

Midsummer Evenings: Part 1

The afternoon sun beat down on the retriever as he worked his way through the mass of students. The canine kept his head down as he followed the crowd, the fur on the back of his paws slightly dampened from earlier. He held several books to his chest as he squeezed past a dingo out to a more open area.

"Hey, Luris!"

The retriever paused, turning to face the speaker only to receive a rough shove, knocking the canine back into several others.

"S-sorry," Luris stammered as he gathered his things, fighting the urge to retaliate.

"What a ditz..."

"Watch where you're going to damn dog," the bear growled as he stepped towards the retriever.

"I didn't mean to." Luris said quietly.

A dingo stepped in front of the bear, cutting him off. "Beat it Seth," he growled, his tone one of quiet anger.

"Or what?" Came the reply.

"It's fine," Luris sighed, getting to his paws again. "Leave him."

"I'm not going to repeat myself again, Seth..." the dingo said, completely ignoring the retriever as he slipped a paw into his pocket. "Get lost."

The bear sneered down at the dingo as he stepped forward, towering over the smaller canine. "And just what do you intend on doing, bitch?"

No sooner had the words left the ursine's muzzle when the dingo pounced, throwing his weight against the bear. He brought a paw up, catching the ursine at the throat as he wrapped a hind paw around the ursine's leg, knocking the larger creature to his back. The dingo removed his paw from his pocket, giving it a swift flick and opening the knife in the blink of an eye, placing the tip of the blade right in front of the bear's eye.

"You really want to find out?" The dingo asked, struggling to keep his paws steady. "I catch you again and you'll be blind, you understand me?"

"Okay, okay!"

The dingo stood and took a step back, reversing his grip on the blade. "Beat it."

The bear shot the dingo a sharp glare before getting up and making his way into the crowd. Several of the students simply stared in shock while others ignored the spectacle, choosing instead to move on.

"U-uh...Thanks?" Luris asked, tentatively.

The dingo sighed, folding the knife up and offering the retriever a paw. "Anytime...You alright?"

"Yeah, I think so," Luris replied, taking the dingo's paw and hoisting himself upright.

The dingo nodded. "Good. Mind if I walk with you?" he asked, his voice taking on a much lighter tone.

The retriever paused, giving the dingo a rather confused stare.

"Just...for company's sake."

"I...guess, yeah."

"Cool!"

Luris shifted uneasily before making his way out to the main streets, the dingo following behind him.

"So, I don't think I got a chance to introduce myself," he said, moving up to walk beside the retriever. "I'm Cole."

"Luris."

The dingo smiled. "So...Luris, yes? Mind if I ask you something?"

"Fire away," he replied.

"Would you be interested in joining me at the mall later tonight?"

The retriever stopped dead, looking over.

"Ah, before you ask; no, that wasn't a joke. I'm serious. The company would be nice."

"Why me?"

Cole smiled. "Why not?"

"We don't even know each other."

"What if I wanted to change that?" Cole asked.

"Then you're insane..." Luris replied as he turned back and began making his way down the street once more.

"I think my insanity has already been established," Cole laughed, keeping pace. "I did jump a bear twice my size."

"I really don't think it's a good idea," Luris replied.

"The park then?"

"Why the park now?" the retriever asked as he came to a halt in front of his house.

"Because it's close by? Well, more for the reason I'd like to hang out with someone and chat really..." the dingo replied. "Think it over, okay? I'll be there if you decide to join me," he said as he turned to leave.

"But--"

"Ten o'clock," the dingo called as he glanced over his shoulder. "I'll be waiting."

* * *

Luris sat in his room, staring down at his paws in silence. Several small scars ran the length of both his arms just barely visible through his fur. For several long minutes the retriever sat there, looking over to the closet, a solitary tear falling onto the pad of his paw.

A light tapping at the door brought the retriever back to reality. "Hey Luris, are you feeling okay?"

The retriever pulled the sleeves on his shirt over the scars. "Just feeling a little sick..."

"Still?" The door opened, as an older retriever walked in, looking over at him. "Are you sure you're okay? You could see the doctor you know," She said, sitting down beside him.

"Yeah, fine...just a bit tired and a headache," He replied, smiling slightly. "It'll go away sooner or later."

"It's been constant over the past few weeks--"

"I'm fine, mom...I just need some rest is all..."

"If you're sure."

"Yeah...I'm sure."

"Well, alright. Let me know if you change your mind, okay?"

"Yeah, I will."

"Sleep well then."

* * *

Cole paced back and forth along the park, glancing anxiously down the road every few minutes. The dingo paused to check his watch, heaving a heavy sigh. 10:23... No surprise; the retriever hadn't shown. Frustrated, the dingo threw himself down at the base of a tree and lay back, staring blankly at the stars for a few minutes before eventually folding his arms over his face.

It wasn't long after he had dozed off when he felt a light prod against his side followed by a quiet voice.

"Uh, hello? Cole?"

The canine gave a quiet grumble as he turned on his side and curled up.

"Oh come on..."

"Mmmf... OH CRAP!"

The dingo hopped up and brushed his fur out hastily, turning his attention to the speaker. "Uh, hi...sorry about that..."

"Ah, you live."

"Yeah, uh...kind of fell asleep for a little bit... What time is it?"

"Around eleven...sorry I didn't show up earlier..."

"Ch, it's fine. Don't worry about it."

"Why're you still here?" the retriever asked, moving to lean up against the tree. "I imagine you've been here for well over an hour."

"Just waiting for you."

"But why wait so long?"

"To be honest...I don't have anywhere else to be."

"You could just go to bed, no?"

The dingo lowered his head, letting his ears droop a bit. "I mean, I really don't have anywhere else to be."

"...Your family?"

"Heh, haven't got any. We might be related, but I won't be associated with them..."

"Oh...I'm sorry."

"Don't be," The dingo said, giving the retriever a smile. "I'm just glad you decided to come by."

"Yeah well...I almost didn't," he replied. "Why'd you ask me, though?"

"Because it seemed like you could use someone to hang out with occasionally. I know I could."

The retriever smiled slightly for a moment, though it faded quickly. "Surely there were others to ask."

The dingo sat down, patting the spot beside him. "There were hundreds. You've seen the amount of students in the school... But none of them are you."

The retriever hesitated for a moment before taking the spot, holding his knees up against his chest. "What makes me so different? Everyone's always seeking me out, why?"

"Honestly, it was kind of a spur of the moment thing...that and I thought you might enjoy some company."

