

Trigger Warning: Fire, Panic Attacks

Ford had thought the burning of Leuda and Arcadia had been a once in a lifetime event.

Evidently, he was mistaken.

He was actually on Arcadia, when it happened. He was just about to wrap up his shift, when the dragon first struck. In between the patients coming in, treating them for their wounds, Ford was able to put in some calls to Leuda. It seemed like even after the dragon supposedly vanished from the skies, there was no word of an attack on his home island. He asked to be updated immediately if the situation changed- as owner of the medical facilities there, his leadership would be required. He might have even gone out to the ferry, but it seemed that there was talk of them shutting down for at least a few hours. A wise move- a ferry seemed like an easy target for a flying monster.

As things finally calmed down, Ford thought he would head outside. It was hours after his shift was initially scheduled to end, and even if he couldn't head home yet, he thought the fresh air might do him some good.

He was not outdoors for long. While nothing was currently on fire, seeing the scorched buildings here and there had him immediately reconsider. He stepped back inside, seeking a private area to rest for a while.

Violet never imagined to live through the burning of her home island once again. She had been in the lobby when it happened. Right by the window, where she saw a flash of orange in the distance. Then, smoke.

The moments after led the clinic into a frenzy. Nurses and doctors alike calling home and checking if everything was okay. Others calling near the affected areas to see whether assistance needed to be sent over, should anyone have been caught up in the flames. Violet had called her sisters on a borrowed cell phone another nurse had, checking to make sure they were okay. And thankfully, they both made it out okay.

Though as more information came around, things began to settle from the initial panic. It seemed nobody had been hurt aside from minor burns - nobody had even been inside the places attacked, thankfully. Violet still felt extremely anxious though, pacing through the clinic and just letting her thoughts run with anxiety. Would the dragon attack again? Why had the island been attacked? Was there even a reason to begin with?

In her thoughts, she nearly ran into someone. She stopped centimeters away from them.

"O-Oh, I-I'm sorry..." Violet stepped back, looking up only to see Ford, "O-Oh!"

So distracted by his thoughts, Ford didn't noticed he was about to collide with someone, until just a moment before he did. He froze, at the same time as that person, and looked down. It took him only a second or two to shake out of his (mostly masked) surprise, and recognize the person stepping back.

"Oh!" he said, a second after her. "Violet... I'd forgotten you were still here." Despite having talked with her earlier that day. "Are you all right? Given everything that's happened... I know you have family here. I haven't heard anything about the apartments being attacked, either, but...?"

"Y-Yes...I-I'm fine..." Violet nodded, "M-My apartment wasn't hit...a-and both of my sisters are safe..." Her expression turned to worry. Though she heard that Leuda hadn't been hit...this still must be a lot. After all, it was a lot for her, even if she emerged unscathed.

"A-Are you okay...?" Violet asked.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said.

In response to Violet's question, he nodded. "It seems that this time, only one island was attacked. I was able to make some business calls over the last few hours. I'll be notified if anything changes... But for now, at least, it seems Leuda was spared. Of course, it might be a while yet until the ferries are up and running. I may have to rent a room at the inn for the night. We'll see what happens."

"T-That's good to hear..." Violet spoke, "I-I, u-um, wouldn't want you t-to go on the ferry i-if a dragon is loose...s-so..." Honestly, him potentially staying at the inn was quite a relief to her.

"Yes, it's understandable," Ford sighed, crossing his arms. "I'm sure they won't be running them until they determine the waters to be safe. However, that does leave me stranded here for the time being." He glanced out a window, gripping his sleeve a bit tightly as he spotted a bit of smoke on the horizon. "...Not something I find myself particularly enthused about."

Violet followed his gaze, spotting the smoke on the horizon. She blinked, then her expression grew worried.

Right...Ford had a fear of fire.

"U-Um..." Violet took a step back, "L-Let's t-talk...s-somewhere else..." There were plenty of spaces in the clinic without windows, after all. At the very least, it would help if he didn't see anything...

"...Hm?" Ford looked back at Violet, on somewhat of a delay. From her additional step back, he pieced together that she wanted to move, and with that, he finally processed what she had just said to him.

"Ah. Yes, we can do that, if you want...?" He wasn't really sure why she was suggesting that. But perhaps it wouldn't be such a bad thing to get him away from the window, anyways.

She nodded, turning and walking down the hall, occasionally looking back to check that he was behind. Thankfully, since there weren't any casualties of the attacks, there were plenty of empty patient rooms to occupy, some without windows. She walked into one of them, gesturing for Ford to follow.

Once they were both inside, Violet shut the door, giving them some semblance of privacy. And then, she turned her head to him.

"H...H-How are you handling...a-all the fire?" Violet asked quietly, "D-Did you see any of it...?"

Ford followed along silently, keeping one arm crossed over his chest, keeping a grip on his opposite arm. He got the feeling that she might want to have some sort of private conversation when she gestured for Ford to follow him into the room. He wondered what that was about. Given everything that was going on, he somewhat doubted it was anything good.

He stepped inside the room, and let Violet close it.

He blinked at her question, before shaking his head. "I'm all right. I... barely saw any of it." He made his way over to one of the nearby chairs, taking a seat. "I was just wrapping up with what was supposed to be my last patient of the day when the commotion happened. I never saw the

dragon- although, I did see some flashes of the fire. Nothing much... It was... a little more difficult when this happened the first time. I'm sure I don't need to tell you why."

Violet knew about his phobia. It so rarely acted up- usually, he handled fire quite well. It was only when it was out of control like this, causing all sorts of damage that it really shook him up.

"...I did make the mistake of stepping outside a few minutes ago... But nothing was actively set ablaze. It was mostly just... some charred remains, here and there."

A slightly pained expression settled on his features, as he spoke. He tried to keep things matter-of-fact, but some of the unease he'd pushed down was beginning to bubble up back towards the surface.

Violet took a chair next to him, her worry growing. She looked at his pained expression and felt her heart ache. Of course it was affecting him. If just seeing the fire spread out like that was horrifying to her and so many others...she couldn't imagine that it would be like for him. And if seeing remains hurt him like this, then part of her was genuinely thankful that he was with a patient during the worst of it.

For a moment she was unsure what to do. Back on that voyage, she had held him when he was spiraling. But...what about now? He wasn't spiraling but he was still in pain.

"U-Um..." Violet put a gentle hand on his shoulder, "I-Is there a-anything I-I can do t-to help...?"

Watched curiously as Violet reached over and placed a hand on his shoulder. He stared at it for a moment, before letting out a sigh, placing his own gloved hand over it, and looking back up at Violet.

"Really, it's all right," he reassured her. "I was able to pull through then, and I can do so now. So while I appreciate your offer... You don't have to worry about me. I'm not at risk for a panic attack. At least, I don't think so. I am a bit tired from my extended shift, which certainly isn't helping... But..."

Even as he spoke, he found Violet's touch to be a great comfort. Still, he didn't quite know what to say about that. He liked her presence, but had no idea what exactly he wanted. He felt it had to do with physical contact, but he wasn't certain how to phrase it.

"...If you do insist on helping... Perhaps you could... well, I don't know..."

"I-I do want to help..." Violet spoke, "W...W-What do you want me to do?" No matter what he said, she would worry. So she wanted to do anything she could to help him.

Ford hesitated a moment, feeling tongue-tied. Despite numerous affirmations in the past, it was still difficult for him to ask for things like this. At first, it had been because he didn't even know what he really wanted. Now, because it was difficult to find the words.

"Could you... erm.. Could I... have you in my arms?" he asked.

Violet blushed, a little surprised. She shouldn't be, of course. The last time she saw Ford struggle with fire, she held him as much as she could. It only made sense that it would be the same now. And she already knew the answer.

Violet would never refuse a chance to be in his arms.

"O-Of course," Violet nodded.

Ford opened his arms up a bit, holding them awkwardly in the air, feeling embarrassed. He didn't want to stand right away- as soon as he'd sat down, he'd realized how tired he felt. He hoped Violet wouldn't mind either sitting in the chair next to him, or standing and bending down a bit. Or even just standing close enough for him to wrap his arms around her.

"Th-thank you... erm..."

She smiled gently, standing up and bending down a little. With a timid motion - wanting to give him an opportunity to refuse if he changed his mind - she wrapped her own arms around him, pulling him into a hug.

Ford let out a silent breath of relief as Violet bent down toward him, pulling him closer. He returned the motion, pulling both of them together. He closed his eyes, leaning forward in his chair, letting himself take comfort in her embrace.

In her arms, he felt safe.

