaned over and whispered to Lupus, “Rayne and his truck. It’s always a sight to see.”

Snackers inhaled the crisp air. **“Alright, put your stuff in the house,”** he directed. **“We’ve got a lot of fun ahead of us.”** The raccoon’s tail swayed as he slipped off his backpack, laying it down by the garage.

“Alright, see you in a sec, big guy!” Deko said as he fished out the lake house keys from his pocket and collected his suitcase by his boyfriend’s toe.

Just before the arctic wolf made his way to the truck, Rayne announced, “I’ll get our luggage, Lupy.”

Lupus gave him a look like he wanted to come help him, but stayed put. He watched as Rayne and Deko disappeared into the house, then turned his attention back to Snackers, who now loomed above him like a friendly, furry obstacle course. The arctic wolf rubbed the back of my neck, a bit of awkwardness creeping into his voice as he replied, “It’s good to see you too, mate. But, it’s weird, you know? Seeing you all in person rather than with a bunch of pixels.”

“It’s so good to see you, Lupy!” Snackers sang to Lupus. The raccoon sat down, the terrain trembling, with both his hands behind him. He extended both his legs out parallel to the western flank of the house.

A wall of fur blossomed at Lupus’ back as Snacker’s thighs fluffed against the ground. It was a living scaffold that called the wolf to climb it, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

Lupus let out a short laugh, before poking back, “You too! You’re a lot bigger than your profile picture.”

“Very Big.” Snackers nodded, his humongous tail thumping against the ground behind him.

“It’s good to be here with you, mate.” He paused for a moment, his expression softening as he looked back at the house where Rayne went inside.

“Agreed. I’m so glad Rayne convinced you to come along.”

“Yeah, I’m glad to. He’s always been there, especially on the day we met.”

“What do you mean, sweetie?”

“I mean, we met in a group chat with some mutual Petritan friends where I was just ranting about UK life I guess, and he poked me a dm one day. We barely knew each other back then, but that gesture—it meant a lot.”

Snackers’ ears twitched at the comment while his eyelids widened. **“That’s how you met?! What...a...sweetheart!”**

The wolf nodded, feeling a warm flush spread through him as he reminisced about that first message.

“Yeah, and Rayne’s looked out for me ever since. Now, I’m here.”

Pausing, Lupus glanced back at the raccoon. However, he stared at Snackers’ massive, fluffy thigh. The femboy’s leg, now extended as he lounged, was a wall of soft grey fur that seemed to swallow Lupus’ entire field of vision. He went quiet, overwhelmed.

“Go ahead, Lupy,” the raccoon whispered with a glowing compassion. **“Make yourself comfortable.”**

He eagerly accepted the Snackers’ invitation and raised both hands to meet the femboy’s exposed thigh. The velvety fur strands provided enough support for Lupus to hoist himself up. It felt like scaling a big cuddly teddy bear.

“There ya go, lil’ guy,” Snackers said softly, watching Lupus’ progress with a fond smile. **“Careful though, sweetheart.”** He muttered and slid a hand behind the wolf, just in case.

“I-I’m alright Snaccy, don’t worry” the wolf replied between grunts as he pulled himself up to the top of Snackers’ thigh. “T-There, see!” he said, breathless but exhilarated.

Lupus mimicked Snackers’ position. Legs spread out across the smooth, pink fabric, while his back leaned into the warm embrace of the raccoon’s stomach. “This...is nice,” the wolf sighed and let the flesh and fur of Snackers’ belly cushion his body.

The raccoon’s grin widened. **“And it’s all yours, Lupus,”** he says, his voice a gentle purr that sends a shiver of delight down Lupus’ spine. Snackers reached down with a finger, gently ruffling the wolf’s hair. **“All yours. You deserve it.”**

“I...” was all the wolf could say when the raccoon’s digit stroked between his ears. Lupus rushed both arms up to pull Snackers’ finger to meet his chest. But Snackers had more in store. He flopped his striped, elongated tail in front of the wolf’s lap.

“Shushhhh,” he muttered, pressing his finger against Lupus’ lips. “Relax while the others unpack, -kay? You aren’t going anywhere,” Snackers insisted and stroked Lupus’ cheek with that same finger.

“Wait, where are you putting your stuff?” Lupus interrupted as the raccoon’s finger playfully brushed his frame.

Snackers pointed over to the garage. **“There,”** was the raccoon’s only response.

“Um, mate, I don’t think your bag will fit through the door—” Lupus was cut off by Snackers’ rumbling chuckle.

“Haven’t you got ERAS installed in your buildings back in the UK?”