"I don't really do well with company."

The dingo paused for a moment, glancing over. "Why is that?"

The retriever smirked slightly. "Seth makes it obvious, I'm sure you've noticed."

"Hah, as if I could actually take that idiot seriously." The dingo replied. "Nothing he says has ever held true, as far as I can tell."

"So those rumors mean nothing to you then?"

The dingo gave a quiet laugh. "That sounds about right," he said, smiling broadly. "Rumors are an individual's opinion of something, not mine. It's like...oh I don't know, your favorite meal. Others might agree that it's great, but that doesn't mean it's their favorite. Vice-versa, you could hate something when others like it. Jumping on a bandwagon based on someone's personal opinions is a dumb idea."

"I...guess that's a relief." Luris said.

"So why did you decide to join me if it makes you uncomfortable?"

Luris sighed and lay back. "I guess because I wanted to give myself one more chance."

"What do you mean?"

"I...wasn't intending to be around after school."

"Around...?"

"I...had been thinking it over for a couple months. I wanted to prove to myself that there was something left for me this morning but...trying to talk with my family, it seemed like it'd be better if I wasn't there to cause worry anymore. Throughout the day, I had a lot of the others harassing me and I just wanted it all to end. Seth kind of drove it home. I don't fit in with the others. Then well...you decided to step in. I spent a good while at home just thinking. There really wasn't much left to do besides pick up the knife..."

"O-oh..." Cole replied, lowering his gaze slightly, letting his ears droop. "I'm sorry... For what it's worth, I'm glad you decided to come."

"Thanks, I guess," Luris replied. "In a sort of round about messed up way, I owe you my life."

Cole smiled as he nudged the retriever lightly. "In that case you can hang around with me until you can return the favor, yes?"

The retriever let out a quiet laugh. "I suppose that's fair."

"Excellent!"

"One thing that bothers me though... Where do you intend on sleeping?"

"Hmm? Oh...I'll probably just nap out here again," Cole replied. "It's actually kind of nice once you get used to it."

Luris shifted uncomfortably. "I...well, mind if I joined you?"

"What? Out here?"

"Well...yeah...I don't want to go back to my room."

"Why not? Surely a bed is more comfortable than the ground..."

Luris chuckled. "There's grass, it's not too terrible. Like you said, it's kind of nice once you get used to it."

"But you do have the option to go...I mean, don't get me wrong, I'd love the company, but don't feel like you need to stay."

"It's really just that I can't deal with it right now..."

"Oh... yeah, I understand."

The two lay in silence for several moments, each left to their own thoughts. The wind whispered quietly as it tickled the leaves of the tree, causing them to dance about. The moonlight barely shone through, the brief glimpse of light through the leaves one akin to the fireflies that fluttered about.

"Do you mind if I asked you a personal question...?" Luris asked, his eyes following two particular insects as they danced around one another.

"Hmm? Fire away."

"About your family...did something happen?"

The dingo sighed quietly taking a few moments to gather his thoughts. "In a sense... I don't really like talking about them much though..."

"It's okay if you don't want to," Luris began.

"No, it's just that I'm not too fond of what they're like is all. My mother is constantly putting me down, saying that everything I do is a mistake and that it's wrong. My father is no different. They want me to do things on my own, but exactly as they say."

"That's unfortunate."

"Heh, it gets worse," Cole said quietly. "Lately they've decided that everything is up to me. I need to balance school with work and household chores. Not only that, but everything needs to be perfect. If I'm even a little bit late or if I missed the smallest detail on anything they freak out."

"I guess that explains why you stay out here."

"Yeah...I can't be a part of their family so I make my own."

"Sorry what?"

Cole chuckled. "I see my friends as my family. The furs I spend time with are my siblings. My teachers have kind of become my parents, aunts, and uncles."

"What happens when you graduate?"

"I move out," Cole said. "I might come back and visit, but it's not as though I'll forget everyone."

"That makes sense," Luris said. "I wonder if I'll find my own family...?" he muttered, closing his eyes.

Cole glanced over and smiled to himself, returning his gaze to the stars above. *I believe you already have.*

* * *

Over the next few days, Luris found himself caught in a whirlwind of emotion. The rumors were still the same. He was still picked on and more often than not he found himself seeking solitude hiding out behind the school. Cole had managed to find him hiding out and joined him. In the final week of classes, a panther caught the two as they made their way off campus.

"Oi, Cole!"

The dingo turned to look over as a panther made her way over, eyeing the two curiously.

"Geez you're a hard one to find."
 "Hello to you as well, Kara," Cole said. "Haven't seen you around lately..."
 "Me? Uh-uh, you're the one who went 'n disappeared off the face of the earth!"
 "Ah, sorry about that," Cole replied.
 "Ach, worry less," The panther said, waving a paw dismissively. "So, I'm curious. who's your boyfriend?"
 "I..." Cole started, pausing for a moment. "Sorry what?"
 "Your boyfriend, yes?"
 Luris glanced over exchanging a confused glance with the dingo. "I think you might have the wrong dingo," he said.
 "No way I'd mistake Cole for someone else hon."
 "We're not...where the hell did you get that idea?" Cole asked.
 "It's been floating around the academy, haven't you heard?"
 "What? No, I haven't."
 "Ah...that explains things a bit. Anyhow, they're sayin' how you 'n some dog've been hanging 'round each other tons. Everyone assumes you two are datin'."
 "That's not exactly the case here," Luris muttered.
 "Oh. Well, you might want to clear that up with the others. I can't say I expect them to ignore you two for long."
 "Perfect," Luris growled. "Just what I need."
 "Eh, ignore them," Cole said. "We have just over a week left, what could they do?"
 "Make life a living hell."
 "Hah, I for one wouldn't mind seeing two handsome dogs like you two goin' at it," Kara said, giving Luris a wink.
 "KARA!" Cole barked.
 "I...wha-... that...NO!"
 The panther chuckled quietly. "Hey, a girl can dream, can't she? Not like you haven't said the same about me and Sarah, eh, Cole?"
 "Shut up...", Cole grumbled, blushing deeply.
 "O...kay then," Luris said as he turned and began making his way down the street. "I'm going home, you two have fun."
 "Ah hey! Wait up!" Cole called, running over. "Sorry about that," he muttered. "She can be a bit... *risqué* occasionally."
 "So I've noticed," Luris replied.
 "Anyway...after next week there's nothing for the summer."
 "Yeah, not sure what I really want to do."
 "Would you be interested in work at all?"
 "Work would be nice...Probably a good idea seeing as how I don't intend on attending much of next year."
 "What? You're dropping out?"
 "No, I'm just a bit ahead in credits so I'm just taking the first semester to meet the requirements and then I'm done."
 "Don't you think that's a little bit much to take on at once?"
 "I'll manage. What about you? You're graduating."