He shuddered, seemingly out of nowhere. He knew the source- the aftermath of fear, and a bit of panic. But, in a certain manner of speaking, he wasn't afraid. It was like... breaking the seal on a carbonated drink, letting out a rush of gas. The nervous energy bubbling out of him now... It was something he'd pushed down, in favor of being able to operate properly.

But now, with some privacy, and safe in Violet's arms, it seemed his subconscious deemed it safe enough to let those negative emotions pour out. And... In a strange way, Ford was all right with that. He knew that Violet would still be here, once he stopped shaking. Despite everything... he felt comforted. So for now, he let himself shudder, pulling Violet closer, to ride out the feeling.

It didn't take long. About a minute or so at most, before the most violent shivers had worked themselves out, and he began to relax his grip.

As he trembled in her arms, Violet felt her heart ache, just feeling what he must be going through. All the while, she held him close in her arms, one of her hands gently tracing circles into his back, trying to send wordless messages to him through the fear. It was okay. She was here. She would be here for as long as he needed. He could let it out.

She prayed that her presence helped, that he was getting somewhere close to feeling safe.

Eventually, his shaking began to subside, and she felt him relax. She gave him a squeeze, and placed a delicate kiss to his forehead.

His eyes began to sting, as she placed a gentle kiss on his forehead. He leaned back slightly, although he kept his hands on her, letting them slide naturally from her back to her arms. He looked up at her, with a wavery smile, and tears in the corners of his eyes.

"...Thank you," he said. He leaned forward once again, tilting his head up to give her a relatively brief but meaningful kiss. It was both a way of thanking her, and yet another way to draw a bit more comfort for himself.

Violet kissed him back, trying to give him as much comfort and love that she held in her heart. Her hands still lingered on his arms, her thumbs tracing circles on the sleeves of his coat. Everything she could do, she wanted to give it to him. If she couldn't make the fear go away, she wanted to do everything else she could possibly do to make it hurt less.

"Y-You're welcome..." she spoke, giving him a warm smile.

Ford backed into his chair again, giving a loving smile. He was no longer shaking- although, it was unclear whether he was at risk of starting up again. For now though... thanks to Violet, he felt relatively stable.

"What did I ever do to deserve you?" he mused aloud, beginning to somewhat mirroring her actions using his own thumbs.

She blushed, feeling flustered.

"I-I...t-think the same a-about you..." Violet spoke nervously, looking away with her cheeks quickly turning red. After all...she never knew how she came to deserve someone as wonderful as Ford. Flaws and all...he was absolutely wonderful.

Ford's smile widened briefly, and he took one hand off her arm to brush past her red cheek. "A part of me never ceases to be surprised by that- especially during times like these. If it wasn't for you, there's a chance that I would be a mess right about now. Or, if not now, then later, when things finally caught up with me. But you always know exactly how to comfort me."

"I-I'm just doing w-what I can..." Violet spoke, leaning her head into his hand and smiling, "I-I'm glad I-I can help you. E-Especially in times like these..." The idea of Ford suffering through this alone made her heart hurt.

Ford gently cupped her face, more than happy to return a bit of the affection he had received. "I just wish I could help you as well. You must be nearly as tired as I am, dealing with the influx of patients. Has your shift ended? Perhaps I could escort you back, before seeing if there are any rooms available at the inn."

She nodded, "Y-Yes...m-my shift j-just ended..." And while she wanted to say she wasn't tired...Violet couldn't deny it. The day had been exhausting for everyone. And the lingering fear of another attack fresh in the air...it was difficult to really calm down from that base fear.

"I-I would a-appreciate that...t-thank you."

"...Well, I might have phrased it as an offer, but it would seem I have an ulterior motive," Ford confessed. "I think that having you with me will make my journey through town a little more tolerable. I apologize in advance if I am more... clingy, than usual."

He didn't want to make a scene... And yet, he couldn't deny the benefits of Violet's physical reassurance. Having her nearby was always helpful... But being able to hold her hand, or even walking arm-in-arm, brought an additional comfort which was difficult to describe.

Violet blinked, then relaxed into a smile, "O-Okay. W-Whatever you need...I-I'll be next to you..." It was hard to imagine what a clingy Ford was like. But it didn't register as a bad thing to her. After all, this was what he needed to walk through town. And...she always appreciated having more contact with him.

"...All right. Just... give me a moment."

Ford spent a few moments gathering up his will to stand again. When he did, he felt a bit weaker than usual- but nothing that would pose an actual danger. He was certain that once he got on his way, he would be fine. At least until he saw the charred buildings again.

"...Is there anything you need to do, before we go?"

"I-I just n-need to get my purse a-and tell Dr. Trent I-I'm leaving..." Violet spoke, "D-Do you want to m-meet in the lobby?"

"Ah... While you're at it, could you tell him the same for me?" Ford asked. "Since I was was supposed to leave hours ago, I thought I didn't need to say anything... But it might be good to let him know. I'll meet you in the lobby," he confirmed.

"O-Okay, I-I will."

It didn't take long for Violet to collect her belongings and tell Trent that they were leaving. Soon, Violet walked into the lobby and to Ford, a gentile smile on her lips.

"I-I told Dr. Trent we were l-leaving..." Violet spoke, "A-Are you ready to leave?" She meant that in more than one way. Was he ready to leave...and ready to look at a partially fire-stricken island?

Ford made his way to the lobby, glancing out nearby windows only briefly- just long enough to reassure himself that things weren't currently ablaze, but not long enough to dwell on the damage. Upon entering the lobby, he waited patiently as he could for Violet to return.

"...Yes," he said, extending his hand. "...So long as you're with me."

Violet placed her hand in his, and the two of them walked outside together. Things had calmed drastically since the initial attack, and though all the fires were put out, the evidence could still be seen in some spots.

"M-My apartment's n-not too far from here..." Violet spoke, looking up at Ford, "U-Um...i-if there's anything you need, t-then let me know." She would do whatever she could to help, whether he needed a break or needed to get a little more clingy.

Ford squeezed Violet's hand, and stepped out the door along side her.

He tensed for a moment, seeing the damage, before his attention was drawn away by Violet's voice. He looked down towards her, nodding. "All right... I'll let you know."

It wasn't too bad of a walk. Occasionally, he would git a whiff of smoke, or have to walk by a building that had been damaged or destroyed. At first, he squeezed Violet's hand tightly. As time went on, he actually did become a bit more clingy than usual- threading his arm through his girlfriend's arm, walking roughly shoulder to shoulder.

It wasn't anything ridiculous- or even anything he might be opposed to, normally. But that didn't change the reason for why he was doing it now. And even if he drew mostly comfort from the contact, he did feel a small amount of shame, that he had to react this way.

Violet didn't point out or say anything whenever he squeezed her hand, nor when he threaded her arm through hers and walked closer to her. She simply kept her eyes forward on the road,

smiling gently as though nothing happened at all. She was worried, of course. How could she not? It was obvious that Ford was suffering from the mere presence of smoke and damage.

But for now, Violet tried to be what he needed. Just someone to lean on and rely on, in these simple ways. If this is what he needed, then she would give it to him for as long as she could.

Finally, they began to approach her apartment building. She began to slow her pace, looking up at Ford.

"H-Here's where I live..." Violet spoke, "Um...do you want to come in? Y-You can take a break, i-if you want..." While her apartment wasn't the best place for entertaining guests, she would gladly allow Ford in. After all, if he was this uncomfortable with her at his side...it could be harder on the way to the inn.

All throughout the walk, whenever he glanced at Violet, she seemed to be smiling gently, as though unperturbed. At first, Ford was surprised. Was she really not bothered by any of this at all? She didn't so much as flinch whenever Ford would hang on more tightly, or when they walked by a burnt building.

No, that didn't make any sense. Ford knew that she couldn't be unaffected by this. That face... was her trying to keep calm. It was a face that he had come to think of as the 'confident doctor face'- the face you put on when you didn't want your patient to worry. No matter how stressed you were, no matter how nervous or tired... You didn't let the patient know that.

And, who was the patient.... Him?

The idea somewhat bothered him, on one level. But at the same time... He appreciated it. She always went through such great efforts, to aid him... One day, he would have to pay her back, somehow. But for now... He simply pulled her closer, fighting back the occasional shudder, until they reached her apartment.

"...If you're certain I wouldn't be imposing... I would like to come inside," he said.

"O-Okay..." Violet smiled, and led them inside the building and up to her apartment. Come to think of it...Ford had never visited her apartment before. She had visited his home plenty of times, but it was never the opposite.

"T-There isn't much...b-but I hope you can relax..." Violet fetched her keys once they reached her front door, and she soon opened it up and allowed him inside.

Her apartment was very humble, compared to most. The living area was small, with a couch, a chair, a coffee table, and a short bookshelf that held a modest amount of books and records. On top of the bookshelf was her record player, a record of her latest find already inside.

