I Won't Forget You
by Erinnyes

Summary

A continuation with permission of "Make me Forget", by the excellent Helthehatter. Nick is a prostitute, and Judy is still an aspiring officer starting to lose faith in herself. When their paths cross at a bar, both of their lives take an unexpected turn.

The original can be found at:
http://archiveofourown.org/works/10165583/chapters/22583084

Notes

A big thanks first to Helthehatter and Milesupshur. Helthehatter created a one shot that just had to be extended (and granted me permission to do so), and Miles convinced me to actually start writing it, as well as providing help in the process. Also a prolonged box/ funny flogging session for Zanrok for infecting me with whatever it is that makes readers want to turn into writers. :)

To answer a couple questions I got repeatedly from people I talked to.

What the story will have: An adventure, fluff, some angst, sexual content, mentions of Nick's profession, probably smut later, and hopefully realistic characters out of their usual setting. What the story will NOT have: Nick/OC, or anything resembling a love triangle. Nick is a prostitute (for now...) and that will be a part of the story, but Nick/OC will not be a thing. I sail aboard the good ship WildeHopps, and I will go down with that ship.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

When Nick woke up, the scent of sex and rabbit remained, but Judy was gone. The fox wasn’t especially surprised, but he did feel a twinge of something that might have been disappointment before slowly dragging himself out of bed. What did he expect, after all? She was a rabbit with ambition that hadn’t yet stomped out, and he was just a fox the world had already crushed enough.

Since Nick met most of his clients at night, his days were fairly free. It was one of the few perks of his current “employment”, if you could call it that. Usually the daylight hours would be spent relaxing, pursuing other business ventures, or working out. Nick had learned long ago that there were certain things that foxes in the city were permitted to do, and certain things they were not.

He’d certainly tried applying for other jobs, many times. Nick was a born salesman, with an innate knack for figuring out what mammals wanted and how to provide it for them. The excuses not to hire him to do precisely that exceeded his desire or ability to remember them all. The subtle would tell him politely that he didn’t have the “necessary skills” to fill that particular role. The direct would just slam the door in his face. Less common but appreciated were the brutally honest, who would say that “public perception” was important to their company, and management wasn’t interested in having a fox as the public face.

Today was going to be a workout day. Even after his second cup of coffee, Nick was still trying to clear his mind of violet eyes, soft fur, and a quiet voice that had promised to never forget him.

“Pfft. Right. Like that bunny is going to remember me as anything other than her worst drunken mistake,” snarked Nick to himself as he threw on the first shirt and pair of shorts he picked up off the floor.

Snagging his wallet on the way out, Nick performed his customary check to make sure his last client hadn’t pilfered anything from him in his sleep. For the first time ever, his wallet felt more full than it had when he went to sleep, and Nick slowly began to count the medium sized mammal bills inside it. Before he got even halfway through, a small, handwritten note fluttered through his fingers and to the floor.

“Nick, I know you didn’t want me to pay you for my first time, but I felt like you deserved it anyway. My 23rd birthday was only a week ago, and most of my family just sends me money because they don’t know what to buy for a weird bunny who wants to be a cop. You gave me something better. You gave me acceptance and for a few hours you made me forget that the world doesn’t want me to succeed. I needed that, and acceptance is something I’d been hoping my family would give me for years. Since that gift finally came from you, I thought that you deserved this. Thank you for everything, and I won’t forget my promise.

- Judy Hopps”

For the second time in under a minute, the paper floated to the ground again and Nick stood silent and still as a statue. Despite his outward calm, inwardly his mind was spinning faster than a carnival ride.

Why would she leave me that?
She told you in the note, you idiot.
No, why would she leave a fox that?
Even in Nick’s head, the word “fox” sounded harsh, like something a mammal would spit from between their teeth.

*Because you made her happy. From the sounds of it, that’s a rare occurrence. Making mammals happy is my job. No. Getting mammals off is your job. You gave her something else. What did I give her that her probably ginormous family couldn’t? Did you even read the note? You accepted who she was and what she wanted. Heh. Wonder what that feels like. Maybe you should ask her?*

Blinking, Nick returned slowly to reality.

*I wish I could, but if she really wanted to talk to me ever again, she’d have left a number on this note. … Oh well. Today is another today, even if tomorrow might be worse.*

Across town, Nick wasn’t the only one lost in thought.

Judy Hopps had (belatedly) followed Fru Fru’s advice and taken a cab home, a decision she was very near to regretting now. The infamous “walk of shame” was something that, until today, had been something she would mock her siblings for doing. Never in a million years would future Officer Judy Hopps lower herself to that point.

Strangely though, despite the strange looks from the lupine cab driver, Judy didn’t feel low. In fact, she felt better and carried her ears higher than she had in longer than she cared to remember. She may have lost her virginity the previous night, but she’d found something she had begun to think may not even exist.

Judy had found a mammal who heard her dreams and didn’t laugh, who gave her a shoulder to cry on without suggesting she run back to the farm, and who had listened to what she needed and provided it, even though he hadn’t wanted to. Shivering, as she recalled what precisely he’d given her, she unconsciously crossed her legs and winced at a twinge of soreness.

“Are you okay, miss?” cautiously queried the wolf in the driver’s seat. “You seem a little out of sorts and you sm… seem like you might need some help”.

Judy’s eyes narrowed and met his in the rearview mirror “And what, precisely, is it you imagine I need help with?”

Taking a deep breath, the wolf sighed and decided to come clean. “Look, little bunny. You’re clearly wearing your clothes from last night, your fur is a mess, you look sad, and you smell like a fox used you as a towel. You tell me what I’m supposed to imagine. I’m just asking if you need help with anything”.

*I look sad? He must have misinterpreted my soreness for being sad. Why would I be sad?*

Sighing, Judy couldn’t really blame the wolf for asking. Even in Zootopia, public pred/prey relationships were almost unheard of, and one between a fox and a bunny might be entirely unique. Looking down at her clothes, she realized that as dressed up as she’d gotten for last night, the wolf probably thought that she was a prostitute. Judy wasn’t really sure why she’d worn such a nice shirt
to such a seedy bar, but now it was really coming back to bite her in an entirely unexpected way. She tried hard to hold in the laughter at the irony, she really did. She really failed.

“HAH” she burst out, carrying on for several seconds as the driver tried not to swerve violently in shock. “Ahem. Sorry. First, your nose works fine. I do smell like a fox. Second, I do not need any help with anything. Thank you for asking.”

The driver paused for a long beat, clearly unsure how to proceed. “... Whatever you say, crazy bunny. We’re here, anyway”.

Judy paid the driver with the last of the money in her purse, and headed up to her room. The driver hadn’t been wrong, she really did smell more like a fox than bunny right now. In retrospect, it wasn’t surprising. After all, they’d worked up quite a sweat their first time together… and the second. Nick hadn’t knotted her again after the first time, but she’d be lying if she said she hadn’t missed the closeness. It was definitely an experience she would love to try again.

You might have, you know, if you’d hung around. Or if you’d just left him your number. Please. Did you see the guilt on his face when he did it the first time? He’s probably glad I wasn’t there when he woke up.
Bun-bun, he knotted you. He told you straight up that he hasn’t knotted anyone in years.
Of course he hasn’t! He’s a prostitute! He probably hasn’t had a real emotional relationship in just as long!
Exactly.

Oh.
Imagine how lonely he must be, to have all those mammals who want his body, and not a single one who wants anything else.
Oh.
You should have stayed. Maybe you both could have gotten something you wanted.
Sweet cheese and crackers.

Ears drooping again, she slowly walked into the room she shared with Fru Fru. Ordinarily an Arctic Shrew would be in a smaller dorm than the one Judy required, but somehow Mr. Big had gotten wind that his beloved daughter had wanted to room with a particular rabbit. One moderately anonymous donation to the college later, and a special exception to the usual guidelines had been made.

“OH MY GAWD! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!!” the tiny shrew shouted. “I was about to have Daddy’s polar bears start scouring the streets for you! You were gone all night and you weren’t answering your phone!”

Until that precise moment, Judy hadn’t had a hangover. Unfortunately for the lapine, the shrill voice of her roommate at volumes usually reserved for much larger mammals was the last straw. “Ugh… I’m alive and well, Fru. I’m not bruised and I’m not bleeding, but I do have a spectacular headache now. So please can we take it down a notch?”

Criminals across the underworld were familiar with the smile that crept over Fru Fru Big’s face. It was the same smile that Mr. Big always wore while watching a mammal be slowly lowered towards the icy water under his office. It was entirely too terrifying to belong to a creature that small, but there it was anyway. “Oh but of course, Judy. I’ll be very careful and considerate of your hangover, just as soon as YOU TELL ME WHERE IN THE FROZEN HELL YOU WERE LAST NIGHT!!!”

Ears and head ringing from the onslaught, Judy gave only a passing thought to the words that came out of her mouth next “I went home with someone”.
For the first time since she was a small child, Fru Fru Big was too stunned to yell. “You did what? I must have misheard you”.

“You heard right, Fru. I spent the night with a…” Judy paused here, not being sure how many details she could successfully get away with omitting. “…mammal I met at the bar.”

“Oh my Gawd! Judy! You have to tell me all about it, I’m so excited for you! There aren’t that many bunnies in Zootopia, you must have found quite a catch!”

Later that day, Judy would blame the hangover for correcting Fru on her assumptions. Many months after, she would finally realize it was simply that she couldn’t bring herself to be ashamed of the first mammal to really support her goals, and the first mammal she’d slept with at all. “It wasn’t a bunny”.

Fru Fru blinked. “A hare?”

“God, no. The last one of those I met was insufferable. Thought his name and stripes made him a gift to does everywhere.”

“A Pika? A raccoon?” Fru Fru was clearly grasping at straws.

“Nope.”

“What did you go home with?”

After a short pause, “A fox”.

Another pause while Fru Fru digested that information. “Judy, are you serious here? You went home with a fox?”

Bracing herself against the horror and criticism that was sure to follow, Judy groaned out “Yes, Fru. I went home with a fox. We had sex twice last night and then I took a cab home today, and I’ll probably never see him again.”

Fru Fru took a deep breath and did the only thing Judy could never have seen coming.

“Judy! I can’t believe you did that! I love it! How was he?! Wait. Don’t foxes have a knot?” Fru Fru seemed like she might soon start vibrating with joy. “JUDY! Did he knot you?! I need all the details!”

For the second time in 24 hours, Judy was stunned by the reaction of another mammal. She had expected Nick to laugh at her dreams, and he’d been supportive. She’d thought Fru Fru would call her a freak for sleeping with a fox, and instead she was demanding details. Not even a day after everything had looked so bleak, her life was looking up! Everything was going so much better, except…

“It’s not like it matters, Fru. I’m never going to see him again, anyway.”

“But why not? He must have been a special fox for Studious Judy to go home with him”.

“He was, he’s the first one who’s believed in me for a long time.” Fru Fru was wonderful, but she had a rather dim view of the city, and a darker still view of the police. While supportive of Judy in general, Fru was absolutely convinced that eventually Judy would cave and come work for Mr. Big. There were always openings for friends of family, especially friends who’d spent the last four years getting in shape, studying, and learning how to fight mammals much larger than herself.
“Then go find him! Even if you don’t want sex again from him, he sounds like a friend. Everyone knows you could use some more of those. How did you meet him the first time?”

Judy carefully considered her answer, not wanting to reveal more than she had to. “I met him at a bar where he… works.”

“So you know where he’ll be! Do you know his hours?”

Judy’s ears tilted sideways in thought “He didn’t tell me directly, but I have a guess he probably works most nights at the same bar. He didn’t seem like he was exactly rolling in money.”

Fru Fru waved off the last detail “Neither are you, darling. I keep telling you to let Daddy hire you, but that’s not important right now. If you like this fox, and you know where he’ll be in the evenings, you should go see him!”

She’s right you know.
But wouldn’t that be weird?
No more than literally anything else you’ve done in your life.
My parents would lose their minds if they found out I was hanging with a fox!
They didn’t want you to try to become a cop either, and here we are.

Straightening up to her full height, Judy finally found that look of confidence again that made her unique among rabbits. “You know what? You’re absolutely right. I’m going to go find that fox.”
Thank you, everyone for the overwhelming response to chapter one. I’m so happy everyone enjoyed it and the response helped me get this installment out early. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

While none would guess it from the outside, Nick took certain things very seriously. The apartment may have been dirty, but his personal appearance was always immaculate. Unless he was waking up after a long night, you would rarely see the fox with anything less than perfectly brushed fur and clothes that showed off just the right amount of it. Part of the care of his appearance was his workout routine.

Unlike some mammals, foxes weren’t made to be bulky. Without steroids Nick would never have biceps like a cape buffalo, but that wouldn’t be attractive on the lithe predator anyway. Instead, Nick played to his species’ natural strengths: speed, agility, and endurance. Monogamous though most foxes may be, there’s a reason that vixens had a reputation as being particularly attractive.

On any given day, Nick’s workouts would include a several kilometer run at a brisk pace, but today one could be forgiven for thinking that Nick wasn’t running on a treadmill as much as he was running away from something, mostly because he was. The memory of violet eyes and gray fur was still front and center in Nick’s mind, and for someone in his profession that was a problem.

Good job, slick. There’s a reason we don’t do ‘intimate’. Now you can’t get her out of your head and the ‘distracted fox’ look will be great for business.

Uhhuh, and being intimate is the only reason you were disappointed she wasn’t there this morning?

Absolutely, 100%. I’m a prostitute for Karma’s sake. Having sex with mammals without getting attached is literally my job.

I don’t know… you two seemed pretty “attached” last night. I’d say you were being knotty, but that might stick with you the wrong way. She sure didn’t seem to mind, though.

That could happen to any todd on occasion.

Yep, and anyone could be so distracted they would accidentally run twice their normal distance. Also, you’re exhausted.

Wha?

FWUMPKSSSH
Missing his next step, Nick fell arms first onto the spinning belt and was violently tossed into the next row of treadmills. All anyone would later be able to describe was a surprised yelp that seemed to emanate from a red blur which could have been mistaken for a bowling ball in a different location. As the room slowly began to remember it was stationary and not spinning, Nick assessed his injuries.

All four limbs? Still attached. Fingers and toes? They move and some of them hurt, that’s probably a good sign.

Does it mean you’re having a bad day when pain becomes a good sign?

Probably, now shut up.

Okay, but I’m not sure foxes were meant to bounce quite like that.

... Karma, why me?

Should I make you a list?

Not helping.

Staggering to his feet Nick, pressed his paws to his ears to try and quiet the ring in in his head. He had a bruised knee and back from the landing, a sprained wrist from the fall, and a buzzing in his head that simply would not quit. The vulpine was going to be out of work for a few days, he couldn’t afford to give a client less than full attention after all, but nothing serious enough to warrant medical attention beyond an ice pack and a drink.

So much for running until I got my mind off things. Damnit, Karma... Just... Why?

My offer to make a list is still on the table.

NOT HELPING.

Let’s go to the bar and drink on the bunny’s dime?

Much better.

A shower, some Tigerol, and as thorough a fur brushing as Nick could manage one handed later, and he was feeling like an actual fox again. Ears were in the upright and locked position, and his signature smirk was on his muzzle as he walked into the bar across from his apartment complex. He’d almost forgotten what had him so frazzled earlier, and the dull aches all over his body had settled to a level where a couple beers would make them vanish entirely. It was almost a shame that the first thing he saw at a booth in a dim corner were a pair of long ears over violet eyes.

Judy Hopps was not one to dawdle over decisions or second guess herself. She had more than earned the much hated nickname “Jude the Dude” by being stubborn, strong willed, and utterly
tenacious. Her dream was to be a police officer, and she already knew that she was going to need to not only be up to the standard, but far over it if she wanted to be taken seriously.

It was that drive to be perfect that had her sitting through her normal afternoon classes with Fru Fru, despite the undeniable fact that for the very first time she would much rather be literally anywhere but there.

*Is it that you want to be anywhere but here, or did you have a specific spot in mind? Maybe, say, a specific foxes apartment?*

*No! I’m going to go to the bar and talk with him. Get your mind out of the gutter!*

*Why? You’re a bunny, after all. The weird thing isn’t that you’re fantasizing about someone, it’s that you haven’t ever really done it before now. I mean, he’s also a fox, but honestly that’s less weird than the other part.*

*Shut up! I am not fantasizing about creamy fur… and soft paw pads…*

*No, obviously not.*

*SHUT IT.*

“Judy!” A small voice hissed from beside her. “What are you doing’?”

“Just… taking notes!” Judy whispered back brightly.

“Really? Because your ears have been going up and down so fast in the last minute that you’re blowing papers off the table behind you.”

Judy’s ears snapped down to lay flat against her back again, prompting muttered grumblings on the subject of whether she was a rabbit or a living fan. The mutterings stopped when Fru Fru’s bodyguard/chauffeur turned to glare at them.

“What’s got you so worked up? Still thinking about your fox?” Fru Fru piped up again from her perch atop the polar bear’s paw.

“Ye...NO!” Judy squeaked back.

“Miss Hopps!” The bespectacled zebra who taught Criminology shouted from the front of the room. “Is there a problem? It’s not like you to be chattering in my class.”

Stammering cost Judy whatever chance she had to reply before Fru Fru hissed at the giant bear.

“Koslov! Judy isn’t feeling well. Take us to the car.”

The polar bear spoke loudly enough for the professor to hear, “Miss Hopps is not feeling well. We will take her to see the nurse. Please excuse us.”

“Eeep!” was all Judy had the chance to say before Koslov scooped her and her bag up with one paw and began walking towards the door. “What are we doing?!”

Fru Fru waited until the door had closed behind them to respond. “It’s just like I said! Clearly you aren’t feeling well, and we’re going somewhere to help you feel better.”
“You said we were going to the nurse!” Judy shot back accusingly.

“No, I said we were going to the car. Koslov said we were going to the nurse, mostly so the professor wouldn’t ask questions. We are going shopping.”

Judy’s ears drooped behind her head. “Fru, you know I can’t afford to go shopping. I spent the last of my birthday money last night, and I don’t have a lot of spending money.”

Fru Fru waved her hand dismissively. “Don’t you worry about that. Daddy gives me plenty of money to splurge a little. Besides, I know lots of things! One is that there’s nothing better to get a girl’s mind off things than a little retail therapy. The other thing I know is that shirt you wore last night is the only nice one you have. Once you find your fox, don’t you want to keep him?”

A flush shot up Judy’s ears at Fru Fru’s phrasing. “He isn’t my anything, Fru. I just want to talk and maybe make a second friend. You’re the one who’s always telling me to make more of them.”

It was easy to forget that under the high voice and bubbly personality of the tiny shrew lay a mind just as intelligent as her father’s, and many times as sympathetic. Fru Fru sighed and was silent for a few long moments before speaking again.

“Judy, you’ve been getting more depressed ever since you started applying to the ZPD. We both know that your rejection has nothing to do with the class being full, and everything to do with the fact that you’re a bunny. Daddy’s friends made some quiet inquiries and found that the last few classes had several open spots.”

None of this was news to the small lapine, and she shut her eyes tightly against the tears that had wanted to spill ever since she got the last letter.

“I know you thought you’d be able to get them to make an exception for you, and you’ve told me that this has been your dream since you were a kid. For the first time since you got that letter, you walked into our room with your ears up and a smile. I don’t know what that fox is to you, but he’s the only thing that changed since then, and I’ll do anything I can to bring back that smile.”

Judy sniffed a final time and smiled at her friend. “Thanks, Fru. I know you've never really wanted me to join the ZPD, but you're the closest thing I've had to a supporter my entire life. I can't really tell you what it means to me.”

Fru Fru smiled back at her friend. “You don't have to tell me a thing, darling. You just have to go shopping with me.”

Coughing out the last of her tears, Judy carefully pulled Fru Fru closer. “I'm going to be the first rabbit officer at the ZPD. I think I can manage a shopping trip.”

Several hours later, the proud future officer was rethinking her bravado. Fru Fru may have been small, but her stamina for shopping was boundless. Judy felt like a store mannequin and was completely confident she’d tried on more clothes than most of them. Between the two mammals, they’d put together a couple outfits guaranteed to get Nick’s attention. Neither were anything in Judy’s usual wardrobe, but since Fru Fru was paying, Judy didn't feel like she could entirely object.

The first was a loose, thin strapped, red dress that went down to her knees and was what Judy would wear tonight. It was attractive without being overtly sexual, and would be perfect for tonight’s objectives.

“Whether or not you want to be friends or want something more, it's always best to keep your options open”, the shrew had observed.
The second dress was something that Fru had picked out against Judy’s better judgement. It was as if someone had taken the infamous “little black dress”, and shrink wrapped it onto Judy's trim form. It was strapless, low cut, and extended only to mid-thigh. There was a small hole in the back just barely big enough for her tail to fit through, with the black dress perfectly accenting the white puff. To cap it off, Fru Fru picked out a gold and amethyst necklace that brought out Judy's already stunning eyes. It was guaranteed to catch the attention of any male in visual range with a pulse, and Judy had absolutely no intention of wearing it anytime soon. Ever, if she could manage it.

That evening had the freshly groomed (also at Fru Fru’s insistence) bunny sitting in the same seat as the previous, anxiously awaiting a certain fox and doing her best to keep her foot from thumping on the air in front of her seat. She was so distracted by her nerves that she almost missed the flash of red fur and emerald eyes that walked through the door. Proving neatly that cats weren't the only ones who landed on their feet, Nick barely did more than blink in surprise at Judy's presence before continuing his trip to the bar. Obtaining his usual from the bartender, he took a moment to try and get a read on the bunny who looked so different from the night before.

Wow. Groomed fur, brand new dress, ears are up, and she's sipping on a drink instead of trying to drown herself in it. If it weren't for the eyes I might not believe it was even the same rabbit. What’s she doing back here?

Well, given that the only two things she found here were alcohol and you, and she doesn’t seem to be overly interested in the alcohol, I'm gonna guess she’s here for you.

But why?

Good question, but you're not going to figure it out from over here.

We’ll see.

As the older stag bartender brought Nick’s drink back, he pointedly dropped a tip into the jar and waved for the bartender’s attention with a teeth revealing grin spread across his face.

“Jimmy! Quick question, if you could be ever so kind.” Nick inclined his head gently towards the corner to indicate Judy’s table. “See that bunny in the corner? Is she here with anyone?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Not that I’ve noticed. She got her first drink about 30 minutes ago and has just been sipping on it quietly ever since. Not the best tipper so far, but she also hasn’t turned over any tables, so I’m willing to call it square.”

Nick’s smile turned inquisitive. “Ya don’t say… Thanks, Jimmy.”

Shrugging internally the fox started to wander over towards Judy’s table and took a moment to assess his own outfit. Thankfully, his earlier injuries hadn’t caused him to forgo his usual intensively grooming, and his clothes were subdued but classy. He’d chosen dark wash jeans with a black shirt that showed off his muscles, instead of the loose Pawaiian shirts he secretly loved. He may have been off duty, but he still had a reputation to uphold.

Clearly nervous amethyst eyes followed his Nick’s progress to the table. Reaching it, Nick rested his
elbows on the surface as he leaned over it and smirked.

“And what, pray tell, is a girl like you doing in a place like this? I know you aren’t planning on hiring me again.”

Judy started, she hadn’t expected Nick to go in for the big question so quickly. “Can’t someone just want to come and say hi?”

Nick regarded her flatly and his ears folded slightly back. “In my experience, no.”

The lapine’s expression flickered through several reactions in quick succession, going from surprise, to sadness, and then brightening considerably as her ears perked up.

“Oh… Well then I guess I’ll have to be the first! Hi!” She waved brightly at the confused fox, and then gave him an appraising look. “I’m sure that’s your idea of dressing down, but you look nice tonight.”

The fox’s expression shifted from confused to smug. “I always look nice, Carrots. The new clothes smell I can pick up from over here tells me that you, on the other hand, don’t dress up overly often. So why would a bunny like you go through the trouble of looking even more beautiful for a place like this?”

