Let's Go Do the Thing
by Yeah_JSmith

Summary

Sometimes you get ideas you know aren't going anywhere, and then you have beginnings to and snippets from stories you'll never write. I've decided this is where mine are going to rest. I'm a WildeHopps shipper, so it'll be mostly that.
Bark at the Moon

Chapter Summary

According to prophecy, vaguely-mortal con artist Nick Wilde is apparently destined to be the consort of the moon goddess. Judy Hopps, bored cop on forced medical leave, might be his only chance at defying fate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This bunny, Nick laments, will be the death of him.

Every evening she comes into the shop in her police blues, usually for several hours. Every evening she has another book and a bag full of files with her, and every evening her smile tugs his irritatingly existent heartstrings.

*(Chordae tendinae, he reminds himself, *strung between the tricuspid and mitral valves and papillary muscles. Nothing to do with emotions.)*

The distinction is important, not because anyone cares, but because this con hinges on successfully passing as a medical student. He knows a lot more about muscles and bones than he ever wanted to, and some of the stuff he’s researched makes him glad he’ll never get sick. Cancer? Ebola? *Mange*? Whose idiotic ideas were those? Honestly, the gods are a disaster. They are why, in every dimension, mammals can’t have nice things.

In another timeline, he’s a paramedic right now, and this charming – no, annoying, she’s *annoying* – bunny is his partner. In a different timeline, he’s a cartoon who became a cop, again, as her partner. He can’t make sense of this whole timeline thing, though, because he was never trained to use the powers his gazillion-times-great-grandfather passed down. Why did *he* have to inherit the stupid? Probably because he’ll never have kits. He’s quite literally the last of his family. Being a descendant of the God of Time sucks, and he’s not doing it. Nope. He’s going to live his own life, prophecies be damned.

“I’d like a peppermint espresso,” she tells him, much to his reluctant amusement. She orders something new every single time, usually something any sane mammal would hate.

“Anything else?”

“Your number.” She grins at him. “You can write it on my cup.”

“Not going to happen, Sweetheart,” he replies, rolling his eyes. “I know this game. I give you my number, next thing I know, you’re trying to pin me for felony tax evasion. Which *isn’t a thing* because David Furris always pays his taxes. Just to stop the inevitable attempt at blackmail. That’ll be five-fifty.”

“It was three-fifty last time,” she pouts, and *great fires above* that face does things to him that it really shouldn’t. She’s a hick bunny, and he’s...well, on the outside he’s a fox. On the inside, he’s not really sure what he is. Whatever he is, he’ll outlast her by decades, if he can die at all. It’s all
that stupid book of prophecies.

“Last time you didn’t get any syrup. And you hated it. When will you learn that you don’t like espresso?”

“I won’t stop until I’ve tried everything. It’s my motto. Try everything. Even if I could fail.”

Try everything, sings a scantily-clad gazelle from a stage in another universe. In the real world, this one, Shakira Ripawl is an attorney with the MCLU who got his mother out of a tight spot.

“That’ll take a long time,” he tells her distractedly. What is it about this bunny that brings up these glimpses? He’s always had them dancing at the edges of his consciousness, but ever since he met her, she’s made them go crazy. They’re connected, he knows it, because the Others always include her. Sometimes he thinks there aren’t any other timelines, and he’s just delusional and in love with her. That would make more sense, but it would also be inconvenient. Not only is love the worst thing that could possibly happen to a mammal, but mental illness ought to be treated, and he has neither the time nor the money to stay in some institution while they shove meds down his throat to see what might work.

“I have my whole life. My whole long...boring...life. Here’s the money, David. Keep the change.”

It’s a twenty. Sweet.

Her name is Judy Hopps, and she’s been a police officer for about three years now. There was some kind of hushed-up hullabaloo when she first appeared on the scene, something involving former Mayor Lionheart and the assistant he very obviously only chose to get the sheep vote – Weatherballoon, or whatever, washed-up politicians are about as interesting as drying paint – that either involved savage mammals or poisoned blueberries, depending on who’s telling the story. She solved the case relatively quickly with the help of an ill-tempered Fennec, which is great, whatever, hurray for fox recognition and all that shit, but then she turned her attention to the streets. The streets include him. He’s always careful to use the right alias with the right mammals, but one of these days she’s going to realize his name isn’t David, and she really might try to bring him in.

David Furris, struggling medical student and vaguely-hipster barista, pays his taxes. Nick Wilde, however, does not. Neither does Peter Clawson, Chris Fangworthy, or Carmelita Flocks.

“One peppermint espresso,” he tells his coworker, whose name he can’t remember, though he does know that she’s a linguistics student, has one child whose father is not in the picture, wants to teach Basic in the Crimson Isles, and doesn’t actually like coffee. Not knowing her name is more of a deliberate choice than a mistake. If he gets to know her, he might like her, and then he might miss her when he inevitably moves on.

She wrinkles her nose. “Officer Thumper here again today, then?”

“I thought her name was Hopps. Weird.” He gives his coworker a charming grin, which – note to self – he won’t be able to use for much longer. He’s thirty-five already. If he can somehow thwart destiny, he won’t look this young forever. “But yeah, she’s here.”

“Wish she’d go somewhere else,” the wolf says venomously. “Anywhere else.”

“Why’s that?”

She gives him a look that says he’s stupid and ought to be ashamed of himself. He’s too awesome for shame, though, so it’s not very effective. “You’re not at all subtle, Dave. She distracts you. And
“You’re insufferable,” she tells him, shoving Hopps’ drink into his paw. “Take your break. Ask her out, or chase her out, either one. Second, preferably. I’m sick of your mooning.”

Oof, bad choice of words. Not that she would know. Nobody knows, and it’s going to stay that way.

The gist of it, as far as Nick is aware, is that the First Son of Time wrote a book of all the things he saw, and thus far, every single prophecy has come true. He married a mortal, whose children married mortals, and the connection to the gods all but disappeared from the family line. The Wilde book of prophecies ends with a warning that the last of the line, who is either immortal or not exactly mortal, must be the consort of the Goddess of the Moon, who has been trapped in some kind of suit since Time Himself had a rut with a vixen and knocked her up. She also might be trapped in a box. The book’s been translated a dozen times, so the wording is a little unclear, and the footnotes are obnoxious. That whole thing seems like it would be just a grand old time, except he doesn’t want to be anybody’s consort. He doesn’t want to be bound by fate or divinity. The only thing worse than not having money is not having control. Well, maybe those ought to be reversed.

Okay, maybe they’re pretty even. Relative scales are not the point. The point is, Nick would rather eat his own kidneys than seek out some vixen to appease the gods. What have they ever done for him, anyway? Perpetual lack of respect and sketchy time powers that make him feel schizophrenic are not great motivators. As far as he’s concerned, they can choke on his baculum.

If it came down to the goddess or the bunny, he’d choose Hopps every time. Wait a minute! Maybe his coworker has a point. Maybe he ought to choose her. Maybe he ought to pursue her, as quickly and affably as possible, so that when he comes nose-to-nose with the goddess, he can say he’s taken. Not even a goddess would interfere with that, right? And he can totally get that far. All things considered, Hopps is great, and she is very easy on the eyes. Yeah. He can totally out-hustle the gods.

...Maybe not the Goddess of Thieves, or her consort, but they have a history of avoiding mortal affairs after that incident that almost left her headless. He prays to her sometimes, out of respect to fellow con artists, but it’s as halfhearted as he can get while still doing it.

Do other mammals grow up learning all this stuff? Probably not. Mythology is boring.

“A peppermint espresso for the prettiest bunny I’ve ever met,” he says, plopping Hopps’ drink on the table beside her. “Mind if I sit?”

