

The Edge of Comfort

Ricardo left the house as soon as he could. The oppressive air in his parents' house, stuffed with bored people, was driving him crazy. That summer vacation was turning out to be a disaster: it rained for days, and the sun refused to show up. Since the previous night, the rain had taken a short break. It was still cloudy and windy, but the temperature was at least pleasant, just a little too cool. In the morning, Ricardo went out just to take a walk.

He didn't know that beach, and was nearly regretting knowing it. It wasn't a terrible place: it was a charming little place, small but urbanised enough. The beach itself wasn't the problem, but the house. He only wanted to get out of there.

He went through the avenue that stretched through the beach from end to end, running parallel to the sea. It was an endlessly straight tarmac road. He only wanted to know where it would take him. He walked on for a long while, to the point where he didn't know if he was still in the same beach. The houses and the little streets he crossed were still nearly the same, but somehow, he felt it wasn't the same place.

At a certain point, Ricardo decided to turn left into one of the transversal streets, heading away from the sea. He walked through an unpaved road, a simple, wide trail through the grass. He headed forward, just to see where that street would end. Even though it was rough, the street was long, and spanned about three or four blocks. At the end, it seemed to end among some trees, but he went on.

To his surprise, he found a series of dunes, like a little unknown oasis in the middle of that place. He walked, with his feet sinking into the soft sand, marching up the smallest dunes. The rest of the beach and the sea were behind his back, and just a bunch of trees were ahead. That place sure looked different enough.

Ricardo climbed the tallest dune, sticking out among the sand. It was a rough climb, and he was already tired halfway through, with sand sticking on his legs up to his knees. Yet he went forwards. He just wanted to check out the top.

Once he got there, he had a quite pleasing sight of the place. To one side he could see the trees circling the dunes and the big grassy fields that stretched out behind them, and to the other side, the sea. The most remarkable of all, though, sitting next to him on the edge of the dune, facing the distant hills, was a young man.

Ricardo couldn't see much of the young man, as he was facing away from him. He could only see he had dark, wavy hair and wide shoulders, and he was wearing what looked like white swim briefs or underpants, and nothing more. Ricardo felt mystified by that presence, but decided to get closer, and silently sat next to the man. He seemed to just ignore Ricardo's presence.

The young man clung to his bent knees with his arms, pulling them against his chest. He had a distant gaze, with little expression, as if he just waited for something. The two sat in silence for a while. Ricardo considered starting a chat, but didn't feel quite at ease. He had, though, a great urge to know who was that young man, who looked to be about his age; perhaps a few years younger, in his very early twenties.

"Do you enjoy the sight here?" Ricardo said at last.

The young man shook his head. "I didn't come here for the sight," he said, his voice rough, low and maybe a little faint.

Ricardo fell silent, gazing at the hills at the distance.

"Am I bothering you?"

"No," the young man said, without looking at Ricardo.

"If I am, I can leave."

"Do whatever you want, man."

Ricardo couldn't tell if that was spite, discomfort, or mere neutrality. Regardless, he decided to stay there, still wanting to know more of that young man and also why he

was there; for the same reason as himself, perhaps? Ricardo tried to imagine the situation with the roles reversed. He couldn't: he had to know first why the young man was there, and it wasn't for the sight, allegedly.

"Do you like this place?" Ricardo said, soon realising how pointless the question was.

"I don't know," the young man said, closing his eyes a little. "That's not why I'm here."

Ricardo felt a certain hostility. "Man, if I'm bothering, I'll just leave."

"I told you, do whatever you want."

"I just don't want to annoy you," Ricardo said.

"Just don't touch me then."

As weird as it could be, it was a sensible reply. Ricardo was relieved for still being allowed to talk, and thought he could break the ice.

"Why would I do that?" he said. "You're quite handsome, but we've barely met."

The man turned his head dramatically to look at him, furrowing his brow. "What kind of comment was that?"

"Man, it was a joke, I'm sorry!" Ricardo said, raising his palms. "I'm only kidding."

