In a small cut between slabs of granite, a small beach lay nestled between the boughs of wooded greenery on shore. Clear green water lapped gently on the brown pebbly sand with a soft hiss, before receding gently once more. The mid-day sun shone brightly, imparting a golden warmth to the surroundings. To one side of the cove was a rocky outcropping, which jut sharply into the cool green water beyond. Directly above a sprawling oak leaned precariously towards the ocean, sea-hardened roots defiantly gripping the rocky ground even as it crumbled beneath it. Perched on one of its lofty boughs was a small sparrow, almost invisible among the branches and leaves. Rico was an appealing if somewhat ordinary bird. Charmingly plump with mottled brown feathers, he could easily pass unnoticed when hidden in the treetops.

The sparrow ruffled his feathers nervously, appearing to poof up a bit as he hopped back and forth across the rough bark of his perch. He’d been here several times over the last few days, for it was here that the recipient of his affections stood each day to preen her fair feathers. Not that she knew of him, of course. Before coming to the coast, Rico had never seen a bird like her, yet now each day he stood and waited just to catch a glimpse of her from the treetops.

Sweet Sylvia. Silver Sylvia. Sylvia was a gull.

It was this that complicated things to the point that he’d been too afraid to even introduce himself, despite having overheard her name raucously called out by others of her kind. He longed to speak to her, yet at the same time the prospect terrified him. Making his affections known to another sparrow would be difficult enough, but approaching a large, and potentially dangerous bird with such feelings brought his unease to a new level. Yet he couldn’t deny his feelings. He’d known he’d have to try since he’d first laid eyes on her.

Gulping nervously, he willed himself to step from his perch and descend to the graceful figure preening herself below.

Rico landed behind the gull with a gentle little hop, folding his wings and ruffling his feathers nervously. He took a deep breath, wanting to make a good first impression with his introduction, but for a moment nothing would come out of his beak.

“H...hello?” he finally managed, cringing inwardly as the words came out as more of a squeak. Not exactly the confidence he had been hoping for.

Sylvia turned, glaring at him with sharp golden eyes. She looked far bigger up close than he’d realized, even having done his best to prepare himself for this moment. She cocked her head to the side, eying him almost with an air of curiosity. He wanted to take a step closer, but was too afraid to move.

“What do you want?” she asked tersely. Although the words weren’t the friendliest, her tone of voice wasn’t hostile. The fact gave Rico a little bit more confidence.

“Um…” he trailed off, suddenly feeling very embarrassed. How would he tell this gull, a bird he’d only just met, and another species at that...that he had feelings for her? The very idea of it was preposterous.

“Come on, spit it out little guy” Sylvia said, suddenly looking impatient.

Rico instinctively took a few hops back at her pointed glance, fear welling up inside of him despite himself.

“I just uh…” what to say...what to say! Rico’s mind drew a blank.

“I just wanted to say hi-to...introduce myself!” he finished lamely.

Sylvia looked unimpressed.

“You are a funny little fella, aren’t ya?” she asked, casting him an appraising stare. The graceful movements of her head and neck transfixed Rico, to the point he could only nod in agreement with her statement. She gazed toward the sea, before turning back to him, almost like he was an afterthought. For a moment Rico had been sure she was about to fly away.

“Well...you wanted to introduce yourself. You got a name little bit?”

There it was. A flush of joy spread through the amorous sparrow. Sylvia had asked him for his name. A lowly sparrow! He flushed giddily, feathers standing on end.

“It’s Rico!” he chirped excitedly.

“My name’s Rico!”

Sylvia bowed her head slightly, seeming almost to smile as she looked at him.

“Well Rico, nice knowing ya” she said, spreading her wings.

As Sylvia went to fly away, Rico felt a panic overcome him. He had so much still to say!

“W...wait!” he exclaimed, words falling on deaf ears. Sylvia flapped her wings, taking to the air.

“Sylvia!” he called out, not thinking.

Sylvia paused midair, and then dropped back to the ground, turning towards him.

“How do you know my name?” she asked, approaching a little close for comfort.

Rico backed away, scared by the intensity of her gaze, but didn’t flee despite his instincts screaming at him to get away. He hadn’t meant to share that little bit of information with her, at least not yet. The sparrow was afraid that the idea he’d been watching her would come off the wrong way.

“Come on, spit it out pipsqueak” she said, looking a little annoyed now.