It was a very clean and well-kept area, save for a few library books scattered across the coffee table. The most chaos in her living area was right by the window, where many flowers sat right in the sun. Some were inside, soaking it up through the glass, while there were many more growing outside in a row. On a small table beside the window was a well-used watering can and several flower seeds for the next season.

"Y-You can relax for h-however long you need..." Violet spoke, walking over to a neat - but small - open kitchen, "U-Um...do you want any tea...?"

Ford stepped into the apartment, careful to wipe his shoes before entering. Living above the hospital himself, he had no judgements about living in a small place like an apartment. As he took a quick look around, the discomfort at being outside slowly starting to ebb away, he realized that nothing here was familiar to him in the slightest. That was right... Violet never invited him over before. He was never certain if there had been a particular reason for it... But either the thought had never crossed her mind, or he had looked extraordinarily pitiful.

Hoping it wasn't the latter, he turned towards Violet, to answer her question. "Some tea might be nice," he affirmed, before turning away to further inspect her living quarters. It was all very clean and well-kept... Which did wonders to help put Ford at ease. It was definitely a space he could relax in.

Scattered throughout the apartment, he noted signs of Violet's interest. Flowers growing by the window. A record player- she had remarked on them both having them in the past- on top of a bookshelf, lined with books. Some books were also scattered on the coffee table- probably her latest reads. He walked over curiously, moving a few under the pretense of straightening them up, but picking one or two up to read the title.

"Okay..." Violet spoke, smiling softly before setting everything up for tea. Filling her electric kettle, taking out two mugs, and going through her modest collection of tea to see what to serve (lavender? chamomile? something herbal would probably be best). Occasionally she looked over at Ford to see how he was holding up. Thankfully, he only seemed to be looking around...though it did make her feel a bit self-conscious. Her living space must be so boring, wasn't it? And she didn't even have the time to clean up...

Just as she picked the tea and sorted out the loose leaves, she saw Ford pick up some of her library books. Her library books were usually mixtures of novels and anything that particularly piqued her interest at the time. Last time she went to the library, she wanted to know a little

more about this town called Selphia and about some medicinal herbs, so there were a few of those books sitting around. Of course, they were mixed in with a couple of novels she was picking her way through. Both of them *very* romantic.

"U-Um..." Violet felt a bit of embarrassment creep up on her, her cheeks blooming pink, "S-Sorry, m-my library books are a b-bit messy, aren't they?"

"Hm?" Ford looked away from the book in his hand, back towards Violet. "Well, messy isn't exactly the word I'd use... Rather, it simply looks lived-in. Like you intended to come back and pick up where you left off- Which I assume was the case."

He turned back towards the book, flipping it forwards and back, to read the title and back cover. "Selphia... I don't believe I've heard of it before. Is it some place around here? Another island, perhaps?"

Despite his education on the mainland, there were still a lot of things he didn't know. Anything having to do with magic- including places in the world where magic was frequently practiced- were entirely outside of his scope of expertise. Not that he hadn't done extensive research since coming to the Pelago Islands, but still...

"N-No, it's a town on the mainland..." Violet spoke, thinking back to what she already read from the book, "I-It's mainly on the c-country side...r-right on a cliff. There's a big castle t-there...a-and a lot of people say t-that the views are amazing. S-Some people say you can see for miles from the cliffside..." Some even said that you could see the entire country from it...though she thought that was an overexaggeration. But still...it sounded really amazing.

"Oh, is that right? Hmm..." Ford said. He thumbed through a few of the pages briefly- careful not to lose Violet's place in the book- before setting it back down neatly. He then picked up another one. This one appeared to be about medicinal herbs.

Come to think of it... It had been a while, since the last time they had gotten together for a potion's lesson. This year had been incredibly busy for the both of them. Finding time to visit each other was difficult, outside of spending an hour or two on lunch or dinner when Ford had

work days on Arcadia. He... Really needed to set aside some more time, for them to do things like that.

Placing the book down, he looked back towards his girlfriend. "...How much longer on the tea?" he asked. Now that some of his curiosity had worn off and was no longer providing an adequate distraction, he was starting to feel a bit anxious again.

Just as Ford asked, the kettle finished up heating the water.

"J-Just a moment," Violet smiled and returned her attention to the tea. She poured out the water into the two mugs she prepared - each with little bags of chamomile tea she prepared.

"D-Do you want any sugar in yours?" Violet asked as she reached for the sugar. She put a spoonful in her own.

Ford took a seat as she prepared the tea. "Just a little bit, thank you," he said. By now, he was pretty sure that Violet would know how much 'a little' meant. She had a fairly firm grasp on his taste preferences. At least, the way she would cook for him seemed to imply so. He couldn't think of the last time she'd made something too sweet for his tastes.

"O-Okay..." Violet spoke, just putting a little bit of sugar in his tea. Not as much sugar as she got, but enough for him to taste it. Once she stirred both of the cups and put her kettle away, Violet walked to the living area, setting down the two cups on the coffee table.

"I-It's chamomile tea..." Violet spoke, sitting beside Ford, "I-I hope it helps a little..."

"Chamomile..." Ford repeated, taking the cup from her. "That's supposed to have a calming effect, correct? ...Thank you."

He took a sip of the tea. It was good... And surprisingly enough, drinking something warm did seem to help a bit. "...And thank you for before, too. I know you were putting on a brave face for me. I... can't fully express what your thoughtfulness means to me."

So he could tell. Of course he could.

"Y-You're welcome..." Violet spoke, taking a sip of her tea, "I-I just...wanted to help as much as I could. I-I'm glad it could help a little..." In actuality, while the sights and knowledge of a dragon attack terrified her. She was scared. What if the dragon attacked once more? What if her sisters were caught in the crossfire? What if *Ford* was caught in another attack?

But...being the rock to Ford during their walk helped those fears go away. It was easier to focus and put on a brave face when someone she loved was suffering from it. All she wanted was to help make the hurt go away, and doing so melted her own anxieties for the moment.

"H-How are you feeling now...?" Violet asked, looking over at him.

"More than a little, I should say," Ford said. He wanted Violet to know that the part she had played was no minor role. Without her... Ford would have definitely suffered a great deal more. In acting as his anchor... She had kept him from getting lost in a sea of fear.

"...I am feeling better," he said. "I don't much care for the idea of heading outside again... And I do believe I am still carrying a certain amount of anxiety around with me... But you know, given that the attack just happened... I would say that I feel much better than how I felt coming out of the first attack. No doubt, you are wholly responsible for that."

Violet smiled shyly, looking back down to her tea, "I-I'm...v-very glad to hear that." To know that she made such a large difference genuinely made her feel good. Part of her wanted to deny it, but it was hard to logically reason with it when Ford said something like that.

"Y-You can stay for as long as you want..." Violet offered, pausing to take a sip of tea, "S-So you can relax as long as you want..." Honestly, some part of her would rather he stay a long time. If the dragon came back...then what if it attacked the inn? What if it attacked while Ford was out walking? If something bad happened...Violet would rather him be here...

It didn't make sense. Her home wasn't any more safe than the inn or elsewhere on the island. But still...

"...You're too kind," Ford said, the ghost of a smile making its way onto his features. "...In that case, I will stay for as long as you permit- But I must insist that you let me know when I've

overstayed my welcome. Heaven knows, with things being the way they are, you might have me for the the whole night, otherwise."

Violet blushed.

"U-Um..." Violet paused to take another sip of her tea. "I-If...y-you want to stay the night...t-then t-that would be okay..." She could offer Ford the bed. After all, he was a guest. And she had fallen asleep on her couch a couple times before. So she could do that again...

"...Eh?"

Ford blinked, caught off guard. He hadn't actually expected her to offer something like that. "...Are you sure that's all right? You're not forcing yourself, are you? After all, you never invited me over before... Am I to believe that you're suddenly comfortable with me spending the night at your place?"

"Y-Yes, it's okay..." Violet blushed a bit more. She wasn't forcing herself at all. It was the opposite...and she felt quite selfish for it.

"Um...it's m-more for a selfish reason..." Violet spoke, "I-If something else happens...I-I feel like...I-I would want you here. I-I know it isn't s-safer here t-than anywhere else...b-but...I-I want you here..."

Ford's eyes wider slightly in surprise, at that confession. He didn't see it as selfish at all- rather, it made his heart skip a beat.

She wanted him close by... to protect him.

Ford put down his tea, turning towards her. "...Well. I can't argue with that logic," he said. "After all... I do feel safer when I'm with you."

He leaned over, planting a kiss on Violet's cheek.

Violet blushed. He felt safer with her? That was...very good.