Judy laid her ears behind her back to hide the color that spread quickly at the foxes smooth wit, and gestured to the seat in front of her. “Would you like to have a seat, or do you have other mammals to charm this evening?”

Nick responded only by sliding into the booth with a smile that turned into a wince as his bruised back contacted the unpadded bench.

A look of concern flashed onto Judy’s face as her nose gave a nervous twitch, “Are you okay? Did someone hurt you?”

“You’re not gonna believe this, Fluff, but I suffered an absolutely terrible attack just last night.” Nick’s sly grin made a reappearance as he watched the bunny’s eyes grow wide in horror at his imagined assault.

He sighed morosely, lowering his ears fully back against his head. “I’m just not sure I’ll ever be able to forgive you for riding me until my back was bruised.”

The inside of the bunny’s ears turned bright red and she pulled her ears over her face. “Oh, Nick! I’m so sorry! Let me buy you a drink to make up for it!” She jumped out of the booth and practically sprinted over to the bar to order another round.

Nick laughed quietly to himself once she was out of earshot. “Oh you bunnies… so emotional.”

He waited until Jimmy was done taking her order, and then waved to get the stag’s attention. With a meaningful look, he pointed at Judy’s back and shook his head, then pointed at himself and nodded emphatically. With the barest tip of his antlers, the stag acknowledged his understanding and quickly sent Judy back on her way and added the drinks to Nick’s tab.

As Judy returned to the table, Nick continued where they’d left off. “So, Fluff. My terrible injuries and saying ‘Hi’ aside, what really brings you here tonight?”

Judy thought for a moment before responding, “Did you see my note?”
“I did. That’s part of why I’m so surprised to see you.”

Long ears tilted slightly to the side, “Why?”

“Because usually when someone leaves a note with no number and is gone before you wake up, they don’t intend to see you again.”

“That’s… fair. Maybe I didn’t.”

“What changed?”

Judy put her paw over Nick’s on the table. “A friend told me that choosing to never see again the first mammal to really support me was probably not the smartest move I’ve ever made.”

Nick idly rubbed the back of Judy’s paw with his thumb, “And I wonder, did you tell her what I do for a living?”

Looking uncomfortable for a moment, Judy found something very interesting on the table to stare at.

“No. I did not.”

For some reason, seeing the light dim in her lovely eyes made Nick sad.

“Am I right in thinking you’d prefer to discuss other things this evening?”

The rabbit looked up at Nick awkwardly.

“I mean… I don’t want you to think I look down on you… I just… it’s not something I have a lot of experience with.”

Smoothly steering the conversation away from troubled waters, Nick gave a relaxed smile to the unsettled lapine and changed the subject. For the next two hours they drank and chatted about Judy’s childhood, music, the city and how Nick seemed to know everyone in it. Throughout all of it, the only thing they didn’t discuss in any meaningful capacity was Nick himself.

As the crowd at the bar was winding down, Nick and Judy were both rather tipsy and having a great time, but a question had been nagging at the back of his head.

“So, there’s just one thing I don’t get, Fluff. Tell me, how did a lovely creature like yourself get this far without any serious relationships? I’m not sure if you’re aware, but rabbits have a very different reputation.”

“Oh, I’m aware. There’s a reason I have almost 300 siblings.”

Nick choked on his drink, a small dribble of beer coming out his nostrils as he hacked violently. They’d talked about her family, but the rabbit hadn’t mentioned just how big it actually was. Judy didn’t even bother to acknowledge the distressed fox and continued.

“I fully understand the reputation of rabbits. Unlike some stereotypes, this one is almost completely true.”

Finally clearing his airways of his drink, Nick looked over the table in amazement. “And just how in the world do you guys manage that?”
Judy leaned towards Nick, putting her muzzle well over onto his side of the table with a ‘come hither’ grin. “Wouldn’t you like to know, Slick?”

Nick closed the rest of the distance and flicked out his tongue, drawing a quick line over her lips with a smirk you could see from space. “Maybe I would, Fluff.”

Standing behind the bar, the older stag couldn’t help but laugh as both mammals nearly sprinted towards the door. “Ahh, kits…”

Pausing briefly, tail swaying happily behind him, the fox held the door as the rabbit walked out with far more certainty than she’d had walking in. Seeming to know that Nick was staring at her tail, she put just a little more sway in her hips and her fluffy tail twitched enticingly as they disappeared into the apartments across the road.

Stepping through the door into Nick’s apartment was a very different experience than the night previous. For one, both mammals were far more sober than they had been, and perhaps more importantly this time there was no question of what was going to happen and whether or not they even fit together. The fox had never referred to the place where he lived as anything other than “the apartment”, but somehow with Judy it felt a little bit more like coming home.

Nick shook his head to clear the unwanted thoughts as he watched Judy’s fluffy tail twitch gently as she walked inside. The rabbit paused as the door shut quietly behind them, and Nick took the opportunity to gently wrap his arms around the bunny’s torso and pull her back against his chest. As the fox trailed light kisses down her neck, his keen nose detected a part of her scent that wasn’t just arousal.

With the barest hint of disappointment, Nick knelt down and turned Judy to face him. “Still nervous, Fluff?” Nick asked softly.

Judy gave him a smile didn’t even come close to reaching her eyes. “Of course not! I’ve already been here once, what do I have to be nervous about?”

Nick sighed and lead her over to the couch, helping her take a seat on a cushion meant for a much larger mammal. Taking her much smaller paws in his, he continued to speak quietly as one would to a frightened kit. “I’m honestly not sure, Carrots. But I don’t need my nose to tell me you are, and we’re not doing anything until you tell me why.”

A long moment of silence stretched out between the two mammals as Judy frowned and gathered her thoughts.

Finally working up the nerve to speak what had been nagging at the back of her mind since they left the bar, Judy never met the fox’s eyes when she asked, “Why am I here, Nick? You know I don’t have enough money to pay you.”

Nick flinched as if he’d been slapped. “I… I don’t even know what to say to that, Fluff. Am I really nothing more than my job to you?”

Panic raced through the tiny bunny as she realized what she’d said to the fox. “No! Nononono! I swear that’s not it!”

“Then what IS it?”, the fox bit out.

Drawing her knees to her chest, Judy wrapped her arms around herself before putting her forehead against her knees and answering to the couch.
“Did I ever tell you what my childhood nickname was?”

“No”.

Judy sniffed and laughed bitterly. “Everyone in my family always called me ‘Jude the Dude’, because it wasn’t that far from the truth. Since I was eight I’d wanted to be a police officer, and everything I did was about that. While the other girls were learning how to put on makeup, I was working the fields with my brothers because I wanted to get stronger. When they were wearing dresses and batting their eyelashes at the eligible bucks, I was still wearing overalls and writing tickets to the other kids at school for jaywalking.”

She looked up at Nick for the first time in over a minute, and saw that his hurt had been replaced by growing understanding and sympathy.

“You asked me at the bar how a bunny managed to get to my age without any serious relationships, and this is how. I’m wiry where a doe should be soft, I’m ambitious and aggressive instead of affectionate and complacent. I’m not a very good bunny, and I have no idea why a handsome fox like you would ever want to be with me if they weren’t getting paid for it.”

Nick leaned back heavily against the arm of the couch and opened his arms in invitation to the teary eyed lapine. In a show of speed that only a rabbit could manage, Judy flung herself across the couch and into his embrace, burying her head against his chest and filling her lungs with the heady scent of violets. He gently began to run his paws down the back of her ears in a comforting motion.

“Fluff, I don’t know what is fundamentally broken with the bucks in your town, but you’re the most beautiful creature to walk into that bar that I’ve ever seen, inside and out. As shocked as you seem to be that another mammal could want to be with you, I was just as shocked that you came back to see me tonight. Especially when I realized you’d gone out of your way to look nice for someone you could just throw a wallet at. That isn’t who you are though, and I… I haven’t encountered that in a long time.”

Nick’s slow caress of her ears turned slowly more sensual as he gently drug a thumb claw down the inside and let his warm breath trickle across the back of her neck as a sly grin crept back into his visage.

“Now, I don’t understand all the reasons you’re here tonight. If you’re looking for respectable company I can tell you I don’t have it, but what I do have is a very specific set of skills. Skills that I have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make me a nightmare for an innocent bunny like you. If you’d like to leave, that will be the end of it. I will not stop you and I will not pursue you. But if you stay I will kiss you, I will undress you, and I will devour you until you beg me to stop.”

Judy froze in her position nestled close against the fox. “Did… Did you just quote Lamb Greenson?”

With smugness that could be be felt from the next apartment, the fox grinned down at her. “Did I borrow his epic speech in a bid to break the melancholy and wind you up? Yes. Yes I did.”

He paused momentarily. “Did it work?”

The rabbit slowly trailed her paw down the foxes long torso and mirrored his sly grin. “I don’t know, Mister fox. You seem like a dangerous mammal, and I’m just not sure a country bunny like me should be alone with you. You might try to take advantage of me.”

Nick stroked the inside of her ears again and felt them start to heat up as he moved his muzzle down to her neck and nibbled gently. “I would never take advantage of you…” he murmured into her neck.
as he slowly kissed and licked his way to the hollow of her throat. “... if you didn’t want me to. How ever can I prove to a sweet little bunny that I’m a perfectly innocent mammal?”

Judy brought her paws back up to the fox’s neck and dug her fingers into the scruff as her toes curled in delight. “Well, you can start by keeping that promise you made. I warn you though, I’ve never been one to know when to quit.”

Chuckling softly into her fur, Nick trailed his fingers down her side. “Then I suppose it’s time to see if this fox can teach you some new tricks.”

The bunny grinned with a sense of anticipation and the thrill of a challenge, “Bring it on”.

With a grin that revealed every single one of Nick’s sharp teeth, he licked his chops in a lewd gesture that showed where they were going. Noting the full body shiver that wracked the bunny’s body, he covered his teeth again with the ghost of a frown and moved his paws to her face and ran his thumb gently over her lip as his smile returned.

“Your wish is my command.”

Chapter End Notes

Well well, looks like the eventual smut may come sooner than I'd originally planned. What's everyone think? Chapter three is shaping up to be steamy indeed, but don't think they're out of the woods just yet. There's a lot of unanswered questions and bumps. Until next time!

Comments are fuel for the engine that drives this story! :-) 

EDIT: I've moved the conversational part of chapter three into this chapter to preserve the ability of readers to skip over those sections if they so desire. Moving forward, I'm going to do my best to continue to ensure that's possible. If there's a point where I can't easily split it into its own chapter, I'll provide clear markers.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Thanks everyone so much for the overwhelming response to chapters one and two of this installment. It's been beyond anything I expected. Special thanks to anyone who left a comment, it's been an absolute blast getting to hear what you all think. Speaking of blast...

This is the first of the smutty chapters. If you prefer to not read this sort of thing, you can safely skip over it. Originally there was plot at the beginning of this chapter, but that has since been relocated to the end of chapter two. If your version of chapter two didn't end with "Your wish is my command.", please check it again!

For those of you who are into this sort of thing, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As Judy pursed her lips to kiss Nick’s paw, he pulled it away and replaced it with his own lips, covering hers in a kiss that could only be described as hungry. His paws trailed down her back, and the bunny realized for the first time just how much bigger her fox lover was. One dark paw covered almost half of her back, and both of them together felt like they could touch her everywhere at once.

This size difference was something Nick used to its full advantage as one paw continued to massage her back and the other trailed further down to cup her toned rear end and squeeze it as he continued to kiss her hungrily. Judy’s inadvertent moan at his touch was all the opening he needed to slip his tongue between her lips and take his first taste of bunny for the evening. He savored the sweetness that no vixen could match as he squeezed the rabbit again and pulled her entire body flush against his.

Moaning into her lover’s greedy mouth, the bunny rubbed her thighs together in a vain attempt to tame the fire between them. While her first time had been wonderful, the alcohol and depression had dulled her senses. Tonight her nerves seemed to be making up everything they’d missed, and her body felt alight with lust and desire.

With an impish grin through the kisses, the fox slipped his paw lower to the hem of her dress and lifted it slightly. His dusky paws contrasted beautifully against the red fabric, and Judy gasped as she felt the cool air in the apartment caress her upper thighs. Nick bunched the fabric up around her waist and gently dragged his claws up the inside of her leg towards her sex.

“Ah! Ahhhn!” The bunny cried out as she felt the dull points draw towards the source of her heat, only to pull away at the last second. “P-Please, Nick!”

The fox in question nuzzled against one of her ears. “Patience, little fluff. I promised to devour you until you begged me to stop. Begging me to keep going is barely the beginning.”

In a quick reminder of how much stronger the russet predator was than the gray rabbit, he supported her entire weight in a bridal style carry as he stood up with barely a hint of additional effort.

“You are so light, Carrots. I would never have to put you down if I didn't want to.”
Feeling a surge of comfort and safety that she didn't feel compelled to question, she rubbed her face against his shirt again. “If you intend to make me beg you to stop anything, you're going to have to at some point”.

Nick smiled down at her and chuckled. “Don't worry, Fluff. I'll keep my promise.”

The lithe predator sat Judy gently on the bed and slowly pulled her dress over her head, baring her chest to the cool air of the apartment. If it were not for the lust still burning through her body, the country rabbit might have covered herself reflexively. Instead, she lay languidly back and let her arms lay above her head, pulling her chest and flat belly taut.

Humming appreciatively, the fox took off his own shirt and fell to all fours over the bunny, covering her body with his own. Instead of going for any of the most obvious points, he simply dragged his long tongue slowly from her navel to her neck and admired the way her body arched under his caress. Finishing his path with a series of kisses to the edge of her right ear, he delighted in the lust filled sigh that escaped the rabbit as he pulled away.

As Nick lowered his muzzle to passionately kiss the panting bunny beneath him, he followed the fur his tongue had ruffled with his paw, smoothing it and stroking her all the way to the gap between her thighs. With one gentle paw pad, he finally touched her dripping sex for the first time that night and pressed in on her lips.

Judy had been wound tight, like a coiled spring that abruptly released at his touch, snapping her legs tightly closed around his wrist as she arched her back again and moaned her loudest yet. Rather than let that deter him, the fox used the fact that his fingers were longer and thicker than that of any bunny as he gently pushed her panties aside and insert his finger deeper into her body. It didn't matter that he couldn’t move his wrist, his finger was more than enough to make the bunny’s entire body tense again and then relax as she surrendered to his ministrations.

With his paw free again, Nick seized the opportunity to quickly lace two fingers through her panties on either side of her legs and pulled them free of her body. Finally, every inch of beautiful gray and white fur was on display to the hungry predator, and he drank her in like a starving mammal eyeing a feast. Pulling Judy easily to the edge of the bed, Nick knelt beside it and draped her legs over his shoulder as he gripped her thighs and brought his maw to her inflamed lips.

This was the moment they’d both been waiting for since Nick made his promise, and as the long canine tongue snaked out for the first time to lap some of the moisture from her sex, Judy dug her heels into his back in a vain attempt to force him to devour more of her. Many things the sly fox may be, but he was neither cruel enough nor mentally strong enough to deny her wishes at that moment.

His mouth opened wide, allowing him to shove several inches of his tongue into the warm grip of the bunny’s tight body. As he had been their first time, the fox was amazed at just how much pressure she could put on something even as thin as his curled tongue and how responsive she was. The teasing and the kissing leading up to this moment had her already on edge, and he knew her first orgasm wasn’t far.

Releasing one of her legs, he exploited the size difference again to gentle rake his claws up her torso on the way to her tiny nipples. Finding one, he ran a paw pad over a raised tip, and grinned to himself as he heard her draw in a shuddering breath and grip the sheets like she was afraid she would simply fly away.

Rubbing circles around first one nipple and then the other, Judy’s body continued to tense around the fox and her back arched farther off the bed by the moment. Waiting until it seemed like she couldn’t possibly tense any further, Nick grabbed one of her stiff peaks and softly pinched it between his
finger and thumb pad. That was the final straw as the coiled tension snapped inside her and Judy screamed her first orgasm to the night and covered the fox’s tongue in her juices.

The night previous, Nick had allowed her a moment to recover and catch her breath, but he had no intention of providing such mercy this time. Even as her pliant flesh rippled around his taste buds the hungry predator continued to devour her, twisting and turning his tongue inside her to stimulate every inch of her pussy he could reach. Releasing her first nipple, he groped for the second and twisted it in the opposite direction of the first.

Judy couldn’t be sure if she erupted into another orgasm, or if her first simply intensified and continued with no end in sight. The fox was still holding one of her legs, covering her upper body with another paw, and filling her sex more completely than she could ever dream of. It was more stimulation than she’d ever experienced before and some part of her mind knew then that she was addicted to the dangerous predator more completely than she could be to any drug.

His attentions and her orgasm seemed to drag on for hours, though it was more likely that it was only a minute or two of stimulus overload before she finally began to come down from the high. The russet furred trickster had one more trick to play on the inexperienced bunny though, and as he felt her contractions slow just the smallest bit, he released her other leg and moved his paw to her belly. Wearing a grin that should have been impossible with his tongue that occupied, he lowered the pad of his thumb to her clit and started rubbing in quick circles.

The three pronged stimulation was too much for the tiny bunny. Her heart felt like it was going to hammer its way out of her chest, her claws were leaving punctures in the sheets, and her mind was overwhelmed with the feeling of Nick being absolutely everywhere at once. Soon she felt she would even forget how to breathe, and it was with this in mind that she finally gasped and screamed the words the fox had been waiting to hear.

“N--Nick! Please! No more! I can’t take any more!” the rabbit managed to shout with some semblance of coherency.

With a loud slurp, the fox slowed his touches and pulled his tongue out of her, savoring the flavors that came with it. Grinning like he’d just been named “Sexiest Mammal Alive”, he clambered up on the bed and lay down next to the rabbit. As she trembled and her heart rate slowly came down to normal levels, Nick pulled Judy close to him and stroked her ears while making soothing noises.

As the conscious mind slowly returned to the overstimulated rabbit, she lifted her muzzle and nestled into the fox’s neck, taking a deep whiff of his strong scent.

“That was… beyond amazing, Nick. Thank you,” she murmured to him.

Planting a kiss between her ears, the satisfied vulpine smirked slightly. “One day you’ll get over being surprised that I’m precisely as amazing as I say I am, Fluff. I’m looking forward to it.”

Judy chuckled lightly in response. “Don’t hold your breath, dumb fox.”

Shifting her position to get more comfortable, Judy noticed two things in quick succession. The first was that Nick was still wearing his pants, and the second was that his cock was still completely hard and in desperate need of being freed.

Realizing Nick’s predicament, Judy determined to repay the pleasure that had been shown to her. The reinvigorated bunny planted a light kiss on the vulpine muzzle, tasting herself on his lips as she pulled away and whispered into his perked ears, “My turn.”.
“What do you mean, your tuuuRN???” the fox’s curious query turned into a surprised yelp as she unbuttoned his pants and reached inside to soothe his aching length.

“Seriously, Nick? No underwear? Just how well did you think dinner was going to go?” the bunny asked facetiously as she finished removing his pants and used both of her soft paws to slowly rub over the vulpine cock.

Nick gasped under her tender touches. “If you recall, Carrots, you didn’t exactly let me know you were coming. That applies to every sense of that word tonight, if you were wondering.”

Even with her paws wrapped firmly around his foxhood, Judy still managed to blush at the double entendre. With a confidence that she didn’t quite feel, she bent low and gave a tentative lick from the base to the tip, scooping up some of Nick’s precum as she went and making a show of swallowing it down.

“Not bad.” She smacked her lips lewdly and then smirked back at the vulpine still laying flat on the bed. “Maybe some other time if you’re a good foxy I’ll show you just how sorry I am. Not tonight.”

Nick’s hips gave an involuntary buck at her lascivious suggestion. “What are we going to do tonight, evil bunny?”

The smirk from a moment prior grew wider as she momentarily began quickly stroking him, ensuring he was fully hard. “I’m going to introduce you to another reason that rabbits are amazing. Something we’re even better at than multiplying.”

Even under stress, Nick’s sarcasm couldn’t be contained. “I didn’t think there was anything you bunnies were better at than that. How many siblings do you have, again?”

Judy threw one of her legs over his hips, straddling him and rubbing her slit up and down his length. “Oh, there is.”

With a groan, the fox’s voice grew tight and clipped “What’s that?”

The rabbit raised herself up again and positioned the tip of Nick’s cock at her entrance. “Bouncing.”

Loosened by several intense orgasms and well lubricated by both her juices and Nick’s, she was easily able to slide three quarters of the way down on the first drop. The fox hissed in pleasure as her wet heat gripped him tighter than any mammal before her and used all of his remaining willpower to not simply grab her hips and thrust the rest of himself into her. This time it was his claws leaving tear marks in the sheets and his panting that filled the room at the abrupt surge of pleasure.

Judy paused at the incredible sense of fullness that spread through her body like a warm tide. Left to her own devices, she would gladly have simply savored the sensation for some time, but this was about returning to her russet lover some of the pleasure he’d given her. With that in mind, the bunny made true on her own promise and used her powerful legs to rise back up swiftly and then fill herself again with Nick’s red length.

Finally trusting himself to let go of the sheets, the fox shifted his paws to her hips, using his strength and reach to take some of the load off of her legs on the upstroke and allowed her to control the depth as she bounced up and down at a pace no vixen could ever hope to achieve. The tightness, the heat, her beauty, and her (dare he say it?) cute moans were conspiring to cause a tingle in Nick’s furry sac that would not do just yet.

To distract himself and the bunny, the fox shifted his paws from Judy’s hips to her chest, spreading his fingers and covering most of her upper torso with his paw pads in a way that made her feel again
like Nick was touching her everywhere at once. The feeling of his fingers rubbing over her nipples at the same time as she was impaling herself with all the speed she could muster was going to bring the rabbit to ruin for the fourth time that night.

With a cry that would likely be heard several rooms over, the rabbit sank down the rest of the way on Nick’s cock, filling herself with everything except the knot that was beginning to make an appearance. Nick felt her impossibly tight grip ripple around him, feeling her clench and attempt to bring him over the edge as well. He wasn’t quite there though, and Judy was clearly in no condition to continue her bouncing bunny routine.

Years of working out and a natural size advantage made rolling over while never leaving the bunny’s warm embrace a trivial matter, and the fox threw her legs over his shoulders for the second time that night to give himself full access to her sex. Judy screamed again as the fox buried himself in her body again until the knot pressed slightly against her lips. With a quick kiss to her toned calves, Nick found his own rhythm and began repeatedly impaling the bunny trapped beneath him.

After all the stimulation of the night, it was not a pace that would last long and Judy could tell that Nick was reaching his limit. His panting breaths sounded more like a snarl and his knot pressed a little deeper with each thrust, but still he was holding back.

“All of you, Nick,” the rabbit gasped.

“I can’t-I won’t risk hurting you,” the fox growled back into her ears without slowing down.

“No… I’m not going to break Nick, knot me. I want all of you.” Her voice turned from gasping to pleading, with a hint of desperation.

Nick’s entire body tensed as he continued to fight his natural urge while getting closer to his own release.

“DAMMIT NICK, KNOT ME LIKE YOU’RE TRYING TO BREED ME!” the bunny yelled at him as she dug her dull claws into his shoulders.

That was the last straw, and without any further reservation the fox thrust forward with all of his strength while the bunny lifted her hips up to meet him. A mutual grunt and an audible pop later, his knot was buried firmly in the impossibly tight body of the rabbit now firmly tied to the fox. Judy screamed one more time, that last sensation as his knot had pushed past her clit was all that she needed for her final orgasm. Her eyes rolled back into her head and her toes curled almost painfully as she felt the warm wetness fill her core.