“I ah...overheard it from the trees...up there” Rico said nervously, motioning with a wing back to where he’d been perched.

Sylvia tilted her head to the side.

“Have you been spying on me?” she asked, voice no longer threatening. If anything, she sounded a little puzzled.

“No!...well..um..I guess a little, yes” Rico confessed, not wanting to lie to her.

“Why?” she asked bluntly.

Rico swallowed nervously. He felt like he was choking on his own words. He knew she wouldn’t wait for him much longer. It was now or never!

“I...I love you!” he finally blurted, instantly regretting the words once they’d left his beak.

“Oh, ok little fella…”

Sylvia looked visibly taken aback, seeming unsure for a split second. Then she laughed, a joyous sound, but one that cut Rico to the bone.

“…So, let me get this straight. You spied on me and introduced yourself because you love me? You? A sparrow?”

“Yes!” Rico said softly.

“Heh...you’d only satisfy me one way” she said dismissively.

Rico fluffed his feathers nervously. It didn’t take a genius to understand what she was referring to.

“Would you just...give me a chance?” he asked meekly, hating that fear caused him to stutter through his words.

“Trust me, you don’t want that.” Sylvia said flatly.

“I’m not a nice bird, especially to little nuggets like you.”

A single tear rolled down the sparrow’s cheek. His heart felt like it was being wrung through the talons of a raptor.

“But..but you’re so beautiful” he said, terrified by her words. Did she really see him as food? The thought was dizzying. He was close enough she could probably snatch him with her beak if she wanted to.

Sylvia smiled, seeming almost to bow at the compliment.

“You are a little sweetheart, huh?” she asked, eyes softening a bit.

Rico looked up from the ground, meeting the gull’s gaze. A small bit of hope welled within him. He just wanted to be near her...to talk to her alone was gratifying. He allowed himself a shy smile, trying to forget the apprehension that gnawed at his innards.

“Because of that I won’t take a snap at you” she said, spreading her wings once more and taking flight. Rico didn’t try to follow her, knowing better than that. He watched as her elegant pinions disappeared out to sea, and then flitted back to his own perch, heart heavy. He supposed it was always going to end like this. At least she hadn’t eaten him.

…..

Rico spent much of the next morning trying not to think about what had happened, but staying away from his overlook proved to be impossible, and he soon found himself stealing a glance at the shore despite himself.

Sylvia stood in her usual location, preening her feathers seemingly without a care in the world. A rush of passion and apprehension welled up in Rico’s breast at the sight of her. He had to try again; he knew he’d never be happy with himself if he didn’t. His wings felt like lead as he willed himself off his perch, landing awkwardly next to her.

Sylvia turned towards him as he landed, catching his fluttering motion in the corner of her eye.

“You again?” she asked, craning her neck.

“H..hi!” Rico replied nervously.

“Hey there, nugget” Sylvia responded, eying him with decidedly hungry eyes.

Rico suddenly had the feeling he was far too close.

“H..have you thought more about...about what I said yesterday?” he asked, already feeling desperate as she took another step closer to him. He backed away nervously, but couldn’t bring himself to fly away. Not from her...not from his love.

Sylvia cocked her head to the side in amusement.

“You’re a cute little morsel, I’ll give ya that. It just wouldn’t work. You’re not ready for what I’m looking for.”

Rico didn’t know what to say. He knew what she wanted, yet he couldn’t bring himself to stay away. Not yet.

“We couldn’t try?” he finally implored, becoming increasingly uneasy. She was only a foot or two away from him now.

Sylvia shook her head, turning her golden eyes on him.

“Just fly away little guy. While you still can.”

Rico felt his blood run cold.

“W..what do you mean?” he asked, not wanting to believe his instincts.

“I’m gonna eat you” she said, bluntly spelling it out for him.

Rico’s eyes widened at the words, instincts finally wiping the rosy haze away. He spread his wings just as Sylvia lunged for him, sharp beak snapping at his tail as he took to the air in a fright, frantically flapping as hard as he could back for the tree line. As he landed, he looked back.

She hadn’t followed him. His heart rate slowed a bit as he watched her calmly preen her feathers for a while before flying away. Rico slumped against the bark of the tree, exhausted and defeated. He should’ve known better. She would never see him the way he saw her...it was foolish to believe otherwise, and he’d almost been eaten for it.