“Go ahead.” She waves at the chair beside her. Even as sized for small mammals as this section is, her feet don’t even touch the floor. “Aren’t you working, though?”

He sits next to her, trying to see the cover of her book, but she’s holding it in such a way that in order to look he’d have to stand like he’s peering down her shirt, and that’s not going to happen. “Nah, I’ve been ordered to take a break.”

“Me too,” she shares gloomily. “Medical leave. Not that I asked for it. I’m sturdy, but apparently a little thing like broken ribs is enough to keep me out until I’m cleared to go back.”
“Broken ribs can do damage to your lungs and spleen. Sometimes even your blood vessels or your heart,” he tells her, and then winces. At this rate he could probably skip hustling and just become a doctor.

“Maybe yours.” Because of course after years as a cop she’d carefully ignore her mortality. All mortals do. “So, David, out of all the mammals in this place, why’d you decide to come talk to me? Not that I’m complaining, mind, but I’m beginning to get the impression that you don’t like me much.”

“I don’t like anybody,” he assures her.

She raises a brow. “That’s probably not as reassuring as you think it is.”

“You’re absolutely right. What I meant was that I don’t like anybody as a general rule, so when I do like someone, I don’t know how to treat them. I like you. I mean, I don’t – this is going exactly how I didn’t want it to go. Full disclosure, I came over here to ask you out. And ask you what you’re reading. Not in that order, but that’s how it goes, apparently.”

He has never in his life babbled this much. His defining trait, thus far, has been his way with words. Silvertongue, his mother used to call him, and he can’t imagine why his mouth is failing him, but he assumes it’s because she’s pretty. Frankly, Nick’s used to being the prettiest mammal in the room, but Hopps far surpasses him, and right now she’s laughing like he’s told a joke. Well, if you count him as a punchline, he supposes he has.

“I thought you didn’t want me to have your number?”

He shrugs. “I was being paranoid. I’m a fox, in case you haven’t noticed, so my experiences with cops haven’t always been the best. But my coworker convinced me you have good intentions.”

“Did she, now?” Hopps grins. “How fortunate for me. My answers, in the wrong order, are yes, and Galinë át Pana-Të. I don’t think I can literally translate it, but a rough equivalent is Champions of Midnight. Ish. That last part...there isn’t a word in Basic for Pana-Të. Anyway, it’s a comedy about two siblings who have to outwit the Great Creator, who took away the sun as punishment for the misdeeds of the creatures of Earth. Meanwhile, the Spirit of the Moon is trying to hinder them, because she’s in love with the Spirit of the Sun and wants him for herself. Where do you want to go? I’m guessing the usual standby of coffee would be a little banal for you.”

“True, it would just remind me of work. How do you feel about a picnic in Central Park? I know it’s tradition to do dinner and a movie, but that’s a terrible way to get to know each other. Too formal.”

Plus, he worked a brilliant scheme at the movie theater under a different alias, and being called Bartholomew when he’s supposed to be David would raise questions.

She purses her lips thoughtfully and he wants to nibble on them. No. No, he doesn’t, this is far too soon. He’s totally into her on a spiritual level, and by that, he means if everything goes well he won’t have to commit spiritually to some random divine vixen. It’s fine. It’s not really using her if they both get something out of it. He has lots to offer. Great fur, for one. A long tongue, for another, which should help with the more...physical aspects of this romantic shit. He’s happily a virgin, so pleasing a bunny is a little bit intimidating (especially if the stories about bunnies are true), but he can get over that, right? Nothing to it.

Is he rushing into this because she’s pretty, or because he’s thirty-five, which is the age he’s supposed to meet the goddess? Does it even matter? He’s committed now.
His paws shake. He *hates* the idea of committing to someone. The very idea sends all sorts of existential dread creeping through him. If he does this, if he uses her, he might be *free*. And then what? What will happen after he meets the goddess and tells her to go screw herself? What if he comes back to his comfortable life and just scrubs out? It won’t be because of fate or destiny or the will of the gods. It will just be because he’s not good enough. That’s kind of a big deal, considering how long he might live, and Hopps will probably leave him out of disgust or something.

“I’d like that. You know, I’ve patrolled there, but I’ve never seen it. No time to smell the flowers when you’re on-duty.”

“That must be so terrible for you.” He hopes his tone was less sarcastic than it sounded to him. “What language is that, by the way? Galeenaya át…?”

“Gay-lee-nee-eh aht Pay-nay-Tee-eh. Ungatir is a dead language. Only really pretentious bunnies study it.”

“You do know you’re outing yourself, right?”

She shrugs, a smile teasing the corners of her lips. Her nose twitches and he thinks he’ll probably explode. “I’m mostly just a cop. My litter learned Ungatir so that we could have a secret code and be special. Pretentious isn’t exactly off the mark there, buddy.”

“So basically, you could be messing with me right now about the plot. It could be porn.” She fixes her eyes on the table, and he grins in delight. “It totally is. It’s ancient porn. *Verily, mine insatiable desire for thy pearls yet goeth unfulfilled! I beg thee, allow me access to thy-*”

“S-stop,” she gasps out between giggles. “It’s not porn! There are just...some steamy bits between the sister and the Great Creator. It’s supposed to be the explanation of bunny fertility. It’s garbage, especially since the real Cosmic Mother would never trouble herself with lesser *gods*, let alone mortals, but I like the prose.”

“So you, uh…” He has to tread carefully here, because as much as he’d love to use Hopps to hustle the gods, he also doesn’t want to get too close to some kind of religious fanatic. “You believe in the Cosmic Mother, and all that? The gods?”

“I guess. I know they could have existed at one point, but they sure don’t exist now. Without physical form, they wither without faith. I mean, according to legend. Who really cares about stupid stories though?” Her discomfort is obvious as she adds, “Definitely not me.”

“Me neither,” he lies, unsure whether touching her shoulder would be breaking any boundaries. Nick’s personal bubble is about six feet in diameter, so he’s a bad measuring stick, and prey don’t really like him to get close, but Hopps is clearly into him, and *this right here* is why he never bothers with mushy shit like dating. “You’re lucky I like weird, Officer Sweetness. Wouldn’t want you to miss out on my red hot tail.”

“It is red, but the jury’s still out on whether it’s hot or not. I’d have to touch it. Run my paws through it, *stroke it*, maybe even *taste it*.”

Nick chokes on his own saliva.

“Verily,” she says dryly, “mine exceptional wit maketh thy...heart...swell.”

“You,” he says, just loudly enough for it to blend in with the noise of the coffee shop, “are a *bad bunny*.”
Hopps laughs again. He chances a glance at his coworker, who only gives him the stink-eye. Good thing he’s only got one more day on the job, and he can leave the con behind. David, though...David might have to stay a little longer.

Chapter End Notes

Bet you'll never guess where this was supposed to go.

Oh wait, I'm the most predictable writer on this site. You definitely already know.
Officer Judy Hopps was being reasonably honest when she told that irritating young street con that she wouldn't kiss him if they were the last two mammals alive. Of course, that was four months ago, and it’s hard to keep to your principles during what seems to be the apocalypse.

“Admit it, Detective Carrots,” the fox said, paws on his hips and shoulders squared proudly, “you just can’t resist me. You fall asleep at night thinking about me.”

“Yes, I find you desperately attractive,” Judy replied dryly. She was exhausted, and Nick Wilde was not making things any easier. “That’s why I’m here to question you. Again.”