"Haha, don't remind me."

"Not excited?"

"No I'm excited, but not for the same reasons others would be. I just want to get out on my own and prove that I can live my own life."

"Sounds like you've got plans," Luris replied. "You still intend on living on the streets?"

"For a while, yeah... At least until I can afford my own place."

"I'd offer you a place to stay but I'm still living with my family..."

"Don't worry about it! I appreciate the thought but I wouldn't impose like that."

"At least drop by on occasion, yea?"

Cole smiled. "Sure. You just take care of yourself, deal?"

Luris gave the dingo a small smile. "Ok, deal."

"I'll see you later tonight then?"

"of course."

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Luris sighed quietly, checking the time once again. The dingo was late, much later than was acceptable. The retriever groaned, slipping his paws into his pockets as he began circling the park. The canine found himself standing at the edge of an outcropping as he stared silently into the night sky. The retriever heaved a sigh and lowered his gaze to find his reflection staring back at him. For the first time, the canine felt an emptiness he had neglected to notice in the years past. Though it hadn't been very long since he had met the dingo he had grown used to having the canine around.

Luris paused in his thoughts, allowing himself a small smile as he heard the leaves behind him rustle. "You're late," He said, not turning.

"Yeah, sorry about that," came the reply.

The retriever turned slightly, his smile fading all too quickly. Cole's usual tone of voice had suddenly disappeared. The light hearted mannerism that the retriever had come to love was suddenly replaced by a tone all too familiar.

"Hey...everything alright?" Luris asked, the worry apparent in his voice.

"Just feeling a little off tonight," Cole replied, giving the retriever a smile. "Had a bit of a stressful day at home..."

"Ah...I'm sorry."

"Oh don't worry about it. Anyway, what've you been up to? You looked a little down."

The retriever waved a paw dismissively. "Oh just thinking, that's all."

"About?"

"Nothing in particular," The retriever replied.

The dingo was silent for a few moments simply giving the retriever a long stare. It was obvious the canine knew better, though Luris kept his muzzle sealed. "Well, okay," Cole said, laying down beside the retriever. "What d'you think of Kara?"

Luris was silent for a few moments eventually heaving a sigh and taking a spot beside the dingo. "I think she's kind of forward."

Cole chuckled at the comment, giving a nod. "Yeah, that's definitely one way to describe her," he said.

"D'you think she was just making it all up?" Luris asked, looking over.
 "Hmm?"
 "About the rumors, what they're saying and all."
 Cole sighed quietly. "I doubt it. She's not that kind of fur."
 "Does it bother you at all?"
 "A little bit, but I don't think it's worth losing a friend over."
 "You know they'll come after us, right?"
 The dingo smiled. "Let them."
 "Don't you go attacking anyone again!"
 "I won't..."
 "You attacked Seth,"
 "I was...on edge," Cole said. "I kind of lost my temper."
 "I...guess I didn't really help, squeezing by and all."
 The dingo chuckled quietly. "Well, no...but it's not like you were doing anything that bothered me."
 "What was bothering you though?"
 "I was just having a particularly bad day," The dingo replied. "feeling a little down and generally just upset with my life."
 "Was...it because you were lonely?"
 "Hah, might as well just have said it outright, eh?" the dingo asked, giving the retriever a wry grin. "Yeah, I was lonely. Seth hadn't made things much better earlier that day."
 "What'd he do?"
 "Oh nothing unusual. It was his usual teasing really. Saying I was some damn hobo with no life, living alone on the streets with no one who loves me."
 "Owch...I Can see why that bothered you..." Luris replied, lowering his ears.
 "I guess...just, the day before my parents were kind of harsh on me...Apparently I wasn't good enough for them. I guess that's why it got to me. Your being shoved gave me an excuse to take it out on the guy..."
 "I...see."
 The dingo heaved a sigh. "I'm sorry, I know I'm really not the most respectable guy out there..."
 "Believe me, you're much nicer than most."
 "Heh, I try...sometimes it just gets to be too much, you know?"
 "Yeah, I hear you," Luris replied. "I...don't mean to bring up negative memories, but...are you at home long?"
 Cole gave a bark of laughter, shaking his head. "No way. I go home on occasion just to pick up a couple things and take care of whatever chores they decide to throw at me while I'm there. Other than that I might be home for a couple hours at most."
 "Oh...So, what are your plans for the weekend?"
 Cole thought for a moment before responding. "I'm thinking of staying at the shore actually...Found a nice little spot where I can just set up camp."
 "You looking forward to it?" Luris asked.
 "Oh absolutely," Cole replied. "I've been just dozing off in parks and napping at school mostly."

This time it was the retrievers turn to give the dingo a silent stare.

"Ok no...I'm not," Cole replied, his tone changing slightly. "I hate sleeping out in the open. The wind is so harsh and it's cold. The nights just drag on forever without company. I just want to cry a lot of the time..."

"Alright then," Luris said. "I'm dragging you home with me tomorrow evening."

"W-What?" Cole stammered. "But your family?"

"They can be a little harsh, but they're not that mean. If you need a place to stay for a while I'm sure they'd welcome you."

"I...I don't know about that Luris," Cole replied. "I really don't like being a burden."

"You won't be," The retriever replied. "I get lonely too you know."

"We haven't even known each other for that long."

"And I still feel terrible for letting you go without a bed," Luris replied. "There's a spare room and a futon you can use. And I'm sure you'd enjoy having a warm shower again."

"I...I couldn't."

"Please?" Luris pressed. "I don't like the idea of leaving you out here on your own when I have the option to help you out a bit...even if it's just a little..."

Cole sighed. "I...I really shouldn't, Luris."

"What's the worst that could happen?"

"I just don't feel comfortable."

"Well then come over after classes are out and you can decide after staying for a little while then. Deal?"

"But-"

"At the VERY least come and relax for a while after class. Get a hot shower and a decent meal for once."

"Luris I..." Cole began, stopping short as he took note of the retriever's expression. Despite having a family that cared, it was clear that Luris had felt the effects of being alone far more strongly than himself. "I...accept your invitation," the dingo replied, giving the retriever a small smile. "But only because you insist."