……..

That night Rico’s sleep was fitful and restless. The following morning, he awoke to the patter of raindrops against the leaves overhead. Sylvia was still on his mind. Earlier she’d made her intention to eat him pretty clear, yet he couldn’t help but wonder why she’d told him about it instead of simply grabbing him and gulping him down the second he’d approached too close. She definitely could fit him in her beak if she wanted to….and he was sure she could swallow him easily too after watching her daily squabbles over fish from his perch. He would’ve been easy prey willingly approaching her so closely. It didn’t add up.

The realization gave Rico pause. He felt a tiny spark of hope swell within him. Sylvia had spared him twice. Maybe she really did like him after all! He wasn’t sure how gulls handled courtship. His own feeble attempts thus far hadn’t seemed to work...yet he couldn’t extinguish the wild hope that there was some chance. He had to try again.

Waiting for mid-day felt like an eternity, but finally Rico saw Sylvia land on her perch for her daily preening. As he approached, she cast him a sideways glance, sweeping neck turning her sleek head to the side to study him.

“Come back again, little bit?” she asked, an air of nonchalance in her voice.

Rico stammered, unsure of what to say.

“I...I had to see you again” he finally managed, feeling a flush of embarrassment.

“E...even if it means…”

He swallowed nervously, almost unable to say it.

“Even if it means you might...eat...me. I just want to be near you. That you're a predator...who perhaps even only sees me as food...doesn't matter. I just…want to be with you.”

The words felt so pathetic. He looked at the ground, before meekly turning his gaze back up to her. He took a step closer, longing to feel the touch of those beautiful feathers, to hear her sweet voice, to know that everything was alright, even as every core of his instinct screamed at him not to!

Sylvia cocked her head, surveying him with those bright, beautiful eyes. In them was a greedy glint...a predator’s gaze.

Rico shuddered, terrified yet transfixed.

“Heh” she finally chuckled with a sinister grin, running her tongue along the edge of her beak

“If that's what you want, have it your way”

Rico knew what was going to happen next, yet he was frozen as her gaping beak came for him. At this point there was little chance of going back even if he'd wanted to.

It seemed all to happen in slow motion. A rush of terror...shame, guilt, and perhaps even a tremulous excitement at the sight of her long, wet tongue, glistening between outstretched jaws!

She snatched him up quickly. For a split second, the dark wetness of her ravenous gullet was visible, slick and pink and wet, big enough to swallow him whole!

Yet this view was whisked away as she rapidly snapped him up, jaws glomming hungrily onto him before lifting him effortlessly from the ground.

The hot, slippery wetness of her beak was shocking as he was squished by her tongue, feathers being soaked by her slobber. With a jerky little toss and some deft movements of her jaws she got him inside her beak completely, closing it tightly around him. The blood warmth inside her mouth was unlike anything he'd ever experienced...carnal, slick, slimy...sensual even!

The realization disgusted him. He was sick, deranged, insane? A rush of terror enveloped him. This was wrong. Regret overwhelmed him. He tried to choke back tears, but they came anyway. Pitiful.

“Oh please...please don't hurt me” he cried shrilly, his own words sounding pitiful to his ears.

Her tongue pressed up greedily against his belly, soaking his feathers...claiming him! Any second now he expected her to tip him back into her gullet and swallow him alive!

"Please...Sylvia!” he urged, throwing all of his desperate passion into his pleas. For a split second everything was still, and Sylvia just paused, holding him in her mouth.

Then with a quick shake side to side, she spat him out! Rico fell to the ground with a wet splat, his feathers rather thickly sodden in her saliva.

Gingerly, he looked up at her.

“You...you didn't…”

Sylvia shook her head.

“Today’s your lucky day, nugget. I'm not feeling hungry after all.”

Rico cocked his head to the side, sensing the words really had a double meaning.

“I...I'm glad you didn't e..eat me!” he replied, voice still trembling with fear.

“Don't make a habit of this, little bit” Sylvia replied, casting him a pointed gaze. Suddenly Rico felt himself come to his senses. He'd almost been eaten! He didn't have to think twice about her warning before spreading his slime-soaked wings and fleeing, leaving the gull behind without a word.