And he would worm his way out of the allegations. Again. Wilde was a pain in her tail, always skating the line between generally classless behavior and outright violations of the law, so they could never pin anything on him. This time, it was a tip from Jerry Jumbeaux, Jr., who wanted Wilde to stop “stealing” his ice cream. The problem, though, was that nothing in Wilde’s sketchy business plan was actually illegal. There was nothing illegal about purchasing supplies elsewhere, as long as they were used in making a new product and not sold under a trademarked name. There was nothing wrong with modifying an existing recipe — Wilde added just a tad more sugar to his jars of melted ice cream — especially since nothing in a Jumbo Pop was even patentable. It was clearly a hustle, but entirely legal, down to the necessary permits. And since Wilde hired children to purchase the ice cream every day (one dollar per Jumbo Pop), Jumbeaux had no way of knowing which ice creams were being redistributed...creatively.

“You could just ask me out, you know. I might even give you a kiss, if you’re really lucky.”

“I wouldn’t kiss you if we were the last mammals alive,” she retorted through gritted teeth. “Now, please answer my questions. We have to make a token effort to look professional, even if you and I both know this is a waste of time.”

Once upon a time, Judy had been naive. She had come to Zootopia with high expectations. She had very quickly found out that mammals in the city had the same general attitude that everyone else did: rabbits belonged on farms, popping out dozens of kits, and certainly couldn’t be police officers. It had taken her exactly one month to realize that she would never be taken seriously. It had taken sixteen months for the Mayor to realize that the MII had been largely ineffective in practice. Judy suspected that Chief Bogo was still annoyed with her for the inconvenience and embarrassment of being raked over the coals by a dedicated bureaucrat, but the result had been
small assignments and a gradual realization that perhaps she had *deserved* her marks in the ZPA.

She was still a cop, eight years later, and although her assignments were almost invariably related to other small mammals, she was satisfied with that. The next step up in size was the undersized boar in Major Crimes, and Swinton was both unconcerned with regular civilian matters and a bit of a psychopath. Small mammals needed someone on their side, even if it meant that Judy would probably spend the rest of her career low on the chain of command.

“Yes, of course. How rude of me to keep a beautiful lady waiting,” said Wilde disingenuously, and Judy choked back a scream of frustration. Oh, how she wished she’d never saved his life.

Well, all right, that wasn’t true. She had sheltered him in his time of need, nursed him out of what the dismissive doctors at Zootopia General had called catatonia, and protected him from those angry polar bears that had been after him for whatever reason, and that had been the *right* thing to do. His ability to be obscenely obnoxious didn’t warrant his death. But couldn’t he take that elsewhere? Surely he had someone else to annoy?

Surely he wasn’t sincere in his affections? If so, he was terrible at flirting and needed serious remedial courses. Preferably in another town. Because Nick Wilde may have been as attractive as he was irritating, but that was not happening. Not until he cleaned up his act and did something productive with all that potential. Or ever.

Of course, that was four months ago. Judy thinks back on that moment fondly now, because a train thundered by and a baby whined for its mother. The city was alive and beautiful. Now, there’s just silence except for bugs, lizards, and the moaning of the undead. Oh, and Wilde’s constant narrative. Because of *course* they’d be the only two mammals in the whole world immune to the virus that turned everyone into shuffling nightmares.

“Our intrepid hunters engage their quarry with caution and discretion,” he drones, making no effort to actually be quiet, and Judy seriously considers calling off the hunt for the snake, abandoning Nick to death by starvation, and using the sturdy shotgun on *herself*.

It started with predators “going savage,” and if Judy had been new to the city, she might have believed in the “primal regression theory,” but after eight years working alongside dependable predators and seeing all sorts of criminal activity all across the digestive spectrum, she discarded that idea offhand. Her skepticism was justified the first time a prey mammal “went savage.” Mayor Lionheart made a valiant effort to contain the problem, reopening Cliffside Asylum to house the savage mammals, but by the time anyone figured out it was a fluid-borne disease with a 28-day incubation period, half the mammals in Zootopia were affected. In the end, everyone was either bitten or eaten by what appeared to be real zombies. She herself had a nasty bite mark on her ankle from a sweet otter in her favorite flower shop. Nick had one from a lemming who’d manifested right there at his vending station.

When they ran into each other on a grocery run, they were ecstatic to find someone else alive, even if the reason was immunity rather than an uncanny ability to protect themselves. Plucky heroes, they were not. They just happened to fall in together because there was literally no one else alive.

Leaving the city was the best option. They *would* run out of food, if they didn’t become food first. Zombies appeared to be able to eat anything, including each other, but she’d noticed their tendency to go after the freshest ones first. Her chances of survival were low if she stayed, and as annoying as Nick was, she couldn’t leave him to die.

They made it to Bunnyburrow before the car broke down. The country was full of zombies too.
They stole a truck with a bed cover and continued on, and Judy may have had a slight breakdown afterward, but at least Nick was sensitive enough to just hug her for a bit and not laugh at her.

And hey, at least they don’t have to pay for gas anymore. She used to leave cash at fill stations, but Nick brought up the fact that everyone else was either dead or undead, and there was a pretty good possibility that they’d need to roll joints. She did not agree...at the time.

Yeah, okay, now Judy knows why there was such a big movement to legalize before the apocalypse hit. Not that she’ll ever tell Nick that. He’s insufferable whenever he’s right, and it only feeds his delusion that he has a chance with her. The truth, though, is simple: they can’t. It’s not the age gap; he’s 24, not 12. It’s not the species difference; he’s not that much bigger. It’s not even that he’s quite possibly the most obnoxious mammal to ever exist on any plane. It’s just that she has a moral code. She may be a bunny with needs, but she’s not going to use him to sate them when he so clearly has actual feelings for her.

So here she sits, unable to look at him directly, because she caught him jerking off, and he was so surprised by her intrusion that he caught his own load mostly with his face. He hasn’t even had the decency to wipe it off yet, the idiot. She knows he can smell her arousal, which makes this whole thing worse.

“I, uh,” she begins awkwardly, trying to look at him. But he’s still got streaks of...himself...all over, and the sight makes her dizzy, so she looks away again. “I heard you and I thought you were being attacked. I didn’t...I swear I didn’t mean to see...and, yeah. Sorry. About walking in on you...and the smell.”

“I didn’t know you’d be into this,” he replies casually. Except...there’s another note in there, something a little less flirty, something she’d label vulnerable if he were anybody else. “I sort of thought you were a lesbian?”

She can be an adult about this. She can. Just so long as she doesn’t look at him. “Females tend to be less likely to insist I need to settle down and squeeze out progeny, so I’ve mostly dated other does, it’s true. But I’m not entirely averse to male company.”

“So what you’re saying is, I’ve got a chance? I can totally put on another show for you. Or like bend over the seat and let you – where are you going, Officer Carrots?”

“Away from the stupid,” she tells him. “Don’t you dare follow me unless zombies come. I think our fire’s far enough away from the nearest enclave.”

“Aww,” he says, but he’s teasing her again, so she doesn’t have to feel too bad about it.

She’s not heading away from the stupid. She’s heading away from the temptation. When she reaches the truck, she sticks her belt between her teeth, teases her clit through her underwear with the butt end of a pen, and comes hard to the image of Nick taking it up the rear.

He’s going to know exactly what she did lying in the truck bed. He’s going to smell her all over. But she will not allow herself to waver.
AdventureQuest

Chapter Summary

In which Judy is a knight in shining armor, the princess is in another castle, and Nick may or may not be a troll.

Chapter Notes

(also known as: "jay has officially lost her mind and you're just now finding out about it."

“So it’s basically a magical quest,” the bunny grumps, looking him in the eye. How Judy Hopps manages to make him feel like prey is anyone’s guess, considering his ancestors used to eat hers. Nick just figures it’s a spell, but not the same kind that makes him look when she kicks off her pants. “My first case, and it’s a freaking magical quest.”