The man shook his head. "What a stupid comment," he said, sounding far less aggressive than he should have been.

"I'm curious about why you're here," Ricardo said.

"Shouldn't you be curious about why *you're* here too?"

Ricardo chuckled. "I actually am. But then, I'm naturally curious."

"So that's why you're still trying to talk to me?"

"Well, yes." Ricardo smiled. "But if you came after some peace and quiet, like I did, I can shut myself up."

"That's not what I'm here for," the young man said.

"Alright. I'm here for that," Ricardo said, "but a little human contact never hurt me."

"Then you don't know all kinds of human contact," the young man said, with obvious sarcasm.

Ricardo raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Well, yeah, maybe not." He paused. The young man sighed.

"Nature is amazing, isn't it?" Ricardo said.

"Nature wants to kill us," the young man replied.

"Sheesh, that's negative."

"It's not," the young man said, "it's just true. That's how nature operates: it kills the weakest so the strongest will make it. Did you ever realise what an inhospitable world this is? Try living out there in the wild and see how long you'd last. For someone like us, that's impossible. There are hundreds of ways to die, each one worse than the last. We can only live in the comfort of our homes, in the city, with every possible convenience."

"And yet here we are," Ricardo said, "at the edge of our comfort, standing before that same nature that wants to kill us."

The young man thought for a moment. "Yeah."

"So is that why you're here?"

"Uh, I guess," the young man said.

"Without clothes on?"

"Why?" he replied, turning to Ricardo again. "Do you have anything against it?"

"Of course not," Ricardo said, a little intimidated. "To quote your own words, do whatever you want."

"That's better."

"I just found that curious," Ricardo said.

"That's not curious," the young man replied, "*you* are."

"That's true."

"I just hope that's only curiosity," he went on. "I'm not very fond of your interest on what I'm wearing."

"Hey!" Ricardo said, protesting. "What's going on? Do you think I'm harassing you?"

"I didn't say anything," the man said.

"Well, you're still suspicious, and there's no need for that. I'm just relaxing here."

"So what's with that interest? Isn't it normal for people to be more comfortable and loose in the beach?"

"Yeah, of course," Ricardo said in a vain attempt to fix things. "But, the weather's so bad, and you're all curled up..."

"Alright, fine," the young man said, stretching out his legs, frustrated. "I'll be all relaxed and at ease, if that makes you feel better."

Ricardo reeled back, embarrassed for causing that reaction. He noticed the young man was in his white underpants, not in swim briefs, and that embarrassed him even further.

"Man, I told you, do whatever you want," he said. "I just made a question."

"Every question comes from some interest," the young man said. "And I still don't know what is your interest in me."

"Dude, I'm sorry, I just wanted to have a chat," Ricardo said. "I'm fed up with being stuck in a house filled with boring relatives, without actual friends. When I saw you there, I thought that, maybe, you could be lonely too."

"I'm alright," the man said.

"In that case, there's no need to be irritated when I ask you what brought you here."

"I've told you, it's to be at the edge of life, or whatever you said."

"At the edge of comfort?"

"Yeah, that," he said.

"Then that's fine," Ricardo said. "Maybe we can just share this moment?"

The young man shrugged. "Fine."

"Can you tell me your name?"

The young man sighed, resigned. "Marcelo," he said.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Ricardo."

He reached out his hand. Marcelo eyed him for a moment, and shook his hand at last.

"Alright."

The two turned to face forwards again.

"So, at the edge of comfort?" Ricardo said, with no idea what to expect as a reply.

"Yeah," Marcelo said, sighing.

"You know, I like this sight," Ricardo went on. "It's nothing spectacular, or extraordinary... but, I think, that's exactly what I like. It's nothing special, and that's what makes it special."

"That's stoner talk," Marcelo said. "You could pass the blunt, at least."

Ricardo chuckled. "Nah, I don't smoke it."

"Me neither," Marcelo said, shrugging. "Not anymore."

"Really? Why did you give it up?"

"I don't know. I just think it's not for me anymore. I think I've seen it all."

"You did, huh?"

