

A shaky, deep breath.

"I'm afraid..."

"Sweetheart?" I turned from my work desk in my swivel chair to face him.

There wasn't anyone else in the room aside from us.

"I just...--"

"Sweetie, it's okay. There isn't--"

"...."

He was just staring.... Down at the floor.

I didn't understand what was going on. It wasn't even raining; the stars were out, the waxing half-moon was shining...

...Maybe it was a bad idea to move out so far from civilization?

"M-Mel? I'm right here... Please... can you tell me what you're afraid of?"

He looked from the ground into my eyes, and it was only for a microsecond, but I caught it; the relief mixed with excitement upon first seeing me. ...Why did it vanish?

"Th-they're here, Sharlina... Don't you see them?"

Gently, I placed my paw on his thigh.

"See who, darling?" I asked softly, soothingly, taking care not to sound dismissive.

"Th-the... sh-shadows..."

He began to shake with fear, starting to snifle.

"What do they look like, dear?"

"Uh..." He strained to think. "N-n... I can't... They're shapeless, and dark, but somehow I can still see them...."

"I'm so sorry..." I could do naught but look sorrowfully on; I was powerless to this invisible foe.

He sighed, visibly calming down a touch. "I-it isn't your fault, Sharlina..."

He slowly looked up at me, meeting my gaze with puppy dog eyes, and I knew what that meant~

"C'mere, you~" Tail swishing, I leapt forward from the chair, tackling my partner to the bed,

and eliciting a cute little yelp from him. "Mmm..." I rubbed noses with him as though he were my pet cat, and nuzzled his soft cheek.

"Sh-sharlina?"

I paused above him, tail wagging. "Yes?"

"Can I talk to you about something?"

"Day or night," I replied, gazing into iridescent, green eyes.

"C-can you get off me first?"

I giggled. "Whoops. Sure." I rolled off of the silly wolf, so that I was now side-by-side with him.

whirrrr

We both jumped at a mechanical noise, then simultaneously relaxed, realizing it was just our air conditioner. He always seems much more peaceful when cool air is blowing...

"So what did you want to ask?" I said, stretching myself out and looking to the ceiling.

He fiddled with his paws, hesitating. "Is it... okay? That we're out here?"

"What do you mean?" My eyes had met his now.

He'd told me once that this felt like a dream; that it was too good to be true. As if he were afraid it could end at any moment...

...and wake up in the hell I'd saved him from.

"Well, we're just..." He blinked. "...so far away, from everything and everyone we've ever known..."

We can make this work, though, right?

"It's not that long of a drive back..." I pointed out. Maybe I could buy some chocolate? That'd make for a fun movie night~

He sighed, almost turning away from me, but I'd touched him before he could.

"...You miss her, don't you." I kept my tone quiet and docile, in spite of the conversation I'd just started.

I saw tears well up in his eyes, and could tell he was trying to hold them in, but out they spilled anyway. He nodded yes in quick succession as he covered his eyes with his hands, as though out of shame.

“Hey...” I spoke soothingly, placing my hand on his side. “It’s okay; it’s natural that you miss her. I’m not going to be upset at you for that.”

The sobbing slowed a bit. “Y-you... you won’t?”

He was like a child... not in a bad way; he was quite intellectual for his age, and very competent. He’s just... so innocent; still so very afraid of what lies in the darkness.

And based even from solely my own experiences in childhood... I can’t say I blame him.

“No...” I threw my arms around him, unable to contain myself. “All I’ve wanted since the moment I saw you is to keep you protected.” I kissed his cheek gently.

“B-but... th-that would mean I’m.....” He didn’t have the heart to finish his sentence, but I knew where he was going with this.

“You’re *not* weak.” I repositioned myself to look at him. “So you have different challenges than other people. You know something?”

He blinked, interested, waiting for me to continue.

“I’m relatively certain that if any other fur were to walk 1 mile in your shoes, they would sob until they hadn’t any energy nor tears left. No matter how tough, successful, or otherwise ‘superior’ they might seem.”

He seemed hopeful for a moment, almost like he was about to reach out and hug me... but his face fell again.

“...They’d all laugh at me if they knew I was being protected by my girlfriend...”

I paused for a moment, then asked, “Is that important to you?”

“Huh?”

“Whether they laugh or not. Do you really care about their approval so much?” I took care not to sound too harsh.

I saw his expression change, soften.

“.....No. I-I don’t.” He showed me a cute, small smile.

I beamed. “Then they can all screw themselves~! <3”

He laughed at that. “Thank you, Sharlina.”

“You’re welcome, my sweet,” I replied, giggling back. Now his face had melted back to comfort, here, with me, in our home on our cushy bed~

I continued to hug him throughout the night, and he sighed contently in my arms, allowing me to snuggle him as much as I pleased~

Don't worry, Mel... I'll always be here for you.

No shadow can ever keep us apart...