“I did tell you to pick another line of work,” he replies unhelpfully.

“Yeah, but you only said that because I was trying to arrest you.”

“For doing my job.”

“For being a bridge troll! That is not a legitimate job title, Nick, and you know it.” She huffs. “Here in the 21st century, it's just called aggravated assault.”

“Here in the 21st Century, you’re allowed to be a cop,” he points out, grinning, “so maybe you should stop pretending you aren’t madly in love with me for getting you out of Bunnyburrow.”

“You think I’m madly in love with you,” she says, although technically it should be a question. Judy has never been very good at over-expressing incredulity.

“No, Carrots, I know you’re madly in love with me.”

Her mouth drops open slightly and she gives him that look, the one he’s been noticing for about a century. Then, she steps close to him, trailing a finger down his chest. It stops just above the line of his boxers. He doesn’t bother to pretend she isn’t getting to him, because hell, he’s been giving her the same look for two centuries now.

Finally, she smirks and pulls away. “I changed my mind, Wilde. You’d be a terrible cop.”

Her fuzzy-wuzzy little tail brushes up against his groin, the lightest of touches, as she turns to pick up her pants and throw them over the arm of the sofa. He curses the day he crashed into her life.

“You’re a witch,” he says, forcing himself to sound neutral as he sinks onto the comfortable cushions. “A mean old witch. A wicked witch.”
“Is that really the best you can come up with?”

“No, but you don’t deserve the full strength of my wit. 700 years, and you haven’t changed a bit.”

“Oh, Sweetheart,” she says solemnly, tossing an absolutely sinful grin over her shoulder, “you do know that speaking in rhyme won’t give you magical powers, right?”

“Yeah, speaking of, you can’t just come into to my home, complain about a magical cop quest, and then leave me hanging!” He shakes his head. “What are we doing? Chasing down a spirit jewel thief? Rescuing a politician’s daughter from zombies?”

She faces him again with something like shame in her expression and laughs unconvincingly. “It’s kind of a funny story…”

The thing is, Nick never meant to throw in with Judy Hopps. She, then called Laverne, was a small-town nobody who found him in the wreckage of his ship and healed him with those damn amethyst orbs of hers. It took weeks, apparently, and now one of the magical orbs in her necklace is less “amethyst” and more “moonstone” in color, but at least he didn’t die. Unfortunately, her wacky 14th century magic ruined any and all chances of him ever repairing his ship and returning home, so he left – feeling angry and irrationally betrayed – to seek his fortune elsewhere.

Due to local attitudes toward foxes and the fact that “space bard from the future” wasn’t a real job, he’d ended up under a bridge in the city they now call Zootopia, scaring citizens into giving him money so that he could eat. Laverne, who had only been allowed to become a knight when she’d transformed herself into a stupid-looking buck called Jack Savage, was sent by the King to kill him (or, more probably, get killed by him). Instead, she took off her Jack Savage mask, forced Nick into a bath, and told him a terrible, glowing secret.

Something had changed her, and because she had changed healing him, he was changed too.

Nick had no idea which system her magic had messed with, but some unholy union of technology and magic had made them immortal. A technomystic might know, but Nick wasn’t one; he didn’t even know what any of the doodads on his own ship were. It had mostly piloted itself through an AI system Nick had stolen from the interstellar dump site and sensibly named Finnick, because it was finicky, although most mammals would call it glitchy. Or, less charitably, broken. Its unexpected tendency to skip around in time without warning had been a delightfully efficient way of escaping the Union Forcers, who had to get warrants for time travel.

(Nick knew a lot about the universe and its inhabitants in the 53rd century but his grasp on technology was limited. He’d just been glad to find an AI with pilot protocols at all before the UF’s found him. Unfortunately, “space bard” wasn’t a real profession in his own time, either, and he’d mostly supplemented his lack of income with a bit of sweet talk and a card-cloning device stolen from a Union lab.)

Their first few months together...were not good. At all. Laverne was impetuous, wary of him for his species, and too energetic when all he wanted to do was sleep. She stole his tablet and sneered at the unfamiliar symbols on the screen, pronouncing it inferior to real magic, and then – upon learning it was simple technology that showed actual words – she demanded to be taught his native language.

Considering it was her money paying for their rooms and she had saved his life, he rolled his eyes and began teaching a fourteenth-century Terran rabbit to read.
“Joo-Dye and F-rinds,” she sounded out one night, frowning. “That’s me, but why am I naked? Is this...a sex icon? Why would your magic book have one of those? Oh, my, the picture is moving, and... oh! But that’s not safe! Nicholas, why does your magic book...no, bunnies don’t do that!”

“Give me that,” he said, annoyed. Judging by the sounds coming from the speakers, it looked like she had accidentally managed to access his research, and for once, that was only incidentally a euphemism. Rabbits were extinct in the 53rd century, but in the 38th century he’d landed on a planet run by them. He’d immediately asked Finnick to download every scrap of information on rabbits.

Most of it was porn. He didn’t watch it. Really.

The video she’d selected was simply called Judy and Friends, which was a wholesome and wholly misleading title, considering that the screen showed the titular Judy unenthusiastically getting spitroasted by her two equally unenthusiastic friends. If Nick had to guess, the video (made in the 35th century) had been a money-making endeavor. They probably hadn’t made much off of it. It was about as un-sexy as porn could get. Even their moans sounded bored.

She was right, though, he thought as he stopped the video and helped her navigate back to the non-creepy section of the tablet’s memory. That rabbit had been almost identical. Only the eyes had been different. It was probably a descendant of hers.

Which meant...

That eventually, they would split up, presumably because Nick found a way off this rock. Sweet.

“Why do you have that in your book,” she asked him suspiciously.

“For the last time, it isn’t a book, and Finnick accidentally downloaded it,” he said. She stared at him blankly. Right, 14th century.

“My shipmate put it in there as a trick.”

“Oh.” She nodded, as though that were believable. “You don’t seem the type to enjoy torture curses, so I can see why your shipmate would use it to trick you.”

“Torture...?”

“Is Joo-Dye okay? Did she survive?”

“It’s Judy, and I’m sure she went on to make many more of those.”

“Oh dear. I suppose every culture has their ways of keeping their servants in line,” she said dubiously, “although I believe torture to be barbaric in every case.”

This was...kind of hilarious, trying to explain visual porn to a 14th century virgin. Not that he was experienced either, but still. “I’m pretty sure they weren’t punishing her, Carrot-Head. In her ti – in her culture, females are in charge. She’s the one directing them.”

Half true, half not. One of the reasons male-dominant porn had been in such high demand in the 35th century was because there were very few female stars willing to swallow their pride long enough to submit to a male, even on film, and very few males in the porn industry wanted to take charge when they didn’t have to. That was probably why the whole performance had been so lackluster.
“So...in the case of intercourse...in her culture, females don’t have to do what they’re told even if they don’t like it?”

His eyes narrowed. “Did someone make you...?”

“No. But my sisters all say...that’s why I ran away the eve of my wedding, you see. Jack Savage may be an unpleasant character, but at least nobody wants to marry him off.”

“Solid reasoning for doing a sex change...illusion...spell...thing,” he told her, even though he couldn’t really imagine it. In his time, he’d just boarded a spaceship one day and never looked back. They hadn’t even asked for papers.

“You say such funny things. Reasons are not solid, Nick,” she said, and then sighed. “I wish I were Judy. Nobody lets me be in charge of anything.”

There was no reason to like her, but he did anyway. So they stuck together.

And stuck together.

And stuck together a little more.

“Do you remember Ruby Harfang? The vixen I dated for a while?”