“Eras? What do you mean, eras?”

“No, ERAS. I think it means ‘Elevated Roof Access System.’ Snackers spoke, while he withdrew his finger from the wolf’s cheek to rest down onto Lupus’ lap. **“It’s to help Vastelerians working for emergency and mental health services retrieve people inside their homes without damaging the building.”**

“W-Wow—”

“Wow, indeed. But, we can still use it for our own purposes,” Snackers insisted with a mischievous glint appearing in his eyes. **“So, later. I’ll toss some of my stuff in the garage later. Now, relax, Lupy.”**

Lupus nodded and stretched both arms to brush through Snacker’s tail fur. As he melted beneath the fluffy appendage, he watched Rayne and Deko moving suitcases and boxes around through the windows. He knew Snackers could do the job quickly, but the femboy’s insistence on keeping him between thigh and tail made it all the more heartwarming.

Lupus glanced up, his sapphire eyes shining. “Understood, my friend.”

“Good,” Snackers whispered, resting a finger along the wolf’s lap. **“So, tell me about your life in the UK, Lupus.”**

Held by a finger into the raccoon’s squishy thigh, Lupus placed two palms on the fluffy digit. Lupus breathed deeply and reflected on his life across the Atlantic. “It’s different, very different from here,” he started. “Specifically, you drive on the wrong side-.”

Snackers rapidly shook his head. **“Lupy, your country drives on the wrong side,”** he chortled.

“Nah, you do, but anyways—” The wolf nestled into the raccoon’s squishy stomach. “Well, it’s been interesting, to say the least. The weather is usually cold, but that’s perfect to keep up my running.”

“Oh yeah, that’s right, you run,” the femboy replied, raising his other knee up to get comfy on the field. **“But are you faster than me?”** Snackers gestured to himself with a playful grin.

“Maaaaybe,” Lupus challenged with a smirk.

Snackers raised an eyebrow. **“Oh yeah? Are you sure about that, Lupus? I mean, look at the size of me.”** He plucked the wolf between thumb and finger, positioning him on the summit of his kneecap. **“Maybe I’ll challenge you to race.”**

Lupus gulped hard to drown out the flutter of nerves in his stomach. He veiled himself with a grin. “Bring...it...on.”

“Alright, if you say so. But don’t say I didn’t warn you.” He gently shifted upright, ensuring to keep the kneecap steady for Lupus. **“How about we do it now?”** The raccoon said with a smirk.

Lupus paused. His heart skipped a beat. The wolf glanced at Snacker’s gigantic emerald eyes and then turned to see Rayne and Deko, who paused their unpacking to watch. Suddenly Lupus’ view of the pair was replaced with fluffy darkness as Snackers’ fingers enveloped him. Snackers gently lifted him off his slim kneecap and put him on the ground.

“Okay,” Snackers muttered and shifted his weight to stand up. After, he untied his striped scarf, letting it slither from his shoulders to the ground as dust kicked up. He stretched his limbs, pointing across the field to an oak tree shrouded in amber and bronze. **“We’ll race to that big tree across the field and back. Are you ready?”**

Although Lupus realised his mistake in challenging his twelve-storey tall friend, he maintained his bravado. The wolf slipped off his chequered flannel, squatted down, and raised his hips. “I’m, uh, ready.”

“Would you like a head start?” Snackers teased down and arched his body to match Lupus’ running pose. **“Or are you still confident you can beat me, Lupy?”**

Lupus stopped for a second and stared at his Vastelerian opponent. Possessing such a svelte figure did nothing to detract from the fact that this behemoth of raccoon rivalled an apartment building for size. Cast in the raccoon’s shadow, the wolf gulped a second time and muttered out, “Yes.”

“Alright! On your mark...get set...go!” Snackers projected.

They both set off. Their competitive spirit briefly overshadowed whatever friendship these two possessed.

Adrenaline pumped through Lupus' body. A gentle breeze picked up, carrying with it the fragrance of freshly cut grass and distant wildflowers. He felt the vibrations of his shoes pounding the soil, but above all, he sensed the subtle tremors of the raccoon's steps. Hesitantly, the wolf glanced over his firm shoulder to glance at Snackers hurtling towards him- slowly?

Unlike Lupus, who dashed forward, Snackers moved at a walking pace. The raccoon's green eyes remained fixated on him as Snackers gained ground. It didn't take long for the femboy to overtake him, swinging his Converse-clad foot overhead. The shifting footwear reverberated through the air around Lupus until it thumped down in front of him. Displaced dirt radiated out in a cloud, temporarily obscuring the wolf's path.

