

Chapter 1: A New Beginning, Part I

Dawn creeps over another dry morning. Or dry-*ish* morning at least. The old newspaper did its best, but if it weren't summer then my dirty red fur would be soaked clean through. Inspecting my arm revealed claw marks. The damage of nervous ticks on display. My stomach rumbles hungrily, urging me to climb to my feet and get moving before the larger world awakes. I can't help but feel cheated that I need so little compared to the giants that try to shoo me off their streets, yet even so I am left hungry.

Still, I'm alive, so there's hope. And as long as I don't get any foolish notions about actually *meeting* one of those giants up close for a chat, I'll survive till tomorrow too. They could eat me, use me, or worse; The thought terrified me. I've pondered fleeing to another city, but whether here in Concordia, or any other city, the giants are still the same. I started to hear the sounds of the crashing waves and the breeze of the sea. I found the source of the sound around another street corner.

A large valley of sand and the crystal blue sea stretched to the horizon. Fortunately, I had not missed the sunrise, but I cut it close. I tread across the sand. Even pulling my feet out of the sand was pointless, it continued to torment me. But I continued. As I got nearer to the sea, I started to sit down.

I made it.

It was dawn, the sun slightly rose above the horizon. The dark fading, and replaced by the hope of a new day. But, by sunset, it would disappear. Every waking morning, I hope for a new day. But, every day was like groundhog day. Loneliness was my only companion. I prayed for a new beginning, to hide away and forget my past. I wanted to move on, more than anything, but I was never that fortunate.

My jaw dropped as I sat in awe of the crimson sunrise. The beach was quiet.

I placed my head back, and lay down. The clear blue sky lurked above. The wind rustled through my fur and the sun projected its almighty heat against my skin. It aggravated the already potent smell that cocooned my body. But, I do not flinch to that familiar smell. I took a breath, clearing my mind. 'Just *once...I want* to talk to someone, other than...myself' I bit onto my lip. Clenching my paws against the cold sand was the only release from the chaos in my mind. The only companion was a ring. A ring that's source and sentimental value unbeknownst to me.

Suddenly, a shallow thump echoed in the distance, the vibrations travelled through my body. My idle paw attempted to maneuver towards my arm, but I refused to give in. Then, I heard it again, the vibrations stronger. The thump happened again and AGAIN! A pounding travelled through my body, shaking it to its core. Rivaling the movement from below. My paw was still attempting to inflict its will onto my arm. Craning my head up, turning around, I saw nothing. It was quiet.

"W-What...was...that?" It was strange. 'I c-can't have been one of...*them!*' I tried soothing my beating heart as it pounded my fragile chest. I heard it, in my head. My ever-skinny chest rose up and down in quick succession. I could see my ribs, more than ever before. My muscles were forced to stretch like elastic. Yet they were close to tearing. Breathing only aggravated the strain. I tried to smile. Enjoying these minutes was all I had. Then reality would hit.

Moments passed, and no noise. 'I-It's...*stopped?*' The world around me started to fade. A voice called to me.

"H-hello? W-would you mind if...I sat here?" the voice asked, ever so gently in a loud whisper. The voice filled me with delight, but I did not budge. I greeted the stranger with a smile. **"Of course!"** I projected. Yet, my heart betrayed me. The voice's identity remained unknown. That was made clear. 'Just...remain calm. Wait for them to say something...and then...'

****THUMP****

I thrust upwards. The ground disappeared for a moment. I gasped. The stranger's identity became known. My eyes shifted to the voice. I froze. A punch struck my chest. Rhythmic pounding was close to cracking my ribs. I almost fell over before turning back to my intruder. A giant wolf with soft grey fur and a long black tail. A large amount of fur surrounded his chest. 'Run' my instinct insisted. The wolf's smile softly widened as his shoulders jumped up and down, he was chuckling. The wolf never showed his teeth and kept his distance.

An odour enveloped me. Fear. He leaned slightly back away, **"I'm not going to hurt you, I promise"**. He gave a wider smile, his eyes opened. They seemed kind. I thought. **"My name is Marcos, pleased to meet you?"** but while my face struggled to comprehend his existence, his grey ears now hung low. The wolf hoped introductions would help. It kind of did.