She smiled when he kissed her, and soon she turned her head to catch his lips with her own, giving him a soft, loving kiss. Violet pulled away, looking down.

"I-I'm...g-glad you feel that way..."

Ford was caught off guard by the kiss- not that it wasn't a welcome surprise. He melted into it, during the brief moment it lasted. Forget the tea- Only Violet could make his chest feel warm and fuzzy like this.

"How could I not, with all the effort you put in?" He moved a bit closer to her. "When all this is over, I shall have to think of some way to pay you back for today. It's only fair."

She felt him move closer, and her blush only intensified. She took another sip of tea before setting it back on the coffee table.

"Y-You don't n-need to pay me back..." Violet spoke timidly, peeking up at him, "I-I'm d-doing all of this b-because I-I want to...s-so you don't need to..."

"Hmm. Valid point. Let me put it like this, then," he said. "I want to make you feel as cared for as you've made me feel today. Not out of obligation- but simply because I would like to do so, as your boyfriend."

He reached for her hand. "Today has been frightening and difficult for you as well. Now that I'm feeling a bit more put together... Is there anything I can do for you?"

She placed her hand in his, intertwining their fingers together. Violet wasn't sure what she needed or wanted. Him staying with her for the night was already a huge relief for her. Otherwise she'd likely be fretting between each of their phone calls, worried how Ford was doing.

It had been a frightening and difficult day for her. She wouldn't deny that. But what did she need? What could Ford do?

"U-Um..." Violet looked up at him, looking a bit meek, "I-I'm not sure. J-Just...y-you staying h-here tonight is a-already a relief for me..."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that- But I can't help but feel as though you're extending me a favor, rather than the other way around," he said. He rubbed his thumb against her hand for a moment, trying to be soothing.

"It can be anything you like- Don't be embarrassed to ask. You did the same for me back at the clinic, didn't you?" It had been difficult for Ford to phrase his desire, but getting to hold Violet close in that moment had been more than worth it.

She looked down, feeling her heart beat a little faster. Anything she wanted. It was such a tempting offer. After all, there were several things Violet always liked receiving from Ford. A hug, many kisses, being close to him...all comforting and loving. All special and rare, just as he was.

Was it really okay to ask for anything she wanted? Just like that? Part of her thought better than to do it, but with the way Ford pressed the issue, trying to soothe the answer out of her...it was hard to silence it.

"I-I...w-want to be held..." Violet's voice was very quiet, timid. "A-And...k-kissed..." The last request slipped out before she could stop herself. Her cheeks burned red, and she turned her face away. They had kissed a lot before - especially on Christmas - but saying it so plainly was just so...bold. Was it okay?

A warm smile spread itself on Ford's lips. He scooted himself closer, so that he was right up against Violet. With his free hand, he gently placed his fingertips against her chin, urging her to look back at him. Even through his glove, he thought he felt the heat from her face.

Good. He liked that her heart beat fast for him. It meant that he wasn't alone.

He let go of Violet's hand, snaking that arm around her back, pulling her into a sort of half-hug, while his other hand moved up to cup her cheek. He leaned forward, closing his eyes once he was barely an inch away, and kissed her. In that kiss, he attempted to convey his thanks.

His thanks, and his love.

Instead of rejection, Violet was met with affectionate touches, his body coming closer to hers, and a sweet, affectionate kiss. She melted into it, kissing him back with all of the love she held in her heart.

Receiving a kiss from Ford was always a precious moment to her. Though it was more common now, she always knew how much it meant from him. It was all a culmination of the love he held, the love she was lucky enough to receive. And she treasured every second.

Her arms reached behind, holding him in turn. One hand remained firmly on his back, while the other timidly wandered up his spine, stopping right below his neck.

After taking a brief moment to breathe, Ford resumed the kiss, applying a bit more pressure than before, leaning into her. The hands at his back and neck sent tingles down his spine, and he mirrored the position, moving the hand at her cheek onto her neck, and his hand further onto her back.

Things like this never really felt like a favor. If anything, they felt like a treat. He used to think himself a bit selfish, for taking so much enjoyment out of something that was supposed to be for Violet's benefit- But over time, he had come to accept that when it came to relationships, personal satisfaction was often a mutual experience. Enjoyment of this kind could be shared.

And so, as he kissed Violet- again, and again, and again- he felt his own stress evaporate away. And with each kiss, he tried to convey that exact feeling to Violet. To have her troubles fly away with his own, until they both felt loved and content.

Violet wasn't sure how she deserved all of this love and affection. With every kiss, she melted more and more into his embrace, kissing him back with as much love and enthusiasm as he gave her. The stress of the day faded away, his warmth grabbing her full attention.

Slowly, the hand on his neck began to drift up. The movements were so slow and timid, like she feared making one wrong motion. But slowly, her hand settled on the back of his head, encouraging him to continue, her fingers softly brushing through his hair.

Ford pulled back to breathe again, letting out an unintentional sigh of satisfaction. He paused for just a moment, staring down at Violet, using his thumb to massage her neck a little, before leaning back towards her, with her encouragement to continue.

When he had first begun dating her, the experience of this kind of intimacy had been somewhat scary. He didn't know what to make of the heat flooding his body, or the way his that her attention drove all other thoughts from his head. But now, he was used to it. It didn't frighten him in the slightest. In fact, he sometimes found himself craving it. After long days at work, or when nothing seemed to be going his way... He would sometimes feel an ache in his arms, as though they were crying out for her.

It was embarrassing, so he didn't think he would admit it to her any time soon... But for the sake of all the times he wished he'd had her with him- and for any time she might have felt the same way- He held her close, pouring out his affection in the form of deeper and deeper kisses.

Violet never expected to be this intimate with anyone, much less such a wonderful man like Ford. After a series of stolen kisses, unrequited love, and watching other couples on the sidelines, it had been hard to imagine kissing a man this much and being so close for so long. She loved just how loving it was, how affectionate he was. Like she was something comparable to special.

She could remain like this forever, just taking in his love, giving the same love back, and being held close in his arms. Sometimes, she desired something like this when she was alone, wanting nothing more than to be held and kissed by Ford. And now, she was hardly inclined to let it go.

Violet pulled away a moment to breathe, and looked up at him with all the love she held in her heart. There was a smile on her lips, perfectly natural in this moment, and she took a moment to just take it all in. And as she did, three words bubbled up from inside her chest.

"I love you..."

At those words, Ford smiled broadly, the heat in his chest simmering down into something warm and comfortable. Yes, they were nothing new... But it was still a pleasure to hear them spoken aloud, each and every time. A reminder that his feelings were not one sided. Something to fall back on in times of uncertainty. He was loved... and it was incredible.

"And I love you," Ford replied. "More than words can express." And it was the truth. He wasn't certain he'd ever find the correct way to convey his feelings. To get Violet to truly understand what she had engendered within him.

Her smile brightened even more, her heart fluttering just from hearing those words again. Ford had told her this many times before...but it was still special. She wasn't sure if she would reach a point where hearing those words wouldn't make her feel this way.

Violet pressed another kiss to his lips, short and sweet. Not as deep and heavy as before, but light and loving. The hand on his head drifted back down his back, simply holding him close to her.

Ford kissed her back with the same gentleness. Taking its brevity as a sign that she was done with kissing, and simply wanted to be held for now, he moved his hand away from her neck, bringing it up to the back of her head. He applied a light pressure to it, inviting her to lean her head against him.

He had clung to her the whole walk here. If she wanted to do nothing more than hold on to him for comfort... That too, was a pleasure he was happy to provide.

Violet eagerly took the invitation, leaning her head against him and snuggling up against him on the couch. She breathed a very relaxed sigh, just content to lie there for a while.

She rested there a while, just letting herself relax after what was a very long day.

For a long time, they simply stayed like that. It must have been roughly a half-hour or so. Ford would have been content to stay that way- but his arm was starting to fall asleep. He shifted a bit, feeling the tell-tale sensation similar to pinpricks trailing down his arm.

"...Violet?" He said, attempting to grab her attention. "Are you feeling hungry? Perhaps we could start on dinner."

"Mmm...?" Violet spoke, stirring a little at his side. She wasn't sure how long they were snuggled up like that, but Violet had been content to just let her mind go blank and just enjoy his presence. But at his question, Violet began to feel a bit hungry.

"I-I am..." she spoke, shifting to reluctantly part from his side, "I-Is there anything in particular you want...? I-I can see what I have in the kitchen..."

"I feel as though you know my preferences well enough by this point. Beyond that, there's nothing in particular I'm craving."

Ford moved his arm back to his side, trying not to grimace as the blood flow returned. He more or less succeeded, although he couldn't help but rub at it, to try and make the process go faster.

