

Prompts: Raffi and Stargazing

Notes: From a timeline in which the Honor Bound MC had a bad time growing up in a group home; slowburn friends-to-lovers. Perhaps this is in the epilogue, or perhaps later.

Male Raffi

Raffi laughs, digging his bare feet into the sand. "We used to call it the Beheaded Lizard," he says, "because Gabriela said it was the Butterfly, but I thought it didn't look like that."

You squint up at the sky. The moon is a delicate crescent, just at the end of its waning cycle. You have a lantern with you to see by, but here on this Espinante beach, the village lights barely register—not like the glow you know of New Belmir City—and the stars are so bright and thick that it's easy to see the stars of the Butterfly constellation sitting neatly next to the Hummingbird.

"Denario and I," you say, and as you say his name the words come a little haltingly, "used to sit up on the hill next to Honored Lidia's mansion. He said the Hummingbird would surely eat the Butterfly."

Raffi gives you a quick sidelong look. His voice lowers, softens. "When you were in the group home?"

It's not easy to think of those times, even though it's been so long. Seeing Denario, everything that happened with him—it surfaced memories you had little desire to revisit. You push your fingers into the soft sand, then slowly let it trickle through your fingers. You do not speak, and nod instead.

A sympathetic sigh from Raffi. He scoots along the sand and throws a friendly arm around your shoulders. "What I like," he says, "is when the stars reflect on the water. When it ripples—I feel like it's not quite the same, is it, when you're not here."

You smile down at the sand. Hard to figure why, but Espinante feels more like home than you've felt for a long time. When Raffi withdraws, you turn with him without thinking about it, seeking the warmth of his side again. He pauses, then, and his face looks uncertain in the flickering light of the lantern.

"Hey," he says. "It's all right. We're good."

You are. The two of you are. You've been friends for over a year, and it's always been affectionate and relaxed between you: that's what you liked about him, that you didn't have to *think* so much, you didn't have to be your job title, it was just—this.

But right now, *this* suddenly feels precarious, unknown.

You reach out, laying your hand on Raffi's strong forearm. "Raffi—"

He swallows. "Yeah."

"You can come back."

Slowly, as though concerned that he'll do the wrong thing, Raffi slides his arm around you once more. Loose, but warm. You lean into his side, butterflies fluttering in your stomach, and, equally slowly, you put a hand on his leg.

An intake of breath from him, and he draws you closer, allowing you to lean your head against his shoulder. He bumps his head gently against yours, and then, softly, his hand slides up to cup the nape of your neck.

For a long while, you do not speak. The closeness between you feels so precious that it might break. But your heart feels very, very full.

Female Raffi

Raffi laughs, digging her bare feet into the sand. "We used to call it the Beheaded Lizard," she says, "because Gabriela said it was the Butterfly, but I thought it didn't look like that."

You squint up at the sky. The moon is a delicate crescent, just at the end of its waning cycle. You have a lantern with you to see by, but here on this Espinante beach, the village lights barely register—not like the glow you know of New Belmir City—and the stars are so bright and thick that it's easy to see the stars of the Butterfly constellation sitting neatly next to the Hummingbird.

"Denario and I," you say, and as you say his name the words come a little haltingly, "used to sit up on the hill next to Honored Lidia's mansion. He said the Hummingbird would surely eat the Butterfly."

Raffi gives you a quick sidelong look. Her voice lowers, softens. "When you were in the group home?"

It's not easy to think of those times, even though it's been so long. Seeing Denario, everything that happened with him—it surfaced memories you had little desire to revisit. You push your fingers into the soft sand, then slowly let it trickle through your fingers. You do not speak, and nod instead.

A sympathetic sigh from Raffi. She scoots along the sand and throws a friendly arm around your shoulders. "What I like," she says, "is when the stars reflect on the water. When it ripples—I feel like it's not quite the same, is it, when you're not here."

You smile down at the sand. Hard to figure why, but Espinante feels more like home than you've felt for a long time. When Raffi withdraws, you turn with her without thinking about it, seeking the warmth of her side again. She pauses, then, and her face looks uncertain in the flickering light of the lantern.

"Hey," she says. "It's all right. We're good."

You are. The two of you are. You've been friends for over a year, and it's always been affectionate and relaxed between you: that's what you liked about him, that you didn't have to *think* so much, you didn't have to be your job title, it was just—this.

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You reach out, laying your hand on Raffi's strong forearm. "Raffi—"

She swallows. "Yeah."

"You can come back."

Slowly, as though concerned that she'll do the wrong thing, Raffi slides her arm around you once more. Loose, but warm. You lean into her side, butterflies fluttering in your stomach, and, equally slowly, you put a hand on her leg.

An intake of breath from her, and she draws you closer, allowing you to lean your head against her shoulder. She bumps her head gently against yours, and then, softly, her hand slides up to cup the nape of your neck.

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Transmasc Raffi

Raffi laughs, digging their bare feet into the sand. "We used to call it the Beheaded Lizard," they say, "because Gabriela said it was the Butterfly, but I thought it didn't look like that."

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Raffi gives you a quick sidelong look. Their voice lowers, softens. "When you were in the group home?"

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You smile down at the sand. Hard to figure why, but Espinante feels more like home than you've felt for a long time. When Raffi withdraws, you turn with them without thinking about it, seeking the warmth of their side again. They pause, then, and their face looks uncertain in the flickering light of the lantern.

"Hey," they say. "It's all right. We're good."

You are. The two of you are. You've been friends for over a year, and it's always been affectionate and relaxed between you: that's what you liked about him, that you didn't have to *think* so much, you didn't have to be your job title, it was just—this.

But right now, *this* suddenly feels precarious, unknown.

You reach out, laying your hand on Raffi's strong forearm. "Raffi—"

They swallow. "Yeah."

"You can come back."

Slowly, as though concerned that they'll do the wrong thing, Raffi slides their arm around you once more. Loose, but warm. You lean into their side, butterflies fluttering in your stomach, and, equally slowly, you put a hand on their leg.

An intake of breath from them, and they draw you closer, allowing you to lean your head against their shoulder. They bump their head gently against yours, and then, softly, their hand slides up to cup the nape of your neck.

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