“Yeah,” he says sourly. This thing between them, whatever it is, seems not to be as important to her as it is to him. As cultural standards relaxed over the centuries, so too did Laverne, who eventually changed her name to Judy; she gives her affection freely to anyone she deems worthy, and while he would never doubt her love for him, they’ve never even kissed. That hasn’t stopped her from kissing all sorts of other foxes, though, including Ruby Harfang, who (if her eyes and distinct muzzle shape are any indication) may very well be very distantly related to him.

“Well, she’s gone missing,” Judy tells him, slouching next to him on the sofa. “Her new girlfriend filed a report. I shouldn’t be on the case at all, considering our history, but there’s magic involved.”

“And you’re the only sentient magical being left on the planet,” he finishes.

“Not for long, unless planets from your time have magic. I have my amethyst orbs, so I’m okay to focus my spells, but it’s getting harder every year. Pretty soon the source of Terran magic will be gone.”

“Why do you still call them that? Amethyst orbs? We both know what they’re made of, and they’re more...hexagonal than anything.”

She shrugs. “It’s what my mom taught me they were.”

“Well, it sounds like a phrase you’d find in purple prose,” he teases. “How do I know you’re not talking about your eyes?”

She gives him a look of disgust. “I outgrew that kind of romanticism in the 1600s. You know, when they accused me of consorting with devils for being able to read at all.”

“Still touchy, I see.” It’s been centuries, but he supposes you never forget your first burning. Nick’s been lucky enough to have only been shot and stabbed, once each, but Judy has uncommonly bad luck; she was burned once and hanged thrice for the crime of being educated and poor at the same time, she was shot by a drunk hunter who thought she was a large turkey, and she
was gutted in a town square one time. She would be safer if she’d stop putting herself in harm’s way to help others, but that’s just who she is. Magical orbs and all. “What’s this about Ruby?”

“They want to get at magic, I think. They weren’t subtle about calling me out personally. Chief Bogo showed me the ransom video. Of course he had no idea what he was looking at, but he knows enough about me to know I’m a little spooky. Magic dies off but the legends survive, that kind of thing. If I forget my ego for a minute...I know he’s hoping this will either chase me off or kill me off. Same thing different day. But this is my chance to prove myself, even if it means going on another magical quest.”

“Okay,” he says, willing himself not to make a sudden, wild gesture at her evasion, “but why Ruby?”

She puts her face in her paws and her ears melt down her back. Oh, this is going to be fun. “They called me a knight in shining armor...and they called her my princess. They’re holding her in the old warded Fälzian Castle. You know, the one you can only access by boat for only thirty minutes each night, the one protected with everything from brain-exploding curses to nipple-twisting ones. I don’t know how they even got in there. The only family granted unhindered access died off two centuries ago.”

“Well,” he exclaims, standing up and brushing imaginary crumbs off his pantsless legs. He has a strict “no pants” policy at his place. “It looks like you and I had better prepare for some serious titty twisting. Don’t want to keep your princess waiting.”

“Nick.” She tugs on his paw and stands up next to him, wrapping her little arms around his torso. “You don’t have to come if you don’t want to. I’m not going to say no to company, but I don’t want you to get hurt. The truth is, if they really knew anything about me, they’d be calling you my princess instead.”

He closes his eyes, hugs her back, and pretends he’s not squealing like a kit on the inside.
Chapter Summary

The summer that Cloverleaf Industries buys up lots of property in the Nocturnal District, new zoicide detectives Hopps and Wilde take on the murder of special effects whiz Marvin Acme. No, really.

Chapter Notes

Because who wouldn't love a Roger Rabbit crossover where Nick is starstruck and Judy makes heart-eyes at people who are comically bad for her?

“I’m just saying, Carrots, that Trent Grizznor wannabe was bad for you. He was always going to drag you through his downward-”

“Don’t you dare,” says Judy, all fluff and bristle. “Don’t sully my childhood angst that way. Sam was a jerk, no two ways about it, and he couldn’t even sing, the lying sack of-”

Nick squeezes his partner’s shoulder gently, stopping her before she really gets going. Why she has such a thing about liars, when she seems to attract them like iron filings to a magnet, he’ll never know. “Okay, okay. But you’re really broken up?”

“He stole my grandmother’s pearls, Nick. There’s no coming back from that.”

“Fair enough.” He eyes her as she Marches stiffly beside him, pent-up energy and probably nerves about their very first zoicide case making her strides longer. She looks good in her new pantsuit and black tie. They both do. “I was still on my first cup of coffee during the briefing. Did you get the name of the stiff, or are we going in blind?”

“Marvin Acme,” she replies promptly, “and official protocol requires us to not call them stiffs in public. It makes us look like we lack empathy.”

He stops in his tracks. “Empathy, schmempathy. This is Marvin Acme? The Marvin Acme? The one who makes the magic happen for Maroon Studios? The best SFX artist in the business?”

“You don’t have to act like a giddy schoolkit. He’s dead.” She tugs at his tie, rolling her eyes, and he trails after her, unable to muster up any sort of shame for his outburst. “And you’re a nerd.”

“This guy made me want to go into the film industry! I wanted to learn computers and make art happen. Work for Disney, maybe. Before they started making weird shit about fake animals, anyway. The creepy furless ones.”

“Why didn’t you follow your sweet little dreams,” she asks blandly, and despite her excellent grifting skills, she can’t hide her real curiosity from her partner. He’s awesome that way.

“Computers cost money. So does school.” He shrugs, uncaring. “I have the best job in the world
now, so score one for the fox.”

She grumbles something (probably unflattering) under her breath.

“What was that, Fluff?”

“Get your game face on,” she snaps, which is not what she said, he’s sure of it. “There might be grieving mammals inside.”

“In this warehouse?”

“One of them might be you,” she threatens, and he smothers a grin. She must still be sore about another ex turning out to be a loser.

This is her twelfth breakup since they’ve been working together. There was Pablo, the albino bunny artist who allowed shady drug deals to go down in his gallery, and then Sharon, a sweet hedgehog tabloid journalist who chased an alien invasion story in Hanapepe and never came back. Dan the red panda who wanted to pee on her (that particular angry rant kept Nick in stitches for half an hour), then Michael the bunny with several dead exes (they still can’t find him), Everett the otter who didn’t respect her, Matilda the sheep who joined some hippie circus, Sylvia the kleptomaniac raccoon, Will the coffee-shop-novel-writing ocelot who just plain got on her nerves, Peter the dingo with a creepy fascination for spiders, Joan the bunny who left her for some famous runner, Thomas the freeloading vaguely-feline musician, and now Sam the drug-using, jewel-thieving hare.

Yeah, Judy’s not very good at picking partners, especially since she refuses to use her resources for background checks. Also, Nick’s starting to think she has a type. They probably ought to talk about that sometime.

“Game face,” he says solemnly, and follows her inside.

The warehouse contains an indoor set. The cast and crew that found the body are pressed into a corner by a bunch of boxes and police tape. Nick wonders how many of them actually saw anything. Probably none of them, or they wouldn’t look so confused. There’s disgust and fear there as well, but that’s to be expected at the site of a murder. And speaking of murder...

The body is...a body, but bloody and broken. Kind of gross, all things considered, but Nick has a spectacular poker face. Judy’s genre of choice is slasher comedy, so this is probably just another day at the office for her, but he isn’t super happy about looking at his old hero all smashed to hell by – is that a safe?

That doesn’t happen outside of the movies. It just doesn’t. But Acme, back when he was still involved in storyboarding, invented the trope, so maybe the killer was going for irony. Still, heist movie props as murder weapons seem horribly inefficient, all things considered. “Are we sure this was a murder?”