"Perhaps some sort of soup or salad?"

"I-I think I have enough for salad..." Violet spoke, standing up and walking over to the kitchen. She checked her fridge and fetched out some vegetables. Yes...she could definitely make a salad out of this. She would just need to cut some things up and mix it up...so it wouldn't take too long to make...

Ford waited a moment or two for his arm to go mostly back to normal, before standing up and following Violet into the kitchen.

"Did you find something?" he asked her. "If so, allow me to help. It's the least I can do, what with you letting me spend the night." Come to think of it, he should probably let work know he would definitely be making a late appearance tomorrow... But he could handle that later.

Violet looked up, surprised. She usually took complete control of the kitchen whenever she was cooking, mainly because Ford's dishes were...not the best-tasting of foods. But, then again, salads weren't that involved. It was mostly just cutting and mixing everything together. She could make sure everything was seasoned and mixed properly...and maybe having an extra hand to help cut everything up would be good.

"O-Okay, t-thank you," Violet smiled and set aside some vegetables, "C-Can you help cut these, then? Y-You can put them all into...hm...this bowl." She opened up one of the cabinets and fetched a large bowl, setting it down on the counter.

Then, she looked back in the fridge to see which dressing she should use. She was running low on ranch, so it probably wouldn't do much in a larger serving...she had a few more choices...hm...

"Of course," Ford replied, taking the vegetables, and walking over to the sink, so that he could rinse them off. It was possible that Violet had already done so, at some point, but a second wash never hurt.

He reached into his pocket, pulling out some disposable gloves. He figured they would be better for cooking, as it wouldn't matter if they got wet. Swapping them for his normal gloves, however, got him thinking.

A while back, he had promised to make more of an effort. To try and get over his anxiety, so that he wouldn't need to wear gloves when holding Violet's hand, or touching her face. Right now wasn't the time to try that... But it was something he filed away for later.

In the meantime, he washed the vegetables, and quickly located and pulled out a knife. "Do you have a cutting board, somewhere?" he asked.

"O-Oh, yes," Violet spoke as she pulled out some dressing from the fridge. She walked over to one of the cabinets and pulled out a cutting board, setting it down on the counter.

"Thank you," he said, bringing it over towards where he had set everything down. He immediately began chopping up the vegetables.

Now, Ford had gotten complains on his cooking before... But it was never anything visual. While he was a little out of practice, he was fairly skilled with sharp instruments. Washing and cutting a few vegetables was nothing, and he was able to take care of it rather quickly, putting it all into the bowl.

"There we go," he said. "...Well, now that everything is chopped up, does that mean it's time to eat?"

While Ford chopped vegetables, Violet got everything ready to mix into the salad - just some seasonings that would work nicely with the dressing she picked - and also set out two bowls and silverware for when it was all ready. By the time Ford was finished up, Violet was just about ready for the next step.

"T-Thank you," Violet spoke, walking over to the bowl with her seasonings and dressing, "L-Let me just mix everything together..." She put in the dressing and seasoning, and then began working to mix it all together. Soon, it looked like everything was evenly mixed in.

"T-There we go..." Violet spoke, "It's ready..."

Ford glanced curiously at the bowl that Violet brought over. Apparently, she intended to put things in more than just the vegetables. Which, he supposed was fine. He personally didn't feel that it needed anything else, but he trusted her culinary skills.

"Excellent. Shall I help set the table, then?" he asked. He didn't exactly want to go rifling through Violet's cabinets searching for bowls and the like. It felt a bit rude.

"T-That would really help, t-thank you..." Violet spoke, taking the two bowls over and putting an equal amount of salad in each. There was a little left over as well, incase either of them wanted to have more.

"Of course," Ford said, taking the bowls from her and brining them over to the table, as well as the silverware.

"Hmm... I dare say our drinks from earlier have gone cold," he said. "Seems a bit of a waste... But perhaps we ought to toss them out?"

"O-Oh, I guess so..." Violet spoke, "D-Do you want any more? I-I think I'll have another cup..."

"I think just water will suffice for now," Ford said, bringing over the dirty cups, and pouring them down the sink. He couldn't really find it in him to be upset about not being able to finish them. After all, if he had the option of tea or Violet being brought to his lips, well... His preference was obvious.

"But here's your cup," he said, placing it on the counter for her, while he filled his own with tap water.

"Thank you," Violet spoke, starting the electric kettle again and preparing another tea bag. Thankfully, it didn't take long for the water to heat, and soon she was pouring herself some water, mixing in sugar, and walking over to the table, gently setting it down next to her salad.

Returning back to the table, Ford waited patiently for Violet to come over, before starting to eat. He took the opportunity to switch off the disposable gloves for his regular ones. When she finally did join him, he smiled, before picking up his fork and stabbing at his salad. Like with all things Violet made, it somehow tasted far better than what he was used to cooking up at home. Could whatever she mixed in really make that much of a difference?

"...After dinner, I hope you don't mind if I make a few calls," Ford said. "I'd like to see when they'll have the ferries operational again- as well as let people know that I'll likely be late tomorrow. That is, if I get to travel home at all."

"O-Oh, of course," Violet spoke, taking another bite, "I-I wonder when the ferries will be running...I-I hope it'll be safe to travel..." She frowned a little, remembering just how much uncertainty they were in.

"Hopefully, by tomorrow morning," he said. "If it is much longer than that, well... I suppose we'll work it out then."

Ford took another bite of his salad. "...Do you happen to have some extra supplies for me? A toothbrush, soap, shampoo... If there's anything I need a spare of, or that you're unwilling to share, I suppose we will need to buy before it gets too late..." Although, he was hoping he wouldn't have to go outside again tonight.

"U-Um..." Violet paused, thinking a little and looking towards the bathroom door, "I-I should have another toothbrush...a-and you're free to use my toothpaste and soap...t-though that's only i-if you don't mind u-using my soap..." It was all floral soap and shampoo, so as long as he didn't mind smelling like that, then they should be good to go.

Though what else would he need...? Maybe if he thought of something, she could go out to buy things he needed. She doubted he would want to walk around outside anymore, and she didn't mind going out for a little bit if needed.

"I hardly think I'm in a position to be picky," Ford replied. "If you don't mind me using them, then I am of course all right with it. As long as I get my own toothbrush. Although, I may have to borrow other things... A towel, for instance. And of course, I'll need a pillow and blanket for the couch."

"O-Of course, y-you can use whatever you need..." Violet spoke, though paused, "A-And...y-you don't need to worry about that. Y-You can take my bed...I-I'll take the couch tonight." After all, he was a guest.

"Oh?" Ford said, tilting his head slightly. "That hardly seems fair. It's your bed. You've always been the one to sleep on the couch, when you stayed over my place... I had assumed it was my turn."

"W-Well...y-you're a guest...i-it doesn't feel right to ask you to sleep out on the couch...especially after today." He probably needed a very good rest after a day like this. And sleeping on her bed would be for the best.

"...Well, I would have to object to that guest bit, unless you're calling me a poor host," he said. "But putting that aside... While I thank you for thinking of me, I don't think that sleeping on a couch will make me more anxious. You've had a difficult day as well, haven't you? I'm sure you'll have more comfort sleeping on your own bed, than I would have sleeping in a strange bed."

Not that he particularly liked the idea of sleeping on the couch... But he couldn't help but object out of fairness.

"H-Huh? N-No, y-you're not a poor host at all!" Violet shook her head firmly, "I-It's just...a-are you sure y-you won't be uncomfortable on the couch...? I-I don't mind sleeping out here tonight, r-really..."

Ford frowned a bit. It was hard to argue with Violet. After all, he didn't particularly want to sleep on the couch, and she was being incredibly insistent about the fact that she didn't mind it at all. Something felt off... But he couldn't quite place his finger on what. After all, if she truly didn't mind, then would going along with her plan lead to a situation where they were both fairly comfortable.

"...Do you find the couch comfortable?" he asked.

"W-Well, I've f-fallen asleep on it a few times..." Violet answered. All of those times had been accidental, though. The result of reading a little too late. It hadn't been the most comfortable experience upon waking, though she hadn't gone to bed on her couch with a pillow or blanket before, so it should be fine.

"...Well, if you're certain," Ford said. He saw no point to arguing. If Violet truly found it comfortable... Then what was the point of insisting, when he would almost certainly find it uncomfortable? "...Thank you."

Violet smiled, "Y-You're welcome. I-I'll grab a pillow and blanket from m-my room before you go to bed, then." It would be an interesting evening for her, but at least she knew Ford would get a good night's rest after what he went through.

Ford finished up his salad, before checking his phone. "...You don't have a charger, correct? In that case, I'd better conserve power. Would you mind if I made a few calls using your telephone?" he asked, standing up. "It should be quick. After that... I don't know. Perhaps we could watch a movie together?"