I faced the sand below, and expanded my chest. A slight shiver travelled down my spine. **"I am C-C...Carlos S-S...Shavinsky..."** I stammer enveloped me, the compassion from the macro was bizarre. That hesitation was mimicked by his smallest digit greater than the size of my puny form. Tired muscles strained to draw his finger to me. Jolting at every shift. I felt my survival rate diminish. **"...N-Nice...to meet you?"** I quivered.

"So, Carlos. What brings you to the beach?" Moving my focus towards the horizon. Paying no attention to his visage as he smiled. Like photosynthesis, I took in the sun's rays. Hoping to absorb its confidence to beam with delight. I took a deep breath, tilting my head back. And exhaled.

"The...s-sunrise" I rubbed my red fur, my face paralyzed before the wolf. He only watched me, but he too rubbed his fur. Those great claws that could pierce titanium scraped across his neck. And he shrugged his shoulders.

"What was it like?" Marcos shifted his maw closer, an electric shock travelled down my spine. Back straightened. Tilting my body away did nothing to keep the distance. Marcos retreated. Took a quick glance around, before returning back to me. Craning my head up, I stared at two large hazel pupils. They were glistening. Rosey cheeks and all. It does not ease the contraction against my ribs. 'Remember...*Exitium!*' I snarled. I felt my throat swell. Breathing was becoming a chore. Marcos' ears started to fall, his head tilting.

A snap out of my mind helped me realise the void between us. Instincts filled the silence, ravaging me. Twisting my reality. **"It was...beautiful..."** a delicate squeak escaped me. **"The sunsets...I've *seen*..."** I exhaled. As air escaped my lungs, he only watched in awe. Lowered eyebrows, and sparkling eyes surrounded his visage.

Past sunsets flashed through my mind. These words felt like my last. A forced smile travelled across my quivering maw. **"They can be both beautiful...and sad..."**. I projected. Instinct attempting to restrain me. I watched as his pupils expanded. Ears tilted to one side. A smile smothering his maw. I moved my head to face the sun, clenching my paw through the sand. **"...marking the beginning...and...the end"**. My eyes locked back with Marcos. I stared at him.

"Quite the poet, aren't you" his head lunged forward as he chuckled. I shifted back timidly. The jaw was now facing me. Overpowering my view. Any attempt to identify those might dentures, failed. Not a single tooth was on display. His laughter quietened, **"Say. May I ask you something?"** he asked gently.

I nodded my head. Marcos maneuvered his head; neck tightening as it moved. Inspecting the surroundings. **"I was waiting to be certain. But, *where...is your designated Marco?*"** He turned back towards me with a raised eyebrow. But, his child-like smile remained. A slight rhythmic thump shook my head. Eardrums pounding. A small stutter coursed through my body. Tension burning my insides. My legs closed in, knees raised, and head placed upon them. I beckoned for any confidence. Begging for it. Any remaining fur turned darker in colour. It was drenched. Sweat trickled down me. My heart was almost ripping my chest. Ribs close to shattering. Eyes struggling to keep focus.

The wolf's smile disappeared.

The sand became my only view. My idle paws scraped half a dozen shallow claw marks across my arms and fur as my stressed mind dwelled on its own internal panic. It wasn't until one of my claws inadvertently pressed just a little too hard past my fur to cut the skin below that the sting jolted me back to reality with a spasm. Looking down and examining the indentation with my pawpad, I found no blood, still though, perhaps I'd have been well off to keep an eye on my nervous ticks.

Releasing I was in someone's company, I prayed he had not noticed. Silence was a relief.

"I-I. I d-do not h-have one". Ears collapsed, but open. Tuning into the reply that awaited me. I envisioned his mighty digits surrounding me. Grabbing me. Claiming me as his own. That history will repeat itself. Except, what I heard instead was, a desperate plea.

I tilted my head to meet him. His paw pads stamped against the ground at his sides, before he dived towards me. Filling my eyeline. The musk hit my nostrils. But, it did not overwhelm them. A puff of air exited his nostrils. **"W-without one. Anyone can...s-s...stomp you"**. I collapsed, craning my neck towards him. His teeth refused to demonstrate its power and might. I closed my eyes. Small creases and wrinkles crossed my eyelids. Light struggling to find entry. I lied in darkness, awaiting my end. I felt the warmth of his breath cover my fur. His musk, the only smell penetrating my nostrils. The pounding in my head stopped.

But, a sudden surge of light struck my eyes. I re-opened them. Marcos was nowhere to be seen. As my chest expanded, I craned my neck up. I saw Marcos. But, he was further away. A distance equivalent to half his height. Marcos shadow being another thing that left me. **"S-sorry"** he whispered softly. **"P-P...Please...trust me. I...can be...your Marco?"**.