"Yeah, why?" Marcelo said, giving Ricardo a slight frown.

"I don't know. You make it sound like such an unimpressive experience," Ricardo said.

"But that's what it is," Marcelo said. "Better yet, that's what it becomes after some time."

"Oh... well, okay." Ricardo stopped talking, looking for something to say. "I hope it doesn't start raining again."

Marcelo just shrugged. "I don't care."

"Really?"

"I don't know, I guess."

"I wish I could know how you can be so indifferent," Ricardo said.

"Would that make any difference to you?"

"Of course! I'd understand you a little better."

"There's nothing to understand."

Ricardo looked at him again, in a symbolic gesture. "I'd say otherwise."

"You'd better try to understand yourself," Marcelo said.

"Well, but I do!"

"I doubt it."

"What do you mean, you doubt it?" Ricardo said.

"Well, tell me what did you see in me that's so interesting that it's making you talk to me."

Ricardo scratched his forehead. "What I saw is that you seemed to have an interest similar to mine, when I spotted you sitting here."

"But now, that you know that's not true, what's the interest?"

"Well, I find you a mystery," Ricardo said.

"I mystery!" Marcelo echoed in disdain.

"And why wouldn't you be? That's not a scene I see every day."

"Go on, admit it, you were interested in me because I thought that, since I'm here, in the middle of nowhere, alone, in my underwear, then I'm available," Marcelo said. "You think I'm a faggot, don't you?"

"First, someone who wanted to show he was 'available' wouldn't be somewhere so remote," Ricardo said. "Second, I have no guess on your sexuality."

"That's what you say," Marcelo shot back. "Are you a faggot yourself?"

"That's irrelevant."

Marcelo laughed. "The sneakiest way to say yes."

"Alright, look, I'm bisexual, okay?" Ricardo said, annoyed. "But I repeat this is irrelevant."

"Of course it's not. That's why you're here."

"No, it's not," Ricardo said, frustrated. "And I want you to stop insinuating that."

"Well, if you insist."

The two paused.

"Seriously, there seems to be something bothering you a lot," Ricardo said. "I don't think you're always like that."

"What reason do you have to think that?"

"I don't know, man. Maybe it's just a feeling."

"You mean, you just want to believe what's more comforting for you. The edge of comfort, yeah, right," Ricardo said, not very convincing in his sarcasm. "If you actually wanted to be at the edge of comfort, you'd think the exact opposite: that I'm really like this, and at any moment I can say something that hurts you a lot."

"You don't seem capable of that," Ricardo said.

"Oh, I don't?" Marcelo said, facing Ricardo as if challenging him.

Ricardo just chuckled. "Wow, it seems like I hurt you instead."

Marcelo turned forwards, thoughtful.

"I just think that, if you were like that, you'd have hurt me already."

Marcelo shrugged. "If you'd rather believe that, it's fine," he said, curling his legs again.

"Aren't you cold?"

"No."

"Why don't you get dressed?"

"I don't want to," Marcelo said.

"Come on, man," Ricardo said. "You'll freeze."

"I don't care."

Ricardo paused for a second. "Marcelo, honestly, what happened to you?"

"It's none of your business."

"I'm serious, if you have any problems, share them with me. This is the moment."

"Then why don't you share your own problems?" Marcelo said. "You seem more eager to do that."

Ricardo pondered for a second. "Alright," he said, quickly taking off his t-shirt and dropping it aside.

"What the hell are you doing?" Marcelo said, in shock.

"At the edge of comfort, right?" Ricardo said, pulling down his shorts and dropping them aside as well.

Marcelo felt his heart beat a little stronger, but soon thought it was worthless. Ricardo was on his tight blue briefs, and curled himself up a little due to the cold. Marcelo noticed for the first time that he was handsome, with deep green eyes, beautiful, prominent face and long, wavy hair falling on his shoulders.

"I can't understand you," Marcelo said.

"But you said there's nothing to understand," Ricardo said.

Marcelo was a little embarrassed, and tried to cover it up. "Of course. I don't want to understand you anyway."