Violet nodded, "O-Of course, feel free to use my phone."

At the mention of a movie, Violet began to think, "S-Sure. L-Let me see w-what we should watch..." And she went over to see which movies she had on-hand. She didn't have a large collection. Violet kept the movies that she really liked watching, and went to the library for anything else she wanted to see.

She went through the films. Beauty and the Beast was so nostalgic for her - moreso after their shared dream - but they already watched it together. Maybe...another Disney film? She scrolled

through some of the films she had...and settled on The Little Mermaid. She honestly wasn't sure how Ford would like it, but she would want to show it to him regardless.

Ford nodded, leaving the dishes on the table for now, and making his way to the phone. A couple of calls later, and he had found out that the ferries would in fact be up and running tomorrow morning, provided nothing else happened to prevent that. He also informed the Alpha Medical Center that he would be late to work, and to please find someone to cover his shift. He said that he wouldn't be taking any calls until tomorrow, gave them Violet's number in case of an emergency, and with that, turned off his phone, so he would have power until tomorrow.

Making his way back to the table, he began to clean up a bit, emptying what remained of the salad in both bowls, and dropping them off in the sink, before searching around the kitchen for a good way to wrap up what remained of the salad in the original mixing bowl.

Soon after Violet picked out the movie and got it all set up for them to watch, she was surprised to see Ford cleaning up.

"O-Oh, t-thank you for cleaning up," Violet spoke, smiling softly, "H-How is it looking for tomorrow? I-Is the ferry going to run...?"

"Not at problem at all," Ford said. "Although, I apologize that can't wash the bowls. I foolishly threw out my disposable gloves before dinner. I only had the one pair on me."

"The ferry should be up and running early tomorrow morning, provided nothing changes. Given that last time, the dragon did not return, I would hope that this one is far from both islands by now." Odd, that it had only attacked Arcadia this time... But he was hardly about to complain.

"Did you find a good movie, by chance?"

"T-That's okay, I can w-wash them myself later..."

She looked relieved at the news. If the ferry was opening, then they probably haven't had any other sightings. At least Violet could hold onto that small comfort for now...though she had to admit she'd still be a little on edge for the next few days. Even if last time the dragon didn't return...was this a different one? She didn't know.

"I-I did," Violet nodded, walking over to the couch, "I-It's another movie I-I used to watch a lot as a child...i-it's called The Little Mermaid."

Wash them later? Well... Yes, if Ford couldn't wash them now, it felt odd to demand that Violet wash them. And it wasn't really messy, per se... They were in the sink. He couldn't even see them if he weren't in the kitchen. It was fine. For now.

Trying to forget about it, he walked out of the kitchen, back towards the couch. "The Little Mermaid... Sounds familiar."

Ford wondered what his thoughts would be on this one. Some of the movies Violet liked weren't quite to his tastes. That being said, it wasn't like he disliked watching them with her. Often, her own fondness rubbed off on him, and he wound up enjoying a movie he probably wouldn't have given a second thought, watching by himself.

So he hadn't seen it yet. Good, then she could show him something new while he was here. She sat down on the couch and grabbed the remote, letting the movie start.

And soon, once Ford settled in beside her, Violet leaned in, getting comfortable at his side. It had been a little bit since she watched The Little Mermaid, so she was excited to get back into it. She could only hope that Ford would at least enjoy it a little.

Ford settled in on the couch, and shortly after, Violet had leaned up against him in her usual fashion. It was comforting as always, to have her by his side. He let that feeling drive out the stresses that had begun to creep back in over the last few minutes- the reminder of the dragon, and the bowls in the sink.

Honestly, getting lost in a world located completely underwater, during a time like this, was tempting.

The movie was another well-animated children's cartoon. Again, it was nothing Ford would have put in alone, but it was nothing he detested, either. Like with his first watch of Beauty and the Beast, before that shared dream had given him a special connection to the story, he did not form an emotional attachment to the characters in the same way that Violet so clearly did. But that wasn't enough to ruin his enjoyment of spending time together. And even if he wasn't drawn into

the story the exact same way, he still followed along, giving it perhaps not his undivided attention, but quite a large portion of it.

There was one part that almost instantly destroyed his immersion, however.

"Daddy, I love him!"

Ford blinked. "...She loves him?" he questioned, turning towards Violet.

Violet smiled, getting lost in the movie. While she wasn't as attached to this movie as Beauty and the Beast, it was still a nostalgic ride going back through it again.

However, when Ford spoke, she looked up at him. If she were a little girl watching this movie again, she would have firmly defended the line. But as a young woman...it was easy to ask the same exact question Ford asked.

"W-Well...s-she probably j-just has a crush o-on him..." Violet spoke, giggling a little, "I-It isn't realistic, is it?"

"No, it certainly isn't," Ford said. "The reaction of the father also seems a bit extreme," he noted, nodding at the events on screen, "But honestly, if he were a bit more level-headed, I'd be entirely siding with him. I can hardly see how you could love someone you've barely seen."

"...It's one of those things that always confused me, I suppose. How people could take one look at someone, and instantly claim to be head over heels."

"I-I used to think that w-when I was younger...t-that I could fall in love with a l-look..." Violet spoke, returning her attention to the movie, "I-It's very silly to look back on...i-it's very superficial, n-now..."

Ford turned a bit towards Violet, finding the confession more intriguing than what was currently happening in the movie. He took a few seconds, to figure out how he wanted to phrase his next question.

"...I don't mean it judgmentally... Although, I suppose there was a time when I would have been judgmental about it... But it's more that I could never really understand," he said. "Everyone would just act like I would, one day... And now that I have you, it's true that some things have

fallen into place. But there are other things I still fail to comprehend. Whether it's superficial or not... I don't know how someone could become so attached, with a simple glance."

Violet returned her gaze to Ford, listening quietly. He had talked about similar things before, of not having an urge to participate in romance before they were together.

"I-I see..." Violet spoke, "W-Well...i-it's a very immature f-feeling. Y-You...just look at s-someone and y-you just s-start g-getting really flustered and...v-very curious about them, I guess. I-It doesn't matter who they are...o-or how they feel about you..." She frowned, remembering one particular crush she had a couple years ago. Violet was all caught up in a crush, while he wasn't interested in the slightest. Didn't stop him from taking her out on a date and kissing her, though...

"I-It isn't the best feeling..." she continued, "A-And...I-I don't know why it happens. B-But...it seems to stop once you get older." Or wiser, in Violet's case.

"Does it now...?" Ford questioned, turning back towards the television. "It seems I might have missed my window to experience it, then. Not that I'm particularly upset by that. I had a much better time falling in love slowly with you."

He pulled Violet a bit closer to him, although since important things seemed to be starting to happen on screen, he kept his attention mostly on that, so as not to be rude. "I suppose what I felt towards you was similar, in some respects. Bit by bit, the more I got to know you, the more curious I was about you. And once I began to work out my feelings, I most certainly began to feel flustered."

Violet blushed, happily cuddling up closer to him.

"I-I felt the same..." Violet spoke. She remembered wanting to know more about him, wanting to know how his training was going. Wanting to find out how to bring out his magic more. Wanting to impress him. And then the second that she realized what she was feeling...she was flustered beyond belief.

Ford leaned his head down so it was partially against hers as he watched the film. Yes, he could remember those days well. It had started off as simply wanting to learn magic. But then, it had

developed into something more. At some point, magic became the secondary reason for wanting to spend time with her. He had just wanted to spend time with this interesting woman. He wanted to learn from her, and to share his own knowledge with her. She impressed him with her hard work and dedication at every turn. Soon after, he saw her kindness and compassion. Her fearless bravery and determination, in frightening scenarios. And then, having gotten to know her that much, he eventually saw a trait he rarely ever recognized in another person- her beauty.

Yes, he was truly head over heels, long before he fully realized it. Tripping over his own sentences, before he even knew why. And when he finally put it all together... Well, for a brief amount of time, he was a mess. But he need not have worried. After all, as Violet just said... she had felt the same way, all along.

The trip down memory lane was somewhat interrupted by the next plot development. The main character, Ariel, had been pressured into signing away her voice, and potentially her freedom, in order to meet the man she supposedly loved. Ford's brows furrowed a bit.

"It all seems a bit extreme, doesn't it?" he commented, once the scene had moved on to mermaid discovering her new human limbs. "That whole deal. I don't mean to nitpick at every turn, but... Who would possibly agree to those terms?"

Violet continued watching the movie, a happy smile on her face with the additional physical affection. She always loved being like this, all wrapped up together with Ford, and treated every moment as a precious treasure. She could remember how hesitant Ford was to do things like this before. And getting to experience it so casually like this was such a delight, one that she would never take for granted.