Instincts seeing that as an invitation for its propaganda. Searching for reasons to decline. Digging into old habits, I scratched the top of my head. Expanding the circular gaps of fur. Feeling my claws touch my bald spots snapped me out from compulsive tics. The rags below smothered in a fur blanket. It snapped back to reality. Back to Marcos. The wolf possessed a twinkle in his eyes. And a hesitation to face me. He seemed worried. Marcos, still not exhibiting his teeth, kept himself at bay. Accepting his offer was the easiest option. The only option. 'Whatever...he does. It would at least end...this...pain'.

"Yes" I surrendered, accepting my fate.

Marcos' visage sparkled with delight, his maw widening. But, I struggled mimicking that emotion. I took a deep breath in. Wearing my veil of joy, but cracks started to form. He started leaning in a little closer to better see my tiny form. Still further than when we first met. My head fell down. Refusing any offer of pity. Marcos laid down. His neck met the ground, and head looked at me. Although the distance between us appeared as a kind gesture, I remained skeptical.

"Okay...if you're sure? Where were you heading to, after, the beach?" Marcos asked, retreating his gaze back towards me. I shrugged my shoulders. Biting my lip, I resisted the urge to reveal the context of my life. A grin reappeared on his maw. A light laugh followed. Lying seemed suitable; I feared the truth.

"I need to find...G-G-GET some food..." I paused. Like a child, I wanted to cower under my bed. But, I was forced to suffer the consequences of my choice of words. Marcos' eyes expanded, his hazel pupils filled my vision.

"F-F...FIND? C-Carlos, do you not..have any food at home..." Marcos' ears tilted slightly, head jolted off the sand. His body shifted, and paw raised. Marcos reached for something in his pocket. I waited in anticipation, terrified. I heard a rustle, a soft fabric. The rustling drowned pulsating sound in my head. 'W-W-What...is...it? W-What is *he* going to d-do to m-me?'. My lungs contracted, the air getting thinner. I quickly shuffled myself away, but I kept falling. Any remaining fur turned white. A quick glance to Marcos revealed he remained oblivious. 'G-GET UP! J-JUST...STAND!' I snarled. I pounded the sand, an ant-hill to Marcos formed around my paw. I froze; my blood turned cold. Any fur did well to hide the goosebumps.

"NO! Please! I am b-b..begging you" I screamed. I curled into a ball, hands over my head, covering my visage. My heart sank. A tear trickled down my cheek. Marcos had only withdrawn his paw, before rushing towards me.

"C-Carlos?" he gasped, placing what was a piece of a sandwich at his side. A faint tear lurked in the corner of his eyes, whilst his muscles trembled in front of me. I struggled to face him, attempting to block out the world. 'I-It is...*just*...me. O-O...Only me'. Placing my paw on my chest, attempting to keep my heart within its confinement. Allowing the air to vacate my lungs. Easing the pressure of what felt like a hydraulic press against it.

"N-n...no, it's fine. Sorry" I sighed.

His eyes clenched as he shook his head. Marcos pupils fired towards me. Marcos sighed. **"I'm staying with you...okay"**. That caring smile remained on his maw. Yet, his eyes seemed occupied. **"Here...take this"**. I moved my eyes towards his paw, a small piece laid between his fingers. Held in place between his meaty paws. I was hesitant, at first. I stared at the piece. My mouth watering as the aroma struck my nose. It was fresh. Avoiding direct contact with the piece, I gave a nod. I refused to appear desperate. But, I had to accept his offer despite the doubt. I grabbed the piece.

I held and stared at it. I watched as crumbs abandoned the bread, it was not stale. I took a bite. An explosion of sensation followed. It took longer than normal before I swallowed, but I wanted to savour it. A tiny bulge travelled down. It struggled to slither down, scraping against my throat like sandpaper. I felt it land. I patted my stomach. I took another bite. And then, another. And, another. I tore through the sandwich piece. It appeared feral. I realised that Marcos was watching me. 'Have some control!' I snarled. But, I protested. When I devoured the slice, I stared towards him. Half expecting a visage of shock and worry. Yet, he smiled. I was confused.