For the first time in years, Luris smiled. Not one of mere amusement or entertainment, but one of genuine happiness.

Cole felt a light tapping against his legs and glanced down, letting out a small chuckle at the sight which greeted him. Both canines had begun wagging their tails, eager for the coming weekend.

Midsummer Evenings: Part 2

A dingo stood at the locker, gathering his things when the faint sound of paws hitting the tiled floor reached his ears.

"COLE! Damn it, where are you?!"

Cole stopped to peer around the corner immediately slamming the locker shut and making his way over to the retriever. "Luris! What on earth?!"

Luris came to a halt just ahead of Cole and gave a low groan. The retriever propped himself up against a wall and brought a paw up to wipe blood from his eyes, his other holding his side.

"What happened?" Cole breathed, kneeling down in front of the canine. "You alright man?"

As if in response, a bear and horse made their way towards the duo.

"Well look who it is," The bear said. "If it isn't Cole... trying to protect that faggot, are we?"

"Seth..." the dingo snarled. "You little-" Cole began as he stood, taking a step towards the duo.

"Hey," Luris said, catching the dingo's paw. "Leave them," he said.

"I can deal with them..." Cole growled angrily.

"Not a chance," Luris said, tightening his grip and pulling the dingo away. "You'll just get in trouble again."

"Better listen to your boyfriend," Seth said with a sneer.

Cole growled quietly but nodded. "Fine..." he muttered, turning to leave with the retriever. "Come on, we need to get you taken care of," he said, letting the retriever lean against him as they made their way down the hall.

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"What happened back there?" Cole asked as Luris made his way out of the nurse's office, holding an ice pack against the side of his head.

"Ugh, it's really nothing new..." Luris replied. "I got caught in the field by Seth and his friends...He kind of decided to use me as a punching bag for a while."

Cole growled quietly. "I swear that bear makes me sick. If I could just get my paws on that jerk..." he muttered angrily, his voice trailing off for a moment. "Anyway, we should get you back home...get some rest," the dingo said as he returned his attention to the retriever. "You sure you can walk alright? I can probably find us a ride if you'd like."

Luris gave a slight nod. "Yeah I can walk. It's only a mile or so to get to my place."

"Well, alright, if you say so..." The dingo muttered. "So, details," Cole said as they began making their way down the road. "Was there anyone else involved besides Seth and that horse?"

The retriever gave him a slight nod. "A few...I honestly don't know how I got away. It all kind of blurred together. I remember walking across the field and having some hawk cut me off, asking where my boyfriend was."

Cole glanced over, raising a brow. "Rumors spread fast..."

"Well, to be fair it's been several days since Kara mentioned it..." Luris said. "Anyway, some cat and horse decided to stop by and poke fun at me for a bit...refused to let me just keep walking. And then

Seth shows up along with Alan. Next thing I remember I'm running down the hallway trying to find you..."

The dingo gave a small nod. "I see...What happened to the other three? You said there was a cat, a hawk, and that hare, Alan."

"They didn't follow me."

"Smart..."

"Anyway...You're coming over, right?"

"Ah, yeah...I'll drop in for a few," Cole said.

"Good," Luris replied. "Ma was kind of excited actually."

"Excited?" The dingo asked. "Why?"

"It's just been a very long time since I've had anyone over..."

"No siblings?"

The retriever shook his head. "Nope, just me, mom, and my grandmother."

"What about your father?"

Luris was silent for some time, lowering his head slightly. "He's...somewhere. I think."

"Sorry," Cole muttered.

"Not important. How was your night anyway?"

"Oh the usual," Cole replied. "A little cold but otherwise restful."

"I guess that's a good thing..."

"Well, it sure beats being awake all night."

"That's true," Luris replied.

The two continued on in silence for some time, the dingo eventually speaking up.

"How far do you think they'll go?"

"I...don't know. Either way you won't have to deal with them," Luris said quietly.

"Yeah but you will," Cole said.

"I can take care of myself."

"I dunno Luris..."

"Believe me I'd rather not do anything. If at all possible, I just leave."

"As long as it works," Cole replied.

"One thing..."

"What is it?"

Luris sighed stopping at the intersection just beyond his home. "If anyone asks, I fell down the stairs."

"What...why?"

"I don't want them bugging me," Luris replied. "That and they'll just ask why I'm being picked on."

Cole sighed. "Alright...I guess that's reasonable."

"I'm constantly getting myself hurt anyway. I'm always tripping over something or just flat out not paying attention."

"It might be a good idea to pay attention on occasion," Cole replied.

"Hah...maybe, but it takes too much effort," Luris replied, making his way down the street.

Cole stopped as Luris made his way to the door, hesitating at the edge of the driveway. The retriever paused and turned to look back at Cole.

"Hey, you alright?" He asked, making his way back to his friend.

Cole shook his head. "Not in the least," he replied, hugging himself. "I don't know if I really want to go inside..."

Luris glanced over at the house and nodded. "I guess I can understand that..."

"No no, it's not that I don't like being inside," Cole replied hastily. "I just don't know what to think of...you know, older furs."

"Oh they're not that bad," the retriever replied. "I'm sure..." he began, the sound of the door opening interrupting him.

"Oh you're back!"

Cole shifted uncomfortably, his tail held between his legs.

Luris glanced over and raised a paw in greeting. "Hi ma," He called, nudging at Cole. "Come on you, she doesn't bite."

"Not unless you happen to be food...which I certainly hope you aren't." Luris' mother replied.

"Heh... mom, this is Cole, the dingo I mentioned the other day."

"Oh good!" She said, clapping her paws together. "You can call me Gale," she said, holding her paw out.

Cole gave a nervous smile, taking her paw. "Ah, nice to meet you Gale," he said.

"I didn't exactly expect you to come outside as soon as I got back," Luris said, glancing over.

"Just came outside to get a few flowers from the bushes. I didn't exactly expect you to come home with a head injury," Gale replied, leaning in to examine the area. "Doesn't look too bad," she muttered.

"It's nothing, don't fuss over it," Luris replied, stepping away. "Stairs hate me."

"Again?" His mother asked, sounding rather exasperated. "You really do need to be more careful Luris."

"I can't remember how to walk and talk at the same time," Luris complained. "Walking's hard enough without stringing together a whole bunch of syllables at the same time."

Gale smiled. "So Cole," She began.

"Yes ma'am?" Cole asked, looking over.

The retriever paused, glancing over at her son momentarily. "Um, just Gale please," She said. "Come inside and have a bite to eat?"