Back on the relative safety of his perch, Rico felt the rapid fluttering of his heart begin to slow. He took a few deep breaths as he pondered his situation and tried to calm down. He was in her mouth. The realization chilled him. Yet her scent was all over him, caked in his feathers. The realization made him oddly giddy. He couldn't pin down exactly why at first, until he remembered how it had felt...almost pleasurable? He shuddered in revulsion at the thought. There was no way he could’ve…enjoyed it. Was there? For sure not. And yet it drove him mad, that yearning to be so close, so intimate. In that one instant he'd been a part of the most basic of natural relationships. Predator and prey. He'd been hers, belonging to his sweet love completely! The experience had been so visceral, so intimate and so unlike anything else he'd ever experienced, he found himself lusting to feel that way again.

He had to go to her, even if it meant becoming her food. Today had proven it, and he didn't think his feelings could be denied any longer. First, though he had to see a friend. If there was anyone who could get him through this without becoming lunch, it was Magnus.

With a flit of brown wings, Rico took to the air, flying past the familiar trees of his home away from the coast.

His friend Magnus was a magpie. As a Corvid, he was wise in such matters. They'd been friends since both were nestlings. In the years since, Rico had grown to respect his intelligence and wisdom.

Soon he came upon a clearing in the forest, before heading towards a familiar tall tree. Magnus was preening as Rico approached. The corvid looked up, grinning beakily at the sight of his friend.

"Rico! Hey there!" he said, fanning his tail feathers. The magpie had an easygoing way about him that Rico envied.

The corvid turned to the sparrow, his grin fading as he saw Rico’s distraught expression.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm in trouble, Magnus"

"You, in trouble?"

the Magpie laughed, knowing Rico wasn't usually one to take chances.

"Yeah...I'm serious. I've fallen for someone...I've got it bad and I need your advice."

"Ohhh, who's the lucky bird?" the magpie crooned teasingly.

"Her name's Sylvia" Rico said tentatively.

"Come on, what's she like? I need details!" Magnus continued, ribbing him gently.

"Well…" Rico stopped for a moment, feeling a little flustered.

"....she's not a sparrow. Um…actually, she's a gull" he confessed sheepishly.

The Magpie cocked his head, silent for a moment.

"Heh, you ARE in trouble!" he finally chuckled, shaking his head.

"Gulls eat sparrows you know" he continued, keenly observing Rico's matted feathers.

"I uh...found that out" Rico replied miserably.

"I just...can't let this feeling go, you know?"

Magnus put a sleek wing over the sparrow’s back, bringing his head down to eye level.

"If I were you, I'd try to forget it" he said seriously, voice devoid of its former joviality.

"Look, are you going to help me or not?" Rico responded, feeling annoyed now.

Magnus looked at the ground for a moment, thinking.

"Look, I don't uh...think this is a good idea for you to pursue. Gulls are brutish and hungry. There's no way she'll feel the same way about you if she has any thoughts at all that you'd be more satisfying as a meal. And I hate to say it, but you're not exactly high up on the food chain."

"Oh, I know!" Rico said earnestly.

"Sylvia isn't like that! She's actually...kinda sweet!" he said, conscious that perhaps he was stretching the truth a little bit.

Magnus looked incredulous.

"She's let me go three times already" he continued, feeling desperate.

An awkward silence drew out.

"Please Magnus...I've tried everything I can think of!"

The magpie sighed heavily.

"Alright, I guess if you're set on doing this, I should at least give you whatever help I can."

Rico felt elation rush through him. With a corvid brain on his side, whatever plan he came up with was sure to work!

"Oh, thank you Magnus!" he gushed happily, hugging his friend.

"Alright, alright" Magnus replied, gently pushing the damp sparrow off his shiny plumage with a wing.

"So, what have you tried so far?"

Rico thought for a moment, realizing his efforts up until now hadn’t been particularly coordinated.

"I uh...introduced myself and uh…"

The memory already seemed painfully embarrassing. If there was anyone, he could trust with it though, it was Magnus.

"I...told her how I feel" he finished lamely.

"Aw Rico, no wonder she tried to eat you!"

Magnus shook his head.

"Look, if you wanna get the lady gull, you've got to be able to impress her. You're not gonna cut it as a sparrow."

"That's...not helpful, Magnus!" Rico chirped, sighing unhappily.

"Alright, well think of what gulls do during courtship. Anything that you know you could try on your own to win her over?"

"I'm not exactly familiar with gull courtship practices" Rico confessed.