Ricardo chuckled. "Sure."

"Alright, but since you started this nonsense, go on and tell me your problems."

"Fine," Ricardo said. "My problems. ... well, actually, I don't think I have one big problem, you know?"

"Good for you," Marcelo said, without a hint of sincerity.

"Not that I don't have any. I could say... my family, for example."

"They don't understand you," Marcelo mocked.

"No, it's actually not that," Ricardo said without losing his pose. "I just don't feel at ease around them. It's too many people, too much ego, too much showing off. I'd say, maybe, I have about two cousins who I can spend some time with and have some fun. But when there's this many people around, I don't feel good. So much pointless chit-chatting, you know?"

"Oh, sure, Monsieur Descartes," Marcelo mocked again. "This riff-raff can only spew nonsense."

"Undoubtedly, Monsieur Diderot," Ricardo replied.

Marcelo gave him a puzzled glance. "Descartes and Diderot didn't live in the same period."

Ricardo shrugged. "So what? They're both dead."

"Yeah," Marcelo said, turning his head forwards, as if admitting this defeat. "But if that's your biggest problem, you're doing well."

"Eh, I'm not sure if this is the biggest," Ricardo said, resting his arms on his knees. "This was just the first one that came to mind. My house is full of relatives now, and I was fed up being locked inside the house with them because of the rain."

Marcelo just gestured vaguely.

"Are you with your family too?" Ricardo said.

"No. I'm staying with some friends," Marcelo said. "I mean, not really friends. Most of them are guys I knew from school, or friends of friends, that kind of stuff."

"And you don't wanna stay with them?"

"Yeah, basically," Marcelo said, "but we were talking about your problems."

"Right," Ricardo resigned. "Well, this year I have to start to work on my final paper for college. This scares me a little."

"Sure," Marcelo mocked again. "Nothing more scary than having the privilege of going to college."

"Hey, I didn't say that!" Ricardo said. "Of course it's a privilege for few, unfortunately, especially being a public college. But that doesn't mean it's easy."

"It depends on the course," Marcelo said.

"I don't know. I don't know how the others are."

Marcelo sighed, realising his curiosity about Ricardo was growing bigger. "What course are you taking?"

"Physics."

Marcelo raised his eyebrow. "Okay, that deserves my respect."

Ricardo chuckled. "Wow, that's the first time you showed some admiration for me."

"What can I do?" Marcelo replied, shrugging. "I just admire those who can study exact sciences. I can't help it."

Marcelo shook his head, smiling. "Are you on college too?"

"Yeah. It's a Languages course, before you ask."

"Really?" Ricardo said with extra interest. "Do you enjoy it?"

"No," Marcelo shot back, "I just want to starve through my whole life, actually."

The two fell silent for a moment.

"It's amazing how nobody can understand why I took this course," Marcelo confessed.

"But that wasn't my case," Ricardo said.

"Ah, sure," Marcelo replied. "The way of saying it may change, but the intention is the same: I took this course because I had no capacity of doing something else, or because I'm not one of the geniuses of Computer Science."

"That's why asked if you enjoy it," Ricardo said, "because I thought that was the case."

"It gets worse the more you try to fix it," Marcelo said.

"Fuck you," Ricardo replied.

Marcelo looked at him, shocked, but soon relieved to see Ricardo didn't say it out of anger. He chuckled. "That's the first sincere thing you said so far."

Ricardo looked at him, questioningly. "You don't really mean that, do you?"

"Not really, I'm not teasing you."

"At times it's tough knowing when you're serious and when you're joking."

"I like messing with you," Marcelo said.

Ricardo shook his head, chuckling. "Sadistic asshole."

"No one forced you to speak to me."

"Come on! I know you actually really want me to stay here," Ricardo said. "Now it's your turn to talk about your problems. I've told you mine."

"Tough luck," Marcelo said.

"Don't give me that," Ricardo insisted. "Tell me what's bothering you now."

"I *don't want to*," Marcelo replied, in an unreasonably loud tone.