Coughing and blinking against the dust cloud, Lupus frantically swiped at the air in front of him to clear his vision. He never broke his stride, but the dirt stubbornly hung in the air and entered his maw. While he battled the aftermath of Snackers' footsteps, he could hear the faint, but distinct sound of the raccoon's footsteps drawing farther away.

Finally, the dust began to settle. Lupus blinked a few times to expel the last remnants of the cloud from his eyes. As his vision cleared, he noticed that Snackers had halted to tap a fingertip onto the tip of the Oak tree.

“Slow poke—” Snackers teased back down to Lupus, and pivoted on his heel after he muttered, **“catch me if you can, Lupy!”**

Heart pounding, adrenaline pumping. Lupus watched as the gigantic femboy nonchalantly strolled back. Those seismic booms struck again when Snackers strode towards him. The wolf watched, wide-eyed, as the raccoon spared a wink as he lunged past him.

By the time Lupus reached the Oak wood tree, Snackers projected, **“YAYYYY!! Victory!”**

The wolf stopped by the tree and slumped against it. Panting and exhausted, Lupus slid down to the ground, his chest heaving. He raised a hand to wipe the sweat from his brow and muzzle. When he looked up, he saw Snackers swing a leg forward and thump his cyan blue converse in front of him. The sound was sharp, like a celebratory drumbeat.

“Phew, that was fun!” Snacks exclaimed and fell until he was on par with Lupus. **“You were so, so close!”**

Lupus wiped the last trickle of sweat from his face while he stared at the gigantic shoe for a moment, then up at Snackers' beaming visage. A reassuring smile grew across his snout as the raccoon offered a fingertip to the canine.

“I-I made it...halfway, at least—” Lupus wheezed and grasped Snackers' waiting finger to hoist himself up.

“Exactly!” He pressed a finger across the wolf's sweat-drenched, bare chest. **“Now, let's give you a shower—”** Snackers muttered and drew his muzzle closer to fill Lupus' vision.

“Uhh, S-Snackers, what are you-?” Lupus stuttered, while the raccoon's warm breath washed over him like a gentle breeze, a minty aroma mixed into its gust.

“You are so sweet, Lupus,” Snackers said, his voice dropping to a playful whisper that still tickled the wolf's ears. **“I wonder if you taste just as sweet.”**

Before Lupus could react, Snacker's mouth parted to reveal the salivating pink cavern. Two rows of teeth marinated in raccoon drool parted, allowing his tongue to slide through. The enormous pink muscle slipped out. It was nearly as wide as Lupus was tall, and the thought of being licked by it was nerve-rattling. Snackers hovered it just inches from Lupus, close enough that the wolf could feel the heat radiating from it.

"Snackers, don't you dare eat him!" Rayne called from behind, but in a tone that was more amused than alarmed.

As much as Lupus wanted to snarl at Rayne for his inability to take the situation seriously, his eyes were fixated at Snacker's massive tongue. It twitched slightly, flicking at the open air as more of its length slithered from the raccoon's lips.

"Relax, silly little Rayne," Snackers purred loud enough to vibrate the wolf's innards. **"I'm just havin' a bit of fun."** He giggled back to Rayne and brushed Lupus' snow-white fur with a tongue tip.

Lupus shivered at the contact. The raccoon's tongue was warm and slightly damp, while the texture was rougher than he expected. Snackers' tongue tip glossed over his elbow, leaving behind a trail of dampened fur as it climbed toward his face..

"This—" Lupus finally managed to speak. "This is not a shower dude. Ew!" He grunted, flicking off a strand off a strand of raccoon drool from his cheek.

The raccoon pulled his tongue back. **"Don't worry, I won't actually lick you completely. Unless you want me to, of course?"** he teased, lifting the massive pink muscle over Lupus once again.

"I think I'll pass, thanks." Lupus laughed softly, but leaned to the side to lock eyes with Rayne. "Thanks for help, by the way," he grunted.

"Of course, you are welcome." Rayne smugly smiled back. "You are absolutely welc—" He stopped when Snackers quickly spun around to show off his drooling tongue to him.

"Want some too, Rayne?" Snackers snickered to him.

"Uhh, no I'm good," Rayne replied, backing away slightly.

Snackers grinned mischievously and dropped onto all fours, inching and crawling closer to Rayne with his tongue hanging out. **"Come on, just a little taste,"** he growled playfully.

Rayne stepped back again. "Seriously, dude, I'm fine!" He raised his hands defensively, while he tried to put some distance between himself and the raccoon.