Magnus tilted his head, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"Well...I've seen gulls offer their mate a gift...food usually. That seems to be a central part of pairing it off."

Rico brightened, getting an idea. A terrifying, wild, perhaps insane idea. But it just might work.

"That's it!" he enthused.

"Thank you, Magnus! You've been a great help!"

Rico spread his wings, turning towards the sea once more.

"Wait!"

Rico turned back to his friend. The magpie had an intense expression in his eyes, perhaps guessing what he had in mind.

"Be careful."

"I will" Rico promised, swallowing nervously.

………...

Sylvia was in her regular spot at the regular time, and seemed genuinely surprised when he landed close by once again.

Unlike yesterday, he was careful to stay a few feet away. Outside of her reach, there was little threat from the larger, less agile bird.

“I thought I’d scared you away for good, morsel” Sylvia said, well aware of his distance as she continued her preening.

Rico felt blood rush to his head, suddenly unsure of himself. He laughed nervously, hopping just a bit closer to her. What he was about to propose was…unorthodox, and intimate and it felt wrong to be shouting it from a distance.

“Sylvia…I want to talk to you…I…uh…”

She turned towards him, actually smiling.

Emboldened, he continued.

“You won’t…eat me if I come closer, will you?”

Sylvia bowed her head, intelligent eyes showing an interest obviously piqued.

“You’re safe for now, sparrow” she said.

An inward sigh of relief. Rico hopped closer, looking up earnestly at her.

“I’ve told you how I feel, and I know you aren’t interested in having me as your…mate” he started.

The word “mate” sounded weird. Perhaps he really was crazy. Yet there was no point in denying how he felt. Deep in as he was, he resolved to push further, unable to live with the thought of not speaking his mind now. Without even realizing it, his stuttering faded away, overcome by the depths of passion from which he now spoke.

“…and obviously I can’t provide you with some of the things another gull would offer, but I just admire you so much and want to be with you.”

Sylvia cocked her head, listening but not saying anything just yet.

Rico took a deep breath, almost not believing what he was about to do.

“I heard from a friend…it’s tradition for a male gull to present a meal to a female he admires. I obviously couldn’t catch you a fish, so I’d like…to offer myself instead.”

There. He’d said it. No going back now.

Sylvia looked visibly taken aback. Then her golden eyes softened.

“Aw, that’s actually pretty sweet, nugget. I didn’t think you had it in ya.”

Rico, heart felt like it stopped. For a split second he couldn’t believe his ears.

“Y…you really mean that?” he asked, voice sounding small.

“Aw hell, why not. You’re not exactly what I’d had in mind for a mate, but I guess you *are* kinda cute…I suppose I could give it a try.”

“Ohh, thank you!” Rico gushed, tears welling up in his eyes. He wanted to bury himself in her clean white feathers.

“I promise I won’t disappoint you!”

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll be quite satisfying!” Sylvia said, beginning to drool. Her eyes held a glint of that same predatory greed Rico had observed before.

Terror. Rico wasn’t sure what he was getting into…but it was too late now to do anything else.

Sylvia’s beak was only inches away.

She seemed to notice his fear, now altogether different than the scary, indifferent predator from before.

“Aw don’t’ be afraid nugget. I’ll be gentle with you.”

The words were meant to be reassuring, but they only made the sparrow tremble more with fear.

“You…you’re set on ea..eating me?” Rico chirped.

“Do you trust me?” she asked gently, nuzzling him with her beak. Suddenly it seemed like that attention he had so badly wanted from the gull was more than he had bargained for. Nevertheless, the sensation of her touch sent a thrill through him. Rico wasn’t sure he DID trust her, but he also knew this was his only chance. There was only one answer to give. He nodded silently, gazing nervously at her beak.

“Don’t worry” she whispered quietly.

Part of him was wondering why she had to eat him, yet at this point it was going to happen whether he had concerns about it or not.

Sylvia opened her beak, towering over him now that they stood close together. He looked up into the ravenous abyss opening above him, transfixed by the elongating strings of drool stretching and breaking as her salivating beak widened, before dripping and slobbering down her long tongue. Her jaws looked deceptively narrow, yet were obviously big enough to take him without trouble. He could see every detail of her pointed mouth; her long tongue, the serrated ridges of her glistening, drool-soaked palate, the glint of slimy drool stringing wetly from the back of her throat, and most of all her tongue where it curled back and disappeared into the darkness of her gullet.