"A-ah... I..." Cole stammered, receiving a light nudge from Luris. "Uh, that'd be wonderful," Cole replied.

Luris smiled. "I'll show him around quick," he said. "You wanted to get a couple flowers, right?"

"Ah, yes," Gale replied, glancing over at the gardenia bushes along the side of the wall. "I'll meet you inside in a moment then?"

Luris nodded and began making his way to the door. "Come on," he called back, waving the dingo over.

Cole glanced between the two retrievers before following his friend rather hurriedly, the two making their way inside. The dingo followed close behind the retriever, uncertain as to the proper

reaction. It had been a very long time since he had been inside someone else's house and even longer since he had felt he was a welcome guest.

"It's really not much but it's where I live." Luris said as he brought the dingo around the house. "This is my room."

The dingo peered in and smiled to himself. While it wasn't the neatest it had a much different feel than the rest of the house.

"I know it's a bit of a mess," Luris said quietly. "I haven't been taking the greatest care in keeping it clean."

Cole chuckled. "Ah, no worries. It's a lot nicer than what my room used to look like." He said. "It looked like a miniature tornado had gotten in the house sometimes."

The retriever laughed. "That's what mom's said about my room a few times," he said. "I did clean up a bit yesterday though...just haven't made the bed."

"You know, it might help if you actually got up a few minutes earlier so you had time to do that," came a voice from behind them.

Cole jumped, turning to see Gale standing behind the two, smiling broadly. "c'mon, there's some cookies in the dining room."

"Ah, thanks," Cole said, following the two retrievers.

"So Cole," Gale began as the trio took their spots around the table, each of them retrieving one of the many cookies from the plate sitting in the center. "I'm kind of curious; Luris mentioned that he wanted to have you stay for the weekend."

The dingo glanced over at the retriever but nodded.

"It doesn't seem like you brought anything though. You did let your parents know?" She asked.

Cole nodded again. "Yeah, I don't have anything to bring though."

"Change of clothes at least?" Gale asked.

"I only have what I'm wearing really," Cole replied. "I have a couple changes at home but not much. It's a long story."

"No worries, you can use my clothes. We're about the same size," Luris said, "Besides, it's easier."

"Well, in either case, I do hope you decide to stay for a little while," Gale said. "It's been so long since Luris has had a friend over."

Cole smiled slightly. "I'll probably hang around for a little bit if that's okay. I don't know about a night though...I really don't want to be a hassle."

"Oh it's no hassle, really! It'll be nice to have you around. We do have a spare room for you to use should you choose to stay."

"That's very kind of you," the dingo replied.

Luris glanced over, giving a light chuckle. "Relax Cole. There's no need to be so tense," he said. Cole had been sitting with his tail drawn up over his lap, paws crossed beneath him and ears somewhat laid back.

Cole grinned slightly. "I'm just not used to being inside is all," the dingo replied. "Makes me nervous."

"Why's that?" Gale asked, taking a bite from one of the cookies in front of her.

"Ah, I spend a lot of time outside. My siblings would kind of take over inside."

Luris raised a brow at the dingo but remained silent.

Gale chuckled. "Oh now that brings back memories," she said. "My brother had a tendency of locking me out of the house when we were little. I used to get so mad at him... wouldn't get back inside until either mom or dad got home. They weren't particularly pleased with him either," she said.

Cole gave a quiet chuckle.

"By the way," Luris interjected. "I was thinking of going around town tomorrow afternoon. Interested in joining me?"

Cole raised a brow but nodded. "Sure, I don't see why not," he replied. "Honestly, I didn't think you would be one to wander around town for no reason."

Luris shrugged. "Thought I'd take a look and see if anyone was hiring. Might as well get a bite to eat and visit the beach while I'm at it, right?"

The dingo nodded in agreement.

"Well, I need to get back to work, still have a few things I need to do," Gale said as she stood. "Should have dinner ready around seven so don't go running off for too long, okay?"

"We won't," Luris replied as his mother made her way to the back of the house.

Cole watched the retriever for a moment, making sure she was out of earshot before leaning over to Luris. "I thought you weren't looking for a job this summer," he whispered.

"I'm not," Luris replied quietly. "But what other reason would I have to go out?"

"I guess that makes sense," the dingo replied.

"As for you, what was that with your siblings?"

Cole shrugged slightly. "I can't just say my parents treat me like some slave, can I?"

"Well...okay," Luris muttered. "Anyway, does being indoors really bother you that much?"

"Yeah, kinda."

"You feel a little better if we lay around in the back?"

"I...maybe?" Cole asked. "I have no idea. I've spent the majority of the past few years wandering the streets."

"Come on, might as well spend the time outside while it's nice," Luris said.

The dingo nodded as he stood, following the retriever out to the back of the house.

As the duo made their way into the yard, Cole felt himself suddenly relax. The air blowing through his fur felt wonderful. The warmth of the sun coupled with the sound of the birds made for a very familiar environment, and what was more, he felt safe. Not the same as being in the parks. Out there it was open; a public environment where anyone could just walk by. No. Out here; the shade of the trees were cut off from the streets and walkways other furs used. The rough, rock walls provided very little in the way of a barrier, but provided a sense of privacy...something the dingo had been lacking for several years now.

Maybe... Cole thought, looking around the garden. *Things are going to change.*

Luris smiled to himself as he noticed his friends change in demeanor. He made his way over to the tree and took a seat, leaning back against its trunk. Far too often the retriever had sat beneath this very tree when he felt lonely. Even still, despite the company he now had, he could feel a twinge of those feelings as he glanced over at the dingo who had taken a seat beside him. There was still so much that they didn't know about the one another. Finally though, after so many years he had someone to share the space with.

Cole took a seat beside the retriever enjoying the gentle breeze. The duo sat in silence, each left to their thoughts.

Despite the time Luris had spent with the dingo; he couldn't help but feel strangely guilty. Something kept telling him to walk away from it all while he could. Left in the silence with no topic of conversation; the retriever could feel his mood darken drastically, despite his efforts to ignore it. The weather wasn't helping much either. The air seemed to grow heavy with his mood, the clouds gathering overhead beginning to block out the sun.

Cole sighed quietly and lay down, turning his gaze to the sky above. "Luris, I have a question if I may. Or, more of an observation I guess."

The retriever was silent for a moment before giving the dingo a nod.