As ropes of hot cum were pumped into Judy’s tiny body, Nick’s head lunged forward and sank his teeth savagely into the nearest pillow he could find. His jaw clenched down hard and left deep tears in the fabric as he lowered himself to his elbows so that he could wrap his arms under his lover and pull her tight against himself.

His hips continued to jerk erratically for another few moments, each small thrust being accompanied by a moan from the bunny and a small growl from the fox. Every movement caused some of his essence to leak out of the overflowing bunny and dribble onto the bed and Judy would coo at the loss.

The ears of the panting predator were pinned back against his head, and it was Judy’s turn to stroke them and whisper affectionately as he came down from the most intense orgasm he could recall.

Carefully controlling the movement of the hips that were tied tightly together, Nick flopped onto his
side and pulled the rabbit close to himself. He savored the feeling of her fur pressed against his, the slight dig of her nipples against his torso and the simple comfort that came from the feeling of her paws reaching far up to be able to continue petting his ears. Her fur was softer than he imagined a cloud would be and more beautiful than a sunset.

These were his final thoughts as the exhaustion of their activities and the drinks they’d enjoyed earlier finally caught up with both mammals. Before the darkness and sleep claimed him though, he opened his muzzle one final time.

“Thank you, Judy,” he whispered.

Her ears perked slightly at the sound of her real name.

“Thank you for bringing more pleasure to this fox than I could ever have dreamt to deserve. No matter what, I will never forget you, either.”

Judy whispered something back that the fox couldn’t quite make out, and he made a note to ask her tomorrow.

“Good night, Fluff. I’ll be here in the morning. I hope you will be, too.”

“I’ll be here. I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

While this may be my first time writing fiction in a long time, this was my first attempt at this sort of content ever. Let me know how I did!

There is some good news and some bad news. The good news is, I’m buying a house with my fiance this Friday! The bad news is that means I’m moving, and chapter four will be delayed as a result. My objective is to have it out by next Wednesday. So far I’ve exceeded my goals for release, and with a little luck that'll continue. Until then!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

My apologies that this took longer than I'd expected it to. Moving wound up being an absolute nightmare, but I'll leave that for another day. For now, on with the show!

Thanks as always to DrummerMax, MilesUpshur, and ADeadMissionary for their invaluable assistance with proofing and ensuring everything reads smoothly.

Enjoy!

In almost all mammals, sight is one of the last senses to fully activate after waking from a deep sleep. Most commonly, the first sense is either hearing or smell, and foxes are well known for being very reliant on their noses. For this simple reason, the first thing that Nick was aware of when he slowly returned to consciousness after his second night with Judy Hopps was that the scent of sex and rabbit was again heavy in the air of his apartment.

The sense of touch not far behind, some important differences between the morning prior and this morning began to become apparent. A warm weight rested on Nick’s chest, rising and falling in time with his breath. It was comfortable and comforting in a way that no blanket could ever hope to match, and it was an entirely new feeling for the fox.

Nick's black-tipped ears flicked lightly as his brain began to process sound again. Most of the sounds in the apartment were the same as every other day. There was the knocking sound from the aging air conditioning and the distant cacophony of engines and horns from the traffic outside. Amidst the banal was one noise in particular that began to speed his ascent into full wakefulness, the sound of breathing from another mammal in the room. It was slightly faster than his own, but it wasn't shallow enough to seem panicked or concerned.

At long last, Nick gave in to the temptation to open his eyes and finally see for himself what happy circumstance was creating these feelings of simple pleasure that were so rare for the russet-furred predator. Blinking to clear his vision, his very first impression of the world was of a beautiful pair of violet eyes looking back into his own emerald ones. Beyond their aesthetic beauty though were the emotions contained within. The fox could be forgiven for saying that these eyes looked at him for all the world as if he were a source of light and good, and Nick didn't have the first clue how to deal with that.

Unlike the nocturnal predator underneath her, Judy had been awake for some time. As a species that was most active at dusk and dawn, being early to rise was second nature to almost all rabbits and was part of the reason they made such excellent farmers. Much like Nick, she’d slowly drifted awake as her various senses slowly reminded her that she was neither alone nor at home. Unlike Nick, however, this was her second time waking up with the fox, and she was struck now just as she had been then by how strangely natural it felt.

Judy was a prey mammal designed to hear danger before it could get too close, which meant that she could frequently hear things from her environment long before waking up. With her ears against the sleeping fox’s chest, Judy had no trouble at all hearing his heartbeat. It was slower than a bunny’s. More deliberate, deeper, and somehow seeming more powerful for it. She had always been aware
that Nick was a predator, and her involuntary shiver the night before at the sight of his teeth was sufficient proof that that fact held special significance for the rabbit. Whether it was from old memories, instinctual fear, or something else entirely had yet to be seen.

As her awareness returned, Judy discovered that she had simply stretched almost her entire body out on top of her predatory partner and was rocking gently in time with his breathing. It carried the same sense of peace and calm as smooth waters on a sailboat, and it was an extremely welcome relief from the stress and self-doubt that had dominated the small mammal’s mind for the last few months.

Nick’s musk filled the apartment and her lungs with the smell of violets and cinnamon, evoking memories of home and feelings of safety instead of the terror that instinct would otherwise demand. It was this last thought that caused her to reminisce and realize for the first time how very long it had been since she’d felt safe and content in the city.

Excitement had overwhelmingly been her predominate emotion on her first arrival, absolutely ecstatic with the possibilities and filled with hope for the future. She was a country bunny from the burrows out to make the world a better place, and the city where “anyone can be anything” was the place where she could do it. She was in college for her criminal justice degree, had a wonderful roommate, and nothing in the world could stop her.

Ironically, it was eventually Fru Fru, the closest thing she’d had to a cheerleader, who had finally managed to dampen her spirits. This was a particularly impressive feat given the first two rejection letters from the ZPD had not managed to do so. After being told twice that the academy classes were full before her application was considered, Fru Fru had asked Daddy Big to make some polite inquiries about the most recent class sizes and whether there had been space for a small lapine. The answer had been simple: the classes had space, but the chief of police didn’t want a rabbit on the force.

This rejection by one of Judy’s personal heroes had been the final straw. She’d built her entire life around letting the scorn and disbelief of those who said she couldn’t do it roll off her shoulders. She was Judy Hopps, and she was going to be the first rabbit police officer. End of story, thanks for listening, and no she doesn’t want to hear why you think she can’t do it. If the chief himself was against the idea though, that was it. Her dream was over before it had ever begun, and every mammal she’d laughed at for the last decade had been right.

The news had absolutely devastated the bunny, and had left her in the deep depression she’d tried her best to cure with alcohol the night before. She’d already decided she would finish her criminal justice degree; law school didn’t have size restrictions after all, and drinking away her woes while she coasted out the end of her final semester seemed like her best bet. In so doing she’d found something much better than the bottom of a bottle. She’d found Nick Wilde.

Nick had understood through personal experience being told what he could and couldn’t do with his life just because of his species, and he’d listened to her dreams without laughter or judgement. Judy was a tryer; she’d spent her entire life going it alone, and the honest support of even a mammal who’d initially just wanted to sell her a good time was enough to reignite the spark of determination that made her special among almost 300 siblings. Through his nature alone, Nick had become a firm place to stand and regain her footing while getting ready to take another swing at the world. It was with this expression of gratitude and affection that she was looking at him when his eyes opened and emerald met amethyst that morning.

It’s commonly said that there are two kinds of mammals who never lie: the very young and the very drunk. Uncommonly noted though is that there’s a third category who tend to say whatever comes into their mind first: the half asleep.
“I didn’t think you’d still be here”, Nick murmured to the bunny on his chest.

The rabbit in question gave Nick a confused look. “I promised I would be.”

Black-tipped ears laid back against his head and he raised a paw to idly stroke Judy’s back. “You would be absolutely astonished how little that usually counts for in my experience.”

Judy dropped her head to nuzzle into Nick’s ruff and drew herself close to him. “Not with me, Nick. I keep my promises.”

Even in his sleepy state, it wasn’t in Nick’s nature to allow silences to persist for long. When confronted with an awkward situation, his first response was usually to go straight for deflection with humor.

“Do you always watch foxes in their sleep, Fluff?”

“No idea, got another fox for me to try it with?” Judy shot back with a grin.

At her words, Nick felt an involuntary surge of jealousy, fear, and anger. His tail wrapped possessively around Judy’s back while his claws extended slightly, and it was all he could do to hold the growl in his chest instead of snarling at imaginary foes. Even a sloth would have realized his heart was racing and his breathing was much too fast. The fox wrapped his arms tightly around the bunny and pulled her close, sniffing deeply at the crook of Judy’s neck to draw in her comforting scent.

After resisting the initial urge to flee the ensnaring predator, Judy wrapped her much smaller arms around Nick’s neck and gently rubbed the ear tips that seemed to be trying to dig into the fox’s back. Even a naive bunny from the country could figure out what had set Nick off, and Judy was consumed by guilt for causing that reaction in the fox who she’d just been feeling appreciative of.

“It’s okay, Nick. I’m not going anywhere, you’ve got me. Just breathe. Everything is going to be okay.”

A few moments later, the jealousy left Nick and was replaced almost as quickly by a growing sense of horror and guilt at his reactions to her verbal jab. The fox was trapped in a feedback loop of wanting to draw her close to assuage his fear of losing her and being afraid that he would scare her off by doing so, which only magnified his apprehensions. It didn't help that the implications of forming this level of attachment this soon were concerning, to say the least.

Through all of this, Judy just carried on with stroking Nick's ears and whispering quiet reassurances until slowly, by degrees, the fox’s heart stopped thundering in his chest and his breathing slowed to something resembling calm. After a few more moments of just holding each other in bed, Nick pulled away to look into the worried eyes of the bunny with him. Nick chose his next words carefully, to ensure their sincerity was felt.

“Judy, we need to talk.”

An hour later found them eating cheap delivery food on a couch that looked like it might actually be worth less than the food. To say that the gangly colt who had dropped off Judy’s salad and Nick’s tofu was surprised to see the door answered by a smug fox that smelled like a bunny would be an understatement. Nonetheless, money had been handed over, food had been procured, and several minutes of eating in silence eventually gave way to conversation again.

“So, we need to talk.”
“We do.” Nick sighed loudly and dropped his ears a fraction.

“Oh... how do you want to do this?”

“Fluff, I'm not even going to begin to count the rules I've broken with you, and I'm about to break one more.” Nick pointed at a clock on the far wall. “See that clock there?”

Judy turned to look at it and then nodded back at him.

Seeing her confirmation the fox continued, “Here’s my proposal. Twenty minutes of honesty to the point of utter stupidity. No holding back, no wondering how the other mammal will take it, no half truths or lies. Just whatever pops into your head first.”

Nick smirked before adding, “Just consider it fair compensation for turning you into a quivering puddle of bunny last night. I did keep my promise, after all.”

His lapine companion looked nervous, and then scrunched her face in determination. “Twenty minutes?”

“Twenty minutes. Then we can go back to being normal mammals who hide their feelings beneath layers of sarcasm and self delusion.” Nick nodded as if stating immutable facts of the universe.


With a grin more predatory than any he'd worn the night before, Nick went straight for the kill. “Why did you come back, and why didn't you run when I grabbed you this morning like any rational rabbit would have?”

Her pause didn't go unnoticed by Nick. “Remember our deal, Carrots. Full honesty.”

Judy smirked back at the fox. “This explanation might take a few of those precious minutes. You sure that’s where you want to start? I figured you’d want to ask about my fantasies first.”

“Trying to appeal to my sex drive is still deflection. Absolutely, 100%. Now talk.”

Judy’s face fell. “What do you know about rabbit families?”

“Besides the fact that yours is enormous and they're fantastic at multiplication (I enjoyed the live demo, by the way), not a lot.”

As quickly as the rabbit’s ears flushed at memories of the night before, they dropped flat on her back while her face fell.

“Nick… I told you once that rabbits generally deserve their reputation for promiscuity before they take a life mate, but it goes much farther than that. Rabbit families are huge, even as large as our warrens are there’s no way for most kits to have a room to themselves. We tend to sleep in big piles, and most bunnies never lack for friends and confidantes. It’s one of the perks to having such big families, we never want for company. At least… as long as you don’t rock the boat too much.”

The fox felt a pang of guilt as he saw the beautiful amethyst eyes across from him start to tear up before she continued.

“I was an outcast, Nick. I wanted to be a cop. I wanted to leave Bunnyburrow and have a career instead of starting a family, and no other bunny wanted to be near me. Even though I was absolutely surrounded by other rabbits every minute of every day, I was always alone.”
Judy drew her arms in around herself, dull claws digging into her sides to try to distract from the pain of emotional wounds long buried.

“Do you have any idea how hard it is for an animal raised to constantly be in contact with family and friends to go entire days without speaking to anyone? While my sisters were being asked out on dates and boasting about the bucks who would do anything to get them into bed, all I had were romance novels and a dream of being a police officer. No eligible buck would ever be caught dead asking ‘Loony Judy’ out on a date. After I started picking fights with the school bullies to protect the few friends I did have, my parents had to give me a private room because my siblings were afraid of me.”

Finally cracking, Nick lifted Judy’s sobbing form with careful ease and drew her close to himself, allowing her to burrow into his neck and draw strength from his scent. Gently rocking the distraught rabbit, the fox stroked her ears gently and just held her until the tears subsided.

“My entire life I’ve been alone. Mocked and shunned by the mammals I would have given anything to have support me. Zootopia was the first place that others didn't think I was crazy, but even here I never really felt like some mammal felt my dreams were a good part of me.”

Judy extended both paws to cup Nick's muzzle, smiling gently for the first time since she'd started talking.

“Then a shirtless fox of all things sat down in the booth next to me, listened, and, most importantly, understood. You might have just been trying to make a dollar then, but once we got back here something changed. You did something for me that you didn’t even want to do because you knew it would make me happy. I felt important for the first time in years.”

Small gray paws wrapped around a fluffy red neck and lightly scratched at the base of an ear as both mammals smiled at each other.

“You wanted to know why I came back, but you asked the wrong question. You made me feel understood, wanted, important, and beautiful. After all that, the question isn’t why I came back. It’s how could I have stayed away once I realized it?”

If forced to describe his feelings in that moment, Nick would only have been able to say that he simultaneously felt light enough to float and that his chest was being squeezed under some immense weight. Judy wasn’t the only mammal in the room who felt wanted for the first time in much too long, and at the same time he felt crushed by her gratitude and sincerity. How on earth could a worthless prostitute like himself possibly live up to the mammal that Judy had obviously created in her head?

The rabbit planted a kiss on the side of Nick’s muzzle. “Now, Mr. Fox. I do believe it’s my turn to ask you a question.”

Still a little thunderstruck from Judy’s confession, Nick nodded slowly.

“My question is simple. What happened this morning?”

The fox kissed the top of her head before replying. “My turn to answer your question with a question. How much do you know about fox relationships?”

“Same as you knew about bunny families: not a lot.”

Nick’s face fell and his tail lay limply against the floor.
“Fluff… foxes are among the most monogamous species in the animal kingdom. Something like half of us will never have more than one sexual partner in our entire lives, and most of the rest never get past two.”

Judy’s face contorted in confusion. “Then how is it that foxes can be…” she trailed off.

“Prostitutes? Not very well, Carrots. The average life expectancy for a fox in my line of work is three years. Typically we start doing some sort of drugs after our first year to try to make it easier, and either overdose or commit suicide in two more. We tend to form a connection to animals we mate with, and to have that connection form and be ripped away over and over again for years… We just aren’t built to handle that, and eventually we find a way out. I think right now there are only five foxes in this line of work in all of Zootopia.”

“And how long have you been doing this?” Judy prompted gently, stroking his back.

“Five years.”

Judy flinched and wrapped her arms more tightly around his neck, as if she were afraid he would vanish into thin air if she let go. “Nick… I’m so sorry. Are you… err…. How do you cope?”

The mammal in question laughed bitterly, staring at the ceiling. “I’m not on drugs, since that’s what you’re asking. I have four rules, and it isn’t an overstatement to say that following them has kept me sane after this long.”

He began ticking them off. “One: Never have sex with a mammal while looking them in the face. It’s a lot harder to make an emotional attachment to someone you would barely recognize. Two: Never have sex with the same mammal more than once a week. The more frequently a fox sleeps with a partner, the more likely it is that the bond will set in. Three: Never be any mammal’s first time. Way too many instincts are tied up in that, and it usually results in some sort of emotional attachment. Four: No knotting. I don’t think I need to explain that one.”

Judy didn’t want to interrupt Nick’s explanation, but had to step in. “Why, Nick? Why in Serendipity’s name would you break every single one of the rules that kept you safe for me?”

“The first night, or the second?”

“Both.”

“The first night I broke my rules for you because you needed my help, Judy. You were hurting, alone, and the city was doing its level best to stomp the hopes and dreams out of you. If I hadn’t done what I could to help you, I’d be no better than the worthless fox this city thinks I am. I know what it’s like to have nobody in your corner, and I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.”

Listening to Nick’s explanation had Judy nearly in tears again, but for an entirely different reason than earlier. The voice that had encouraged her to find him in the first place made a reappearance.

“He really is as kind as we thought.”

“I know.”

“Do you have any idea what you’ve probably done to him?”

“I’m starting to get one.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Whatever I can.”

“But to what end? What do you really want from him?”

“I don’t know.”
“You don’t know, or don’t want to admit?”
“Both.”

Judy realized Nick had fallen silent and prompted gently. “And the second?”

“Because you came back.” Nick stressed the last word. “Do you remember what I said when you told me that you were just there to say hi?”

“That was unlikely?”

The fox began talking faster, as if he desperately needed to get all of this out as quickly as he could. “Our first night together you called me a good mammal and you promised to never forget me. Then you followed through on that promise less than 24 hours later. Do you know how rare that makes you? How special that makes you? You gave me hope, Fluff. For the first time in a long time I felt like some mammal believed in me, and that’s why I broke my rules for you. Because you made me want to.”

Now it was Judy’s turn to feel thunderstruck by the confessions of the other. In a weak voice, she asked again the question that had started this journey. “And… this morning?”

“I think you probably already have a guess, Carrots. I broke my rules for you, twice. I’m not quite life bonded to you yet, but the next time we sleep together, I will be. I won’t ever be able to mate with another, and I certainly wouldn’t be able to keep doing my current job. I’ll never leave your side, and foxes have been known to pine away and die if their mate abandons them.”

Even if Judy had wanted to interrupt again, she wouldn’t have been able to. She’d just heard from Nick’s own lips that the next time they slept together, she would literally hold his life and happiness in her paws. It was a deeply sobering thought, and more than a little intimidating. Rabbits mated for life as well, but for them the bond took much longer to develop and wasn’t particularly tied to sex until after it had already formed.

Noting the concern and indecision on the face of his partner, Nick paused and looked Judy directly in the eyes, his face the most serious she’d ever seen him. “The next time you ask me to come to bed with you, I need you to understand what you’re asking of me, and for you understand what it will mean if I say yes.”

“Is this a statement or a proposal?”
“Statement, he did say ‘if’ he says yes.”
“What do I do?”
“The same thing we’ve always done.”
“Which is?”
“We try.”

There was so much that Judy didn’t know right now. She didn’t know where she wanted things to wind up, whether or not she could deal with Nick’s profession, or even exactly what her own feelings were, but she knew for absolute certain that Nick had just imparted something deeply important to him. That could be responded to now, everything else could wait.

She cupped his face again with one paw. “I promise, Nick. If I ask, it is with full understanding of the implications. I won’t lie and tell you I know what I want, or how I feel, but thank you for your trust. You have my word that I will not betray it.”

Pulling back a little, she spoke again. “Where does this leave us now?”
“Other than the soul crushing reality that we’re not going to be doing this,” Nick waved back and forth at their nether regions, “for a while at the very least?”

Judy lightly punched him in the shoulder. “Har har, other than that.”

Nick steepled his fingers together and adopted a serious expression.

“There are less than five minutes left in our twenty minutes of honesty to the point of idiocy. That in mind, here’s my thinking. I’m obviously interested in you as more than a client, and unless I miss my guess, you’re interested in me as more than a one or two night stand?”

His ears perked hopefully until the rabbit nodded her earnest confirmation.

“The next academy class will be starting up at the beginning of fall in a few months. You’ll be graduating this summer, and then you’ll be enrolling in the ZPD when their class starts.”

Judy raised a hand in protest, which Nick waved off.

“Shush, rabbit. You’ll be enrolling in the ZPD in a few months. So until then, I suggest we pretend that I don’t sleep with mammals for money and you aren’t a crazy fluff ball, and just do what any normal mammals who like each other would do.”

His lapine companion raised an eyebrow. “You just listened to me explain that I have literally no idea what that is.”

“Neither do I. If it doesn’t involve using my tongue to get into or out of trouble, I have no idea what I’m doing. But with you I’m willing to try to figure it out. We’ll date until it’s time for you to go into the academy and then figure it out from there.”

Judy considered it for a moment.

“Okay. Deal.”
Good news, everyone! I've fixed the flow problem in the word pipes! We already know our fox and bunny are compatible in one way, but now it's time for them to figure out whether or not they're compatible in others. Can they actually stand dating? We'll find out! Now, on with the show!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The funny thing about plans is that simply having one does not magically cause action to occur, nor does defining a goal cause one to magically understand how to get there. While a decision to date had been enthusiastically agreed on by both parties neither Nick nor Judy actually had any idea how to actually do so, which brought them to the long awkward silence they now found themselves in.

“Soo…” Judy drawled out slowly.

“Now what?” Nick finished.

Judy sighed. “Exactly, I was kinda hoping you would have an idea.”

“What would I be doing if I were a bunny?”

“If the few bucks who approached me are any indication, trying to get into my pants and… not a whole lot else. Apparently bucks assume that if you’re unpopular you’re an easy lay.”

Nick’s ears perked and his expression brightened. “Given that what you were wearing last night is still beside my bed, does that mean I’m off to a good start?”

The inescapable fact that Nick was already intimately familiar with every inch of Judy’s gray and white fur did not stop the flush that shot up her ears at his reminder. Swiftly dropping them behind her back in an attempt to hide her embarrassment, Judy threw the nearest pillow at the smug fox.

“The farthest any of those jerks got was the front porch of my house, and most of them wound up muzzle to muzzle with my father’s shotgun.”

Nick paled under his red fur. “Err… Protective type, is he?”

Judy’s inner voice chose that moment to chime in.

“Not only is the answer to that question ‘Oh sweet Serendipity, yes’, but I wonder how Dad’s going to react when he finds out that his daughter is dating a prostitute fox? We should totally record that breakdown and put it on Ewetube! We can use the revenue to pay for Dad’s therapy and Nick’s medical bills from whatever happens next!”

“That is the absolute opposite of comforting.”

“Yes! But not wrong!”

“My father is… mostly a big, emotional, fluff ball. He’s only ever run off the boys I’ve asked him to.”
“Only because there was never a boy you didn’t ask him to.”
“Details.”

Nick muttered something that did not sound entirely enthused.

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. Okay, Nick?” Intending to comfort the fox, Judy leaned in to give him a peck on the cheek and a quick scratch behind the ears. Her lips had barely contacted his face before she violently recoiled as if the fox’s fur was on fire.

“Ohmygosh! I’m so sorry!” Judy sputtered.

The confused vulpine swiftly checked himself over. “For WHAT, Fluff?”

“For kissing you! You just finished explaining that if you life bond to me that you could die!”

A genuine smile spread across Nick’s face for the first time since this morning. “Kissing and mating aren’t the same, Carrots. If you ask me to go to bed with you, that’s one thing. This, on the other paw…” he trailed off and pulled Judy close as his smile spread to reveal his teeth. His paws roamed up and down her back, and she could easily feel the strength behind them in a way that made her shudder with feelings she didn’t fully understand.

“I wholeheartedly encourage you to continue reminding me of how delicious you are”, he rumbled out as he pressed his lips to hers.