"Take it until you go shopping. Is there a macro that can assist you?" he asked delicately. I remained silent, wiping away the saliva. Raising my eyes upwards, I noticed his tail slightly wagging. **"I am happy...to help. I need to go shopping myself"** A small gust of wind surrounded me. His tail reached to the heavens, and swung side-to-side. A large pleading smile across his visage. Those large eyes acting like a lie detector. Searching for the finest detail. I needed to be calm. But I had to turn down his offer. Moving my paw to meet my knee-caps, I clenched them. Scraping my rags.

"I-I...I can just pay...for one" I smiled slightly, only this time, it took all my strength to sustain it. I dared not hurt the wolf. It was too risky. **"B-But...thank you"** I grinned towards him. The light breeze faded. An eerie quietness expanded between us. I watched as his demeanour went dark. All life in his tail faded.

"T-Trust me! P-P..please..." he pleaded, moving forward. This time no regard to the distance he sought to protect. I watched as a tear ran down his cheek. A quiver consuming his once smiling maw. Both his paws pressed together, whilst his muscles bulged under the strain that can flatten cars. All I could do was witness Marcos try to hold back his tears. I felt his warm breath chastise me as he sighed. Staring past his muzzle, I looked to those large windows that lost all their colour. The red roots surrounding his hazel pupil, whilst he dried his moist fur. **"The stories...I've heard...s-so-called...d-designated Marcos. The MSP won't fix it"**, his head craned back from me.

A shiver shook me to my core.

"It's...okay," I whispered. My head collapsed, shoulders not long after. A hole appeared inside me. **"There is nothing...I...can do"**. I shrugged my shoulders, releasing a false grin to distract the wolf. A million thoughts raced through my head, until becoming visible. I shivered. Releasing a large breath. A faint white puff of smoke exited my maw. Craning my neck upwards. I realised I was sitting in Marcos's shadow. My arms wrapped around my tightening chest. With no success, I shuffled towards him, and pressed the side of my body against him. Instinct complied with the decision, I needed to survive. **"Since the Macro Supremacy Party was elected..."** an unnerving tension sung through me like the London Orchestra. Rattling and dislodging any sense of stability I strived to uphold.

Marcos slowly lowered his paw, doing everything not to alarm me, and placed it at my side. I started to close my eyes. A tear tried to creep through my barriers. But, it was successful. I tried to wipe it away. Tears drowned my red pupils. A snuffle emitted out of my muzzle. It started to block. I looked towards him, trying to see past the tears. I cried. But, I took a breath, to calm down. His digit started to shift, applying a smig of pressure, as it moved up and down. He was stroking me. Yet, I did not twitch.

"U-U...Under these...laws" I mumbled as I focused towards Marcos who, just, listened. A tear struggled to escape his right pupil. I stared at him. **"W-W...We are treated...like...v-v...VERMIN"**. I shouted, finding some release through the stutter. Marcos digit and paw retreated from me. The wall of fur I had relied on for comfort, shifted away from me for a moment. When I paused, I dissected his reaction. He was silent, but he was listening.

I focused my attention towards his arm above me. Veins were pulsating. Turning towards his visage, I watched as his maw retreated. Wrinkles and cracks encasing it. **"Have you...*met anyone, like me?*"**. I froze. A rush of thoughts drenched in fear drowned me. My heart raced. A symphony of pounding resonated through my head. I stared at the horizon, jaw and eyes locked open. **"C-Carlos, has a-*anyone...my...*"** Marcos paused, his paw deforming the sand under his will.

Trying to calm the relentless beast in my chest. I placed my paw on the fur, at his side. **"Your government...how they...*treated us...*"** I cried. Marcos tilted his maw towards me. He placed his paw upon my waist and stroked my side. Carefully, he placed me upon his side, back towards his fur. Craning my head up, I watched as his eyes glistened. **"All-t-those micros...the fates they...s-suffered..."**. Raising my paw, I slammed it against his side. **"You could...n-never...understand,"** I growled. Collapsing at his side, pressing both my paws through his valley of fur.

Marcos just stared at me, never speaking. Anger and pain raged through me. I dreaded that he mimicked that feeling. 'W-W..What...HAVE I done!'. The overwhelming urge to run, or hide. To escape this soon to be angry wolf filled me. But, those voices turned silent once he placed his finger on my back. I nearly saw a tear escape his eye himself. I looked in shock, had my words really made this giant behemoth of a wolf release a tear.