"I'm kind of curious why you have only ever been around me," Cole said. "You're a nice guy... why would you choose to hang around some dropout like me? Surely you could make whatever friends you'd like," The dingo asked, looking over at the retriever.

Luris sighed quietly and shook his head. "You're not a dropout. You have things going on most of us can never understand. As for friends, I just don't do well with others. A lot of times it feels like I'm being targeted. Like life is just trying to make me miserable," Luris muttered. "Anyway, what about you?" Luris asked. "It's not like you're short on friends to hang out with"

The dingo simply shook his head in response. "I know others, but I don't really feel as though I'm close enough to any to actually seek them out," he replied. "More acquaintances than anything else."

Cole inhaled deeply, letting his breath out in a long sigh.

Luris glanced over curiously, raising a brow.

"Going to rain soon," the dingo mused. "You might want to go inside."

"You'll get sick if you stay around out here," Luris replied, neither of them making a move to go in.

"You both will if you two don't come inside."

The duo turned to see Gale standing at the doorway, leaning around the corner. "Come on you two, it's going to storm."

Luris stood, taking a moment to pull Cole upright. "You're coming in too, you big puppy."

The dingo grumbled quietly but otherwise didn't protest, following the retrievers indoors.

"So...any plans?" Cole asked as Luris closed the door behind them.

"Why don't you get a shower in?" Luris asked. "I need to take one myself and since we're stuck inside we might as well wait out the storm."

Cole nodded slightly. "I suppose..." he replied. "Mind if I took you up on your offer for some clothes?"

Luris shook his head. "Go ahead. There should be extra in my dresser. Find something you like."

The dingo stood, thanking the retriever before making his way to Luris' room. He took a few moments to look around, spotting a composition tablet laying on the desk beside the dresser. Curious, the dingo made his way over and placed a paw on the book as he debated on skimming its contents. He stood there for a few moments before pushing the tablet aside, turning his attention to the dresser as he began to look through some of the clothes within.

Surely if there was anything the retriever wanted to talk about, it would be brought up at some point. There was no reason for the dingo to go through any of his friends belongings; he reasoned as a gentle rumbling from outside heralded the oncoming storm.

Cole paused as he felt his paw come in contact with a small cylindrical object shoved into the far corner of the dresser. Curious, the dingo pulled the object out, the small bottle giving a quiet rattle. Cole let his ears droop and glanced over at the notebook. Of all the things he had to come across it was this. The dingo placed the pill bottle beside the tablet and made a mental note to ask the retriever about the contents later.

The dingo picked out a simple light gray shirt and a pair of dark blue shorts, placing them on the corner of the bed and made his way to the shower. He let the water run over his paws, testing the temperature before climbing in, the water quickly matting his fur. A quiet murr escaped the dingo, the water flowing over his body seemingly washing away the stresses that had been building up over the past few weeks. It had been so long since he had last been able to enjoy a hot shower without needing to worry about what was yet to come. The dingo simply stood beneath the running water, enjoying the warmth after he had cleaned up, losing himself in his thoughts.

A light rap at the door caught Cole's attention, a cheery voice following the interruption. "Hey Cole, you awake in there?"

"Uh, yeah," The dingo replied, shutting off the water and shaking off. "Sorry. I'll be out in a sec."

"No rush," came Luris' reply. "Just making sure you're still alive."

Cole grinned to himself. "Still here," he called back, brushing the excess water from his fur before toweling off. "First time anyone's bothered to check on me like that," he said.

"Well...you have been in there for almost half an hour."

"Uh, sorry about that," Cole said, wrapping himself up and opening the door. "Didn't think-" he started, coming nose to nose with the retriever. Cole stepped back hastily, shifting his weight uncomfortably.

Luris was standing with his paws crossed over his chest, with a rather aggravated expression. "Enjoy your shower?" he asked, his tone of voice still as cheery as ever.

"Y-yeah...thanks... Uh, is something wrong?" Cole stammered, mentally kicking himself. He had completely lost track of the time. Not to mention Luris was completely creeping him out. The least the retriever could do was sound irritated. It would match the expression he was getting for starters.

Luris frowned, tossing the pills Cole had found earlier at the dingo. "Where was that?"

Cole jumped, fumbling with the bottle for a moment before finally getting a grasp on the object. "In the back of your dresser..." he said, suddenly feeling incredibly guilty. "I'm sorry Luris... I didn't-" he began, only to have the retriever cut him off.

"Doesn't matter. Did you go through the tablet?"

"I...no," Cole said, lowering his gaze. "I admit I wanted to..."

Luris stared at the dingo for what felt like an eternity before speaking. "I guess...I'll just trust you on that," he muttered.

"Ah, Luris..." Cole said, looking over the medication again. "How long has it been?"

"Few months..." Luris replied. "Why?"

"These are prescribed. They're not something you can just not take," the dingo said, turning the bottle over. "And...these aren't exactly old."

The retriever shifted rather uncomfortably. "Get rid of them... There are more in the cabinet."

"If there's more, why do you have this bunch in your clothes?"

Luris was silent for a while before responding. "Do you want the truth or an excuse?"

Cole raised a brow. "Do you really have to ask?"

The retriever huffed quietly. "Fine...Because I put them there the day after I met you... Remember how I said I just had to pick up the knife?"

The dingo nodded but remained silent. He knew where this was going and did not like the sound of it at all.

"I...figured the whole cleanup would be much easier..."

Cole looked over at the retriever, slowly beginning to put the pieces together. "This...really isn't any way to take your life...This much of it would really mess with your head."

Luris opened his muzzle to retort but came up with nothing, choosing instead to avert his gaze. "I know," he muttered. "Takes too long, one might say...though in my opinion well worth it..."

"Luris!"

"Oh don't you start," Luris growled. "I've heard it all from I don't know how many others! It's the way out for the weak, those who don't know how to cope, don't have the ability to deal with it. Then fine, I'm weak, and I'm stupid."

"I-I-I didn't..." Cole stammered, "th-that's, not what I meant at all!"

The retriever took a deep breath, regaining his composure a bit. "Look, I'm not going to kill myself, okay?" Luris asked. "If I was, I'd much rather find a nice little cliff face instead. It'd be a lot less cleanup and ideally no body."

"This isn't a joke!" Cole said harshly.

"Okay, okay...", Luris said, throwing his paws up. "I...was considering it. Maybe there's something worth all the crap I put up with... I know saying as much doesn't change what you see, but please...trust me on this?"

Cole sighed but gave a nod. "Alright... Just know you can talk to me if you need to. Believe me there's almost nothing that can put me off anymore."