It was almost too much for the shuddering prey mammal in the paws of her natural predator. His teeth, the growl-like rumble, and the absolute knowledge that he could do anything he wished to her at this moment. She was surrounded by his fur and smothered in his scent, and there was nothing to do but to lose herself in the kiss he offered.

These reactions, and the spike in her scent that smelled like fear, did not go unnoticed by the predator in question. He was wired to perceive these things. Built and designed by uncountable millennia of evolution specifically to know when the predator had been detected by his prey. There was simply no way he could not notice, and it saddened him. His teeth were as much a part of him as his eyes, and even now those features that nature had gifted him with were causing one of the few things he wished to be closer to, to pull away.

Nick hadn’t lied about the life expectancy of foxes in his profession, and between his job and his very short list of actual relationships he was keenly aware of the pain that could come with separation. The idea of losing Judy so soon after meeting her wasn’t something he could easily contemplate, but his mind entertained the thought nonetheless.

It was her returned kiss though, which gave him hope. There was no hesitation as her tongue snuck out from between her buck teeth to tease gently against his muzzle until he returned the gesture. She wanted him, of this there could be no doubt. Perhaps in time her desire would allow her to overcome her fears of what he was, and only ever see again who he was.

Pulling away slowly, Nick let out a slow exhale and gathered his thoughts. Nick knew the score. He was a fox in a less than honorable line of work with scary teeth, sharp claws, and eventually that would be too much for the beautiful bunny to handle. If it wasn’t for her, it would be for her family, and unless Karma felt a great debt was owed, eventually she would leave him. Despite all that, Nick still felt like he had to give it a chance.

“Oh, Fluff. Here’s my suggestion: Having thoroughly searched you last night, I know you don’t have a change of clothes. Why don’t you go home, shower, change, and then tonight we’ll go out on
a date like real mammals. While you’re gone, I’ll figure out what that means and I’ll pick you up at six.”

Judy looked surprised, staring up at him in wonder. “So soon? Wow, you foxes don’t mess around.”

Nick tried for his usual confident smile, but Judy couldn’t help noticing how he couldn’t quite look her in the eye. “I know it’s kinda sudden, but if we’re being honest, I want to take you somewhere nice before you realize what a giant mistake this is.” He tried to smile and shrug it off as a joke, but his ears pulling flat against his skull and his gaze sliding to the floor showed how scared he really was.

Judy felt an intense pang of sadness go through her at seeing the fox so frightened, so sure, that he was going to lose her. She didn’t really know much of Nick’s past, but what he had revealed was more than enough to paint a picture of a life that had not gone according to plan. She wasn’t an officer yet, she couldn’t yet make the world a better place for everyone. Perhaps though, she could make the world a better place for just one mammal in it. This kind, caring, loving, hurting fox. She made a solemn vow, to herself and to any deity, spirit or celestial being that would listen, that no one was going to hurt him if she could help it.

“Nick, I’m not even going to pretend to understand what you’ve been through, and I’m not going to try to guess where this is going. The one thing I can promise is that I will never look back on this as a mistake. The only regret I have is not going to that bar sooner.”

Black-tipped ears slowly rose and rotated to face Judy while emeralds did the same. He smiled a genuine, honest-to-goodness smile, and she thought it was one of the most beautiful things she had ever seen. “Thank you, Judy.”

With a full body shudder reminiscent of a canine shaking off water, Nick blinked and brought himself back into the present. As if flipping a switch, the confident fox who’d slid into her booth only two nights ago abruptly came back.

“And on that note, would you look at the time? If you head home and change now, you might get home in time to stop your roommate from putting out a missing rabbit report with your future colleagues.”

Nick gave her smug grin. “It really would put a damper on our evening if it was interrupted by a rhino with a badge and a taser.”

Judy chuckled. “Alright, fox. I can recognize when I’m being thrown out. I’ll get out of your apartment.”

Her head tilted to the side with a smirk to match the vulpine across from her. “After all, if you start getting ready now you might be handsome enough to take me out on a date by six.”

“Is that a challenge, Fluff?”

“It’s whatever you want it to be, Slick.”

Nick pat her between the ears. “Don’t worry Carrots, I’ll have you ready to eat out of my paws before the end of the night.”

He leaned close and whispered in a silky voice that made the rabbit’s toes curl. “…Again.”

Walking through the door of her dorm room that afternoon was very different than it had been the
previous day. The most obvious and most pleasant difference was the lack of a hangover. A close second on both counts was the lack of a panicking roommate, and in the place of shrill screams was excited laughter and an immediate bombardment of questions delivered at a pace that would make a cheetah jealous.

“OhmyGAWD, Judy! You stayed the night again! How was it?! Did you have a good time? Did he have a good time? Did you do anything super kinky? Was it boring? Are you dating now? Are you okay? Do I need to have Daddy rough him up?”

It was the last question that brought the rabbit up short. “Wait! What?! NO! I’m fine, everything is fine. You don’t need to have my boyfriend ‘roughed up’!”

If it were somehow possible, the shrew’s smile grew even wider. “OHMYGAWD!!! You are dating, now! I’d say that last night must have gone very well, indeed, but the frumpled state of your dress is more than enough to tell me that. I need details!”

Judy paused, her head and ears tilted to one side as uncertainty ran over her like a cold shower. What could she say? Could she reveal Nick's profession and past? What if Fru Fru met him and looked down on him? Was it even safe to reveal his name? Nick lived in the criminal underworld. It wasn't a huge stretch to imagine that the Bigs might know of him, especially if foxes really were so rare in his line of work. What if it didn't work out? Might Fru Fru actually seek some retaliation on behalf of Judy?

Judy's mind continued to whirl as the moments dragged on. Maybe... just maybe... If she revealed all of what happened, she could avoid saying much of anything about the mammal it happened with. Then, Nick would be safe. Judy was a mammal who kept her promises, and she wasn't going to let anything break her vow to not let anyone hurt him again. Even if that meant she had to reveal way more of her extremely limited sex life than she wanted.

A familiar feeling of contentment spread slowly through her body as she imagined her re-encounter with the handsome fox. With an easy smile she was pleasantly surprised she didn’t need to fake, she took a seat on the couch in their living area and launched into an explanation of the previous evening.

“Some of this you already know or guessed. It was easy enough to find Nick at the bar again.”

A memory of a momentarily stunned fox flashed through Judy’s mind, drawing a light chuckle from the bunny.

“He was so surprised that I was there again... The first thing he did was walk over to the bartender and ask whether or not I was there with anyone.”

The rabbit adopted an evil smirk. “I don’t think he’s realized how good my hearing actually is, and I just didn’t see a need to enlighten him just yet.”

Being a mob boss’s daughter, Fru Fru clearly understood the benefits of keeping certain information close to the chest. The use it had been put to here just made it funny on top of clever, and the shrew couldn’t help but feel a tiny bit of pride at how well the bunny seemed to be doing after the small nudge the day before.

Together, the two ladies easily whiled away an hour as Judy retold the experiences of her night and morning with Nick. Through the entire story Fru Fru was the perfect audience. She giggled at the retelling of their banter, laughed out loud at Nick’s quip regarding his injuries, and leaned forward excitedly when the story reached Nick’s apartment. True to her word to herself, the mortified rabbit
didn’t hold back on the details of her encounter, and by the time Judy got to Nick’s exceptionally talented tongue Fru Fru was actively fanning herself. So was she, but for her there was a healthy dose of embarrassment along with the excitement.

Slowly but surely, the story came to the point of their big conversation. The twenty minutes of honesty to the point of stupidity wherein secrets had been told, insecurities laid bare, and plans had been made. Judy had needed to omit more than a little here, and had simply explained that Nick had been burned many times in the past but the details were not hers to tell. Through all this, Fru Fru had sat as close to the edge of her seat as was possible for a small shrew to get without falling off.

At long last, Fru Fru was up to speed on most of the happenings of her lapine roommate. After a long moment of silence, she finally said the first and most obvious thing that came to her mind.

“Wow. You and a fox, huh?”

“Yup”. Judy smacked her lips on the ‘p’ sound. “Me and a fox.”

Another beat of silence before Fru Fru asked the next question. “Do your parents know yet?”

The rabbit responded with the same enunciation and an aura of indifference, “Nope”.

“When are you going to tell them?”

An edge crept into Judy’s voice. “As far from now as I can manage.”

“Is that really a good plan?”

Violet eyes narrowed sharply and the gray bunny began speaking progressively more quickly and loudly.

“Probably not, but I’ll be damned if I make Nick listen to the crap they're going to say without a fight. Nick's been hurt enough already, and I'm not going to let the rabbits who gave me Fox Spray add to it!”

A ringing silence followed Judy’s last admission. She’d jumped off the couch at some point, her chest was heaving and her fists were clenched at her sides as a potent mixture of fear, frustration, and protectiveness rolled through her.

Fru Fru’s eyes widened momentarily before lowering into an expression of sympathy. “I don't blame you, Judy. Just make sure you don’t accidentally dig a hole deeper than even you can jump out of.”

Judy’s shoulders slumped as she deflated and flopped back down on the seat. “I’m going to do my best, Fru. Like I told Nick though, I have no idea what I’m doing and our first date is in four hours.”

The shrew brightened considerably. “Fortunately for you, your roommate is amazing and can’t wait to help you knock the socks off a fox.”

Fru Fru gave a tiny slap to her own leg. “Now! Let’s get you ready for that date. You going to wear the little black dress?”

With a wan smile after her emotional exertion, Judy looked over at her excited companion. “Fru, I feel more naked in that dress than I did when I was actually naked. I am not wearing it on a first date where the goal isn’t to get laid.”

“Aww… Oh well. It sounds like this is going to be something of a casual affair anyway.” Fru Fru
drummed her fingers for a moment before grinning widely. “Casual doesn’t have to mean you can’t be sexy though… I’d bet you can make him pant if you wear jeans and one of those loose tank tops you lounge in. First though, shower. You smell like a fox towel.”

Judy stood and headed to their shared bathroom. “Why does everyone keep saying that?”

After her shower, Fru Fru helped pick out clothes for the evening, which wound up being a lot easier than Judy had thought it would be. For the top, she wound up in a white tank top with wide arm holes over a black sports bra that Nick would be sure to catch glimpses of. Her legs were covered by a pair of snug blue jeans with a dark wash and a black pleather belt. All together, it made for a look that was relaxed but still showed off the rabbit’s slender form. Her gold necklace rounded out the outfit, and Nick’s tongue hanging out was suddenly a very real possibility.

“It’s just a shame that hanging out is the only thing that magical tongue is going to be doing tonight,” Judy thought to herself.

Several hours and an exchange of text messages to sort out a location later saw Judy Hopps waiting outside of a local diner that looked like it was older than her and Nick put together. Despite all humble appearances, the smell was as amazing as it was impossible to place. Even though it was in the middle of a big city, somehow the diner managed to smell homey in a way that was difficult to describe.

Proving that a wandering mind can befuddle even the sharpest senses, she failed to notice the approach of a fox until his smooth voice caught her attention.

“Good to see you found the place, Fluff.”

Whipping around quickly enough to make her ears fly out, Judy beamed broadly at the fox. “Of course I did! Phones have had ‘Animal Positioning Systems’ for the last decade. I’m not just a dumb bunny.”

The vulpine smirked in his casual way. “True enough. Keep going like this and they might just have to make you a detective right out of the academy.”

The quip may have been meant as a tease, but the bunny’s ears still flushed red and attempted to hide behind her back at the undertone of sincere approval in the fox’s tone. Because her brain was clearly conspiring against her, she also picked this exact moment to notice Nick’s outfit.

He’d clearly taken his earlier threat to have her eating out of his paw very seriously, because they weren’t even inside the diner and she was already itching to pounce on him. The russet predator had chosen an outfit comprised of black slacks, black shoes, and a black button up shirt. The top three buttons on the shirt were undone, allowing the creamy fur on his upper torso to contrast with the color of the shirt. His brilliant green eyes completed the image, and she felt a rush of heat that had nothing to do with his teasing.

With great effort, she managed to stutter out a response. “Y-Yes… well… You do remember I have to get into the academy first, right?”

Nick lowered himself to one knee and placed one paw on her shoulder, stroking her cheek with the back of his other. Her ears were still lowered, but from contentment now rather than embarrassment, and her eyes closed in enjoyment at the closeness. She’d been desperately afraid that their physical closeness would have to come entirely to an end, and the sensation of his fur on her cheek was a warm balm to the cold concern.
“And I told you earlier not to worry about that. These things have a funny way of working themselves out.”

Judy nuzzled into his embrace, pressing her cheek more firmly into his paw and noticing with only the periphery of her mind that she believed him without question. He had promised she would make it, and she believed him with the same simple acceptance that she would feel if he said that the sky were blue or Tundratown was cold. Reaching up to grip the paw stroking her face with her much smaller fingers, she gently squeezed in acknowledgement and nodded. Nothing needed to be said.

That simple feeling of warmth and contentment was almost enough to keep her from noticing the looks and sneers of mammals walking past and seeing a bunny cuddled against the paws and claws of a fox. Almost.

Feeling Nick stiffen as a passing rhino let out a particularly loud snort, Judy pulled away from his comforting touch. She hadn’t forgotten her promise, and no matter how much she wanted to pull Nick closer, she wasn’t going to let him be the subject of more scorn just because of her.

Nick's heart fell as she pulled away. It usually didn’t surprise him anymore when mammals were ashamed to be seen with him, and it certainly didn’t hurt. He couldn't blame her, not really, and in time she would either get over it or she wouldn't. Tonight wasn't about forever. It was just about enjoying each other's company.

Besides, he remarked to himself, he wouldn't be much of a sly fox if he hadn't stacked the odds in his favor. Other than the amazing food, Nick had chosen this particular locale for its owner. That mammal just so happened to be a figuratively grizzled moose, who was happily mated to an actually grizzly bear named Lily. Their first date was safe, at least from external interference.

Whether or not Nick could actually pull this off was another matter entirely.

Fortunately, he’d seen enough to at least know that the first step was to open the door for the lady, and with a swish of his tail and a slight bow he did exactly that.

The diner was sparsely populated except for a few regulars who didn’t bat an eye at the odd couple walking through the door. The owners predilections were well known, and anyone who hung around long enough to become a regular either didn't mind or liked the food more than trouble. Owing to his smaller stature that made it easier for him to navigate between tables, Ian served as greeter and waiter, while Lily worked as the cook.

All of this was naturally unknown to Judy, who assumed that Nick had brought her there simply because the food was tasty and cheap. These were a pair of traits that a broke college student could appreciate, so she didn’t spend much time wondering about it. Come to think of it though, hadn’t Nick promised to take her someplace nice?

As the pair moved into the diner, she gently ribbed him with her elbow.

“I thought you were going to take me someplace ‘nice’, Slick?”

With a teasing tone, Nick grinned and responded. “What, this place isn’t good enough for the country bunny?”

Judy gave him a shove. “Har, har. You know what I mean. When you said ‘nice place’, I’d thought you meant Pawlive Garden or something.”

“I did say that.” The fox gave his compatriot a grin that promised mischief. “And everyone here is very nice. Ergo, this is a ’nice place’.”
The rabbit responded simply by rolling her eyes and setting off for a table in the corner of the restaurant, giving Nick a moment to appreciate her outfit. It managed to reveal an incredible amount of gray and white fur while remaining casual, and the way it hugged her sides showed off her hips in a way that made him ache to put his paws on them again. That, however, would have to wait for another time.

Ian visited their table to take their orders, Nick ordering a cricket burger and Judy a salad that the moose assured her was almost as big as she was. After their waiter departed the table, a comfortable silence settled over the fox and bunny, a simple contentment to be in each others’ company. Eventually, Nick broke the silence.

“So, Fluffball. You’ve told me a lot about the things you struggled with growing up, but since Clawsmopolitan magazine assures me that dates are supposed to be happy, why don’t we tackle something lighter tonight.”

Judy snorted into the paw she quickly raised to cover her face. “Sure! Why don’t we cover why a gentlemammal like yourself has a subscription to Clawsmopolitan.” Her giggling continued. “What else do you have? Pawlure? Furry 16? Maybe you’re subscribed to Oprah Winfurry’s reading list?”

By this point, the rabbit had abandoned all pretense of subtlety and was simply clutching her ribs and doing her level best not to fall out of her chair while laughing at the mental image of Nick sitting primly in a salon reading women’s magazines while having his nails done. She knew on some level it wasn’t quite as funny as she was making it out to be, but it was as if the giant bubble of tension in her chest had been abruptly punctured, and all her unease was rushing out through the hole created by an offhand revelation.

For the fox in question, the situation had long since passed the point of embarrassment and had been elevated to amusement at the antics of his lapine date. While his initial reaction had been to glower darkly and cross his arms with his ears folded back against his head, that hadn’t lasted more than a few moments. Now he simply stared at her with one raised eyebrow and his arms crossed across his chest in a clearly nonplussed expression.

At long last, when Judy managed to bring her laughter down from hysterical to simply audible, Nick spoke up in a very proper voice.

“I will have you know, rabbit, that I do not have a subscription to Clawsmopolitan. Promises were made that I would figure out what a real date was, so I did what any rational mammal would do. I marched straight to the nearest magazine isle, looked for a magazine that promised great sex advice, and then assumed it would probably have something in there about the normal things mammals do before that. As it turned out, I was right. Now, here we are.”

The vulpine paused for a brief moment and looked thoughtful.

“It also said the first thing I would need to do is break the ice, but given that you just spent the last minute laughing loudly enough to draw the attention of literally the entire restaurant and I believe one or two mammals outside… I’d say I can check that box off.”

Sly the fox may be, but a liar he was not. True to his word, every single mammal in sight was staring at the bunny with eyes wide, and a mouth open far enough to be a considered a work safety hazard in the case of a hippo in the corner. Judy responded the only way she could.

“Eep!”

Any mammal with mediocre eyesight could see the blush that shot to her cheeks before she managed
to take an ear in each paw and wrap them tightly around her face. Her entire demeanor was one of a bunny who was giving serious consideration to imitating her distant ancestors and simply burrowing into the floor. Mortification aside, it was the cutest thing Nick had ever seen in his life.

As tempted as Nick was to let the bunny roast for another moment like she’d done for him, there was nothing he wanted less than for anything to ruin their first date. With that in mind, Nick stood up and used a spoon to tap quickly on his glass.

“May I have your attention please! I hope everyone enjoyed this brief preview of ‘The Mad Hare Hatter’, tickets are available online, and you may now return to your regularly scheduled meal.”

A rumble of affirmation and understanding went through the crowd, and moments later the usual cadence of a diner was all that remained. Nick gently took Judy’s paws in his own and tugged them free of the ears that were still concealing her face.

“Come on Fluff, do you really want to block your view of this handsome face? I got all dressed up and even used fur conditioner before I came over. It’d be a shame to waste all that effort by hiding those beautiful eyes of yours all night.”

Judy chuckled quietly and her blush began to fade behind the smile forming on her face.

“Thanks for bailing me out, Slick.”

“Anytime, Carrots.”

Judy looked appraisingly at her date. “You know… with the ability to work a crowd like that, I’m starting to think you’d make a pretty good cop.”

He scoffed into his drink. “Ugh. How dare you.”

The arrival of their food put a brief hold on any further conversation, and they ate in relative silence, punctuated only by moments spent staring admiringly at each other. To say they got lost in contemplation of the other would be close, but not entirely accurate. Each knew precisely where they were, it was just that silly concepts like space and time were utterly irrelevant in comparison to the mammal sitting across from them.

Love, like a castle, can be immeasurable with the help of a proper foundation. The stones for which had already been placed without conscious effort by both mammals. Judy had given Nick hope. Hope for a life where he could be seen as something other than just a fox, and hope for a life where he could have someone to love instead of simply someone to sleep with. In return, Nick had given Judy a mammal she could rely on without question to be supportive, kind, and to catch her when she fell.

Though it had yet to be said, both knew that this was only the start of something wonderful.

Entirely too soon, the food had been consumed, the check had been paid, and Nick was holding the door open for Judy so they could get some deeply needed sleep. They’d avoided causing any further incidents, though resolve had been tested when Nick had threatened to eat Judy for attempting to pay the check. Proving that she was swiftly becoming the slick equal to her foxy date, a muttered question about whether that was intended to deter or tempt her had had the fox choking on the remains of his drink.

Walking slowly back towards their respective destinations, Judy found herself reflecting on some of the more exciting moments, and a question that had nagged at her all evening finally gained a voice.
“How do you do that, Nick?”

The fox perked an eyebrow in confusion. “How do I do what, Fluff?”

Judy took his pawpaw in hers and gave it a reassuring squeeze before continuing. “How do you always step in so perfectly, right when everything looks like it’s going wrong?”

Nick sighed and pulled the bunny gently to a stop, kneeling down in front of her under a streetlight. With the same care he’d shown earlier that morning, he took both her paws in his and looked at his rabbit with a mix of affection, happiness, and old sorrows.

“First, and I mean this in the best possible way, you wear your heart on your forehead. Not on your sleeves, lots of mammals do that. Like literally everything else you’ve told me about, you go to eleven where most stop at eight because their dial doesn’t go past ten.”

In that moment, Judy felt more pinned by the intensity of his gaze than by the light grip he had on her paws. She would easily have pulled free and hid bashfully behind her ears again, but that would have required losing contact with Nick, which was something she was utterly uninterested in.

“That in mind, knowing when I need to step in and help out is easy. The real question is ‘Why do I?’, and that’s the one you should be asking.”

“Sooo… Why do you?”

“Because in only 48 hours you made me believe you really can do anything, and I will hang before I let this city dim the brightest light in it.”

As if flipping a switch, the fox went from somber to smirking. “Even if that light did ride in from some carrot choked podunk in the middle of nowhere.”

Judy pulled one paw free to gently punch him in the shoulder. “If you’d been listening, Slick, you’d know that Podunk is in Deerbrooke County. I came from Bunny Burrow.”

Without blinking, the switch flipped again and serious Nick returned. “I always listen when you speak, Fluff. There’s no other sound I’d rather hear.”

Still face to face under the streetlight, he pulled her in for a kiss that would have caused some mammal to call the police if the street had not been so deserted. Even kneeling, he was still tall enough to dip her low and loop one paw under her head to support it and rest the other on the small of her back. Beneath his rougher paw pads, Nick could feel the velvet softness of her sensitive ears, and had to fight to resist the urge to run his other paw through her unspeakably soft tail. That temptation only ballooned when Nick realized it was twitching left to right in euphoria at being cradled by her fox.

Not to be outdone, Judy reached up and looped both arms around his neck, pulling the vulpine tighter against her chest and offering her tongue to the fox who seemed bent on kissing as much of her mouth as he could reach. His larger muzzle meant that “as much as he could” was quite a lot, and Judy was absolutely enthralled by it.

Eventually, their lips separated and they both stood on the street, content in the moment to simply exist, and be together. Like all good things though, the night must come to an end, and Nick gently cupped her cheek with his paw for the second time that day.

“As truly sorry as I am to end this little moment, I think both of us need to get some sleep.”
“I know, but is it selfish to wish that the night didn’t have to end?”

He smiled affectionately at her. “Not if I want the same thing.”

With a last burst of bashfulness, Judy’s foot thumped a few times against the ground. “So… does this mean we’re officially dating now?”

With a smirk that could have charmed a priest into gambling, Nick stood and started towards home.

“I have no idea, Fluff! Clawsmopolitan didn’t cover that!”

Chapter End Notes

As ever, thanks go out to ADeadMissionary, MilesUpshur, and DrummerMax for their invaluable help.

Suggestions, comments, and critiques are always welcome and appreciated!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone and welcome back. Thank you again to everyone who's left feedback, kudos, or comments. You all are absolutely invaluable. Special thanks as always to DrummerMax64, MilesUpShur47, and ADeadMissionary.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For both Nick and Judy, the next several weeks were a hectic, but pleasant, whirlwind as they learned to balance existing commitments and the new relationship. In Judy’s case, her time in college was winding down as the end of the semester approached and exams were taking far more of her now precious time than she would prefer. There were countless late nights spent studying rather than cuddling, and many hours spent reviewing critical material rather than being out and about with her wonderful fox.