Biting my lip, I withdrew my gaze from him. The weight of my shoulders pressed against my body. **"If I met one of you...that's it"**. Another finger accompanied the previous digit as it stroked me. All Marcos did was sit there, staring at me, he turned his head back to the city behind us and then back towards me. I looked towards him, staring right at him, I felt awkward. I tried to break the silence, **"M-M...Mar..."** but the words declined.

A soft push against my back shook me. It took me off my feet, falling upon it. Marcos had picked me off my feet, literally, and hoisted me up towards his maw. His digits had surrounded me, trapping me. A slight squeeze and that was it. I closed my eyes, and my head collapsed. **"I am...sorry"** he whispered, before falling silent.

I was frozen, my entire body lying between his meaty digits. All I did was look towards his hazel eyes. They started to close as he withdrew. Staring at him, at his maw, sent shivers down my body. I turned towards my arm, already struggling to repair the previous damage. My mind shifted towards my finger. I carefully wrapped my fingers around my ring. My own digits struggled to attain a tight grip. Hoisting the ring, I stared towards it. A silver ring with a red stone trapped in its metal, laid before me. Any inspection I could conduct was interrupted by a sudden jolt from Marcos. My heart skipped a beat.

"T-That ring. Where...did you g-get it?". I turned to face him, struggling to hold the ring any longer. I put it back on. Marcos could not help but stare. His eyes strained as they expanded outwards. I moved my head back towards the ring. Marcos' gaze accompanied my own. **"T-That ring. H-H..How? It cannot be"**. A hesitancy in his voice continued to overwhelm him.

"M-M...Marcos? Do you...know...s-something?"

All Marcos did was give a sudden glance at me before turning back to the ring, **"My...Grandfather. H-His...last...re-quest..."**. Marcos raised his paw, revealing a gold ring with a blue gem. **"H-He...gave me *this*."** A twinkle drowned his eyes like moonlight. Both eyelids tried to conceal the feeling within but, I knew. **"Told me to protect the wearer of...*t-that ring*"**. I stroked his paw, leaning closer towards him. My paw ran through his fur.

He gulped. **"To protect them...so they...fulfilled...some *p-prophecy?*"**.

"P-P...P-Prophecy? What p-prophecy?", but Marcos remained silent. I leaned up, facing towards his maw. **"Marcos. T-T..Tell me!"** I called, but that sparked an unwanted response. **"I-I...I just want to know..."** I begged the wolf, hand and foot as he struggled to face me. The wolf sniffled. A quiet cry came from his maw as his eyes filled with tears. Pulling his head back. Marcos turned his head away in shame. **"I-I...I forgive you. B-B...But, *this...is too much*. J-J...Just, *too much*"**. My eyes began to slowly close as I started to lose balance. All the air in my lungs dissipated. I collapsed onto Marcos' soft stomach. It went dark.

The Dark Dream:

It was dark but not like your average dark. This was not just the absence of light, it was the absence of good, warmth and kindness. An eternity went by. But, time paused as a dark grey shadowy figure emerged. It was frozen. It neither spoke nor moved. An echoing thump erupted in my mind, my chest tightened. I focused my eyes on the figure. Wrapping my arms around against my chest. Trying to hold myself together. **"W-Who...*are you?*"** I uttered nervously, awaiting a reply. Yet there was no response. **"W-What do you *want...with me?*"** I demanded, slamming my footpaw to the invisible ground.

Then, the shadow replied. **"You. WE WANT...You"**. I took a step back.

After turning my head around, inspecting the area surrounding me in hopes of finding someone else there, **"M-M..Me! W-Why...me?"**.

The Shadowy Figure spoke again, this time louder, **"So You FULFILL...THE PROPHECY"**. It snarled in defence. All my efforts on concealing my fear did not work, it knew.

"W-What *prophecy!*". A slight crevice of anger attempted to trickle through my voice, but I tied my tongue. The darkness attempted to consume me like a parasite.

The Shadowy Figure moved forward, ever closer than before. **"THE ONE...YOU WERE DESTINED FOR. YOUR BIRTHRIGHT"**. Just before it could reply, I started to hear a voice calling me. Craning my neck to the source, I tried to lean in closer. My arms were struggling to remain static. I lost control of its movements. The voice was an enigma. Moving my mind and ears closer towards it. I managed to tune into it.

It muttered at first, but as I focused on it more, it became clearer **"C-C...C-CARLOS! C-CARLOS, P-PLEASE, WAKE...UP!"**. The voice was faint. In the empty darkness, that feeling when the sun would rise above the horizon. That tranquility where I felt, no matter what, everything was going to be okay. That I would survive. It returned at the beck and call of Marcos voice. Hearing Marcos voice, the voice of my Guardian. The wolf had come to save me. Marcos was here.