“Unless Acme cut the rope on his own and dashed back under just in time to get it in the muzzle...yeah, it’s a murder,” says one of the CSIs, a much slimmer cheetah than Clawhauser. Bartholomew, Nick thinks his name is. “The rope was definitely cut; it didn’t snap or fray.”

“But who would do this,” Judy bursts out. “This is the most unreasonable way to kill someone I’ve ever heard of.”

“We’ve actually got a pretty good working theory,” says Clawson, a beat cop who got to the scene when it was first called in. Her caffeine-induced mania is a little off-putting, but only because he’s
seen the same grin on Judy a time or twelve and it usually has off-putting results. Like the time she drank too much coffee and dragged him through a carnival. He *hates* carnivals.

“Any input can be helpful.”

“Well, according to the *Chronicle*, Acme was – uh – playing around with Jessica Rabbit.” The ocelot runs a nervous paw through the fur on her neck. “You know, Roger Rabbit’s wife. Last night witnesses heard him say he’d do whatever it took for them to be happy again, and we found some white fur in the chain. So we’re thinking he probably did it.”

“That’s a reasonable assumption,” Judy says thoughtfully, at the same time Nick half-shouts, “There’s absolutely no way!”

His partner raises a brow, unimpressed. “What makes you think so?”

“Don’t you know who he is?”

“An actor. Not a very good one, but an actor nonetheless.”

“Not a very – Carrots, you’re insane.” Nick shakes his head in utter disbelief. “He’s brilliant. I watch more comedies than would ever be appropriate for an employed mammal my age, and I’ve never seen anyone with such *timing*. Anyway, I’m positive he couldn’t have done it. For one, do you have any idea how much muscle it takes to hoist one of those high enough for a tiger to walk under it without noticing? Roger Rabbit is...about as tall as you, and he didn’t go through your training. It’s physically impossible. Plus, you must have heard them talking about having “Jessica” in a room upstairs, defending her husband. Would she be doing that if they hadn’t worked it out?”

“...We should go talk to her and find out.” Is it just him, or does she sound...hesitant? He follows behind her as she takes the stairs at an unusually sedate pace. “Um, Nick, I should warn you. If this is the mammal I’m thinking of, she...Jessica Rabbit is...well, I actually didn’t know it wasn’t an ironic stage name, but she...”

The door swings open from the inside, cutting Judy off, and Nick picks up the scent of artificial roses and...vixen? Judy tenses up as a cop he doesn’t know brushes by them, and then he gets a look at Roger Rabbit’s wife for the first time.

As Judy might say, *sweet cheese and crackers.*

That’s no rabbit.

Jessica is tall, firstly. Just a little taller than he is, wearing an ankle-length pink dress with a slit on the side that goes nearly to her hip. The dress cinches her waist so tightly that the sheer amount of fluff she has is *very* noticeable under the thin lace that holds it on her shoulders. She has artificial hips in that dress, and her gloves make her wrists look delicate. With a sleek, overly-groomed tail and soft green eyes, she is a very stunning vixen indeed.

Also highly unsettling. At second glance, he’s pretty sure that waist is *impossible*, unless she’s much too thin under all her fur.

“Th-this is Jessica Rabbit,” says Judy, and holy Hannah, did she just *stutter*? Judy ‘I Can Beat You with Two Paws Tied behind My Back’ Hopps just *stuttered*? Is the world ending? “She sings. At a club. She’s good.”

“Oh, Judy, this is just terrible,” Jessica says in a smoky voice. Yeah, he can see her singing.
“I’m on duty right now. Officer Hopps. I mean detective! Detective Hopps, ZPD. But you know that. Yeah.”

“Detective, then.” The vixen leans down to wrap her long arms around Judy’s shoulders, and Judy’s nose twitches erratically. He can relate. Jessica’s perfume is beginning to irritate him. “I heard them say my Roger killed Marvin, but he didn’t. He couldn’t.”

As Judy hesitates for a moment, her foot taps on the ground. Then, she pulls back and says gently, “You know him better than anyone. If you say he didn’t, then you’re probably right, but we still have to explore every avenue.”

“As you said,” he continues as though the world didn’t just get ten times funnier, “every avenue. Ms. Rabbit, we heard that you and the victim were...intimate.”

It’s unlikely to be true. There are certain biological tells that she’s not giving off. But it can’t hurt to ask, and any discomfort he might cause is totally worth the daggers in Judy’s eyes.

Jessica, on the other hand, just looks at him like he’s stupid. “You really believe I would cheat on my husband, Detective? My bondmate? You, of all officers, should believe I wouldn’t.”

“Hey, I have to ask. Plus, you’re wearing perfume, and vulpine cues aren’t 100% across the board.”

“Not that you’d know,” Jessica says dismissively, turning back to his partner. “How old is he, Detective Hopps? Forty? The poor dear’s a bit wrung out.”

Nick grits his teeth and doesn’t rise to the bait. Yeah, okay, he’s still single – at forty, thanks for the reminder – but it’s not like he’s been looking. He likes the lack of pressure being single provides, and anyway, he’s got a whole life with Judy, who is infinitely better than any romantic partner could be.

Judy doesn’t get the barb, because she isn’t a fox. He might be single, but his body displays all the signs of being “taken.” Jessica would have picked it up immediately, but Judy can’t smell that he’s...uninterested. Even animals with incredible senses of smell wouldn’t be able to tell by scent, unless they were well-versed in fox hormone signals. “Yep. Trust me, Jessica, he’s the guy you want on this case. We’ll find out what happened to your friend.”

The vixen looks from Judy to him, and back to Judy, before sighing. “God knows why I trust you, Detective, but I do. Clear my husband, and I’ll do anything for you.”

Nick’s jaw drops open at the blatant flirting. It’s not enough to be a proposition, but Judy visibly cringes, foot tap-tap-tapping away. Is this lady serious? She’s got to know that Judy has a crush. Hell, he picked up on it within a few minutes and he wasn’t looking. What a jerk.

“I – we – will do the best we can.” Judy gives Jessica a bashful smile. “Are you going to take off a
“Carrot cake doesn’t make itself,” says the vixen, “but tonight, at least, I will be looking for my darling. I’m counting on you.”

Her breathy voice is really getting on his nerves. Is she trying to seduce his partner or is she just always like that? Why does Judy even like her? How did they meet? She usually shares everything with him...except her apartment, and her family, and the reason she has faint scars on her cheek, but he hasn’t told her that his mother’s alive, so fair is fair.

Still. Current events here in the city are open discussion.

“Don’t leave town,” he advises Jessica, “and call us if you learn anything.”

She brushes past them both, making sure to trail a paw over his chest and swish her tail against Judy’s legs. He’s infinitely proud of himself for not growling in her face. How dare she lead on his partner like that? How dare she just... ugh, she’s horrible. And judging by Judy’s goofy little stare, she isn’t picking up on the sleaze. Not that he can really talk, considering the little cons he’s pulled over the years, but in a way, that makes it worse. Judy should know better, after working with him for years and consistently picking the exact worst partners she could possibly pick.

The inevitable heartbreak is going to be hell. It’ll be Invasion of the Couch Potato for at least a week when she comes to her senses. In the meantime, well, he’s going to milk it for all it’s worth.

He elbows her once Mrs. Rabbit is out of hearing range and says, “So how did you meet, eh, Carrots? Lock eyes across a crowded room? Does her laughter sing in your dreams?”