Ricardo paused, realising he could be getting into some really shaky ground. "Dude, it's alright, don't get angry," he said. "Look, why don't we go out for a walk?"

"No," Marcelo said, looking straight forward with a steely, fixed gaze.

"Are you sure?" Ricardo said. "We can go look for a place to have some coffee, or whatever else you like."

"I don't want to get up from here," Marcelo interrupted.

"Okay, fine," Ricardo said, shrugging. "It was just a suggestion."

Marcelo remained silent.

"I just... I'm getting worried with the weather," Ricardo continued. "It looks like it's going to rain again soon. Seriously, we'd better get going."

"I'm not leaving this place anymore."

Ricardo was stumped. "What do you mean with that? You have to go home."

"I won't."

"And you'll just stay there and starve to death?"

"Whatever."

"No way, man!" Ricardo said. "Come with me and I'll take you home."

"It makes no difference," Marcelo said.

"Of course it makes, dude, don't do that. You need to go back."

"I'm only good for being hated."

Ricardo stopped again, in shock. "But I like you!"

"Don't fool me around."

"Come on, Marcelo, where did you come up with that?" Ricardo said, turning to him.

"What's with that talk of being hated?"

"I'm a faggot, man, get it?" Marcelo said, throwing his hands to his sides. "That's what I

am. If that's what you want to hear, then there it is."

Ricardo was still turned to him, and looked at him tenderly. "And that's enough reason for you to be hated?" he said. "Marcelo, you know that's not true."

"Fuck off," he said. "You know very well it is. You're not a straight guy, you should know it's totally true."

"Oh, dude, I know some people don't accept it, don't tolerate it, and so on. But that's not reason for you to stay here and never go back home! I'm sure there are people who love you back there, and they don't want you to go. And even if that weren't true, I'll say it again: I like you."

Ricardo had no hidden intentions with that, but he had to admit to himself he found Marcelo very attractive; and after that last revelation, his almost naked body was quite tempting. Ricardo restrained himself, though. Marcelo just sighed.

"Come on, man, I'll take you home."

"I can't."

"Of course you can!" Ricardo insisted, getting ready to get up. "Put on your clothes and let's go."

"I can't do that," Marcelo said.

"Oh, yeah? Why not?"

Marcelo rubbed his forehead, looking exhausted. "I can't find them."

"Can't find what?"

"My clothes, you idiot!" Marcelo shot back. "I don't know where my clothes are. Why, do you think I enjoy staying outside in my underwear?"

"But... but then..." Ricardo stood still, and turned to him again. "Marcelo, how did you end up here?"

Marcelo rested his forehead on his bent knees, breathing deeply.

"What happened, man?" Ricardo said, more gravely. "Did anyone do something nasty to you?"

Marcelo just exhaled between his knees

"Tell me, man," Ricardo insisted. "If anyone made you anything bad, tell me."

After a long pause, then, Marcelo raised his face and took a deep breath.

"Last night, we decided to go to a bar, that had something going on. I went with them, but I wasn't enjoying it too much, so I decided to go home. The house was a bit far away from the bar, and I had to walk." Marcelo wiped his face with his arm. "Then, about four guys got close to me and started to taunt me and call me names. Somehow they knew I'm gay, I don't even know how. I got scared, but I said nothing, I just went on walking, but they were still after me. When I realised, they were surrounding me, and I was forced to stop. They got close, and I was already scared. I thought they were going to beat me up. Then they told me to take my clothes off, and I got down to my underwear, I had to. I even thought of screaming for help, but I didn't think anyone would hear, and I thought they'd beat me to a pulp if I did."

Marcelo spoke while staring straight ahead. Ricardo listened silently, with a terrible feeling of anguish that seemed to grow on his stomach.

"Then one of them came up with a stick, or a branch, or something, and told me to lay face down on the ground. I had no idea what they would do, so I expected the worst." Marcelo shuddered, and tried to restrain himself, breathing deeply. "The guy hit my buttocks with the stick, and they laughed at me, and called me every name you can think of. The guy with the stick started to hit harder, I was in pain already, then he grabbed the stick and started to..."