The figure across from me snarled, echoing through the dark plain. **"THE...GUARDIAN!"**. Turning towards him, realizing that his head had focused in Marcos direction. My fists were not designed for confrontation. The brittle tips struggling to make contact with my paw. But, I did not care.

"STAY AWAY FROM HIM". But, that only pleased the Shadowy Figure who chuckled. Only irritating me further.

"D-D...DO NOT WORRY. I-I...IT WON'T BE M-ME...THAT H-H..HARMS HIM" a giggle followed. I growled at his attempt to mimic my stutter.

I growled louder to the figure, creases and wrinkles zigzagging across my withdrawn maw. A feral stare fired towards the figure. I was about to pounce forward but Marcos beckoned my name once again. Louder this time. **"C-CARLOS! P-PLEASE WAKE UP! W-W...WAKE UP PLEASE! OH G-GOD, PLEASE DON'T BE..."**. I raised my paws up, trying to hold onto Marcos. Marcos' voice was my anchor. **"C-CARLOS!!!"**I tried to respond but he could not hear me. The wolf heard my cries. I am safe.

Then, the darkness faded. Marcos' voice guided me. Opening my eyes slowly revealed the tears that had drenched his fur. Marcos was trembling on his knees. I laid there on his soft black paws with Marcos's head right above me. I felt my head reach the base of his digits, whilst my legs struggled to even reach the edge. I laid there on a platform. He began to sigh, **"C-Carlos, you're...okay! T-Thank god!"**. I turned my head around, inspecting the surroundings, **"y-you fainted...Carlos. I thought...*you were...*"**. I looked towards my body, placing my paws on Marcos'. I stroked it, trying to calm myself.

"I am...o-okay...Marcos. I-I didn't mean to worry you". A real smile crossed my maw; my heart thawed. 'H-He stayed! Like some...guardian...'. **"O-O...Oh..."** I muttered. Marcos lowered his head closer to me. I realised that he overheard me, so I tried to dismiss it, **"oh n-no, it's nothing. Just...I realised...something"**. A frenzy of light and joy filled the void that once lurked next to my heart in that alleyway. Marcos' kindness and compassion replacing it. Marcos used his finger to stroke the top of my head as I gathered the strength to sit up. His right eyebrow perked up as he leaned forward. **"That *you...really are, my friend*"** I continued to stroke his paw as I laid down.

Marcos opened my eyes in shock, instantly focusing towards me. Lost for words. **"F-F..Friend...d-did you say, f-friend?"**. A slight hesitation infected his voice. The paw below struggled to stand still, but I trusted him. I remained still, tilting my head towards him. Raising my paw to place upon his paw, my tail started to wiggle. Acting like a twig, I felt it close to snapping. Small sprinkles of rejected fur left to float down towards his paw. Marcos noticed, but did his best to contain his response. Too hung up on what I called him.

I titled my head towards him. **"A-Am I...yours?"**.

"Yes," I breathed slowly. My glass ribs were straining under the pressure. Marcos' ears dropped and tail froze. His finger delicately stroked my back. I felt one of his digits stroke my side. I placed a paw upon it, he felt my weak grasp. **"I'd be honoured to be...your friend"** I looked towards Marcos with a small smile. Taking a deep breath, the tension slowly faded. Marcos was left speechless. The bottom of his jaw shook, and a tear almost escaped his pupils. My heart warmed and I smiled right at him, and he did the same in return.

A few hours went by, and Marcos and Carlos were talking through the day, still sitting on the warm sandy beach. The sun slowly began to set. Carlos laid on Marcos' stomach, staring towards the sun.

As the sun set, stars filled the night sky. It was beautiful. A wave of sadness consumed me. **"I-I think...it's time"**. I started to stand up. Gentle treads landed across Marcos' form. Before I hit the sand. Turning to him, I watched as his features showed heartbreak. Both ears dropped to their lowest point, his eyes struggling to focus on me. I caused this. **"I would stay...if I could"**.

"I-I...understand..." he whispered. Marcos eyes manouvered to face me. A blank stared surrounded those once compassionate eyes. Kindness seemed to have abandoned them.