"Even if I said I was a serial killer?"

"Only if you don't let me go with you."

"That...is totally not okay."

The dingo smiled slightly. "Neither is murder."

"Fair enough." Luris said. "Anyway, life's been better lately and I really don't feel like wasting time brooding. I'm going to get a shower in before I change my mind. Think you can keep yourself entertained for a few minutes?"

Cole nodded. "I don't think that'll be much of a problem," he replied.

Luris chuckled, padding past Cole and into the bathroom, pausing long enough to throw his shirt at the dingo. "I'll be out in a few."

The dingo sputtered a bit, batting the offending cloth from his face. "Sure thing," he replied, padding back to the bedroom to wait.

Midsummer Evenings: Part 3

Cole woke to find Luris kneeling over him, his nose no more than an inch from his own. The dingo gave a surprised yelp, sitting straight up.

Luris sat down hard, holding his muzzle as Cole rolled to his side, holding his own.

"Sorry," Luris said, glancing at his paws. "You okay?"

"I think I bit myself..." Cole replied, sitting back up, a little more slowly this time. "Quite the wakeup call..."

Luris gave a small grin, "Wanted to see how long it'd take you to notice."

"Oh?"

"Took you a little bit." Luris replied. "Sleep well?"

"Ah yeah...Thanks," Cole said. "Sorry, I didn't mean to fall asleep like that..."

Luris simply laughed, shaking his head in response. "It's fine," he said. "Comfy?"

The dingo gave a small smile. "Yeah... sure beats a pile of leaves," he replied.

Luris chuckled, standing up and padding over to shut the door before crawling over to sit beside his friend. "Good. I'd be worried if a bunch of leaves was more comfortable than my bed."

Cole chuckled, looking out the window at the garden. "Looks pretty wet still..." he commented.

"Yeah, apparently it stopped raining only a few minutes ago," Luris replied. "Looks like you'll be staying here for a little bit." He said, grinning at the dingo.

"I really shouldn't," Cole muttered.

"Oh it's fine," Luris replied. "Ma decided you were staying apparently," he said.

"Wait what?"

"While you were in the shower, she had me pick up the room downstairs. I suppose she's expecting you to spend the night at least. Besides, we have dinner before long if you're hungry."

Cole shook his head slightly. "I appreciate the offer, but I haven't anything to give in return."

"Don't worry about that," Luris replied. "You've been wandering around for how long? At least get a good night's sleep while you can. That and a decent meal."

The dingo shifted slightly but nodded in response. "I guess it would be nice," he said quietly. "What about your mom? I don't want to be putting extra stress on her either you know."

"She got pretty excited when I asked if you could stay the night... I don't think it'll be much of a problem," Luris replied. "Besides, with all that's happened, maybe she just wants to have the house filled again."

Cole raised a brow. "Again? I thought it was only you and your parents?" He asked.

"I used to have a brother..." Luris replied. "It's been a while."

"Used to?" Cole asked. "Did something happen?"

"He left home," Luris replied. "I don't really consider him my brother anymore... Not with what happened."

The dingo splayed his ears, looking down. "He do something?"

"Yeah...destroyed my family."

"How so?"

Luris shook his head. "I can't remember it all that well... He got into it with my dad a while ago and it stirred up something with my parents... He just got up and left one day and never did come back. Shortly after that, my dad also left. From there, everything kinda fell apart."

"That's rough," Cole replied. "I'm sorry..."

"It's nothing," the retriever replied. "You've been hanging out on the streets for a while... I've thought about leaving before too but I can't just disappear like he did..."

"Trust me, it's not a pretty place. There's a lot of things about it I don't like... I don't want to be there, but I have nowhere to go, you know?"

Luris leaned over, hugging the dingo close. "You're welcome to come here you know," He said. "Maybe we can explain things to mom, I'm sure she'll be glad to put you up here for a

while if you needed it."

Cole returned the embrace, giving a small nod. "I appreciate it Luris, I really do."

* * *

Gale paused for a moment, looking over at the clock hanging from the wall above the table she was working at. Soon she'd have to get those two for dinner. It had been such a long time since anyone had entered the house besides Luris and herself. It had been quite empty for some time, especially after Ryule had left. That boy had never been satisfied, at least, not until Luris had come around. Those two had gotten pretty close.

The retriever, glanced over at the door separating herself from the two canines. She could hear the two chatting from behind the door, similar to what she had heard before Ryule left. Perhaps, she reasoned, one day they'll have everyone back together. Until then, she would gladly take whatever small amount of happiness she could get.

Gale stood from her spot, padding over to the kitchen to check on dinner before making her way over to the room. The retriever grinned to herself as she picked up quiet giggling from the other side of the door.

"You girls going to come out for dinner or just sit around and giggle all day?" she asked.

"I think she heard you," came a voice.

"Me? What've I got to do with this?"

Gale opened the door slightly peering around the corner of the frame. "Come on you two. Dinner isn't going to stay hot forever."

"Kay, we'll be there in a sec," Luris said, scooting over to the edge of the bed and picking up the towels. "C'mon, I'm starving."

* * *

The three canids sat around the table, the dishes before them having been emptied out a few minutes ago. Cole, being the only dingo at the table, couldn't help but feel a little out of place.

"So what's the plann you two?" Gale asked.

"I think Cole was spending the night," Luris said, glancing over at the dingo.

"Ah, only if that's alright with you," Cole replied.

Gale couldn't help but smile, giving the dingo a nod. "Of course, as long as you two aren't up until the odd hours of the morning. Don't forget to sleep, okay?"

"Yes mother," Luris said. "When was the last time I was up that late anyway?"

Gale smiled. "The last time you had a friend over."

"That was years ago," Luris protested.

"Alright, just make sure you two at least get some rest."

"We will," Luris grumbled. "Cole has the room downstairs?" He asked, glancing over at the dingo.

"That was the plan, yes."

"I don't mind," Cole replied. "It'd be nice..." He said, trailing off.

Gale raised a brow. "Why don't you go make sure everything is in order Luris?" she asked.

"I...sure," Luris said, glancing over at the dingo before taking his leave.

Cole shifted a bit in his seat but made no move to leave, waiting for Luris to get out of earshot before speaking. "Is there something you wanted to ask me...?"

Gale gave a small nod. "I get the feeling there's something I may want to know in regards to you two." She said. "Is there something that I'm missing?"

"We're just friends, Ma'am," Cole said. "I'm...not sure what you're looking for."