Marcelo pressed his eyes shut, as if he tried to hold back something. "I just tried to keep my mouth shut and take it. They did this for a long time, until one of them told me to get up and run, and I did. I never ran like that before. They forced me to run on the wrong direction, and I was afraid of going back. That's what happened."

Ricardo heard the story with his mouth gaping wide and his eyes wide.

"Then what happened next?"

"Then I had to hide somewhere to try to sleep. I found the back of some house I think was empty. I just wanted to hide, so no one could see me. Then, when I got up, I wanted to be as far away from everyone as I could, from anyone. I didn't want anyone to see me, not like this. So I got here."

"So you haven't gone back home since then?"

"No."

"But, Marcelo! Your friends must be out of their minds after you!"

"I doubt it," he said. "They must think I'm sleeping in some guy's bed."

"Haven't they tried to call you?"

"I left my phone home when I left yesterday."

"Man, you have to go home *right now*," Ricardo said.

"I don't want to."

"Are you crazy? You ate nothing all this time? Come with me and I'll take you there."

"I don't want to see anybody," he said. "I'm scared of getting out of here."

Ricardo sighed. "Man, you can't stay like that just because some assholes did that to you. You can't let them affect you."

"It's not just those guys," he said. "A lot more people would have done the same thing if they had the guts. If this happened to me even here, in this shithole, how would it be anywhere else? No, I don't want that anymore."

Ricardo lowered his head, upset, trying to approach it another way. "I once got beat for that same reason, did you know?"

Marcelo gave him a quick, curious glance, but quickly turned forwards.

"I was still in high school," Ricardo went on. "There was this guy I had a crush on, and I thought he fancied me too. One day I talked to him, and I told him about myself, and soon found out he was not into guys. I didn't even hit on him, we just had a talk. But he told some other guys about me, and they bet me up on my way back home. I was in a really bad shape, and had to stay inside for two days. After that I was scared of going back to school. I was afraid that, at any moment, they'd do all that again. I thought they could kill me if they wanted to."

"You don't need to make up stories just to make me feel better," Marcelo said."

"You really think I'm making it up, is that it? Look at this." Ricardo showed him a scar near his left eye. "I carry this with me to this day. I could have acted just like you, if I wanted to," he said. "But I insisted in carrying on with my life instead."

"Good for you," Marcelo said.

"You can do that too."

"I *don't want to*."

"But, Marcelo," Ricardo insisted, turning to him. "Very few will treat you like that. Many others will like you. And some will even love you. Don't you think that's worth it?"

"I don't know. I've lost my hopes of being loved."

"What if I loved you?" Ricardo said.

"No, quit it," Marcelo replied. "You don't know me at all. Get out. I don't want your pity disguised as love."

"It's not pity, Marcelo. I don't want to pity you for a while and then forget. I want to take you to your home, and only leave when I'm sure you'll be fine."

Marcelo sighed. "Then you'll die here with me."

"No, not at all," Ricardo said. "You're leaving with me somehow."

Marcelo shook his head, having nothing to say. "Give up, man."

"No, I won't. I look inside your eyes and I see you don't want to stay here forever. You want to go on living, I know it!" Ricardo said. "Even if it's just your survival instinct, it doesn't matter, you didn't give up yet. You may think it's bad to face people after going through

this, but it will be worse to die here. I know you want someone to love you, and that's why you need to get up and go home."

Marcelo left his head fall between his knees. "I don't want to go through this again."

"Of course you don't, Marcelo. But if you stay here, it means those guys won; they'll have destroyed the life of another guy just because he's not like them. You can't give them this victory."

"As if they cared about my life," Marcelo said.

"But they do!" Ricardo said. "Why do you think they did this in the first place?"

"They were just showing they had the upper hand on me."

"Well then, you have to show *you* have it. Your life is bigger than any humiliation you may ever go through."

Marcelo looked at the ground, thinking.

"Come with me," Ricardo insisted. "I'll take you home. No need for clothes."