"I loved m-meeting you...Marcos. Hopefully that prophecy will make sense, it wouldn't concern me" I insisted as I started to walk. Soft treads filling the silence between us. I envisioned myself alone. That way I would not have hurt anyone, again.

Only after a few mere steps, barely equivalent to half of Marcos, I felt a slight poke behind me. I turned. Marcos raised his right eyebrow as he faced me, **"and why...is...that?"**. Facing him, my heart picked up speed but the pain in my chest remained silent. I only watched as Marcos lowered his maw and ears till they filled my eyesight.

"B-Because it's...important" I grinned. Attempting to dismiss further curiosity from Marcos.

A concentrated gaze directed towards me, dissecting my reply. He tilted his head, leaning forward. Marcos' maw met me. Dwarfing the distance I travelled. And, using his smallest digit, started to stroke my right arm. Praying he would not find the marks or lumps. But, they made contact. **"You think you're...un...important?"**.

My paw pulsating, squeezing tightly. I shrugged. But, Marcos continued looking at me, I refused a glance towards him. A glimmer of shame filled me. Raising my paw to place on his finger as it caressed me. Putting pressure on his finger, I attempted to lower it. It yielded to my command. Struggling to face him, I chose to stare towards the sand. **"I-I...I n-need to...go"**. Before I speak further, Marcos moved me closer to his maw, staring at me. No teeth exhibited.

"Carlos, with respect. What's stopping you staying?" He shot back, but his approach was calm. I went silent. Rubbing the back of my head, rustling through my fur, and the gaps. Procrastinating a response. Praying he had not noticed the pink craters across my body. My maw opened, and Marcos perked up. But the words refused release. All my limbs tensed. I crossed my arms, squeezing them tightly. I turned my head away. **"C-Carlos, w-what...is it?"** he pleaded. A few words vacated me, but they squeaked. **"S-Sorry, p-please repeat that"** he asked softly.

Then, the dam broke. A wave of tears trickled down my fur, soaking it. A quick glance revealed that Marcos was trembling. Ears were lowered, and tail frozen. A small tear began to form. I felt defeated. Releasing a painful breath, I placed both paws on the ground. Arms shaking. His eyes remained on me, and the digit raised again. I leaned back in retreat. But, stopped as it curled against my back. Marcos gave a semi-closed eyed glance. Trying to ease me. It sort of worked. But, instinct remained violent. I closed my eyes, focusing on feeling Marcos' digit stroke my back. It was soothing. **"T-Talk to me...Carlos. I'm...here"** He cooed. The glimmering in his eyes returned. Until, his digits surrounded me, lifting me up.

The ground abandoned my feet. Yet, my body didn't respond. Marcos placed me against his fluffy large chest. Putting a soft bit of pressure on me, he hugged me. A small tear escaped my eye. I embraced him. Placing my arms around as much of him as possible. Marcos lowered his head. The fur of his chin stroked against my back, we were silent. I began to sniffle my nose and wipe my tears, but they just kept coming.

He comforted me.

"I-I'm...fine...M-Marcos. D-Do not worry" I replied softly, but Marcos was still curious. But, his demeanor changed. The pulsating of his muscle's terrified me.

Marcos withdrew his paw from his chest, raising me towards his maw. A slight crevice circulated it. **"You're...lying; I know you are"**. He raised his giant left eyebrow, and scanned me. **"Since I have been here...a-all I've sensed is...fear"**. A light lowering of his eyelids escorted his soft voice. **"You are wearing rags...C-Carlos. Old and...d-dirty ones"** he pointed towards my clothes.

After his silence on the topic, he did not notice. I was wrong. The rhythmic pounding in my head returned.

"Second, the...s-s...smell". My head slumped, and my body clenched. A tear close to leaving my body once again. A tsunami of shame drowned me. I wanted to run and hide. To curl into a ball and cry. But, Marcos forced me to accept reality. He took a large sniff, taking in the smell surrounding me. A small step away from his closing muzzle was not enough. I watched as Marcos flinched.

"M-M...M-Marcos. P-Please...stop..." I pleaded. My maw trembled at the sight. 'know, I get it, please'. The wolf grew larger before me. I leaned my head down, over his paw. My heart raced as the ground moved further away. A slight scream emitted inside my head. Instinct firing through me like neurons.