Through it all though, Nick’s assistance had been absolutely invaluable. He’d displayed a shocking amount of knowledge on her subjects, and somehow always seemed to be available to quiz her or just bring pizza and keep her company in the library’s private study rooms while she pored over her books. She wondered how Nick was managing to see his clients as well as spend so much time with her, but her deep gratitude ensured that was a question she planned to ask whenever hell froze over.

Unbeknownst to Judy, the answer was “with great difficulty”. He had never needed to spend as much time with clients as one would guess, but nor could he afford to spend as much time with his bunny as he preferred. While his girlfriend’s intended profession was honorable, it was never going to make her a rich mammal. After all, one of them had to be able to afford to buy overpriced movie tickets.

Despite the long hours associated with keeping his clients happy and supporting his bunny, he never regretted a single minute of it. Somehow, he had become fanatical, almost desperate to see her succeed. Judy had shown him a glimpse of the world as she saw it, a place where anyone could be anything, and he would do whatever he could to make that world real for her.

After the last few weeks though, both mammals were in dire need of a real break, a night to just turn off their brains and spend some time with each other in relaxation and peace. How “We should have a night off” turned into “I have a great idea! Let’s go dancing!” was anyone’s guess.

With that in mind, the bunny and the fox showed up together at a local club that promised only a few things: Tasty (if pricey) drinks, loud music, and being crowded enough that hopefully nobody would notice them. There was a short, quick, and unspoken understanding between them that their relationship would be better kept discrete for a myriad of reasons ranging from the incompatibility of Judy’s desired profession with Nick’s current one, to the unavoidable fact that a predator/prey relationship was likely to attract far more attention than either wanted.

Thus far though, in the moments where Nick wasn’t concerned she was hiding for personal reasons rather than practical ones, shared subterfuge had been an immensely enjoyable part of the relationship rather than a detracting one. Any pair of fools could broadcast to every mammal in visual
range that they were a couple, but being together in public without arousing suspicion provided an excitement to their escapades that bordered on exhibitionism.

At this point, slinking unnoticed into public places and becoming part of the crowd was now as second nature as walking in the front door, and it was in this fashion that Nick and Judy found themselves at a booth in the corner of The Petting Zoo. From the moment they’d gotten inside, they’d become aware of the deep EDM beats thrumming through their bodies. The rhythmic pulses seeming to be specifically calibrated to excite the nerves and draw instincts to the surface.

The place was enormous, a large ring of tables and booths surrounding a dance floor that was large enough to comfortably support a herd of mildly intoxicated elephants. This was fortunate, because there was a veritable cornucopia of mammalian species on display that evening. As an environment for the fox and bunny to discretely be together, it was nearly perfect.

“So,” Judy shouted over the din. “Is this the kind of place you come often?”

“Nope!” Nick shouted back. Even with the noise, it was possible to hear the rumbling snark in his voice. “Much too loud to charm beautiful bunnies into coming home with me!”

The rabbit leaned closer to be able to speak almost directly into Nick’s ears. “At least with your words, anyway. Why don’t you show me how you can dance, fox?”

Emerald eyes sparkled with mischief and fondness at the implied challenge, a vulpine grin spreading across his face. “With pleasure, Carrots.”

Judy’s inexperience at love had certainly translated into an inexperience with dancing, but she made up with enthusiasm whatever she lacked in technique. Her powerful legs were better than any trampoline, and jumping up to Nick’s height to look him directly in the eyes or plant a small kiss on the side of his muzzle quickly became a favorite maneuver of hers.

Her partner on the other paw could only be described as a liquid, a creature that walked on hind paws but flowed like water around the excited lapine. He moved to the music and rolled with the rhythms, brushing against her from time to time in a way specifically designed to tease.

The unspeakably soft tail would drag across the back of her legs, and a paw would gently brush her narrow shoulders and wide hips. No touch was heavier than a feather, but somehow they seemed to carry a weight almost equal to the piercing gaze that never once looked away from her. Judy had challenged him to seduce her with his dancing, and it was clearly not a challenge he intended to fail at. The growing heat between her legs was a testament to his success, but there was a war between what she wanted and what she was really ready to ask for.

We have to put an end to this soon, you know we can’t go where you want this night to end. Can’t we?


I’m… I… I don’t know.

You should probably figure that out before you ask him to go along with it. That and how you feel about his teeth.

What?

A rougher touch on her shoulder shattered her reverie like a wrecking ball into glass.

“Well hey, little bunny! Think there’s enough of you to share with the fox?” came a clearly drunk voice. She whipped around to see a dark furred wolf leering at her.
Strong legs propelled her several feet back with a hop that placed her directly beside Nick. “I don’t know what you think I’m sharing, but I swear by all that’s holy it won’t be with you.”

“Aww, I here thought bunnies were supposed to be easy? Come on, I’ll show you a good time that dirty pelt could never manage.”

The smoldering anger gathering in Judy’s gut blossomed into an inferno of rage. Her vision tunneled on the muzzle of the accursed interloper, and she balled up her fists and gathered herself for a vicious leap. Before she could jump, a much softer paw landed gently on her shoulders, dimming some of the rage before she could enact violence on the one spewing such hateful tripe about Nick.

It was Nick himself though, who spoke up in a voice of absolute calm. His entire demeanor was as if the wolf’s words had no greater effect than a wave crashing against a sea wall, easily ignored and quickly forgotten. It could almost be said that his voice sounded just a touch friendly.

“Sir, you’re drunk and I would absolutely love to put this little exchange behind us so we can all get back to our evenings. How’s that sound? I’ll even buy you a drink.”

There was a pregnant pause while the wolf clearly thought over the offer. A drink did sound good, but that bunny smelled so much better.

“Hah! Trying to buy me off so that you can skulk off into a corner somewhere and hide? Just like a fox.”

The wolf took a couple strutting steps forward and addressed Judy again. “Besides, little bunny. I smelled what you needed when I walked past you, just as sure as I can smell that you’re not going to be getting it from him. You aren’t mates and stuck up foxes don’t really do ‘casual’, unless he’s some kind of whore.”

The lupine leaned close enough to reach out with a paw to stroke Judy’s disgusted face. “Don’t worry yourself too much though if he is, I hear they get used up and die pretty quick. You won’t have time to get attac-OOMPH.”

In a lightning fast movement that would have made a snake blink, Nick’s open paw shot out to strike with the hard heel of the paw at the diaphragm of his, now, opponent. The shock and surprising strength of the blow forced the wolf to stagger back several steps and take gasping breaths.

While he sucked wind, Nick settled into a general purpose fighting stance and spoke again as Judy fought off the moment of shock that came after seeing the exchange. She was a bunny and she’d barely seen him move, let alone any sort of tell before the strike. For all her surprise though, as she looked over the wolf’s stunned expression at having the wind knocked out of him by a fox, the only thing she could do was snicker quietly at his discomfort. Judy wasn’t usually one for hurting other mammals, but just this once, she’d make an exception.

Her fox spoke again. “For the record, taking my offer of a drink was your best idea. That’s off the table now, because whoopsie number one was turning down a one time deal. Whoopsie number two was trying to touch my date. Since you look about as threatening as a stuffed animal, I suggest you go get back in your box before you find out what comes after whoopsie number three.”

The wolf growled loudly enough to be audible even over the music, drawing the attention of the crowd for the first time. A space opened up around the trio as the dancing mammals either ignored them, retreated from the fight clearly about to happen, or whipped out their cell phones to try and find their 15 minutes of fame.
“You arrogant little,” the wolf sputtered for a moment to find a word to express his anger and disbelief, “BITCH!!! I’m gonna skin you and the bunny ALIVE!”

With a speed surprising for a drunk mammal, he lunged to cover the several steps it would take to rip and tear at this maddeningly calm vulpine.

Something changed in Nick’s face and demeanor at the last words from the wolf. For the first time, his expression hardened from almost friendly calm into something that looked downright… predatory. Nick didn’t look like he was facing a larger mammal intent on causing him harm. His alert but relaxed posture, combined with eyes that promised swift violence, belonged to a fox on the hunt for prey. It thrilled and excited the rabbit in ways she would not have time to figure out before the russet fox responded.

In more than a few ways, it was almost like watching the handsome predator dance again. As the wolf’s first vicious attack sliced through the space where Nick’s head had been only moments before, the fox in question had simply ducked and sidestepped to flow under the outstretched paw, quickly obtaining a position directly beside the much larger canine. The sheer momentum of the lunge and swipe guaranteed that the wolf would have continued moving forward for several more paces if left alone.

Nick, however, had no intention of leaving him alone. Without ever pausing in his motion around the wolf, he finished his half circle around his assailant to the point of almost having his chest pressed against the back of the wolf. In this position, facing the back of an opponent who was severely off balance, years of experience told Nick one simple fact: the wolf was fucked.

A flash of determination flitted across Nick's muzzle before he jumped with all his might up and backwards, reaching around and tightly gripping the dark muzzle of the other predator with both paws as he did.

One of the vulpine’s favorite lessons was: “Where the head goes, the body follows.” In plain English, it is generally much easier to manipulate a mammal’s head than the rest of their body, but the body will always follow to avoid minor inconveniences like a broken neck. As Nick began to apply rearward pressure to the muzzle of the wolf, this fundamental fact of biology was about to see a practical application.

While the momentum of the wolf’s heavy body and legs was forward, his muzzle was being tugged towards the ceiling and backwards with a relentless grip, causing the lupine head to snap up and begin travelling backwards. The split second that the rest of his body continued forward was more than enough to lift his hind paws off the ground, stretching him parallel to the floor in only a fraction of a second after Nick had leapt.

During the entire motion, Nick had never released his grip nor stopped his rearward motion. It was this pull that enabled the falling wolf one brief moment of eye contact with Nick before the now inevitable meeting of his back and the hard dance floor.

That fraction of a second was longer than any rational mammal would have wished to lock eyes with the fox. It wasn't the presence of some particular emotion that was so concerning, it was the near total absence of it. Nick's eyes had narrowed into slits and were devoid of fear, compassion, or indecision. All that was left was a cold sense of purpose backed by muted rage. The wolf had threatened to snuff out the brightest light in the fox's lonely life, and now he would suffer the consequences.

Gravity alone would have taken over from there, but as Nick finished returning to earth after his jump, he broke eye contact with his opponent and transferred his falling momentum into a brutal downward push that slammed the wolf bodily into the ground, where he lay unconscious and
The entire exchange had lasted less than three seconds, and Judy had no idea what to do next. She’d been trained to fight in preparation for the ZPD, but that didn’t cover what to do afterwards! Her mind whirled in a desperate attempt to come up with a response.

*Think, what should I do… what would a cop do here?*

*Ensure that the threat is contained.*

One unconscious wolf with an angry fox standing over him, check

*Great, now look for his friends.*

*What? Wolves travel in packs.*

*Oh, carrot sticks.*

No sooner had that last thought bounced through her head than her sharp ears picked up another wolf growling from somewhere in the crowd. The sound sent a shiver straight to the core of the prey mammal. For some reason, the feeling caused by this strange wolf wasn’t the same as when she heard Nick growl or saw a flash of fang that he would almost immediately conceal. This, however, was a thought for later. In the present, Judy could see a tan wolf holding a beer bottle slowly making his way to the front of the crowd, well out of the line of sight of the fox still keeping an angry eye on his downed opponent.

Judy and the newcomer moved at the same time, both headed for Nick at top speed. The tan wolf was approaching from behind, the gray rabbit from the front at a dead sprint.

“Nick! Toss me!” she yelled quickly as she leapt to Nick’s chest height.

While the vulpine may have been befuddled beyond belief, he managed to get his paws laced together and up high enough for Judy to land on them and push off hard with her foot. She rocketed over his shoulder at the same time the attempted ambusher raised the bottle for a brutal swing at the back of Nick’s head.

The first wolf had laid paws on her, treated her like an easy lay, called Nick a whore and said he would be dead within the year. Now, *this* wolf was attacking her fox from behind because he was too scared to face him head on. Even with the red haze of protective rage clouding her vision, Judy’s promise to herself echoed in her head like a record on repeat.

*Nobody hurts my fox!*

The enraged rabbit twisted in midair to aim a vicious kick not at the wolf, but at the glass bottle he was holding. While the soft fur on the top of her foot was not enough to shatter the improvised weapon, the wolf’s toothy muzzle was more than sufficient. Glass sprayed in all directions, leaving deep gouges in the wolf’s snout and cheeks, immediately sending him to the floor beside his packmate without so much as a whimper.

Nick, the intended target of the cowardly ambush, had already been turning to track Judy as the rabbit landed neatly behind him and smacked the back of his leg to get his attention.

“Eyes front, Nick. He may have more friends,” she snapped.

It was a tone of command that the fox had never heard from the bunny before.

*Maybe she really is meant to be a cop.*

*We’ve always believed in her.*
Maybe, but there’s no believing like seeing, and what we just saw was something else. True.

“You’re the boss, Carrots,” Nick responded easily to hide the anger and protectiveness still simmering just below the surface.

While neither really knew it at the time, something very important was happening at that precise moment. Almost a dozen mammals were standing in a circle around the two fallen wolves and the victorious pair, and recording the entire engagement. In less than two hours, the resulting video of a pair of mysterious fox and bunny duo would go viral, and it was only the low lighting combined with the flashes of strobes and panning spotlights that prevented Nick and Judy’s faces from being attached to the front of every newspaper for the next week.

There, in the present, both were breathing deeply and scanning the crowd for other attackers. It seemed, though, that whatever members of the wolf pack that were not bleeding on the floor felt no deep desire to join their compatriots, and simply retreated back into the crowd. With that in mind, Nick and Judy beat a hasty retreat before security had a chance to either come kick them out or detain them. Either way, they’d already attracted far too much attention, and it was time to head out.

While the daytime in Sahara Square was frequently compared to Hell by mammals not adapted to it, there weren’t many that couldn’t appreciate the evenings. The sunlight was no longer broiling the entire area, and the heaters were on standby until the sun peeked back over the mountains.

It was this warm, enticing environment that greeted the panting fox and the wired bunny as they burst free from the club and into the outdoors. A long moment of silence stretched between them, neither entirely sure what to say, and both worried about what the last several minutes of the past would bring into their future.

“Carrots,” Nick said in a gentle voice. “Let’s take a walk.”

Together, the pair turned and walked the nearly deserted streets with no particular destination, and no particular rush, content simply to take a breath and recoup before having what was likely to be a serious talk.

The fox broke the silence first.

“Judy,” the rabbit blinked in surprise at the use of her first name before Nick continued. “I’m sorry.”

Her nose twitched in confusion. “For what?”

Tall, russet ears laid low along Nick’s head as his face turned down in an expression of sadness and fear. It was obvious to Judy that in this moment he was far more afraid of whatever he felt he’d done than of any risk he’d been in back at the club.

“I… I’d hoped you’d never get to see me like that.”

Judy’s gray brow furrowed as she considered her answer for a moment.

“See you like what, Nick?”

Her tone was thoughtful, almost incredulous. Nick’s ears lifted and his eyes rotated to observe her more carefully as she continued.

“Brave enough to stare down a mammal twice your size? Protective of your date against an aggressive jerk who threatened to skin her? Honorable enough to offer him two chances to walk
away, even though you already knew you would win?"

She looked up at the stunned vulpine with a soft smile. “Is that how I was never supposed to see you?”

“Judy...” Nick blinked rapidly, clearly at a loss for words.

By this point, the rabbit was keenly aware of Nick’s self-deprecating tendencies, and was incredibly keen on not letting what was left of their evening be consumed with melancholy, so she redirected the conversation.

“Besides, Slick. I kinda figured your most pressing question would be how a ‘fluffy bunny’ managed to kick a moving bottle hard enough to knock another mammal out.”

Nick chuckled, his ears lifting fractionally. “Please. A pretty, young bunny like you walks willingly into a fox den, twice? That gets my attention, Fluff, and would have been curious even assuming I wasn’t intimately familiar with exactly how fit you are. No, you clearly had some sort of training.”

Being back in familiar territory was quickly bringing Nick’s mood up, and the smugness was almost back in his voice as he continued his explanation. “There’s only a handful of schools in Zootopia willing to teach a small mammal self-defense skills, and a few phone calls filled in the rest of the picture.”

“You’ve been training almost every hour you weren’t in school since you got to the city, except for the last few weeks.” Nick’s ears were now fully erect and the smirk that spread across his face was beginning to reveal his dangerous teeth as he leaned close to the bunny. “Care to share what’s been distracting you?”

The rabbit blushed, a red tinge shooting quickly from the base to the tips of her ears. “Uhh, no. I have a right against self-incrimination.”

Her head tilted to the side, ears following suit in an expression of mild confusion. “That begs the obvious question though, how on earth did you convince the instructors to give you that information?”

Nick chuffed in response. “I know everyone, Fluff. Those particular mammals I know because of a particularly nasty incident in my childhood we will not be discussing tonight. The important thing is that after the dust settled, I had a choice. Learn how to look after myself, or... just hide and never let anyone see that they got to me. I chose the former.”

He sighed loudly and shoved his paws in his pockets. “As I got older and took on my current profession, I kept up with it. I’m both a prostitute and a fox. For me, violence isn’t the ‘vague possibility’ that it is for most. That wolf back there was far from the first time some mammal has decided they wanted to take something I wasn’t willing to give.”

Nick’s eyes pointed down at the bunny to watch her reaction. “Safety is a big part of why where I sleep when I’m working and my actual den aren’t even in the same district.”

True to his expectations, Judy started, her ears swiveling to point at him. “Wait, what? That isn’t where you live?”

“That dirty hole in the wall? Karma, no.” He chuckled as the rabbit clapped excitedly.

“Ooh! When can I see this mysterious den, then?”
Emerald eyes softened as he answered. “When it’s time for it to be our den.”

Judy blushed again, her ears dropping, and her eyes staring at the ground for a brief moment before recovering.

“Well then, Mr. Mysterious Fox, since you seem so intent on keeping secrets tonight, there’s one thing I insist on finding out.”

The fox in question arched one eyebrow. “Oh? And do you plan to beat it out of me if I refuse?”

A very nearly predatory grin spread across the face of the bunny. “It’s funny you should say that, because my gym is right around the corner and I’ve been going long enough to have a key. Why don’t we step inside and you can show me what you got?”

Nick winced. He clearly remembered all the times she’d flinched or shivered when exposed to his teeth, and every time had settled a cold weight in his gut. It wasn’t something he was excited about seeing again.

“I don’t know, Carrots,” He yawned and stretched. “I’m kinda bushed, maybe we’ll take a rain check on that.”

His lapine companion snorted. “You were wide awake until 10 seconds ago. I’m not buying it, Slick.” She turned and waved for him to follow. “Come on!”

Time for a hustle, then. He smirked broadly. “If you say so, Fluff, but sparring a fox probably isn’t the best idea for a cute little bunny.”

One of Judy’s eyes twitched. “Don’t call me cute. Get your fluffy tail moving.”

Still wearing the smirking mask to hide his internal disquiet, Nick followed obediently. “Okay, Carrots. You’re the boss.”

His strategy was simple. Rile her up enough to make sure she came at him full force, take a few hits and let her win. It would probably leave some bruises, but the sacrifice would be worth it. Maybe… if she felt like she could beat him whenever she needed to, she wouldn’t be afraid of him. His mask faltered and ears flattened as the thought continued to bother him.

Maybe he wouldn’t lose her when she finally woke up one day and realized that she was dating a monster with teeth and claws that were built to hunt her. Maybe he wouldn’t have to be alone again.

Nick mentally shook himself as Judy unlocked the door to her gym, let them both in and lead the way to the mat. The gym was essentially what Nick expected. Soft mats heavily marked by shallow claw scratches covered the floor, various ceremonial and practical weapons adorned the walls, and a center ring was clearly delineated by differently colored mats forming a roughly 15 foot square.

As the rabbit lead the way into the arena, the obvious fact that neither of them were really dressed for the occasion struck him. Both were dressed fairly casually, Judy in a cute pink button up shirt with jeans, Nick wearing a loose green Pawaiian shirt and khaki pants. They would do in a pinch, obviously, but any sort of extended sparring was likely to chafe in places that ought not feel that kind of friction.

He grinned widely at the opportunity this provided. “So, Carrots… Did you leave a uniform here, or are we gonna have to do this naked? I’m not really opposed to the idea, but I wouldn’t want you to be uncomfortable. We could always reschedule for another day.”
Judy paused thoughtfully, and for a moment the russet predator thought he’d been granted a reprieve. This thought, along with most of the rest of his senses, scattered to the four winds as she began to unbutton her jeans and pull them down.

“Carrots! What are you doing?” he yelped as those gorgeous, gray furred legs came into view again. His mouth dried and his ability to speak further seemed to go on vacation as she casually kicked her pants into a corner.

“What?” she looked over with a half lidded smile. “You made a good point. It’s nothing you haven’t seen before, and nobody else ever comes in this late. So why not just be a little more -” the rabbit fluttered her eyes at him with a sultry smile “...natural?”

Secretly, Judy had an ulterior motive. To be clear, she wasn’t lying. No other mammals were likely to come in owing to the hour, and the fox did have a point. Trying to jump around in jeans for an extended period of time was likely to be uncomfortable, and this was a better idea. Mostly though, this was just payback for calling her cute. If it wasn’t for the fact that Judy Hopps never backed down from a challenge, she never would have had the guts to be this brazen.

Nick gaped blankly for another moment as he desperately scoured the recesses of his mind to locate his ability to form coherent sentences. Finally getting his mental feet back underneath himself, he recognized the smirk on Judy’s face and realized he’d been hustled.

Two can play this game, little bunny.

His expression reshaped itself into friendly indifference. “You make a compelling argument, Carrots. I think I’ll join you.”

With a grace born of practice, the fox gently swayed his hips and swished his tail as he slowly peeled off his pants and kicked them into another corner before starting on his shirt. This time it was Judy’s turn for her mouth to be filled with cotton and her jaw to slacken as more and more red and cream fur came into view.

“No fair…” she whispered as he ran a paw through the ruff on his chest, ostensibly in a slow stretch to loosen up.

The heat from earlier bloomed between her legs again, and the sweet scent of her arousal filled the air and prompted a wicked grin from the fox.

That smug fox knows exactly what he’s doing... He gave me part of a strip tease for carrots sake! What the hell, Wilde?! True, but if you beat him to death, he can’t do that thing with his tongue again. Half to death?

Nick chose that precise moment to bend over and do a toe touch facing the doe. That it also showed off his tail and the subtle definition of muscle under fur was clearly deliberate.

Half to death.

When Nick finally stood up and slipped into the same fighting stance from earlier, the rabbit had fully channeled her arousal into murderous impulses. The fire behind amethyst eyes made it clear that his plan was well on track towards being a glorious, if likely painful, success.

Still think this was a good idea, Slick? Got a better one? Might have been good to ask that question before we ruffled the bun.
No, then?

The fox grinned around his nerves. “Ready, Fluff?”

“Born ready.” The rabbit responded before adopting her own stance across from him.

Nick took a deep breath. “Go!”

Chapter End Notes

Fear not! I've already started on chapter 7 and don't intend to make you wait two weeks for the Wilde V Hopps face off! I didn't want to abruptly double the length of my chapters, and it was probably going to be about 9,000 words before I was done at the rate I was going. So on that note, I'm going to go write more. Until then!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

First off, to all my lovely readers, I am so sorry for the delay and I owe everyone an explanation.

Shortly after the release of the last chapter, I was involved in a car accident that broke my fiance’s wrist and left us rather short handed(pawed?) around the house. Doing all the cooking, cleaning, doctor’s appointments, full time job on a new project, etc, did not leave me very much time or energy for writing. There were other issues that I’ll get to in the end notes, but for now, on with the showdown everyone has been waiting for!