"Do you really think I'll feel better with that lame pep talk?" Marcelo said. "You may think you know everything I feel, just because you got beat up before. I'm not like you. I can't be like you."

"Like what? Do you think I'm some superhero?"

"No. I just can't be that persistent."

"Then you have to try."

Marcelo glanced at Ricardo's mesmerising face, as he looked directly at him. For a moment he urged to cling onto that look and swallow it whole, but he lacked the courage.

"Ricardo, go away while you have time."

"I'm not leaving alone."

Marcelo sighed, looking ahead. It seemed to be colder, and the clouds were much darker than before.

"If I leave with you, I'll owe you my life," Marcelo said. "I don't know how I could pay that back."

"Marcelo, are you nuts?" Ricardo said. "Why would you think that? You'll owe me nothing. The only thing you need to do is exactly what I said: go to your home and be fine. No debt at all."

The two heard distant thunder. Rainfall was imminent.

"Man, let's get out *now*, unless you want lightning to strike you on the head."

Marcelo still hesitated for a second, which seemed to last a thousand years. Within him, he definitely wanted to go out with Ricardo and follow him wherever he went; but then, there was that terrible feeling, which he couldn't even identify, that wanted to leave him stranded there. In the end, he got up on his feet. Ricardo picked up his clothes, relieved.

The two trudged down the dune as fast as they could, filling their legs with sand. Before they could get too far, rain started to fall.

"Come on, Marcelo, hurry up!"

Ricardo was terribly scared of being struck by lightning right where they were, among all that sand. Carrying his clothes in one hand, he took Marcelo's hand and helped him get out. They struggled against the sand while the rain got heavier and more thunders kept blasting every time.

Ricardo and Marcelo managed to get out of the sand, and ran below the trees until they reached the street. The rain was quickly turning into a storm, and soaked the clothes Ricardo carried in his hand. The two ran through the street, almost naked, wet and cold.

"How far away is your house?" Ricardo shouted.

"Quite far!"

Ricardo was scared, and thought it would be better to find shelter and wait for the rain to stop. It was pointless to put on any clothes, as they were almost soaked.

They got close to the main avenue, which was empty. Not even cars went by.

"Which way?" Ricardo said.

"There!" Marcelo replied, pointing to the right.

The two ran under the rain, while lightning kept striking. They were tired when they found a store, or a market, with a long roof protruding over the entrance. Ricardo led Marcelo there, and they curled up on the floor against the wall, trying to preserve whatever heat their body had. Ricardo grabbed Marcelo, pulling him close against his own body. They panted, exhausted.

"Let's stay here," Ricardo said. "I don't think anyone will mind."

The store was closed and completely deserted. The few houses nearby were all closed, and nobody went through the road. A single car went by, headed where they were coming from. Ricardo even considered hitching a ride, but he soon realised it was a terrible idea. Marcelo breathed deeply, with his face on Ricardo's neck. They stood like that, hugging, keeping their heat.

"Ricardo," he muttered. "Thank you."

"Marcelo, please, never do that again," Ricardo said. "I just want you to be fine. Just that."

"I don't want to die," Marcelo said. "I don't wish to go through any of that ever again, but I don't want to die."

"You won't die, Marcelo. You don't need to die like that."

"I don't want to die. I want to stay with you."

That last sentence pretty much escaped from his mouth. Ricardo gave him a tender look.

"It will be alright."

"I want to be with you, Ricardo, with you."

The two took a long look at each other, as if they tried to understand that moment, and at last, they kissed. Something unexplainable drove Marcelo close to bliss. He felt he could give himself away entirely, even his body, to Ricardo's most intimate wishes. It was pure insanity, but that's what feelings can be like. Marcelo held him, his hands searching his most hidden regions, pulling him against his own body. Ricardo grabbed his waist with his hands. They exchanged sighs and kisses on their chest and neck, until they fell down, exhausted.

"You know what?" Ricardo said, pulling himself away slightly. "You look quite hot like that, all soaked..."

"Freezing," Marcelo said, ironically.

Ricardo shrugged. "At the edge of comfort, right?"