A loud cry violently yanked me from sleep.

“Lowell?” I recognized the voice, as it came from the bedroom. Loud creaking and a soft bang echoed to my end of the small corridor. “Lowell, what is it?”

I reached up for the light switch between me and the room’s exit, jumping off the couch in my boxers and immediately bolting through the half-closed door. The pillows were lying against the wall as if they were thrown, and blanket lay haphazardly bundled up while the bedsheet lay soaked in sweat. A lone figure in the darkness lay against the far wall, facing me with his knees closely curled up to his chest, his head hung low as he sniffled.

“Lowell?”

He refused to look up at me. Dressed only in shorts, and smelling of recent perspiration, I could already tell what happened. Lowell’s downcast ears and curled tail did everything to make him feel smaller, look more compact and protected. He was clearly on the verge of tears.

We didn’t sleep together earlier in the afternoon, going into the night. Instead, I had opted for the couch, silently knowing he needed the sleep more than me. Just because I was considerate of Lowell’s mission didn’t mean I wanted to speak to him though. Rather than talk or interact with the cocky, inconsiderate mutt, I pretended to be asleep as he returned to the hotel room, paused by the door to likely look down at me, and stormed off to the bedroom. It wouldn’t be until minutes later that I drifted off to nonexistent dreams. We hadn’t spoken a word to each other since our quote-unquote ‘fight’. Our first fight.

Kneeling in front of him, my previous anger towards Lowell temporarily vanished.

“Did you…have a nightmare, Low?”

He feverishly nodded.

“A…A really fucking bad one…” he murmured. In all the months I got to know Lowell, never had I ever seen him as vulnerable. “A really bad, really realistic one…”

I cautiously raised my fingers and gingerly pouched one of his paws. No reaction led me to be a little more confident in my next moves. Thinking ahead of time, I snatched the nearby TV remote from the floor and tuned to a weather channel, raising it to a respectable volume. The background music and a robotic voice describing cloud formations would drown out anything our neighbors could hear. Particularly as I wrapped a comforting arm around the more

The confident, charismatic (and asshole of a) timber wolf I’d grown to love, finally let it out. He sobbed into my nape, soaking my fur with his tears and locking me in a shaking embrace. I did nothing but sit there, letting Lowell release all the emotions inside him, not objecting to him feel for my wrists or my limbs. It felt as if he were making sure I existed, as if his bad dream convinced him I were a figment, a phantom of his imagination.

Dozens of minutes passed by before Lowell whispered into my neck, “Adam?”

“Yeah?” I replied. “You okay, Low?”

“Y-Yeah, I…I am…” he hugged into me. “I think I am. Think I am.”

I didn’t ask what the nightmare was about. Nor did I plan to. Whether it be my fatigue or sense of empathy, I guided my wolf back to bed and joined him. He did not object to the idea. Neither did I. The couch was uncomfortable for my back anyway.