"Third, when I gave you food? You...restrained...yourself" he whispered to help ease his bluntness. I clenched my maw, the creases expanding. Tightening my fist and maw to breaking point. Before release. **"A-And when...you ate it. It was...feral"**

"M-MARCOS! P-P...Please...s-stop" I begged as tears escaped my eyes, I collapsed onto his paw. **"I-I...get it. I stink...I smell...and my clothes..."**my throat closed up. Legs struggling to bare the weight. A slow breath vacated my hardened lungs. **"J-Just please..."** I struggled to lock our eyes.

"You're not telling me...e-everything...are you?". His ears widened, he watched as the tears drenched my fur. Turning darker with each passing tear. Marcos withdrew himself, he granted me space. It did help, to a degree. I shook my head. I felt like a child. I continued to shrink in front of him. **"Then, t-tell me...Carlos..."** he asked softly whilst, I shook more. **"What...is it?"** he leaned his maw towards me, giving a clearer look at me.

But, as I clenched my paws tightly, I took a firm stance on his paw. Staring intensely at Marcos, his ears lowered. It was time. **"M-Marcos..."**. I took a large breath, contemplating the best choice of words. I lightly wiped a tear that attempted escape. But, they still progressed. I watched as his ear raised, and head approached me. My body numbed. **"I-I'm...I am...h-h...homeless"** I muttered in disgust. My heart pounded against my chest, rapidly. All my muscles tensed, breathing intensified. Marcos' visage was locked in place. Only staring at me, silent. Without looking, I broke the silence. **"T-T...Talk to me. M-Marcos...please!"** I begged, but no reply. Instead, I felt a small movement from his paw. He was moving me, but I refused to look. I wanted to speak, or scream, but I could not. It was acceptance. **"I-I... s-shouldn't have told you..."**.

A large layer of fur pressing against the side of my body. It was Marcos' cheek. **"I am...sorry...Carlos"**. He pressed me delicately, but I felt his fingers shake. Placing both paws upon his cheeks, I embraced his gesture. **"I care *for* you. I will *always* protect and...look after you"**. I held tighter onto his cheek. More tears escaped my, already soar, eyes. I wanted to speak but, the tears were enough. Marcos quietly spoke ever so delicately to not hurt my ears, **"Shhh..it's okay"** his smallest finger stroked my back lightly.

I cried.

"Let...it out". As Marcos slowly released me, I gazed at his eyes and hugged his muzzle. Marcos gave a small and gentle smile, his teeth still not showing, but before I could speak Marcos interrupted. Marcos took a deep breath, sighing. **"It...doesn't *have* to be this way"**. He tried to look at me, but he seemed nervous, **"why don't *you* come over mine?"** He gave a small smile afterwards as he focused his large hazel eyes at me. **"I have got food, a shower, and everything"** he stopped. Looking towards me with pleading eyes. **"I *know* we just met but, I can not...*will not*...leave you...like this"**.

Collecting myself proved a difficult task. A gentle soft nod was all I could muster. **"One...night"**. I was adamant with that, I knew in my heart Marcos would insist on longer, but I could not put that on him.

Marcos began to smile **"great!"**. A great gust of wind surrounded me; I was startled. **"Ha-ha sorry, can't help it, I am just excited"** he giggled. I stared at his cackling maw. At his teeth. But my body remained unresponsive.

After his tail started to slow down, he started to stand himself up ever so carefully. Whilst I stood a safe distance away. He looked at me with a smile **"where would you like to sit?"**. I pointed to his forehead. Marcos tilted his head as his tail moved quickly side-to-side. **"You sure? What if...you...fall..."**, his tail froze at that thought.

"I-I...trust you". Marcos's jaw dropped, I immediately looked away from inside his mouth, although I was comfortable with him it was still a frightening sight.

"Y-Y...You...t-trust *me*?" He shut his jaw. Stopping himself from showing his almighty teeth.

"I...do!" A beam of delight emitted from me, my body bursting into life. Thrusting my arms in the air won a chuckle off the wolf.

"*T-That* means *more than...you* know. Earning *trust...of someone like you, it isn't easy*". Our trust for one another, that feeling we shared. With that, his tail began to wag again. Marcos lowered his paw, and I approached it. **"let me..hoist...you up"**. Once his paw was levelled with his forehead. I slowly walked onto it. **"You all good, up there, lil one?"**. Every instinct rattled through me over that word, ears perking up. But, I stopped.

I leaned towards his right ear. **"Yes, I am"**.

He moved his eyes up to his forehead, **"if it gets *too* much. P-Please...let me know"**, and I nodded in understanding.