No sooner had the word “Go” left the fox’s lips than the rabbit’s feet parted ways with the ground. She’d seen how easily Nick had dismantled the wolf, and had no intention of being pulled into a prolonged contest. Her desire to end the match quickly and her frustration were combined into a straight kick that was functionally guaranteed to knock the fox flat on his back if she connected solidly.

Not that she actually expected to do so. The damn vulpine moved like a liquid when he wanted to, and from this range something as fast as him had more than ample time to sidestep. This was, as they say, all part of the plan. Nick’s fighting stance led with the right paw, meaning it was most likely he would dodge to the right, directly into her cocked and waiting left foot.

When Nick responded though, he did so… slowly? He dodged the worst of the hit, but still took a solid thump on the arm, spinning him around and forcing him back several steps with a very canine yelp of discomfort. Before he’d even finished finding his feet, Judy was on him again, this time lunging forward to brace off of his leading leg and jump high enough to put the soft spots between the ribs into range of her small fists.

No mammal in the world liked being prodded in the soft space between their ribs, especially by something as hard and pointed as a clenched rabbit paw. With that in mind, the lapine was already prepared with her follow-up, because the fact that Nick would dodge or block her attack entirely was a foregone conclusion. Until he didn’t.

Seemingly still stunned from her first kick, he was slow on the block, only managing to stop one of her fists. The other smacked hard into its intended target, dropping the fox to his knees on the mat as his ears folded back in pain. The most strained grin Judy had ever seen tried its best to creep across Nick’s face, and mostly failed.

“Damn, Carrots. Looks like you’re-” Nick coughed and clutched at his side, “faster than I gave you credit for. You ready to call this one a victory for rabbits everywhere?”

Judy’s paws clasped over her mouth in panic and regret.

“Oh my gosh, Nick! I’m so sorry! You were just so fast against that wolf I thought there was no way I’d hit you with that! Are you okay?”
She was breathless, almost panting in worry at the obvious pain scrawled all over the fox’s face. In spite of her misery, she couldn’t help but notice that his tail was neither limp or tucked close to his body. Judy Hopps was nothing if not thorough, and as soon as she’d begun the new experience of dating a predator, she’d gone straight to her college library and checked out several books on the subject of predator psychology and culture.

Nick’s tail wasn’t the tail of an animal experiencing intense pain. It was controlled, kept off the ground, and mostly indicated that the fox was focused rather than in agony. This just didn’t make any sense. The confused rabbit’s ears tilted slightly to the side as she thought over the last several moments of the fight.

She thought of his expression, how different it’d been than when he’d faced off against the wolf in the club. His movements were slower and more jerky than the smooth grace he’d displayed earlier. Come to think of it, neither of her hits had really been solid. He’d already been falling back both times, almost as if he knew it was coming...

Black-tipped ears stuck straight up as the truth finally kicked in. That sly fox had hustled her! Just like when he’d pretended to be tired or when he’d tried to make her uncomfortable enough to quit, now he was pretending to be injured. Did he really think so little of her that he thought she couldn’t handle him? He clearly wasn’t afraid of her, and it wasn’t that he was a pacifist. So the only explanation the small rabbit could see was that he was afraid for her. He underestimated her just like everyone else had.

Anger roiled within the bunny like molten lava at the idea of Nick thinking so little of her, that not only would he try not to fight, he would even lie to her and fake an injury to avoid it. This would not stand.

Judy’s detailed research on predator mating habits had netted some rather intriguing information, one tidbit of which had been that predators would frequently play-fight with their prospective mates as a way of proving their strength. Actual fights between males were less common, but still frequent enough that the assault rate took a noticeable jump during mating seasons. Armed with that information, she adopted a stereotypical “dumb bunny” expression with one paw on her hips and said one of the few things that would likely guarantee a very aggressive encounter with a fox.

“Gosh... I thought that predators were supposed to be able to look after their mates,” she said in the most vapid and disinterested voice she could manage.

Nick’s head snapped up with a look that couldn’t decide whether it wanted to be shocked or angry, but the bunny wasn’t done yet. “So far, I’m just not sure you’re up to the task. Oh well.”

To say that Nick responded suddenly would be to do a disservice to the speed and intensity with which it occurred. It was “sudden” in the same fashion as turning on a light. One moment he appeared pained and weak, and the next moment a mammal could be forgiven for wondering if primitive savagery had really been fully stamped out by evolution. His lips peeled back to expose his sharp teeth, emerald eyes narrowed to slits, and his claws fully extended as he rolled to his feet in a low crouch.

As usual, Judy’s generally quiet voice of reason kicked in moments after she’d done something monumentally risky.

*You do remember what happened last time you suggested finding a new mate, right?*

*A surge of aggressiveness that seemed vastly disproportionate to the situation?*
Very good. Now let’s recap. You’ve basically just told a mammal with serious abandonment issues who is twice your weight and has an extra decade of experience that you’ll leave him unless he beats you. The only way you could make it worse was if it was a predator mating challenge. Because you’re you, you couldn’t resist doing that, too.

Uhhhh… Oops?

Sweet cheese and crackers.

During the brief moment that the bunny had been reconsidering the decisions that had brought them to this point, the fox had been moving. Gone were the stunted half movements of round one. This was the fox that leveled a wolf in under ten seconds, and he was clearly looking to repeat the trick.

The slit-eyed vulpine moved first, lunging forward with a hard straight kick that used his longer legs to attack without the threat of reprisal. Responding with speed that would have easily impressed another bunny, the lapine used her strong legs to back flip safely away from the kick. Longer legs, however, meant that by the time Judy had landed, the fox had already taken the two steps required to enter range for a roundhouse kick aimed at head height.

Countering by dropping to the mat and allowing the dark foot to swipe harmlessly through the air over her, Judy gathered her strength for a lunge and almost missed the incoming danger. Nick had never stopped the turn begun by the roundhouse kick, and had also dropped to the floor in a spinning sweep that was, owing to Judy’s own posture, presently coming directly for her head.

Evading danger once again, Judy rolled rearward into a reverse handspring that put her momentarily out of the range of the predator still pressing the offensive. As Nick straightened back into his stance and prepared to advance again, the bunny had a moment of inspiration. Her prior retreats had backed her nearly to the wall, and if she could lull the fox into thinking she was about to be pinned against it…

She glanced back over her shoulder to gauge the distance.

Six feet. Easy jump.

Now all that remained was to wait for the fox to attack again, and she didn’t have to wait long. In an ambiguous maneuver, Nick lunged forward a third time with his knee raised in a way that suggested another kick was imminent. Without even thinking, Judy jumped backwards a final time, feeling her feet contact in a crunched position that loaded her legs like powerful springs for a launch off the wall at the face of the offending vulpine.

She twisted in midair, orienting her hindpaws towards the fox in preparation for an extension and a contact that would put a rhino on the mat. It was only then she noticed that Nick had never extended his own leg; the kick had been a feint and she’d taken the bait hook, line, and sinker. Foxes evolved for millennia specifically to hunt bunnies, and it was on full display here. They were fast enough to keep up, big enough to be far stronger than any bunny, and clever to the core.

As he’d done several times, the fox bowed gracefully out of the way, extending one dark paw to literally wrap around her nude form and redirect her momentum towards the ground, where she landed hard enough to be momentarily stunned. Continuing the graceful step that had taken him out of the way of her kick to begin with, Nick crouched into a pounce that his distant ancestors would have been proud of, landing in a straddle over the bunny with one paw pressing on her chest and the other raised in the air just in case Judy wasn’t prepared to surrender yet.

It was in that moment, being pressed down by one fox paw and staring up at the dark claws of
another, that the emerald eyes she loved so much vanished and were replaced by the enraged blues of another vulpine she’d encountered at a fair so long ago. For a split second, she wasn’t the confident rabbit who’d taunted her date into a physical contest. She became again the young bunny who was about to be slashed in a way that left scars far deeper than fur.

Just like that day, she cringed, shutting her eyes tightly and turning her face to try to escape the inevitable pain that would surely follow. Unlike that day the burning scratches never materialized, and after a couple moments she opened her eyes to see something she would never have thought possible.

Nick Wilde was looking down at her with a face of absolute misery and horror, his eyes wide and his paws tucked close to his chest as if to hide them away from her. When her eyes met his, he scrambled to get off her as quickly as he could and retreated to the opposite side of the room, where he pressed himself tightly against the wall and huddled there. It was almost as if he was attempting to vanish into himself, with his ears almost invisible against his skull, and his tail wrapped as tightly around his body as it would go. His breathing alternated erratically between short and shallow and the sort of deep gasps one would expect from a mammal who’d nearly drowned.

The rabbit looked on for a long moment in shock. What on earth could frighten a mammal who’d effortlessly fought off a drunken wolf and taken her down in less than ten moves? After all, she mused, the only thing even in the room was… her.

Oh no.

Everything clicked together at once for the worried doe. His words from earlier came back to her, ‘I never wanted you to see me like this’. Other memories flickered through her mind: his reaction to the implication she might find another fox, all the times he’d been abandoned in the past, his reluctance to spar with her. He’d been walking on eggshells since they started dating, afraid to lose the one mammal who’d come back for him, and tonight her reaction had confirmed his worst fears and broken the dam he’d put up around them. She had to make this right.

Slowly, trying not to spook the panicking fox, she crawled on her paws and knees to be within a few feet of him and spoke softly, as if she’d been addressing a burrow full of her youngest siblings. Her ears were pressed flat against her back in shame at the pain she’d accidentally caused, and her eyes wouldn’t have tried to meet the fox’s even if they’d been open.

“It’s okay, Nick. I’m not going anywhere and I’m not afraid of you.”

Nick’s eyes shot open and he stared at her accusingly, though he continued to gasp and pant for air.

“It’s true,” the bunny said in her most calming tone. “If you can relax, I’ll explain everything. Do you think you can do that for me?”

Emerald eyes squinted shut again, but the fox gave a sharp, tense nod. Relief washed over the rabbit like warm water at this first sign things were improving, and her ears relaxed slightly. In a burrow with over 300 mammals, and especially if those mammals were rabbits, it was inevitable that some of them were going to suffer from anxiety issues and panic attacks.

A near-pariah Judy may have been, but that hadn’t stopped her from learning about how to take care of frightened mammals as best she could. The first steps were always to make sure they felt safe from harm, and that meant ensuring they knew that nothing would happen without their permission.

“Is it alright if I touch you?”
Red shoulders tensed again, but made no move to pull away this time. A pang went through Judy’s heart every time she saw him flinch or pull away, but she had to stay calm and comforting if she wanted to help Nick. He hadn't acknowledged her request, but maybe it would help if she could address some of the particular sources of his anxiety more directly.

“It’s okay, Nick… I’m not going to hurt you, and I’m not afraid of you hurting me.”

The silence stretched between them for a long moment, Nick finally opening his eyes slightly to take in the warm but worried gaze of the bunny beside him. After deliberating for a long moment, he nodded again, more slowly this time.

Without hesitating, the gray bunny shuffled forward and wrapped her arms around the fox as best she could. Squeezing him gently, she lay her head down on his shoulder and began whispering comforting words directly into one pinned back ear. Little by little, one degree at a time, dark-tipped ears slowly started settling back into their usual position, and the tension trickled slowly out of the predator’s body.

For a predator to have deliberately cornered himself indicated strongly that he wasn’t afraid of being harmed, but instead afraid of doing harm. To establish some sense of normalcy again, Judy needed to help him get away from the wall and into a more comfortable position. That in mind, the rabbit attempted to pull back slightly so she could adopt a cross-legged position. The sudden appearance of a fox paw wrapped around her wrist accompanied by a sharp intake of breath indicated this might be trickier than she’d originally thought.

Nick was so afraid of her leaving that his instincts were reacting to even the slightest signs of it, and the rabbit’s heart broke again at how someone so strong could look so vulnerable and terrified. By all that was natural, she should be running in fear from him. Instead, he was doing his best to cower in a corner because he was afraid of what she could do to him. It was time to try a little bribery to get him to open up.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going anywhere,” she said softly. “Just adjusting so that I can get a little more comfortable and you can lay your head in my lap, is that okay?”

His grip slackened enough for her to pull gently away, and she pulled him towards her until he was laying on his side with his head in her lap. He was still panting softly, but it was clear that the worst of it was over. Judy smiled softly at his sigh as he drew deeply of her scent and allowed his ears to perk back up for the first time in many long minutes. Taking the presented opportunity, she took his ear-tips between her paws and gently rubbed and teased at them, eliciting an immediate sigh of pleasure from the fox.

They held that position quietly for several minutes, Judy alternating between tweaking Nick’s ears and gently scritching at their base, both of which seemed to do wonders to lower his heart rate and bring his breathing into the realm of something that didn’t sound like he was afraid the room would run out of air. Even Judy’s ears had returned to their normal position, perked up high over her head.

Finally, seemingly back in control of himself but still in no hurry to leave his comfortable position in Judy’s lap, the fox spoke his first words since the incident had begun.

“Carrots,” his voice was controlled and quiet, but still filled with some trepidation. “We need to talk.”

Judy sighed, but never stopped stroking Nick’s fur. It seemed to give her almost as much comfort as it did the tired fox laying in her lap.

“We do, Slick. I promised you answers and I think you deserve those and a lot more.”
Emerald eyes were revealed as Nick turned his head so that he could see her more clearly as she continued speaking.

“I wasn’t lying when I said I wasn’t afraid of you, specifically, but we both know I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t afraid at all.”

Black-tipped ears lay flat against her back again, it wasn’t something Judy especially liked remembering.

“You already know I’ve wanted to be a cop since I was just a kit, and that I caught a lot of flak for it from my family and friends. I’ve also told you that I’ve been fighting bullies since the day I announced my dream to the world at the Carrot Days festival. What I didn’t tell you was how that day ended.”

She winced as the memory of flashing claws and burning pain spreading across her cheek rolled over her again. “A local bully named Gideon Grey took some tickets from my friends, and just like you’d guess, I stood up to him. When I demanded he give the tickets back, he knocked me to the ground, and when I kicked him for it… he slashed me across the face.”

One of Judy’s paws lifted away from Nick’s head to spread the fur on her face, revealing three silver scars that had never fully faded. In the real world, not in memory, another fox paw moved towards her face. This time to run one finger gingerly over the marks as Judy finished her story.

“Gideon Grey was a fox. When you pinned me down, it wasn’t you I saw. I was a scared little kit again, and that’s why I reacted like I did.”

Nick’s eyes were wide and for a moment his expression reflected the same horror it had when Judy had looked up at him in fear.

“Fluff... No. Judy. I am so, so sorry. I didn’t know…”

She cut him off quickly. “You didn’t. You didn’t know because I didn’t tell you, because I’d been worried about making you afraid of scaring me.” Judy chuckled a little bitterly. “A lot of good that did.”

Emerald eyes pinched together in slight frustration. “It wouldn’t have mattered if I hadn’t attacked you like I had.”

“Nick… I knew exactly what I was doing when I said what I did.”

His head cocked to the side in a display of confusion. “Then why did you say it?”

“I thought you were holding back because you didn’t think I could handle actually fighting you. I’ve been underestimated my entire life, and the thought that my boyfriend didn’t respect me enough to really try made me angry. So… I said something I knew would make you quit worrying about me. I'm not afraid of you, Nick, and I don't want you to be afraid of scaring me off.”

The russet predator pulled away slightly and gave Judy a flat look, sitting upright with his legs crossed facing her. That they were both still nude hadn’t occurred to either of them since they first stripped down, but now it was a conscious struggle for both to maintain eye contact. “Okay Fluff, you keep saying you're not afraid of me, but I have questions about that. Cards on the table time. You okay with that?”

She nodded cautiously.
The fox took a deep breath and stared intently at the floor. “Every time you see my teeth or claws, or I do something especially predatory, you react. Usually it's a flinch or a shiver, and sometimes I smell fear or something close to it. From here it looks like you love me and trust me as long as you don't think too hard about what I am. That’s why I was holding back. If you’re really not afraid of me, what gives?”

Judy responded with slow speech, taking care to ensure her true meanings were understood. “At first, fear is what I thought it was. Every time you’d yawn or take a bite and I could see your fangs, my heart would speed up and I'd feel hot all over. Fear seemed like the only normal way for a bunny to respond. Over time though, I started to realize that it wasn't really fear. It wasn't until tonight though that I really got it.”

She trailed off, embarrassed by whatever she was about to say. Her paws were in her lap, ears were pressed flat against her back, and she was looking everywhere but at Nick.

Nick smiled gently. “What’d you get, Carrots? You can't just leave a fox hanging like that.”

The inside of her ears flushed darker, and she was momentarily grateful they were still hidden behind her back.

“I.. err.. well…” she sputtered incoherently before trailing off into a silence that lasted several long seconds.

Finally tiring of the silence, the fox broke in. “That was incredibly enlightening, Fluff. Thank you for telling me,” he deadpanned.

Judy huffed in frustration. “Ya know what? Bite me.”

Nick rolled his eyes. “I'm just giving you a hard time, Carrots. Trying to break the ice a bit. Sarcasm is usually my way of being defensive, not yours.”

“I know. I'm being serious, though. I want you to bite me. Gently, preferably. On the shoulder will probably work.”

His eyes widened at her request and he put his paws up in a “hold on” motion while leaning. “Wait, wait, wait. After all this, you want me to bite you. With my fangs. On your fur. Am I getting this right?”

All things considered, the bunny couldn’t really blame him for his reticence at this point. “Yes, Nick. I want you to bite me, like you would a vixen.”

If it were at all possible Nick’s eyes got even wider, his eyebrows seeming to attempt to climb on top of his head. “How do you…”

“Law wasn’t the only homework I did, Slick. That’s also how I knew what to say to you earlier,” she explained with a hint of shame still lingering in her voice and in the way her ears dipped slightly.

While the surprise was wearing off, his wariness remained evident in the set of his ears and that he was still leaning slightly away from the bunny. He would give her one last chance to back out.

“Are you sure this is what you want me to do?”

“I’m sure. Now are you gonna do this or do I have to come over there and stick my head in your mouth?”
He chuckled at the mental image. “Alright Fluff, but if we’re gonna do this, we’re going to do this right.”

Her head tilted to the side. “What’s that mean?”

“You’ll see,” he whispered with a slight smirk while closing the gap between them.

Without another word, the fox gently pressed his lips against hers. The predator kissing his rabbit softly as his arms curled to pull her body tight against his, both rising to their knees to obtain a better position. Again, their nudity became apparent as fur rubbed against fur, creating that delicious friction that only lovers know. Any other time, Judy might have been taken a moment to be surprised or to wonder whether she was in the mood, but tonight was not going to be one of those times. Gentle kissing and snuggling had been as far as they’d gotten since the last time they’d mated, and the pent-up arousal was starting to show.

Judy let out a low sigh as Nick removed his lips from hers and began trailing kisses down her cheek, onto her neck, and then lower to plant several kisses against her small breasts. As his long tongue flicked quickly over one nipple, she gasped in delight and dug her paws into the dense fur on the back of his neck, pulling hard to draw him closer. She was getting a wonderful refresher course in why her fox was such a great partner, with large paws that could nearly cover her entire lower back, a long tongue that seemed to have been designed by heaven, and, now that she was ready to admit to the quiet voice in the back of her head, long fangs that she was desperate to feel against her skin.

With one paw pressed against her lower back, Nick brought the other paw to her chest and pressed gently, lowering his lapine partner slowly to the mat. She went willingly, glad to once again be looking up at the fox she was coming to love more than she had words for.

As Nick straddled her for a second time that evening, there was no fear this time. The eyes that looked down at her with lust and love in equal measure were the same gorgeous emerald green, and she’d never felt safer and more protected than underneath her fanged partner. If there was one thing that she’d learned tonight for certain, it was that Nick would sooner declaw himself than hurt her, and that left her free to experience his predatory features as a rush of excitement from the conflict between her instincts and her desires.

Cradling her face in both paws Nick kissed her again, opening his mouth and allowing his tongue to press against Judy’s lips in a silent request for entry that the rabbit immediately granted. Their tongues touched, savoring the taste of each other in a dance that could only be described as sensual and a flavor that was exotic to both. As she moaned softly into the kiss, the fox trailed his claws gently over her neck, down her chest, and allowed his paw-pads to tease gently at her entrance.

Judy gasped at the touch, arching her hips up against the teasing strokes in a vain attempt to gain more stimulation. It’d been far too long since their last physical encounter, and the gray bunny was fit to burst if that cursed fox didn’t stop teasing. Fortunately, that particularly pleasurable torture wasn’t long lived as one russet finger slipped between her lips and inside her heated body. The entire time that Nick’s right paw was doing such delightful things to her nether regions, his left was caressing her face and letting his claws out just far enough to barely brush the skin under her fur.

“Time for a test run,” the fox thought to himself as he lowered his muzzle nearer to the bunny’s shoulder. This had been his plan from the outset, both because biting in the context she seemed to want it was very sexual for canids, and because she was less likely to panic in her current state if she’d misread her feelings on the subject.

Slipping a second digit into the warm depths of his lover, for the first time he nipped gently at her shoulder, barely allowing the pressure of his fangs to press through to the sensitive skin beneath. Her
response was immediate, a sharp intake of breath and a full body shudder of what was unmistakably pleasure, followed by a loud moan that echoed off the walls of the gym.

For once in his life, Nick Wilde was utterly without a single teasing comment. This rabbit, his rabbit, the one who accepted him, trusted him, and come back for him was moaning at the touch of his fangs. For his entire life, his status as a predator and as a fox in particular had held him back and pushed him into corners, and here was a bunny of all mammals who didn’t love him in spite of those features, she loved him for them.

With this realization, the fox felt a rush of affection and arousal that combined into an intense desire to take and claim the doe right there on the gym floor. Resisting that urge required him to fight against every instinct that he had as a male predator, generating a frustration he channeled into a low, predatory growl right next to the bunny’s ears and drawing another sharp moan from her lips. Clearly, her kink for predators extended past his teeth, something he fully intended to explore at the earliest opportunity.

For now, he contented himself by pushing his fingers inside her body all the way to the knuckle and grinding the pad on his palm against her clit while his other paw moved down to her chest, rubbing and gently pinching a nipple between his fingers. It was readily apparent from the elevating pitch of her voice and the way her hips ground faster and harder against his palm that the doe was rapidly becoming undone under his paws.

At the last moment, just before Judy crested over the edge of her pleasure, Nick leaned forward and opened his muzzle wide, revealing every sharp fang inside it just before clamping down onto her shoulder near her neck. He pressed down just hard enough to leave marks and let out a growl that any of his ancestors would have been proud of. The response was immediate from the bunny. Her head snapped back in a scream and her legs wrapped around his wrist, squeezing so tightly that the fox couldn’t have removed his paw even if he’d wanted. The gray rabbit writhed under him, held in the grip of the most powerful orgasm she’d experienced so far, and it lasted until Nick finally released his grip on her.

Slowly, Judy’s legs relaxed around his wrist, allowing the vulpine to lay flat on the mat and pull the tired bunny into his arms. It’d been a long week and then tonight had been a phenomenal roller coaster of emotions and physical exertion. They couldn’t sleep just yet though; not only did they need to not be in a gym that would be opening in a few short hours, but they also needed to finish their conversation from earlier.

With that in mind, as the bunny slowly came back to herself, the fox contented himself with stroking her ears gently and waiting until she snuggled closer into him.

“You know, Fluff, I hadn't really believed you when you said that you weren't afraid of me. It seemed like a dream far too pleasant to be real.”

A happy warmth ran through the bunny at his words. “I know you've been through a rough time, Nick. I know you have trust issues, and I know you've been burned. I won't pretend to know where this is going, or if it'll work out forever. I can promise one thing, and it's that I'll never lie to you, and I'm not afraid of you.”