She was really going to eat him! In the moment he almost couldn’t believe he was really feeding himself willingly to a predator. There was little time to ponder it as Sylvia brought her bill down onto him. He could smell her wild breath, feel the ravenous, moist warmth of it a split second before her tongue pressed ferally into his feathers, soaking him in her thick drool! He stiffened slightly, yet didn’t panic. Instead, a wild, incredible excitement overwhelmed him as he felt her jaws grip him gently about the midsection, slobbering wetly around him. The vitality of the moment was invigorating as she eagerly lifted him up. Rico was relieved she took care to avoid injuring him with the curved tip of her bill. As she got him to a comfortable height, he panted heavily, looking down the length of her drooling tongue and feeling the sultry ooze of her saliva soaking into his feathers. This was it! Gently, Sylvia tilted her bill skywards.

The gull got him into the slimy darkness of her salivating maw with a few quick tosses, deft movements of her head and beak just as she’d done before. Jerked inwards, Rico felt a little disoriented as her jaws slid and worked around him and her tongue pressed and pulled against his belly, skillfully snapping him up with a few quick clacks of her beak. He felt the bony edges of her bill slide past his belly and rump, jerking up around him and squelching greedily past his wings as she squished her jaws shut, pressing him tightly on either side and leaving nothing but his tail feathers and feet visible to the outside world. He was an effortless snack for her, engulfed in a single bite! He squirmed slightly as she maneuvered her beak around his tail, pulling his feet into her mouth with her tongue. The feathers in the crook of her neck pressed out slightly around Rico’s body as she closed around him.

Inside the gull’s beak, Rico felt the warmth of Sylvia’s tongue pressing wetly against his belly, the soaking stink of slick drool overpowering as her tongue slobbered all over him, rolling and slicking down his feathers with each lick and squish and squelch against his beak-pinned body, reducing him to nothing more than a wet, slick hunk of meat nestled between bony jaws, balanced on a tongue above the stretchy abyss of a ravenous, insatiable throat.

“Mmmh” she hummed blissfully, letting him know he was being appreciated. From inside her bill, her smooth voice sounded crooning…teasing as if alluding to what was about to happen next.

For an instant in the darkness, Rico could hear the ragged sound of Sylvia’s excited breathing as she stopped tasting him before her tongue squelched up beneath him in tandem with a jerk of her head. Wild, thrilling terror coursed through him as she tipped him back. He slid wetly down her tongue with another quick lunge. Then it surged up behind him in tandem with another quick series of jerks as she relaxed her neck, using her tongue to shove him into her throat! Disgusting squelches and squishes of slimy flesh squeezing and sliding in on itself surrounded him as he pressed wetly between her tongue and palate. The dizzying sensation of being forced upside down into her eager throat was shockingly slimy.

From outside the only evidence of Sylvia’s tongue squishing a sparrow into her neck came from a slight out-bulge of feathers at the bottom of her beak. It pressed outwards pleasantly, stretching her neck around the small lump of meat trapped inside.

Sylvia paused a moment before swallowing, seeming to relish the sensation of Rico’s body pressed behind her tongue, distending the crook of her neck. Then she tossed her head greedily back, gulping the sparrow with a soft ‘squish’. Her neck squeezed in a bit as she swallowed, head bobbing in time with an undulation of her neck as she swallowed Rico whole in a single gulp!

“mmmmphhh…ulrk!”

Rico felt himself and a lot of the slime surrounding him slide into her gullet which stretched to accommodate his body. The slick flesh pushed quickly past him, undulating with an audible ‘ulrk’ as she swallowed him. It was effortless, or at least it seemed that way. To Rico it felt like she was made for it, as she squeezed him down her neck with a single gentle swallow. From the outside a bulge pressed along the elegant curve of her throat, before gently pushing out her crop.

He gasped, overwhelmed by the sensation of being swallowed whole, immediately panting in the hot, fishy darkness that surrounded him. He thought perhaps she would’ve taken a few more gulps to get him down…but truly he must have been effortless for her. A morsel indeed, just like she’d said.