The retriever frowned slightly. "What is it about a completely separate room that would be nice? It sounded like you were going to say something else beyond that."

Cole blinked. "Why's that?"

Gale smiled. "Well you did trail off a bit. I might be old, but my hearing is still decent pup."

Cole frowned a bit. "I...guess I did."

The retriever tilted her head to the side. "Sorry, I didn't mean anything by calling you pup..." She apologized.

The dingo shook his head. "It's fine," he replied, taking a moment to think. "I guess you might as well hear the gist of it if I'm staying the night..."

Gale tilted her head to the side, motioning for Cole to continue. "I'm listening."

"I'm a runaway...put simply." Cole muttered.

"Oh...what about your home?"

"Don't have one," the dingo replied, heaving a heavy sigh. "I've just been running around the streets for a while, poking through the woods and more or less just living off the land..."

"As impressive as that is, isn't anyone looking for you?" Gale asked.

Cole smirked. "No, I'm not missed...or so I've been told. I've gone back a couple times and have turned around each time. I've never run into any cops or anyone else looking for me before. No posters, no alerts... so I assume I'm not missed."

The retriever gave a sad nod. "I'm sorry it's like that. Must be rough for you."

The dingo smiled slightly. "It's kind of strange really. I never missed home, never really looked back. I guess I just got used to it after a while."

Gale shook her head. "No one should have to get used to something like that."

Cole gave a small shrug. "It's not easy, but I'm still alive."

Luris padded around the corner and dropped a paw on the dingo's head, ruffling his headfur playfully. "Yep, and you've got a nice comfy bed waiting for you downstairs."

The dingo smiled, looking up at his friend. "Thanks..."

"Cole,"

"Yes?"

Gale smiled slightly. "You should come over more often. We've got the room and the company would be nice," she said, standing up and moving around to stand beside the dingo, leaning over and placing a paw on his shoulder as she picked up the dish before him. "And no more sleeping out in the streets."

Cole blinked, staring at the retriever for a moment before shaking his head. "I couldn't. I've got nothing to offer...I couldn't cover for food or rent right now."

Gale leaned over and whispered something into the dingo's ear, Luris looking over at her curiously.

Cole glanced over at his friend and gave the retriever a small nod. "I suppose I could do that."

The retriever frowned. "Not fair," he said.

Gale simply laughed as she gathered the remaining dishes. "Don't worry about it," she said. "Why don't you two go outside before the sun sets completely?"

"Now that's just cruel."

Cole chuckled. "Come on you...," he said, standing up. "Thanks for dinner...It's been a while since I've gotten a meal like that."

"Oh there's more where that came from," Gale replied, shooing the duo off. "Go get some sun before its gone silly."

Luris looked between the two but gave a small nod, leading the dingo out through the back door. "C'mon, if you're going to be out here for sun-down, you've got to see it from the roof."

Cole blinked. "The roof?"

"Yeah, just don't fall off," Luris replied, making his way over to the tree. "Ma and I would climb up occasionally and just lie around for a while... You get a nice view of the sun setting behind those mountains," he said, gesturing off in the distance.

"You sure your mom wouldn't get mad at us?"

Luris blinked. "I kind of expect her to climb up here in a little bit actually. I think it's something she would do more often than not."

Cole shifted but gave a small nod. "Alright then, how do we get up?"

The retriever jumped up and grabbed a low hanging branch, pulling himself up on top of it. "I'm no cat, but if you get to this branch here, you can crawl over to the roof and just step off of it."

The dingo shifted. "Now probably isn't the best time to mention I can't climb, is it?"

Luris raised a brow. "You can't?"

Cole shook his head. "I've never been able to," he replied. "I've got no upper body strength."

The retriever thought for a moment and hopped down from the perch, beckoning the dingo over. "Here, I'll give you a lift then."

The dingo frowned. "You sure? I'm a little bit big for this, don't you think?"

Luris chuckled, shaking his head. "Nah, I've had to deal with much bigger."

Cole nodded. "Alright I guess...How do you do this...?"

The retriever dropped to a knee, cupping his paws to form a small platform. "Place your hindpaw there and we can get you sitting on that branch I was on."

The dingo shifted but gave a small nod, placing his hindpaw on the platform his friend had made. "You sure about this?"

Luris chuckled. "Yeah, just step up when you're ready and grab for that branch."

Cole took a breath and nodded. "Okay then..." he muttered, pushing off the ground.

The dingo felt the retriever stand with him as he placed his weight on the platform his friend had provided. Cole panicked a bit, latching to the branch a bit early and hanging for a bit before he felt Luris give him a shove from below. The dingo scrambled onto the branch, clinging to the tree as he looked down at the retriever who was grinning up at him.

"See? Not too bad."

"Says you," Cole replied, looking up at the branch nearest him. "And I'm supposed to get to where?"

"Stand up and I'll show you," Luris said.

Cole frowned but managed to scoot his way over to the trunk, digging his claws into the bark of the tree.

Luris climbed up beside the dingo and took a seat, patting a branch just above him. "Just climb up onto this one and then walk out to the roof." He said. "Here."

The retriever stood up and took a step onto the branch he had indicated, placing a paw

out to stabilize himself before offering the dingo a paw. "Come on."

Cole shifted and took the retrievers paw, letting his friend support some of his weight as he moved to the branch Luris was standing on. "This is going to take some practice," Cole muttered, crouching down to retain his balance.

Luris chuckled, leading the dingo along the branch and stepping off onto the roof, Cole stepping down right beside him.

The retriever brought the dingo over to the far side of the roof, stopping at the roofs peak and sitting down. "Just there," he said, gesturing over to the mountains. "You can see the sun set as the sky changes."

Cole smiled, taking a seat beside the retriever. Must really be something from this kind of vantage point."

The retriever nodded. "Yeah...it really is something."

Laid out beneath them was the city. The lights slowly beginning to turn on as the sun sank lower in the sky. Further out was the ocean, the water sparkling as the sunlight danced along the waves. A gentle breeze had picked up, bringing the plants to life as they added their own music to that of the evening birds.

Luris glanced over at the dingo sitting beside him and smiled to himself, shifting his weight slightly to lean against his friend.

Today had been a good day. Despite all that had happened over the past few days, the retriever felt like he would be able to deal with whatever was thrown his way. No matter what it was, he finally had someone at his back that he could share himself with. Knowing that alone gave him a sense of security he had been lacking. Perhaps his luck was finally changing.