“You’re the worst,” she tells him, giving him a glare that is as halfhearted as it is adorable. How is he supposed to take her seriously when he knows she’ll never use all that power contained in her little body against him? Eight years as friends, and that excited little jump-punch after they crashed a train is the closest she’s ever come to seriously hurting him. Her ears go back flat against her head. “I met her through Thomas. He used to perform at the Ink and Fang Club. They didn’t really like each other – he was jealous that I always watched her, I guess, and she thought he was stupid for being jealous – but when we broke up, it was at the club. He said he was moving on and didn’t have room in his life for someone who couldn’t move on with him. Jessica heard what he said and told him to do something...creative...with his microphone. Then she invited me backstage and gave me a hug while I cried it out. I guess it makes sense now why she knew what to do for a stupid heartbroken bunny, but at the time, I was just happy not to be alone. We’ve been friends since then. I go and watch her sing when I don’t have to work.”

“And you’ve never invited me, why?”

“I just...” She shrugs and looks away in that way she does when she wishes she didn’t have to explain herself. “I wanted something that was mine. I share everything with you. Plus, I see how you react to other foxes, Nick. You’re territorial and weird. I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

Does he do that? He hasn’t noticed. It’s not an unreasonable conclusion to draw; he grew up in the only fox family in the surrounding area, so unlike the ones from enclaves, like Finnick, he doesn’t know how to function in a community of familiar-yet-foreign hormones and that unacknowledged primal instinct to have His Own Territory. He could barely manage to live with his own mother once he hit twelve or so, not that she made it easy with her traditionalist backslide anyway.

“I’d like to come along sometime,” he tells her, only sort of meaning it. It’s not that he wants to
hear the vixen sing, but there’s something deep inside that calls for him to protect his best friend, even if it’s from herself. The urge is highly embarrassing, but it’s not like anyone else knows about it.

Plus, how often does he get to see Judy *stammer*?

“After the case,” she agrees, completely unaware that she’s signed a warrant for friendly humiliation. “Now, before we go brave the witnesses, what did you make of the body?”

“It was funky. Who kills someone like that?”

“An actor,” she says immediately, giving him a pointed look. “I told Jessica what she needed to hear, but I don’t trust actors. They lie for a living. I think we need to look much closer into this guy. Maybe take him downtown and give him the heebie-jeebies.”

“It works better on mammals who aren’t bunnies and married to foxes,” he tells her dryly.

“I was thinking we could sic Fangmeyer on him, actually. They don’t get enough muzzle time in the interview rooms anymore.”

“Fangmeyer was an army interrogator. Is that really the kind of trauma you want to inflict on a poor, unsuspecting citizen?”

Her smile is serene and kind of creepy. “Oh, definitely. If he did it, they’ll get it out of him. If he didn’t, well, he’ll get over it. Probably.”

Sometimes Judy terrifies him. One of these days, she’s probably going to snap from the stress and he doesn’t want to be there when it happens. They do nearly everything together, though, so he probably will be.

*Note to self,* he thinks, aware of the tightness of her grip on his tie as she half-drags him out the door, *get a hobby.*
Tripe, Part I

Chapter Summary

Wherein Nick and Judy wake up to an unpleasant surprise and pretend they're not scared.

Chapter Notes

I was talking to a reader on Skype and she asked me how I would play straight the major trope I failed to parody in A Quiet Chaos. The answer is, I wouldn't, but I could probably write Jack in Nick's place and give them all the resolution they deserve. And then I realized I couldn't take it on, but you know, I already had the prologue and epilogue written, so here they sit.

Sleeping next to Jack is usually like sleeping next to a furnace, so waking up cold is unusual. It’s not entirely new; he and I don’t have the same schedule, so we don’t always go into the station at the same time, but he told me last night that this week he has an even later start than I do. There’s no reason for him to have left already, except maybe…

Sometimes he does sweet things like getting breakfast for me and Nick. He’ll walk through the door just as my alarm is going off with that charming little smile nobody else ever sees, and he shares a spinach and cheese stuffed waffle with me while Nick puts away four of those gross blueberry pastries he loves so much. That’s too much sugar in the morning, but Nick likes them, and Jack and I like seeing Nick happy. Usually Jack goes out for fancy breakfast take-out when Nick has been tired, because he’s the only one in this house who doesn’t singe water. It isn’t fair to make him cook all the time, but then, Jack and I could probably burn the house down trying to cook pasta, so take-out is our compromise.

For a lot of reasons, I’m so lucky that my boyfriend and my best friend get along so well. If I’d been forced to choose between them, I would have lost a sweet, devoted, adoring boyfriend, because Nick is the most important mammal in my life, but Jack took our somewhat untraditional relationship in stride and endeavored to become friends with Nick instead of being stupid and jealous. I have no idea how a rather solitary fox can handle living with a hare and an incurably social rabbit, but it works, and I love my boys so much it sometimes feels like I could burst.

Although my body is so unusually heavy it feels like I’m trudging through quicksand, I make my way into the kitchen, sniffing for coffee and not finding it. Maybe he got held up at the shop or there was a long line. Nick’s just coming out of his room, scratching his belly and licking his teeth. He always looks adorably confused in the morning, like he’s not sure if he’s awake or not, but it’s more obvious today. His ears are crooked and his eyes are unfocused. I only just manage to hold in a Clawhauser-esque squeal at the sight.

As I hold my mouth closed, I fight the urge to gag. I need to brush my teeth. Without the air, my mouth tastes like a pee-soaked cotton ball.
“I know it’s not true,” Nick says through a yawn, “but the way my mouth tastes right now, I’d be willing to believe spiders really do crawl down our throats during the night.”

“Me too,” I agree. Once upon a time I’d have thought that gross, but after living together for six years, we are so far beyond the oversharing point that we’ve seen each other naked. I walked in on him jerking off once and he didn’t even stop, just told me to either get out or sit down and enjoy the show, but stop freaking out in either case. There’s no going back after that. But I really don’t want to have dirty thoughts about my best friend, so I hastily add, “I have the worst cottonmouth.”

He raises a skeptical eyebrow. “Worse than that time you went undercover and got drugged?”

“Actually, no, it’s...the same...”

A bad feeling lodges itself in my gut. I do feel like I’ve been drugged, and it looks like Nick feels the same. Has Jack been kidnapped? Or am I just being overprotective again?

“Carrots, where’s Jack,” Nick asks warily.

“I don’t know,” I reply, looking down. I console myself by reminding that overprotective weirdo in my brain that Jack can take care of himself. He’s an elite officer of the law. “He was gone when I woke up.”

“He’s...” Nick frowns at me. Or, not at me, but just in my general direction. “He’s probably just out getting food. Trying to take care of us. What a nerd.”

We share an uncomfortable laugh. There’s no evidence to suggest that anything’s happened to Jack, but it feels...wrong. The empty bed. The cold sheets. The taste of cotton and what could be drugs in my mouth. And if Nick’s feeling it too, the weirdness, then it’s a hell of a lot more likely that maybe something has happened. I trust Nick’s instincts more than my own. He spent almost two decades ducking danger, where I’ve always run headfirst into it.

“Yeah,” I say, looking at the empty kitchen.

“There’s no way anything could happen to him. We’re all officers,” Nick supplies with hope in his voice that couldn’t even convince a kindergartener.

But the truth is, Jack’s one hare. He’s Nick’s size, and Nick’s not the biggest fox in the world. With all of us living in the same house, I feel so safe I can almost forget that danger exists, but we all drank a little too much last night at the May Day bonfire, and if we were all drugged anyone could have taken Jack away without any fuss. It’s not like he hasn’t made enemies over the years. Before he was assigned long-term to Zootopia, he worked lots of zoicide cases with his old partner at the MBI. I’m sure there are plenty of criminals he pissed off – he’s not the nicest mammal alive, particularly when he’s on the job – and any number of animals who might wish to take their pound of flesh from him since they can’t get at his dead ex-partner, Ruby Harfang.