"Hm..." Violet spoke, "I-It is extreme. B-But...I-I guess she's just young. A-And...she also wanted to be with humans, too..." And she guessed that a way to be with them - even if it was through an impossible condition - was near impossible to find otherwise.

"I suppose, but..."

The whole 'young and in love' argument never really made sense to Ford. Perhaps it could all be read as a cautionary tale... But in the end, stories like this were always so romanticized, that he couldn't help but feel that the message was muddled. Perhaps he was overthinking a children's cartoon that was destined to be full of plot contrivances. Even so...

"...I suppose I'm not overly fond of stories that pull things like this," Ford said. "Stories like this could very quickly turn into tragedies. I'd hate to see someone mimic it. Not that someone could

literally sign away their freedom and voice like this, but- Well, then again, you were cursed to lose your voice once, no? I suppose it's actually entirely possible for this scenario to play out."

"W-Well...I-I lost my voice b-because of a curse...I-I didn't willingly sign it away..." Violet spoke, frowning, "T-Though...I-I guess you're right. I-If someone knew how to do something like this...t-then it wouldn't be good at all. T-Though...I-I can't imagine doing something t-that drastic..."

"...Well, I'm relieved to hear that," Ford said, squeezing her tighter for just a moment. "It would have been most upsetting to hear that you'd ever even consider it. Of course, I know you're wiser than that."

Violet curled up close, "I-I don't think I-I could ever do that again...I-losing my voice and my magic was...s-scary..." If Ford hadn't been there to help her cope with it back then...she wasn't sure what would have happened. It just made her all the more grateful to have him in her life, even before they began dating.

"I-I don't t-think I can t-thank you enough for helping me back then..." Violet's voice grew a bit quieter, realizing that they should pay more attention to the movie.

Ford wrapped an arm around her, placing his hand on her head. He turned slightly, to give her a small kiss on the top of her head, as a means to help comfort her.

"I don't think I need to be thanked for that... All I did was provide a bit of support," he said, automatically matching Violet's volume. "It was your own determination that lead you to pick up sign language as fast as you did. Not only that, but you were the one who found a way to end your curse. It was during that hardship, that I first began to see what a brave and dependable woman you truly were."

Violet's chest grew warm, her heart feeling full from his words. He was always so sweet, so encouraging of her. She hardly knew what she did to deserve such a presence in her life.

"B-But...w-when I didn't know w-what to do...you helped show me the right way to go..." Violet spoke, "I-I...honestly would have been really lost without you..." What would she have done? She would have probably continued to spiral, and shut herself away. Focus too much on what

she couldn't do, rather than what she could still do to help others. Without Ford, how long would it have taken to escape that spiral?

Violet turned her head to give him a kiss on the cheek, "T-Thank you..." And then she turned her head back towards the television, a smile on her face.

Yet again, Ford was caught off guard by the sudden kiss. He had simply wanted to comfort her, after all. It was always a surprise, when she so suddenly turned it back around on him. Truth be told, though, he really shouldn't have been- she was, after all, the one who taught him to express love in this way.

"I suppose we all need a bit of guidance, from time to time," he said, also turning his attention back towards the movie- But keeping Violet close to him.

"If I helped you find your way back then, you've since paid it back tenfold, with how you've helped me. Even just today, you helped calm me down before I even realized just how close I was to panicking."

"I-I only wanted to help..." Violet spoke, "I-I knew a day like this...w-would be very difficult for you. I'm just glad I was with you to help..."

"I'm always happy to have you by my side," Ford said. "Just having you here... Helps."

As the movie continued, Ford found his eyelids grow heavy. It had been a long day, after all, and he was feeling warm and relaxed. If he weren't sitting down, perhaps he would have been fine, but as it was, he was finding it increasingly difficult to focus on what was happening on screen.

Violet hummed happily in response, her heart feeling full.

As the movie went on, Violet began to feel quite drowsy as well. She felt so warm and safe in Ford's embrace, and after that day, it was a comfort she desperately needed. She tried to stay awake for as long as she could, and she didn't notice Ford's own struggles keeping awake. Soon, it was hard to keep her eyes open. Sometimes she would close her eyes to one scene and open them to a couple scenes later.

And soon, her eyes closed and didn't open. Violet fell into a comfortable sleep.

The next time Ford opened his eyes, the room was no longer bathed in the orange glow that had filled it upon sitting down to watch the movie. The sun must have gone down hours ago, plunging the apartment into darkness. The only light source came from the white static on the television screen- a sign that the VHS tape had ended.

Ford turned towards the dead weight on his side, and found Violet slumped against him. Apparently, she had fallen asleep as well. He hoped it was before he nodded off, but he had no way of knowing.

She looked so peaceful... Positively angelic, even in this lighting.

Seeing a few stray hairs out of place, he reached forward to brush them back, tucking them behind her ear. As he did so, he caught sight of the white glove he always wore. He remembered his earlier thought- That he should try taking off his gloves again soon. It was something he often put off asking for, as not only did it make him uncomfortable, but he hated seeing Violet's expression when he couldn't hold on for long.

Well, Violet wouldn't have a reaction, now. And she was already leaning against him, so it wasn't like he would be invading her personal space without permission, or anything like that. After a moment's hesitation, Ford pulled off one of his gloves. Then, he very slowly reached for her face, giving her cheek a brief, feather-light brush, using only back of his fingers.

The skin under his hand felt warm and soft. He hesitated another moment, before slowly moving to cup her cheek.

Violet remained asleep, resting against him. Her expression was content, unchanging even with the bare hand on her cheek.

Ford tensed a moment, as if anticipating a bad reaction. However, Violet continued to slumber peacefully. He relaxed, and let himself take in the sensation.

Warm and soft, just like his brief brush had suggested. He rubbed his thumb across her cheek once or twice. He wished he were bold enough to do this all the time. Violet would probably like it. Something told him, however, that he wouldn't be able to do that. Not yet, at least. So for now, this would just have to remain a small, little secret.

That being said, he would have to wake her up eventually. Even if she had volunteered to sleep on the couch, she might want to wash up a bit. At the very least, he should say goodnight, before vanishing off into her bedroom.

"...Violet," he murmured, very softly. He rolled her head towards him, placing a kiss on her cheek to wake her.

This time, Violet did react. She shifted, curling up a little closer to him. She let out a deep breath, and slowly cracked her eyes open. However, it was quite obvious that she hadn't completely woken up. But she did notice a few things. A kiss on one cheek. A warmth on the other.

Violet gave a sleepy smile, "Mmm...?"

Ford pulled back, and smiled in return. He had only one response to that cute, sleepy expression. He adjusted his angle a bit, and gave her another kiss- this time on the lips.

"Sorry to wake you," he said, ending the kiss after a few seconds. "But I thought you might prefer to get ready for bed, rather than simply sleep as you were."

His hand lingered on her cheek a moment longer, before carefully removing it. He subtly brought it down to his side, slipping the glove back on.

Violet kissed him back, soft and sleepily. It helped her wake up a little more, helping her realize that it was far darker than before, the only light being the illumination from the television.

"You're right...thank you," Violet spoke, reluctantly straightening up and parting ways from Ford. She yawned and sat a moment. Thoughts were slower at the moment, so she had to list everything she needed one at a time. Pajamas...a pillow...a blanket...

"Is there anything you need...?" Violet asked, "Y-You can use the shower first...I'll wait until the morning..."

Somehow, even Violet's yawn was cute.

"If you can tell me where to locate a spare toothbrush, and which towel I can use, I think that's all I need."

He had been told that he could use her soap and shampoo already, so that shouldn't be a problem.

"I can get them out for you..." Violet spoke sleepily, "I-I need to get my pajamas, anyway..." She slowly stood up, yawning again as she walked to her bedroom.

Her bedroom was smaller, but comfortable. Her bed was in the far corner, neatly made with some pastel purple sheets and a floral comforter. Across from the bed was a small, white desk and a well-worn chair. On it there was a small collection of stationery, envelopes, and materials for pressing flowers.

Just above her desk were various pictures. Some of them were pictures of Violet and her sisters together - one of the three of them standing right by the shrine, one of what looked like to be at Violet's graduation, a picture of her sisters on what looked to be the first day of school (Violet's first day, based on how young she looked), and one more at the orphanage, with Odette and Lily smiling brightly for the camera, Violet hiding right behind Lily. There were a few more pictures, mostly of the scenery around Arcadia and some of the ocean. And finally, there was a picture of Ford and Violet together, taken some time around Christmas.