At a loss for words for a second time that evening, Nick simply pulled Judy even more snugly against his chest and pressed his muzzle between her ears. He cleared his throat and ran his paws up and down the bunny’s side in an affectionate manner.

“Thank you, Judy,” he said in a voice thick with emotion. “We should probably clear out of here though, before anyone else decides to show.”
She smirked. “Probably. Wouldn’t want anyone else to get an eyeful of your bunny, now would you?”

Nick’s ears perked up and his tail wrapped around them both. “My bunny?” he repeated.

Judy gripped Nick’s paws tightly. “Yeah, Slick. Your bunny. I know it hasn’t been entirely even, and I haven’t been the model girlfriend at times, but I want to do better and I want to be your bunny, if you’ll be my fox.”

“Always, Fluff,” he whispered. Shaking his head clear, he refocused on more immediate concerns. “I just have one very important question for you.”

“Anything, Nick.”

“Carrots…” He sighed as if about to ask something of dire consequence. “I was just hoping you could tell me something…”

Judy looked up at him expectantly, love and a touch of concern in her eyes as he finally spoke again.

“Where are my pants?”

Chapter End Notes

So, Nick bested Judy in their one on one. Before anyone lights torches and pitchforks, here’s my thinking. In the movie, Judy would have absolutely thrashed Nick in less than 5 seconds. She was well trained, stronger than she looked, and had more than a couple tricks up her sleeves. By contrast, Nick basically has a size advantage and that’s about it. We know he could tote around a popsicle far larger than himself with no big problems, and get it to the roof, so clearly foxes have the capability for great physical strength. We also saw him disappear around a corner in the blink of an eye, so he has speed too, but without training Judy would have eaten him alive.

Here though, the odds are different. Foxes evolved to have all the right physical characteristics to hunt bunnies, and Nick has a decade of experience on her. She’s spent a lot of time training, to be sure, but Nick has spent a lot of time actually fighting. Once Judy gets some experience under her belt, it’ll be a much more interesting fight, and I might see if I can work that in somewhere just for fun. :) 

As mentioned in the opening notes, the other factor in the delay is that this chapter was an absolute bear to get right. I really wanted the surfacing of Nick’s fears and emotions to feel real, and for Judy to finally get the chance to be a supportive girlfriend like Nick has for her. Their relationship has been fairly one sided until now, but they’re fundamentally a team of equals. Skilled and talented in different ways, to be sure, but complementary.

I hope everyone enjoyed the chapter, and I look forward to get back to something resembling a more normal schedule. Most importantly, I apologize again for the delay. For now, that’ll still be slower owing to the craziness of life in general right now, but look for another update in about two weeks. Tomorrow being my birthday, let me know what you thought of this big turning point in their relationship. Cheers! :)
Rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated! Real notes are at the end, so I can get out of the way of this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

To say that Judy was exhausted when she got back to her dorm room would have been the understatement of the century. Between the physical exertion(s) and the emotional roller coaster, she was one tired bunny. Even her ears looked tired, drooping flat along her back and matching her equally droopy eyelids. Her pathetic state had even convinced the always-eager-to-gossip Fru Fru to skip her interrogation on how the date had gone in favor of helping direct her immediately into bed after stripping down.

Try as she might though, sleep would not claim her. She couldn’t stop thinking about how hurt Nick had been when she’d recoiled away from him, and how she should have been more open from the start. In trying to protect Nick, she’d hurt him more badly than the truth ever would have, and she desperately needed to do something to make it up to him. Something to show that she was in this relationship for the long haul and wasn’t going to just up and leave one day. That fox spent so much time taking care of her and her feelings that it was her turn to reciprocate in a situation that wasn’t an immediate crisis.

Suddenly, the haze of sleep burned away in a flash of clarity that jolted her to sitting upright in the bed. Her graduation! She could invite him to her graduation along with her… parents… Her head bounced off the pillow as she flopped back down, allowing her arms to fall to her sides.

Are you really ready for your parents to meet your boyfriend the fox?

Not in the slightest. Best case scenario is dad cries and mom stares disapprovingly. Worst case scenario involves getting disowned on graduation day.

What are you going to do then?

Try everything.

Do you even know what that means?

Yep. If I’m really going to be serious about this, I can’t keep hiding it from everyone back home.

Her breath let out in a long exhale, allowing all of the hurt of remembering Nick’s pain to drain away with it. She was still scared, terrified perhaps, but Judy Hopps had never shied away from doing what she thought was right, even if she didn’t always understand for sure what that was. This time? This time she was sure. With that certainty and a new sense of purpose in mind, sleep claimed her quickly.

Most mornings, it was a roughly 50/50 split on who would be up first between Judy and Fru Fru. While bunnies were definitively early risers, arctic shrew sleep schedules were much less fixed. While they tended to try to keep a standard schedule for the sake of interacting with the rest of
mammalian society, old instincts died hard. After Judy’s exertions of the night prior and then her struggling to get to sleep, there would be no such contest this morning. Eventually, after it had passed a time where reasonable mammals would be considering lunch, Fru Fru finally roused the bunny in order to drag her to her overdue interrogation- and lunch.

“Juuuudy!” The high voice of the shrew finally reached a pitch that not even a near comatose rabbit could ignore.

Without lifting her ears or head, the lapine droned back, “Whaaaaaat?”

“Come on roomie, I’m hungry and we have simply got to do lunch.”

“Fru, you’re a shrew. You’re literally always hungry.”

“True!” the shrew squeaked back happily. “But, I’m not just hungry for food, darling. I’m starved for gossip over here. That’s why Koslov is on his way, so if you don’t want to be naked when he gets here, I suggest you drag that fluffy tail out of bed!”

The bunny grumbled dire threats of retribution as she rolled gracelessly out of bed. Despite still shaking off the dregs of sleep, the threat of Koslov walking in on her current state was enough to see her showered, dressed, and ready to go inside of ten minutes. Only a few more saw them safely seated at “The Library”, a bar and restaurant extremely popular with the college crowd.

The entire place was decorated to match its namesake, and popular rumor had it that the location was founded specifically so that students could come and drink while maintaining with full honesty that they’d been “At the library” all night. Books covered the walls, and booths of varying sizes were decorated to look like study cubicles. Unsurprisingly, it was a place where Judy felt comfortable, and Fru Fru planned to use that comfort to get the bunny to spill a little more about her foxy boyfriend.

First though, food needed to be ordered. Arctic shrews were obligate carnivores if one considered bugs to be meat. As Judy fought a hard battle to stay awake, Fru Fru ordered a mealworm chili and waited expectantly for the lapine to order her usual Caesar Salad wrap. Today, she would be surprised, but not disappointed.

“Bring me two cups of coffee and the biggest salad you have,” she said tiredly, but firmly.

“Ah, er… right on it!” replied the confused ocelot server.

She hadn't taken a full step away before the rabbit reached out to tap her gently on the shoulder.

“I'm concerned that what you heard was 'Bring me a big salad'. What I said was 'Bring me the biggest salad you have'."

Looking both more and less confused at the same time, the feline nodded again. “If you say so, bunny. Biggest salad we have, coming right up.”

“Outstanding,” the rabbit murmured with relief as the ocelot rushed away before Judy could stop her again.

There was less than three seconds of silence before the most cheerful interrogation ever recorded began from Fru Fru. The tiny shrew wanted to know everything that had happened the previous night, and seemed particularly entranced during Judy’s faithful retelling of their sparring match, and almost weeping with sympathy while the gray rabbit told her of Nick’s panic attack at the thought of Judy being afraid of him.
Throughout it all, Judy was reminded of how lucky she was to have Fru Fru in her life. Despite having over a hundred sisters, “girltalk” had never been a part of her life until she’d met up with her diminutive roommate. As her story wound to a close, and Judy explained her realization that she had taken more than she’d given, and that it was time to give back, Fru asked the obvious question.

“So! What’cha got in mind, darling?”

Judy took a deep breath. “I’m inviting him to my graduation to meet my parents.”

Fru Fru paused momentarily, shrugged, and resumed eating. “Okay, sounds good.”

The eyebrows of the gray lapine threatened to merge with her ears as they rose high onto her forehead. “‘Sounds good’? I just admitted I’m thinking about introducing the mammals who gave me fox spray to my fox boyfriend, and all you have to say is ‘Sounds good’?”

The arctic shrew shrugged again. “Are you planning on breaking up with Nick sometime soon?”

“No!” Judy huffed indignantly, her ears flattening against her head at the thought.

“Planning on never seeing your parents again?”

“Of course not!”

“Well, since you’re not dumping Nick or your parents, and you haven’t asked me to have Daddy ‘talk’ to anyone, they have to meet eventually. May as well be now. Daddy always taught me that putting off a confrontation only makes it a bigger mess to clean up when it finally comes.”

The bunny chose not to read too far into the implications of what “cleaning up the mess” likely meant for a mob boss, and instead focused purely on what was said. Her internal panic aside, Fru had a point. Whether or not Judy wanted to prove to Nick that she was fully invested in the relationship, he and her parents were going to have to meet eventually. Might as well be now, rather than after (and if!) they decided to be official mates. During the long seconds she was thinking, her ears steadily climbed back to straight up in excitement.

Filled with a renewed sense of purpose, the bunny quickly crafted a plan to run by her best friend.

“You’re absolutely right. I have no intention of quitting, so let’s do this. Here’s what I’m thinking. Final exams are this week and I should get my invitations next Monday once they know I’ve passed. I’ll invite Nick on a date for next Wednesday and I’ll give him my invitation in person. He’s already expecting to not really be able to see me much until after exams anyway, so I should be able to make it a wonderful surprise.”

Fru Fru grinned and clapped gleefully. “Judy! That’s a wonderful idea! Let me help you though, there’s a restaurant in Tundratown that serves all types of mammals and would be perfect. I’d recommend the chicken and the eggplant parmesan, respectively.”

The tiny shrew whipped out her phone and her fingers blurred across the screen, followed by a beep from Judy’s phone in her pocket.

“There, I’ve texted you the address. Just be there at 7:30 on Wednesday night and they’ll have a table waiting for you. You should wear that black dress!”

A flush shot through the bunny’s ears at the recollection of the way the dress made her feel almost entirely undressed, despite being ostensibly modest.
“Never gonna happen. I will wear the red dress again, though.”
“Judy… you can’t wear the same dress again so soon, he’ll think you only have one!”

The rabbit lifted an eyebrow. “And he wouldn’t be far wrong.”

Fru grinned conspiratorially. “Perhaps, but he doesn’t need to know that. Let me get you one more dress, and then I promise not to drag you shopping again until the wedding.”

Judy choked on her drink, coughing several times while her small friend sat across the table smiling. “Until the WHAT? We’re not even mates yet, let alone getting married!”

“Give it time, darling. Give it time.”

Moments later, Judy was spared from that terrifyingly awkward conversation by the reappearance of their waitress, somehow managing to carry what appeared to be an average sized lapine bath tub.

“One…” the ocelot grunted as she sat the bowl down heavily on the table. “…megafauna scale salad for tiny gray bunny.”

Silence came over the table as everyone looked from the bunny to the salad that was literally larger than she was.

“Will… you be needing anything else?” the server queried hesitantly.

A frighteningly predatory smile came over Judy’s face as she gathered her silverware. “Nope. This is perfect.”

Some time later, a much more energetic rabbit bounced out of the restaurant, reluctantly destined for the mall. An unstoppable force Judy Hopps may be, but the daughter of a mafia Don was an utterly immovable object. It was with that and the fact that Koslov was her ride which resulted in a second trip to the local mall for the shrew and lapine friends. This one was a simpler affair than the first, as they only needed to find a single dress for a clearly defined purpose, and it only took them an hour to find the perfect one.

The duo were leaving with an emerald colored dress that matched Nick’s eyes and beautifully contrasted with both her gray fur and amethyst eyes. It was the shape of the thing, though, that would surely induce panting in her foxy boyfriend. The top half of the rabbit was covered only by a wide stretch of fabric that originated from her torso, covered her bosom and then connected behind her neck without covering an inch of gray fur on her back. In terms of length, it was more than long enough to pass inspection even by her father, but slits that went up to the mid-thigh provided an excellent view of her toned legs, something he likely would not approve of at all. Nick, on the other paw, would be fortunate if he escaped the evening without drooling. Given that she was going to invite him to the catastrophe that meeting her parents was likely to be, she thought it was the least she could do for him.

After parting ways with Fru, Judy still had one more thing to do: actually invite the fox in question on a date. As sad as it was to say, calling Nick was always somewhat stressful. If he didn’t answer, she couldn’t help but wonder whether it was for boring and banal reasons, or because he was with a client. She knew what his profession was going into the relationship, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t starting to hurt. Next Wednesday though was about showing her commitment to their relationship, Nick had more than demonstrated his own.

Shaking her head to clear the thoughts that were floating around, Judy dialed a number she now
knew by heart. It rang only twice before Nick picked up.

“Well if it isn’t Carrots! It’s been forever since we last talked!” came the smooth voice of her vulpine boyfriend.

Judy adopted a mock tone of amazement to reply, “I know! It just felt like it’d been years and I figured I’d give you a ring to find out how you were doing after all this time.”

The fox made an amused chuff. “Just as amazing as ever, sweetheart. I’m a bit surprised to hear from you though, don’t you have exams this week?”

“I do, which is why I want to schedule our date for next week instead of this one.”

Nick seemed to pause for a moment to think. “Did we have a date scheduled for this week?”

“Nope!” Judy chirped happily. “But we have one on the schedule now! Dress nicely and I’ll be at our bar at 7PM to pick you up.”

Since they still weren’t mates, Judy had yet to visit wherever it was that Nick actually lived. Instead, they tended to meet up at the bar where their relationship began and head out from there. This was advantageous, because it wouldn’t arouse Nick’s suspicion any further that there was anything special about that particular evening. That didn’t mean that the sly fox wasn’t already wondering about her instructions regarding his clothing, though.

“Dress nicely, huh? Where are we going that requires me to dress up? Last I heard, you were a broke college student. If you think I’m going to Bug Burga in a suit, you got another thing coming, Bun Bun.”

“It’s a surprise!” she teased. “No telling, no hints! I know how you are.”

Nick sighed loudly. “Come on rabbit, you know this is going to drive me crazy all week. You can’t keep me on the hook like this forever.”

“Not forever, only until next Wednesday when we arrive at our destination. I’ll gladly tell you anything you want to know about where we’re going then.”

Judy could imagine Nick’s playful glare as he realized the meaninglessness of what she was offering. “You are a cruel, cruel bunny.”

It took all of Judy’s effort to suppress her excitement enough to tease him one final time. “Awww, is the sly fox sad about being hustled by the dumb bunny? I’ll make it up to you on our date, I have big news.”

“That doesn’t make me feel better about waiting, rabbit!” came the exasperated voice.

“I know, Slick, but don’t worry. It’ll be here before you know it. Don’t forget to dress up, and dress warm!”

“I will, I have my own surprise for you anyway. I’d been planning on holding it for a bit longer, but this seems like it’ll be a good time for it.”

Judy paused, trying to think of what surprise the fox might have for her. He’d already taken her out for her birthday, and Christmas wasn’t even on the horizon yet. Maybe she could get a hint if she sweet talked him a bit.
“Oh really?” the rabbit purred as demurely as she could. “And what might my handsome fox have in mind?”

Nick’s smirk was clear, even over the phone. “It wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you, dumb bunny.”

He paused for a long moment before continuing.

“Also…” he sighed, “It’s not the sort of thing I feel like we should talk about over the phone.”

Long ears laid flat against Judy’s back as she considered every possible negative implication. ‘We need to talk’ was usually code for something awful like ‘We need to start seeing other people’ or ‘I have cancer’, or…

‘Stop this,’ she berated herself internally. ‘He wouldn’t have told you he had a surprise if it was going to be something awful, that doesn’t make any sense!’

Unbidden and unwanted, the voice of doubt sprang into her head, with the sickly sweet tone it always carried.

‘Don’t be so sure... The entire reason you wanted to see him was to reassure him that you’re committed to this relationship. What makes you think he hasn’t decided that you’re not, and his big gift is letting you off the hook?’

She managed to get her internal thoughts under control long enough to articulate a response while her eyes misted over at her imagined scenarios. “That… that’ll be fine. Whatever you need.”

On the other end of the line, Nick heard the resignation in her voice and his own ears flattened in panic as his eyes widened.


‘Hopefully’, Judy repeated in her head. Beyond just his words, his tone wasn’t the one of a fox about to give his girlfriend terrible news. He sounded… nervous? Frightened even, as if he were about to leap into a canyon while hoping, but not expecting, there to be water at the bottom of it.

Suddenly it clicked, this was the same tone he used whenever he was being self-deprecating, or feeling like he didn’t deserve her. Whatever it was he wanted to tell her, the feeling that he didn’t deserve her was something she could work with. After her offer to introduce him as her boyfriend to her parents, any and all doubt she wasn’t in it for keeps should be gone. For now though, a little reassurance would likely go a long way.

“I trust you, Nick. It’s going to be hard to wait, but I trust you and I’m looking forward to seeing you.”

She didn’t have to be able to see him to imagine the look of relief that crossed his face whenever she reminded him that she trusted and wanted him in her life. She saw it often enough that she would likely remember it for the rest of her life. His eyes would close momentarily as if letting her words wash over him like a wave, and if she were present, he would take a deep draw of her scent to ground him in the moment. The mental image brought a smile to her face before he made his reply.

“Thanks, Carrots. It means a lot.”

“You’re welcome, Slick. I can’t wait to see you.”
An hour later found her safely back at her shared dorm with Fru Fru, rummaging through the sparse contents of the fridge looking for an early dinner before settling in to study for her final exams. Per the usual, Fru had immediately launched into an interrogation that the ZPD would use as a superb example of technique regarding her call with her foxy boyfriend, and hadn’t let up until satisfied the situation was well under control. With that crucial duty fulfilled, less important things could be taken care of.

“Oh!” the shrew shouted from her position on the micro-sized desk she was using to study at. “Before I forget, some mail came for you today. It’s on the table!”

Rolling her eyes, the rabbit pawed through the usual mix of pre-approved credit card offers that should count as predatory lending to college students, junk mail, and notifications from the dorm RA that nobody would ever read. Midway through the pile though, was a letter from an address she recognized as being the Zootopia Police Academy.

Of course, the only reason she recognized it was for the crushing series of disappointments, and she wasn’t even sure why they would be contacting her at all at this point. Their last correspondence had been a fairly succinct “No”, after all.

“Dear Ms. Hopps,” she read aloud to herself as she wondered what new and exciting reason they’d found to decline her application.

“We are pleased to inform you that your application to the ZPD has been accepted under a new program from Mayor Lionheart known as the Mammal Inclusion Initiative. Details will follow in approximately a week, after a press conference to make this new program public. Please note that early release of this information will forfeit your place in the academy.”

When sufficiently stressed or shocked, even modern rabbits are fully capable of going tharn, losing the ability to move, speak, or otherwise interact with the outside world. For several seconds, this is precisely where Judy Hopps found herself for the first time in her life. Her entire life had been leading up to this moment, and until she’d met a sly fox named Nicholas Wilde, she’d been ready to give up on everything. She’d almost made peace with the fact that that dream was never going to happen for her, but here she was with proof in her paws that she was going to get her chance. It might be a slim chance, but Judy had never needed good odds to make it worth trying.

It was that final realization which finally broke the spell that reading those words for the first time produced, and while later she’d have dozens of questions about what had changed, for now she was a small rabbit with more excitement than any mammal smaller than a rhino could contain. Her neighbors could have been forgiven for assuming a small bomb had gone off.

“I DID IT!!” She screamed at a volume and pitch that had every canine for three blocks covering their ears.

So enraptured was the bunny with her celebrations that Fru Fru’s fall from her chair went entirely unnoticed as Judy binkied high into the air.

“I’M GONNA BE A COP!” the rabbit screamed again as she landed on the ground and her expression shifted from elated to dazed.

“Oh.. Oh Serendipity…” she whispered. “I’m going to actually be a cop.”

As if to prove that today was truly going to be a day for firsts, for the first time in her life, Judy Hopps took after her father.
“I’m gonna be a cop…” she repeated a final time before she swayed once, and promptly fainted.

Chapter End Notes

So! Thank you one and all for the messages of support, inquiries about the health of myself and my fiance, and continued encouragement. All of you mean the world to me. Special thanks to DrummerMax, ADeadMissionary, and TwoCentNuisance for making this chapter readable and fun. All of you are the best, they're superbestest. Yes, that's a word... as of now.

Life has adamantly refused to calm down, but rest assured that neither I nor this story are dead. I'm still trying to figure out a writing schedule where I can reliably sit down and chew through this, because I'm extremely excited for the upcoming talk between Nick and Judy, and then for the meeting of the parents. :) (Also more smut, as soon as these two can get their heads out from under their tails and commit!) At the moment plan on it being a few weeks before the next chapter comes out, though I'm going to try to divest myself of another hobby to try to pick up some more time to work on this for y'all. Until then!
Rumors of my demise....

Chapter Summary

...are more accurate than I'd hope, but less accurate than you fear.

First things first. I'm not dead. That said, it's been an exciting time and quite frankly if I explained it all I'm seriously concerned nobody would believe me. If you're interested in the full explanation, check the bottom of this post, but if you're not then just enjoy what's coming.

SO! With that in mind, a huge shout out to ScaraMedn and BlueberryAndHoney for helping drag me out of a bad place and make writing fun again. This is a somewhat long winded way of saying I'm moving forward again, and as a reward for your patience I'm posting a preview of the upcoming chapter. It should be full of feelings, reveals, and more than a little sexy. Enjoy!

Exams came with the speed that anyone who has ever dreaded or looked forward to a thing can understand. This is to say, it seemed to take both an eternity and no time at all. Each day dragged on seemingly forever, but before Judy felt anywhere near prepared, the scheduled dates had already arrived. In what would be a surprise to precisely no-one who'd taken classes with the determined and aggressive rabbit, when she got her grades in the mail a couple days later she had passed with flying colors.

This just left one very important thing to do, invite a fox to her graduation and try to minimize the carnage. If she searched hard enough for the silver lining, this was probably going to be fantastic training for riot control.

It was precisely that goal which had her walking into the same seedy bar that she'd first met Nick in what seemed like another lifetime ago. To say that she was overdressed would have been an understatement something along the lines of calling Sahara Square warm. You weren't wrong, but you were miles away from really explaining the situation.

Her backless dress drew the eyes of every mammal in the bar with even a passing interest in female lapines, and had a few others reevaluating their position on the matter. Judy was completely oblivious to all of this, having eyes only for a red fox leaning against the bar. The first thing she noticed was the way Nick was looking at her with a gaze that could only be described as frighteningly predatory. It was hungry, barely restrained, and it sent a surge of warmth from the tips of her ears to the apex between her thighs.

Eyes moving down his body, the next thing she observed was that Nick had clearly taken her repeated instructions to “dress nicely" as something of a personal challenge. His suit was an exercise in excess, clearly tailor fit and made of expensive material. The outer shell was a matte black that served only to draw eyes to other parts of the wearer.
Contrasting this was his royal purple shirt, work with no tie and the top two buttons undone to reveal more than a touch of creamy fur. On any other mammal it would have looked sloppy, but on him it just looked sexy. A long wool coat draped over the chair next to him indicated that he had taken her admonishment to dress warm to heart, as well as dressing nicely. If he wanted to seduce her, the only thing more certain than her panties on his floor were death and taxes.

Judy tried to hide her reaction, she really did, but the flush that shot through her ears and the slight quiver at the tips could not be contained. It wasn't necessary to ask if Nick noticed, the widening of his grin to show too many teeth was a dead giveaway. She did manage though to walk directly and purposefully to him, something the many interested parties scattered throughout the bar observed with great disappointment. As she neared her vulpine date, his nostrils flared and his pupils narrowed to slits for the briefest of moments before he reached out to law a paw on her arm.