The wolf struggled to suppress a chuckle as he watched the scene unfold. "Looks like you've got a new friend, Rayne."

Rayne shot Lupus a mock glare before turning his attention back to Snackers, who was now just a few steps away. "Alright, alright! You win!" He laughed nervously. "Just...stay over there, okay?"

Snackers stopped and slipped his tongue back inside. **"Fine, I'll spare you this time,"** he said with a playful wink.

Soon, wisps of clouds caught fire, igniting in colours of vibrant orange against a canvas of darkening blue. The raccoon's whiskers twitched as the temperature cooled, ears flicking with the rustle of leaves in the evening breeze.

"Alright, Lupy, come on. Let's go get you a shower while we set up the campsite, okay-?" Snackers ordered in his nurturing voice just as the cool breeze picked up around them.

"Hey, babe-!" Deko shouted from the lake house and summoned Snackers' attention, who turned to face the wolf. "Why don't you help him up to the room?"

"No, it-it's okay—" Lupus began, but paused when the raccoon turned back to him with a playful glint in his eyes.

"Too late, come here, Lupy. We gotta beat the sunset." Before Lupus could interject, Snackers scooped him up into one gentle hand. The raccoon's fingers curled as his hand lifted, raising the fluffy cargo towards his smiling muzzle with the greatest of care.

The raccoon carried his precious charge with ease while his steps resonated through the ground.

Approaching the lake house, Snackers squatted down beside it. Even with his knees to his chest this way, he still towered over the wooden building, a revelation that the others quickly picked up on. Then the raccoon brought Lupus up to the large window, offering a glimpse of his bedroom for the weekend.

"Here we are," Snackers said tenderly, slipping a claw beneath the window to slide it up. **"Go ahead and freshen up."**

After the raccoon set Lupus down on the window ledge, the wolf slipped inside and turned to meet Snackers. "Thanks, Snackers. I'll be quick."

"No rush," Snackers replied with a hearty smile. **"Take your time. We'll be right here when you're ready."**

Despite the loss to him racing, Lupus couldn't help but nod and flash a grin to the raccoon. "No peeking, alright?" Lupus giggled and drew the curtains shut.

However, Lupus paused when he heard a soft tap against the window. He drew the thick, embroidered curtains open, and revealed the raccoon nose behind them. Snacker's large, curious eye peered intently through the glass, his nose pressed against the window pane, causing it to fog up slightly with each exhale.

A smile spread across Lupus' maw at the sight of his new friend, unable to resist snickering at Snackers' comical yet breathtaking appearance. Lupus swung the curtain over the window, unlocking and opening it just enough to speak to his masked companion.

"Snackers, come on, no peeking," Lupus said with a hint of amusement, triggering the raccoon's ears to perk. "I *neeeeed* to shower—"

"I know, I'm just standing guard," Snackers' beamed proudly. **"Your own personal guard dog, racc... something, I guess—"** he added with a subtle snicker.

Lupus crossed his arms. "Uh huh," he said with a raised eyebrow, slipping off his chequered flannel and tossing it onto the bed. "I'm still gonna close the curtains, Snaccy."

“Okay Lupy, but I’ll stay here,” Snackers responded defiantly.

“Snackers, come ‘ere-!” Deko urged in a high-pitched, and added, “Or no walkies tomorrow.”

Snackers whined, **“Walkies?”** The word echoed in his mind and made him reluctantly pull back from the window. He left a misty print on the glass. The raccoon glanced at Deko, who pressed a hand against the white rubber rim of his Converse shoe.

“Yes, walkies,” Deko affirmed, his tiny hand still stroking Snacker’s shoe. “Now, let Lupy shower. We’ll go for walkies tomorrow, okay?”

“Walkies!” said Snackers, swaying his tail energetically. **“Alright, alright. I’ll move, babe.”** He tiptoed away from the window and sat down with a thump that almost knocked Deko off his feet. But, he still kept a watchful eye on Lupus through the window, ever the vigilant guardian.

Lupus chuckled. He faced the folf, then glanced up at the raccoon, the spectacle of a giant raccoon expanding his grin. Finally, he pulled the curtains closed.

The raccoon’s expansive eyes never strayed from Lupus’ bedroom, even as the arctic wolf disappeared behind the vanilla curtains.

With the curtains drawn, Lupus headed to the bathroom. As the wolf strolled, he could hear the muffled sounds of laughter and chatter from outside. Although he was thousands of miles from home, the thought of homesickness never crossed his mind. This holiday had barely even started, but now he’d arrived, it would certainly be one to remember.