Curled tightly in her crop, there wasn’t much air to breath, and the slippery walls stretched only enough to allow him to slide deeper. He could hear so many sounds, the soft beat of her heart, the smooth whoosh of her breathing, the soft churn of digestive juices from deeper into the blackness. It was this sound that terrified him the most…the swallowing had been scary and fast, but also surprisingly gentle. Now pressed inside her if felt like he was going to be squished into her belly and digested at any moment. There was nothing for him to grab on to prevent that fate…the sheer slimy thickness of it all ensured she could consume him at will! He squirmed uncomfortably, wanting desperately to be let out.

“S…Sylvia…?”

There was a silence for a bit. Then she spoke, the sound surrounding him.

“Rico…thank you” she sighed, voice smooth and deeply content.

“You made a very satisfying meal”

Rico slapped his wings against her crop as he struggled to turn himself upright.

“T…that’s great…now uh…you think you could let me out?” he asked, silently relieved she could still hear him.

“Oh, I don’t know sweetie…I do so enjoy having you in my belly…”

Rico sputtered.

“Wait….but…”

“Aw don’t worry nugget. I’m not gonna hurt you, just teasing.”

“T…that’s not funny Sylvia!” he chirped, squirming in her humid gut

“Aw, that feels nice” she continued, crooning softly.

“But I’ll let ya out. Just hold still a moment…”

Rico felt a disorienting sensation of vertigo, followed by a slight jostling as she took off, gliding downwards before stopping again. Then he felt flesh surrounding him squelching tightly inwards. Sylvia’s neck tilted down, and he was pushed back up it with an undulating *hlrk* before being shaken from her jaws once more. This time he didn’t hit the ground, instead landing with a splash in cold water. It was a shock after the blood heat of her insides, and also terrifying as he realized she’d dropped him right into the sea and the water was far too deep for him to stand up in. Luckily Sylvia offered him a wing to climb up and onto her back. He fluffed up his feathers, panting for a moment after the primal intensity of what she’d just put him through. Sylvia tilted her head, turning to look at him.

“Are you alright?” she asked, eyes showing a hint of guilt at the sight of his wet feathers.

“Y..yeah” he shuddered giddily, relieved she hadn’t decided to just digest him.

“That’s good” she said, nudging him a bit with her beak. Now that the setting sun was warming his feathers, Rico was kind of glad he’s been dropped in the water instead of on land. The salty water left him feeling refreshingly clean. Looking around, he saw the shore was only a few feet away. Sylvia paddled back to the beach and lowered a wing to the ground. Rico hopped across the soft pebbly sand, looking up at her.

She gazed back, fierce eyes still a bit hard to read. To Rico though it seemed as if she eyed him with affection. That familiar hope welled up inside him again as he quickly refocused his gaze on the orange sun as it dipped closer to the horizon.

For a moment neither of them spoke. Rico tried to collect his thoughts, not knowing exactly what to say. Sylvia finally broke the silence.

“I suppose…I wasn’t very nice to you Rico” she said, looking at the ground. For the first time she seemed shy, almost vulnerable.

“The truth is I haven’t been intimate, if you could call it that…with anyone like you before. You’re sweet, little bit.

Her voice wavered, devoid of its usual confidence, yet earnestly honest.

“And now after what I did to you, I can’t imagine you still want to be with me.”

“Oh nooo!” Rico said, doing his best to give her a hug.

“I want it more than anything. Y…you can even eat me again…uh if you want” Rico said, feeling himself blush again.

“You really mean that?” she asked, gingerly putting a wing over him.

“Of course!” Rico said.

“It was kind of intimate” he continued, a little embarrassed to admit he might have enjoyed it despite himself.

Sylvia brightened, squeezing him gently beneath her wing. Rico flushed with joy. She was so warm, so comforting. In that moment he felt truly safe in a way he had never experienced before.

“Well in that case I guess I’ll have to put sparrow on the menu more often” Sylvia teased, nibbling at his feathers playfully.

“Heyyyy at least give me a chance to rest first” Rico chirped

“Of course, sweetie” Sylvia replied, yawning.

“It’s no fun to swallow sleeping food!”

“Oh, stop it” he protested playfully, feeling tired now that he was surrounded by warm feathers. It had been a long and eventful day.

“Don’t worry, you’re safe for now!” Sylvia assured, hugging him softly.

The words brought such happiness to the little sparrow as he leaned into her feathers. As they watched the sunset together, he relaxed, realizing now that finally, everything was going to be okay.