“See something you like, Fluff?” Nick rumbled out as his expression melted back into his usual easy smile.

*So that's how he wants to do this. Two can play that game, Mr. Wilde.*

“Oh,” Judy said lightly as she stroked at his collar with one finger. "Nothing much. Just a scruffy fox who thinks a bit highly of himself.”

Nick chuckled softly. “And is that why I smelled ‘nothing much’ three steps before you actually got to me?”

The gray bunny giggled behind a paw before embracing him warmly and then stepping back to place a paw on his chest and gaze affectionately at him. “Exactly. You ready to find out where we’re going?”

Vulpine eyes narrowed in mock annoyance while he stuck his tongue out in an adolescent gesture. “You know full well I’ve been ready since you asked me on this date without telling me where we were going, rabbit.”

She paused, placing one finger on her face in a gesture of innocent contemplation. “Gosh… I could tell you now, but where would be the fun in that?”

A very canid whine left Nick at the prospect of continuing to be kept on the hook. He let his ears flatten back against his head, his tail droop low between his legs, and he crouched down so he could look up at the bunny with the biggest, saddest eyes he could possibly muster.

Judy gazed at him levelly for a long moment, trying to hold her determination to not reveal their destination. While she didn’t want to admit it, the ‘sad fox’ act was devastatingly effective. When he added a pleading, submissive lick to the side of her neck, she broke.

“FINE!” she burst out with a giggle that drew the attention of the bar for the second time that evening. “Cheese and crackers, Slick, those eyes should be a registered weapon.”

The fox in question beamed in delight at her muttered grumbling about ‘sly foxes’ and ‘not playing fair’. After allowing her what he felt was sufficient time to lick her wounds, he interjected, “So, I believe you were about to tell me where I would have the pleasure of your company, this evening?”

Judy grinned at the potential innuendo before replying, ears quivering in excitement. “Tonight, we’re going to the Ice Box.”
So, a full explanation was promised for those interested in what exactly the hell knocked Erinnyes flat on his ass. (Nothing but RL crap follows this moment. If you're not of a mind to hear me complain about life, here is your stopping point.)

Still reading? Here goes. About two months ago I was quietly informed behind the scenes that I was about to be laid off in an upcoming wave of "workforce reduction", and that I should probably start taking action immediately. So I did, leaping into action and calling old contacts to find out who was hiring. As luck would have it, an old client happened to need someone to be a lead on an extremely prestigious project that would be a huge promotion and raise. It was basically a dream job, so I immediately jumped into that hiring process.

Two weeks later, the layoffs came as expected, which was... a huge hit, even though I knew it was coming. I'm getting married early next year, and bought a house six months ago, and being unemployed was not on my roadmap to paying for these things. It was okay though, I had this awesome job coming through, and I was able to find some contract work to hold me over until then. It was all but a sure thing according to several sources. Well, five interviews later, I was turned down. Let this be an important lesson regarding how many eggs one should have in a single basket.

Since then I've been scrambling to do applications, interviews, contract work, and stay afloat until I can find new work. There's even more things going on, but those fall into the category of "things nobody would believe if I explained", so I'm going to quit while I'm ahead(ish).

So, that's where I've been, and why I've been quiet. I am moving forward again, and I hope to get a fully edited and cleaned up chapter released sooner rather than later. I'm looking forward to it.

Thanks!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

So, I have a new job, my wedding is almost all the way planned, and I’ve managed to keep everyone safely in their vehicles instead of in vehicle crashes. I am so sorry for the delay, but rather than waste everyone’s time further, on with the show!

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Judy grinned at the potential innuendo before replying. “Tonight, we’re going to the Ice Box.”

Nick rolled his eyes in disbelief, before putting his paws in his pockets and laying his ears half back. “I assume that what you mean by ‘The Ice Box’ is that we will be dining in the walk in fridge for this bar. Because there is no sane universe in which you mean the restaurant in Tundra town.”

“As romantic as a table in a fridge sounds, Mr. Wilde, the restaurant is precisely what I meant.” She paused for a moment to adopt a look of faux incredulity at the stunned look on her date’s face. “Why so surprised? Did you think just because I’m a broke college student I can’t make a reservation there?”

“Yep, absolutely. 100%,” Nick deadpanned back at her.

It was at this moment that the path forward became clear to the rabbit. She’d spent days agonizing over exactly how to go about asking Nick to go to her graduation and meet her parents, when the most obvious solution in the world presented itself to her on a silver platter. Serendipity herself had to be cackling madly.
“Oh, really?”

The rabbit smirked and put one hand on her hip, a look that was as concerning as it was enticing. It inevitably meant Nick was about to be hustled into something, but somehow he could never find it in himself to try too hard to avoid it. The fact that her hustles usually ended with them making out on a couch had nothing to do with it. Probably.

“Wanna bet?”

Nick’s eyes narrowed as he evaluated the situation. She was giving off all the signs of confidence, but there was just no way a college student had swung a reservation at The Icebox in less than three months. This should be a safe bet, but she still had that look…

*Hell with it, let's see what the bunny has behind door number one. How bad could whatever it is she's plotting be?*

“The stakes?”

“If I have a reservation, you have to accompany me to a stuffy event I don't want to go to without you.”

Nick didn't even blink before answering.

“Done. But if you lose, you have to do that thing you did with your ears last time I was over.”

Judy blushed but managed to maintain her composure.

“Deal.” she said, before smirking slightly for the second time. “But you should know Slick, you wasted your bet.” The rabbit paused to observe the confused look on Nick’s face before dropping her bombshell with a sultry voice “I would have done that for you again just for the asking.”

Judy giggled at the crestfallen face of her foxy date, and looked at him with an expression that was full of amusement, warmth, and love. “Don't ever change, dumb fox.”

One Zoober ride later saw them dropped off at the renowned Icebox. The exterior of the building was clearly intended to reflect its name, being entirely done in an industrial style to make it resemble, well, an ice box. The entire exterior was dark wood and darker steel, with the windows recessed slightly into the wall and tinted to give the appearance of not having windows at all. Finally, the doors were hammered iron and clearly extremely heavy. Were it not for the ursine doorman who held open the door with a bow, it wouldn't have mattered if Judy had a reservation or not. They simply wouldn’t have been able to get inside.

To say that Nick was surprised when they were escorted to what he knew was one of the most popular tables at The Icebox would be an understatement. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that he was simply in a state of numb acceptance. Here was a bunny who’d seen him as a mammal rather than as a tool, had loved him and accepted his love in turn, shown that she was courageous, fierce, and loyal.

Perhaps one day she’d quit finding new ways to surprise and impress him, but it wouldn’t be today. If Nick had his choice, she would have the rest of their lives to try, but she didn’t need to know that yet. After all, he’d recognized for some time that regardless of her decisions, she would forever be a part of him. He’d patched up the cracks in his soul with her goodness, and would never want to be without her again.

Those romantic feelings would have to wait, at least for now. Judy was clearly in love with him,
but she had her own mind to make up about what that meant. Nick would sooner declaw himself than attempt to guilt her into staying just to preserve his own happiness. It was with that in mind that he allowed his attention to be pulled to the decor of the restaurant itself. Lavish didn’t do it justice, Nick reckoned that each table probably cost about as much as an average medium sized mammal car. As part of the ongoing theme of “rustic”, most of the furniture was made out of Bocote wood, known for its rich color, beautiful patterns, and patently ridiculous cost.

The opulence of the restaurant, however, was useful as far more than just eye candy. While rich mammals tended to be fantastically judgmental, in front of their peers they tended to do so exceptionally quietly. What wealthy mammal of status wanted to admit that they were at all concerned with a bunny who walked in leading a fox? A truly important individual had no time for such mundane mysteries. For that reason, despite the fact that they were inarguably the most interesting thing to walk through the door in recent memory, they were entirely unmolested. Fru-Fru had been counting on this to give them time to talk. There were secrets and surprises to share, after all.

Their waitress for the evening was a beautiful snow leopard who did her absolute best to appear ambivalent to the comically mismatched couple at the small mammal table. It would have been impressive if her success had come anywhere close to matching her effort. Rather than disgust though, she stared at them with gleeful interest, prompting Nick to defuse the tension in his usual fashion as he took his seat after holding Judy’s chair for her.

With one of his rare grins that was more happy than smug, he shed some light on the situation for the intrigued feline. “Yes she is, yes I am, yes we are, yes we have, and no you may not.”

The waitress blinked. “Err… I follow everything but the last bit. What is it that I’m not meant to do?”

The smug returned. “Call her cute.” He paused for a moment to judge the distance between himself and his date. “Only I get to do that, and she really is the cutest thing. Did you see her tail?”

Silence reigned for a long moment as both bunny and leopard processed what he’d said before reacting simultaneously.

“Cheese and crackers, Nick!” Judy hissed before kicking wildly under the table in search of his shins.

Nick’s grin went from “smug” to “smuggest” as he scooted fractionally backwards to evade her paws. He would pay for that later, he knew. Totally worth it.

At the same time, the waitress appeared to be attempting not to laugh, cry, or (more likely) both. Odds were that the tears were simply because her manager would likely use words like “unprofessional” to describe rolling on the floor laughing maniacally at the absolute madness of the scene in front of her, and that was a tragedy because it was precisely what she wanted to do. The odd couple before her had entered the restaurant with poise and grace, but were now acting for all the world like a pair of kits trying to pull each other’s ears.

Rather than give in to those urges, the waitress managed to gasp out that her name was Fabienne and that she would be back with water (and her composure) momentarily. This left Nick and Judy alone at the table for the first time, and as both mammals wiped tears of laughter from under their eyes and settled down, the weight of the evening finally started to sink in.

It was clear to Nick’s well practiced eye that the rabbit across from him was nervous. Her earlier bravado had fled, and in its place was a mix of hope and worry accented by her ears raising and
lowering depending on which was most prominent in her mind at the time. If they were going to enjoy their evening, it was time to start pulling splinters.

“So, Carrots. You going to tell me what’s on your mind or am I going to have to guess?” His voice took on a teasing tone and his green eyes sparkled with mischief. “I warn you in advance that all my guesses revolve around your tail or mine.”

Unbeknownst to Nick, the terms of their earlier bet were weighing heavily on the bunny across from him. She’d meant to show him tonight how much she cared, and that she reciprocated the trust he’d placed in her, but the first thing she’d done that night was trick him into promising to meet her parents without telling him. These were the same parents who’d sent her to Zootopia with Fox-Away and whose advice for her whole life had been to not trust any predator and foxes in particular. She’d tricked him into walking into a firing squad, and he’d trustingly followed her right in.

Fabienne returned to drop off their waters and Judy placed an order for an appetizer she’d clearly picked out in advance. The name was unfamiliar to Nick, but Judy’s uncharacteristically serious expression lead him to wait for her to speak.

With gray paws wrapped firmly around her glass and eyes steadily on the table, Judy spoke.

“Nick.. I owe you an apology.”

The fox blinked. “For what, Fluff?”

“I brought you here tonight to show you that I was all in on this relationship and that you could trust me, but the very first thing I did was hustle you into doing something just so that I wouldn’t have to ask you directly. If you’re mad at me and want to leave, I won’t blame you.”

Nick’s head tilted in a very canid expression of confusion. “Is this about the bet? I thought you just wanted me to go to some dry, boring event with you?”

In lieu of response, Judy reached into her purse and pulled out the embossed invitation with Nick’s name on it, sliding it across the table to him. Rather than looking angry though, he looked downright… touched, like it was one of the kindest things anyone had ever done for him and he had no idea what to say.

“Nick, my parents are going to be at my graduation. I’m inviting you to my graduation both because I want you to be there, and because I want you to meet them. You already know about my run in with another fox when I was a kit, and you should also be aware that my parents responded exactly like you’d think a couple of bunnies who were already suspicious of predators did. I won’t give you the whole, ugly story, but the punchline is that one of the reasons they were so against me coming to Zootopia is because… is because…”

Judy trailed off and looked away from the table entirely, unable to finish the sentence. Nick saved her the trouble, completing her sentence in a tone as flat and cold as the frozen ponds outside.

“Foxes. Because of all the foxes.”

It took all of Judy’s willpower to not pull her ears in front of her face, instead she choose just to nod slowly in confirmation of the obvious.

Nick sighed, his initial shock giving way to grudging acceptance. It wasn’t like he hadn’t suspected most of this. Country rabbits tended to be suspicious of predators by nature, and given that a fox had scarred one of their daughters Nick wasn’t even sure he could blame them for being more than a little speciest against foxes in particular.
“Fluff, I won’t pretend I’m not a little hurt that you choose to use a bet to ask me to meet your parents, but I also won’t pretend I don’t understand why you were afraid to ask me. What I don’t get is why now? To the best of my knowledge, you haven’t actually told anyone about us, let alone your parents.” He chuckled with a faint hint of bitterness and the familiar tones of self-deprecation. “I was starting to think you might not ever want to.”

Judy looked up, releasing the death grip on her glass for the first time in the several long minutes so that she could cover his paw with her own smaller one. Not for the first time it struck her how different their paws were, and how much bigger his were than hers. She hoped that it wasn’t a bad omen, that she was able to cover so little of him. At the touch of her fur, Nick looked away.

“That’s exactly why I have to, Nick.”

Ears flat, Nick turned his attention back towards his date as she continued speaking, gaining strength with every word.

“Nick… for the last few months you’ve given me so much. You’ve helped me study, you’ve comforted me when I was nervous or worried, taken me to see more of Zootopia than I knew there was, and you even forgave me for making you think I was afraid of you. I screwed up so badly that day that I didn’t even have the right to ask for your forgiveness, but you gave it to me anyway. I love you, Nick. I want to be your bunny and I want you to be my fox, fangs and all. That can’t be if I’m not even willing to tell my parents the truth about the mammal I hope one day to ask three times to be my mate.”

Auburn ears snapped to focus on Judy at her last words, while his eyes expressed nothing short of shock at her last statement. Both that she knew the tradition, and that she’d expressed her intention to follow it.

“I did my homework, Nick. I know that vixens are usually the ones who propose in fox relationships, and I know that the most binding vows are given three times. It won’t be tonight, and it won’t be tomorrow, but I want to be yours one day, if you’ll still have me.”

For the first time since his panic attack, and only the second time in all the months she’d known him, Nick looked like he was on the verge of tears. His ears were pinned back fully, his claws were digging into the table top, and it looked for all the world like not causing a scene was the only thing keeping him from scooping the bunny out of her chair and into his arms. The vulpine’s restraint only went so far, and he settled for moving his other paw so that he could take Judy’s smaller one in both of his.

Judy marveled momentarily at the warmth provided by being totally enveloped by her fox, and wished in that moment that they could be alone so that she could properly express the depths of her feelings for him.

It was, perhaps, fortunate that a momentary interruption came in the form of their waitress returning with their appetizer, but seeing the emotional state of the pair lead the snow leopard to do little more than express a hope that they enjoyed their food and that she would return in a moment to take their full order. This break allowed for both mammals to regain their composure, and for Nick to examine what had been brought.

What sat on the table in front of him was a board filled with various types of fruit and a mixture of sweet and savory dipping sauces. It looked and smelled absolutely delicious, and Nick had certainly brought his appetite with him. Before he could dig in, though, Judy spoke again.

“Nick, I said that tonight was about showing you that I was committed to us, and I hope you won’t
be too offended that I’ve already picked out our dishes tonight as part of that. For starters, I know that
despite everything here being fruit, there’s not a single thing here you can’t eat. I wanted to show you
that I know you’re more than a predator, Nick, and I’ll do everything I can to make sure my parents
can see that, too. If they can’t anyway? That’s on them and it won’t change a single thing between
us. You deserve nothing less than that.”

As Nick processed Judy’s words, the nagging voice in the back of his mind, the one that insisted
their relationship had an expiration date set shortly after meeting her parents, at least for now, fell
silent.

A brief look over the serving platter confirmed that Judy was right. Everything present was edible by
all foxes and considered delicious by most, and it only further confirmed that Judy had done her
homework on their customs and requirements. Not for the first time, but perhaps most strongly this
time, the fox realized that Judy truly did care just as much about him as she professed to.

“Thank you, Judy. That means more to me than I can tell you.”

Judy grinned and popped an apple slice into her mouth. “I have a guess, and I’m not done yet.”

Eating forestalled the need for further conversation. Each mammal was content to graze slowly
and take a moment to collect their thoughts. The waitress came and went, with Judy this time
whispering her and Nick’s order directly into her ears. Her look of surprise gave Nick pause, but he
also knew that all would be answered in just a few minutes, so he didn’t invest the effort in
attempting to drag any further information out of his lapine companion.

Sooner than he’d have guessed, the waitress reappeared with their main course and sat a covered
dish down in front of each mammal. Nick’s sensitive nose was the first to detect something
unexpected, but it wasn’t until the covers were removed and a ruby red cut of seared sesame tuna
was exposed that he actually finally believed his own sense of smell.

It was an odd thing for a rabbit to deliberately order meat for a dining companion, but he definitely
wasn’t going to complain! His smile was wide enough to reveal his teeth, and his fork appeared in
his paw as if it had materialized there. The first bite was delicious, the taste of tuna, sesame seeds,
and soy sauce combined in a delectable morsel that was arguably the best he’d ever had.

Judy waited for his grin to turn into a smile of contentment before speaking again with a smile of
her own. “Before you devour that like one of your ancient ancestors, let me explain. Our first dish
was meant to show that I’d put forth the same level of effort towards understanding your species as
you had mine, and that I knew you were more than a predator. This one is meant to show that I do
understand that you still are a predator, and I accept you for that. I love you for who you are, Nick.
Fangs, claws, coarse fur, and all. I wouldn’t have you any other way, because then you might not be
the mammal I fell in love with.”

The red fox paused to gather his thoughts, setting down his fork and staring contemplatively at the
candle between them.

“No, Judy, I know that I’ve told you that red foxes in my profession don’t tend to live long, and that it
has to do with our urge to live mate. Over the last few months with you, I’ve started struggling with
that myself. In the last few weeks in particular, it’s gotten bad. When I started wondering who I
could call to give me something to take the edge off, I knew it was time. Last week I closed the black
book for good, and I quit. I’m officially an unemployed fox with no marketable skills, but I’m all
yours if you’ll still have me.”

For a long moment, Judy was entirely silent with her ears flat against her back and her paws
motionless on the table. Her frozen state dragged on until Nick started to become nervous that he’d said something wrong. Almost interminably slowly, her ears started to pick up, and his eyes followed their upward progress until they stood as straight up as he’d ever seen them get and started to quiver. Something was building, definitely. But what?

Finally, a single word burst from the bunny like a small bomb.

“YES!” the bunny shouted as she punched the air in joy. “Of course I’ll still have you!”

Nick was taken aback by the enthusiasm in her words. He’d thought, hoped, she would be pleased, but the sheer force of joy in her words was beyond his wildest dreams. There wasn’t a quick fix for decades of mistreatment and years on the streets, but for the first time, Nick thought that with Judy by his side, he might be able to finally become the fox Judy saw when she looked at him.

He was interrupted from his musings by a warm weight and two small arms wrapping themselves around his neck, pulling him towards the bunny who’d left from her chair to be by his side. Judy had resisted the urge to simply crawl into his lap and cuddle him, but only just, and only because getting thrown out of the restaurant before they could enjoy their food would truly be a travesty. After a long moment and some sniffing that Nick would later deny, Judy returned to her seat to finally enjoy the meal with her ma… boyfriend, that she’d been planning for so long.

After the earlier outburst, it was silently agreed that it might be best if they finished their meal and exited with all possible haste and what was left of their dignity. Judy’s cheering had drawn far more attention than was ideal, and it was time to head out. It was with that in mind that they summoned Manchas to take them back to warmer climates, and left their coats with him as they happily wandered the streets of the Savannah Central, arm in arm.

Thanks to their height difference, Judy was able to comfortably snug her head up against her fox’s side, taking in deep breaths of his violet tinged scent. To most rabbits, that scent said “Danger!”, but to Judy it said “Home”. Nick had helped her towards her dream, believed in her, fought for her, and had now given up a lucrative job so that he could be hers alone. The only thing missing from the evening had been dessert, but perhaps that didn’t have to be the case.

Both were so lost in thought that their first clue to the presence of a van trying to pull out of the alley they were walking in front of was the sound of screeching tires and a blaring horn.

“Watch where you’re going!” came the angry voice of the ram driver. Judy’s eye twitched at the rude interruption, and she jumped high enough to slam both front paws down on the hood.

She held herself up on the hood by her front paws long enough to yell back with equal fervor, “Hey! We’re walking here!”

Several more minutes of moderately aimless wandering brought them to a solution to having missed out on dessert earlier. A charming, retro, ice cream shop, straight out of the days when diners were the place to be for younger mammals on a date. It was perfect. It seemed largely like it catered to larger mammals, but that just meant they could get two scoops and share! After all, the sheer amount of salad Judy had eaten the other day had impressed the staff and frightened some of the kits.

It didn’t take much convincing for a giggling Judy to drag Nick by the paw into the ice cream shop for a treat, even if he did yawn and try to pretend he was ready to call it a night. It was late, and they were the only patrons, so the couple would have it all to themselves. They were so lost in each other that neither of them noticed the shocked look the elephant behind the counter was giving them until he spoke.
“Err… Is everything okay, Miss?” The proprietor was clearly taken aback and moderately uncomfortable at the sight of a laughing bunny dragging a fox into an elephant ice cream shop. It was as if she’d walked in wearing underpants on her head, and saw absolutely nothing wrong with it.

“Yep!” the bunny chirped happily back him. “My boyfriend and I were just out for a walk, saw your lovely shop, and decided to pop in for a late night dessert!”

The elephant blinked several times. Usually he’d just tell any fox who strolled in to get out, but this was way too weird to pass up. A walking, talking, episode of Furpley’s Believe it or Not had just walked into his store, and it remained to be seen if it was real, or a camera crew was about to jump out and reveal the prank.

“Sure, why not.” he grumbled in as close to a normal tone as he could imagine. “What’ll it be?”

“One elephant scale scoop of butterscotch pecan, and…” she trailed off, looking at her date.

“Strawberry for me, please.” Nick finished happily.

Shortly afterwards, ice cream and money changed hands, the happy couple sat down at a table, and the elephant just quietly observed them interacting. He definitely had some rather unkind opinions about foxes, but this one was well dressed, polite, and was clearly ears over tail in love with the bunny sitting across from him.

What struck him the most was just how… very normal they looked together. Predator and prey they may have been, but the affection between them was just as real as it was for any other of the many couples that had walked through his doors. It was something to think about, later.

To Nick and Judy though, complicated musings on the subject of foxes, rabbits, and interspecies relationships between the two were the farthest possible things from their mind. Judy had successfully invited Nick to meet her parents, and Nick had revealed his change in employment to her, and both were happier and more content than they had ever been before. They still had rivers to cross and challenges to navigate, but never before had it seemed so possible.

Finally, when the bowls were nearly as empty as biology and physics would allow them to get, and the store was preparing to close, they left the same way they arrived. Paw in paw. Manchas had long since gone to sleep, and they would be taking separate Zoobers to their respective homes. It had been a glorious night, and while neither of them were eager to see it come to a close, both were content with the outcome of the evening.

As they embraced on the sidewalk, waiting for their rides to arrive, Judy asked the question that had been nagging at her since things had calmed down.

“So, now that you’ve retired from your main job, what is it that you intend to do next? Rent isn’t cheap in the big city, after all.”

“Oh.” the fox said with a small grin as he gazed up at the words “Jumbeaux’s Café” hung prominently over the store they had just left. “I’m sure I’ll think of something.”
Thank you for reading! Please leave comments, concerns, or feedback. This is my first story and I'd love to hear what everyone has to say.

I'm going to aim for a rough release cycle of one chapter per week. This should not be taken as gospel. Some will come sooner, some may come later. What I will promise is that I will not simply vanish and not tell everyone what's up. Thanks!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!