Violet walked to the closet, opening it up and pulling out a spare towel and picking out her nightgown, setting it aside for when she could change. She walked to the bathroom, set the towel down on the counter, and opened up a cabinet to pull out an unopened spare toothbrush, also setting it down.

Ford watched Violet stand, and walk into her bedroom. He waited on the couch for a bit, deciding to give her some privacy, as she might want to clean up some things in her bedroom, before deciding he'd had enough of sitting in the dark, and flicked on the light.

Once she went to the bathroom, he followed her in. "Thank you again, for all of this," he said.

"You're welcome..." Violet smiled at him, stepping out of the bathroom, "I-I'm happy to help..."

"Well then, I'll try to be quick," Ford said. Giving a nod, he shut the door.

The running shower water felt good on his skin. Violet's shampoo and soap had a particularly floral smell- Not that it was an issue for him, but it was certainly different than the subtler scents he used. It smelled... Well, like Violet, he supposed.

Coming out of the shower, Ford found himself at a bit of a loss. He had no pajamas here, obviously, and it wasn't like anything Violet owned could possibly fit him. Therefore, wearing his undershirt was a given, but... Was he to wear his work pants to bed? That promised to be uncomfortable. At the same time, he couldn't very well parade around in his underwear, should he?

After a bit of indecision, he put back on his work pants. He just didn't feel bold enough to assume that he could walk out in nothing but a shirt and boxer briefs. He debated putting on his socks and gloves, but seeing as he would probably take them off in bed anyways... Violet's apartment looked clean, so he decided he could manage not wearing those. He placed them on top of his neatly folded shirt and vest, along with his tie, and stepped out of the bathroom.

After Ford went to shower, Violet went back in her room to change into her nightgown. The sleepiness clung to her the entire time, making the idea of heading straight to bed tempting. But she wanted to say goodnight to Ford before then, so she tried to keep herself active and awake, even though a yawn went through her every now and then.

She brought out a spare pillow and blanket to the living room, setting out her bedding. And after that, she went to the kitchen to start washing up the dishes from dinner. At least she could get this sorted out now rather than later.

Once she was finished cleaning up and wiping her hands off, she heard the bathroom door open. She smiled, peeking over to see Ford...and she had to pause. She had seen Ford in an undershirt before, but it was still a very rare treat. And seeing him right out of the shower was...well...very nice.

Ford moved some of the wet hair back and out of his face, using its dampness to slick it back for now. "The bathroom should be free now, if you need to use it. I... suppose I'll just go to your room, then? Or..."

It felt a little embarrassing, for some reason. It was just a bedroom....

"T-Thank you. U-Um...d-do you need anything else before y-you go to bed...?" Violet asked, blushing a bit.

"No, I think I'm all set," he said, glancing down. "...I do wish I had more comfortable clothes for pajamas, but I think I shall manage."

"I-I'm sorry I-I don't have anything for you to wear..." Violet spoke, looking down at his work pants. Would that even be comfortable to rest in? It didn't seem like it.

"I wouldn't expect you to," Ford said. "In fact, if you did, I think I'd have a few questions about why."

Noticing Violet was staring, he followed her gaze. His cheeks flared hot as he realized what she was staring at. "Erm- Ahem. D-Don't worry. I intend to keep my pants on."

Oh good lord in the heavens, that did not come out right.

"H-Huh...?" Violet asked, looking up at him. She was more than a little confused. It wouldn't be comfortable to sleep in work pants, right? Why would he keep them on?

"B-But...w-won't that be uncomfortable...?" Violet asked, a bit concerned.

"...I mean... Perhaps," Ford said. "But, erm... That is.... wouldn't it make you uncomfortable...?"

"U-Um..." Violet did blush a little. The idea of Ford in his boxers was...an idea that made her very flustered. Not uncomfortable. But flustered. Goodness...seeing him in short sleeves was already a lot...but it wasn't *uncomfortable*. But flustered? Absolutely. Could her heart even take it...?

"I-It doesn't..." Violet shook her head, "B-But...i-if it makes you u-uncomfortable...t-then you can take them off before y-you go to bed..."

A pink stripe made its way across Ford's cheeks as well, hearing her say that she was fine with it.

"Then... I might do that, for now," he said, avoiding her gaze for a moment. If he had known that Violet would be fine with it, would he have felt comfortable walking out without his pants? He wasn't certain... But he knew that taking them off while standing right in front of her was entirely out of the question.

"Erm... in that case, I... that is... I suppose I'll... go to bed, now..."

"O-Okay..." Violet hesitated for a second, and then walked over to him. She got up on her toes and gave him a soft kiss on the cheek.

"Goodnight..."

Ford blinked. Then, instead of smiling, his brows furrowed, as though he were considering something. Then, after a second or two, he put his bare hand on Violet's arm, bending down and kissing her.

"Goodnight," he murmured, before making a hasty exit to Violet's bedroom, closing the door without turning around. On the other side he leaned against it, looking down at his hand, still tingling from touching her bare skin.

Was that all right? Oh, who was he fooling- of course it was. For Violet, it probably wasn't even enough. Maybe she didn't even notice. But still... He'd done it. Even though his heart was beating fast, and he felt nervous... He'd managed to pull off touching her without gloves twice in one night.

It took a moment for Violet to realize what had actually happened. She hadn't noticed it at first, but when he kissed her, she finally noticed it.

Ford was touching her with his bare hand.

And before she could even do anything, he said goodnight and quickly fled to her room. Violet stood there a moment, left a completely flustered mess.

He...touched her. Without gloves, without any prompting. All on his own. Her cheeks flushed bright red, knowing just how much this meant. Slowly, she rose up a hand to the place he touched, smiling all the while.

Goodness...how was she supposed to go to sleep now?

Finally pulling himself together, Ford looked up, taking in his surroundings. So, this was... Violet's bedroom. It was funny how that was almost immediately obvious from her bed alone: the sheets in her favorite color, and the comforter sporting a floral design. He couldn't help but wander over to the desk, curiously looking at the pictures hanging there.

Many of them appeared to be family pictures, showcasing Violet and her sisters. Yes, her shy demeanor must have been even worse as a child, based on the photograph of her hiding behind her sister in one or two of them. There was also a picture of what appeared to be her graduation day. He supposed that Violet felt the same pride he felt upon his own graduation, and had hung the photo there as a reminder. Just looking at it gave him the smallest twinge of pride in her as well.

As for the photos that weren't family-related, they mainly appeared to be of the scenery around Arcadia. Pictures she had taken herself, perhaps. Violet was the kind of person who would stop to take in the natural beauty of a place. In a sense, these pictures were a representation of what she herself saw in the world.

Continuing to look through each photo in turn, Ford eventually locked eyes with... himself.

There, framed on the wall along with all these other important things, was a picture of him and Violet, taken just this past Christmas. He remembered taking the photo using Violet's camera, and later sharing a copy with her. To think she had hung it here, along with photos of her own family... Ford's heart swelled with emotion.

It was like finding a secret confession of love. A sign that Violet was always thinking of him, even when he wasn't around.

It made him... very happy.

It took a few moments for her to calm herself down. She wasn't sure whether Ford touched her without a glove by mistake...or if it was on purpose. But all she knew was that the touch lingered...which had to mean something. And it made her completely warm.

Violet walked over to the couch, settling in beneath the blanket and getting as comfortable as she could get. Of course, her thoughts kept on drifting to that one spot on her arm. She was genuinely proud of him. To touch her unprompted was such a big step for him...and so important. She smiled, wondering just what the next step would be. If he had done this unprompted...then there was no way of knowing. And it made her very...excited. She wanted to see what he would do.

She slowly closed her eyes, steadily drifting back to sleep.

Once Ford had gotten enough of staring at the photographs (the one with him in it longest of all), he placed his folded clothes neatly on his desk. Then, he unzipped his pants, taking them off and folding them neatly on top of everything else. It felt a little odd, to be this undressed in a bedroom that wasn't his. But, Violet said she didn't mind, so...

Ford turned towards the bed. It was like any other hotel bed, he told himself. He crossed the room, pulling back the covers, and sliding inside.

It was... pretty comfortable. Certainly more comfortable than the couch. Ford removed his glasses, and laid down on the pillow. He thought he caught her scent off of it- Although, that was actually probably just the scent of she shampoo lingering in his hair. His body felt warm, regardless.

It was a pleasing floral scent, he noted, closing his eyes. It wasn't difficult to imagine Violet right there, curled up beside him. Regardless of how he would have actually reacted if she were actually there... He didn't find the concept unappealing. In fact, it was rather soothing...

Despite having napped earlier, it seemed Ford was still quite tired. It wasn't long at all until he'd drifted off, sound asleep. Snuggled up, in his girlfriend's bed.