It’s not even outside the realm of possibility that one of my or Nick’s enemies might see Jack as an easy way to get at us, though you’d have to be a real idiot to kidnap someone your enemy cares about instead of just killing your enemy outright if you have the chance. No, if anything happened to Jack, it had nothing to do with us. But there’s a good possibility that nothing has happened to him, and Nick and I are just spooked because we feed off each other like a couple of dummies.

“He probably just went into the station,” I offer.

“Right. Yeah. He loves the job almost as much as you do. That’s probably what happened.” Something ugly and dark comes over Nick’s face. “And if anything has happened, we’ll fix it.”
I really love that fox.

“We will,” I agree, and turn around so that I can head into the bathroom attached to the bedroom I share with Jack. That’s when I see it.

Jack’s phone, plugged into the wall right between my ePod and Nick’s stupid lava lamp. He never brings it to the bedroom, but he never leaves the house without it. It’s one of his rules. In the eight months we’ve been together and the year we’ve known each other, that’s the one constant.

Maybe we’re not crazy to worry.
Chapter Summary

Wherein Judy gets some closure, Nick gets a proposition, and Jack gets what he deserves.

Chapter Notes

Feel free to imagine whatever you like. Take the prologue and this epilogue and imagine them playing chess, if you want.

Jack asked me to come alone, so naturally, I brought Nick, though he’s lurking somewhere out of sight. Katie Castleberry, paranoid little weirdo that she is, has a sniper rifle trained on Jack, but I’m no better, carrying a live firearm. Plus, there’s the wire recording everything we say. The MBI may have forgiven him his treachery, but I don’t trust him as far as I can throw him. Which is pretty far, considering the kind of muscle it takes to box with mammals eight times my size. It’s a ridiculous cliché, asking me to meet him where we first kissed, but after three weeks, I’m in a place now where I can look at him without feeling that crushing heartbreak. After this, I can write him off for good. Close this chapter in my life. Ask Nick out for a different kind of coffee than we usually get, once we’re both stable. That sort of thing.

“Hey, Judy,” my ex-boyfriend says quietly, paws clasped behind his back as he stands at attention. It reminds me of when we first met. He was the mysterious, smooth agent who seemed a bit standoffish until I realized he just didn’t know how to talk to the semi-attractive bunny who inspired him to become a cop. Socially awkward, not mysterious. I still find it sweet, but nothing is sweet enough to erase what he did.

“Agent Savage,” I say neutrally.

He flinches at that. He should feel bad after what happened to Nick. I know he believes he loves me, but he played with my feelings, manipulated me, and put me in unnecessary danger. That’s now how you treat someone you love. That’s how you treat someone you view as an object. Judy Hopps is not and will never be a delicate flower who wants to be owned. I deserve respect. Every mammal does.

Still, I take pity on him. Not because he deserves it, but because I don’t want to spend the rest of my day here. “What did you want to speak to me about?”

“I’m really sorry,” he tells me. I stare at him. He doesn’t think it will be that easy, does he? Frowning, he continues, “I know I messed up. I know I wasn’t a good boyfriend to you, or even a good friend. I prioritized the job over your feelings, and Nick’s, and it was hurtful.”

Unable to help myself, I snort in amusement. “Is that really why you think I’m upset?”
“I know it’s...important.”

“If anyone understands the need to prioritize work, it’s me,” I explain, trying not to sound condescending. It’s hard, though, because in lieu of ripping his throat out with my teeth I’d still like to shred him to pieces with my words. But he doesn’t deserve that much energy from me, so I keep my tone gentle. “I would never have been hurt by that. You set me up, Jack. You used me and manipulated me. You disrespected me fundamentally as a mammal and as a fellow officer. And you took my best friend, someone you said you cared about, and stored him away to be tortured—”

“That was not part of the plan! He was supposed to be accommodated!”

“And you did such an excellent job making sure that happened. Very well done. Bravo. As I was saying, you left Nick to be isolated and tortured with no explanation, leaving the department no choice but to label him a traitor. But even if that were forgivable, which it isn’t, I was hurt by your callous disregard of my animality. Not your priorities, your actions against me. I was never a possession or a simpering weakling waiting for you to come home to me, and as my boyfriend, you should have known better.”

I practiced all of that in the mirror until I had it memorized, just so I wouldn’t stumble over the words when I yelled at him, and it seems to have been effective. He slumps, his shoulders moving inward to make him look smaller than he is. “Can I just explain myself to you? Just once? I need you to know why I did what I did. Why I had to.”

I roll my eyes, but why not? Listening to his tale may not be the best use of my time, but some part of me would like to know what made him think my life was his to manipulate. What made him think it was a good idea to stash Nick in a so-called safe place in the paws of mammals who would take advantage of having a prisoner. What made him think we were so inferior that we couldn’t take care of ourselves. “You’ve got twenty minutes. Make it count.”

“Okay. Okay, good.” He lets out a breath and I think, uncharitably, that if he can’t tell the difference between my ‘just humoring a criminal’ voice and genuine interest, he couldn’t have loved me, because he doesn’t know me at all. “It started when Fangworthy came to me with details about the Ruffsteins. I didn’t believe him when he said they were a threat, but orders are orders, right? My initial thought was to get you and Nick on my team, but by the time I saw how bad it was, I was already in love, and I knew that would put you both in the line of fire. You probably don’t believe it right now, but I care about both of you, and...well, I knew I could count on you to do what was necessary, but you know Nick. He doesn’t like to pull the trigger. He’s a great investigator, but a terrible hunter, while you’re hard-wired for that kind of operation. You’ve always been the strong one.”

That...isn’t wrong, necessarily, and it’s a nasty little truth I’ll have to come to terms with eventually. I’m not blind to my faults. My over-enthusiastic impulses could get me into trouble if I ever gave up on being nice. I’ve always considered Nick’s reluctance to engage violently a strength, though. Police brutality isn’t nonexistent, after all, and considering the way other species treat him he lets a lot of things go that other officers wouldn’t. He’s the kind of officer that kits can look up to. He’s the kind of officer I wanted to be when I was nine years old and wanted to make the world a better place.

“We needed him safe, both of us,” Jack continues, but he’s not looking directly at me anymore. His eyes are on the headstone next to me. Ruby Harfang, the one who didn’t get away. Her death was probably the driving factor behind his protectiveness, and I do understand that. His choices were still wrong. “And I knew that between the two of us, you’d choose Nick over me. One of the things I love most about you is your relationship with him. I never had a friendship like the one you have
with Nick, you know, but I knew how to use it to keep you safe. He wasn’t supposed to get in that van willingly. It was supposed to look like he’d been kidnapped, and if you were focused on finding him, you would be too busy to look for me."

I purse my lips. This is the part that didn’t make sense to me, and now that he’s explaining it…it still doesn’t make sense. “You knew there was a bounty on my head, though, and you didn’t tell me. You didn’t tell Nick. You decided not to let me know I needed to be on the lookout for a leak in the ZPD. What if I’d worked with Coates? What if I’d taken my information to Spottson instead of Fangmeyer?”

“I knew you wouldn’t. You’ve never trusted Coates, and Spottson looks at both of us like we’re dirt, so you wouldn’t.”

“I would do what was necessary,” I interject with a scowl. “Spottson is the head of IA. Had I picked up any hint of police corruption other than Nick, I’d have gone to him, discomfort be damned. Your protection could have gotten me killed.”

“And if you had stumbled into the Ruffstein matter, you would have been killed for certain.”

“Really?”

He does look at me, finally. “What?”

“Do you really think so little of me that you assume I would get killed?” I sigh. Most of my good will is gone by now. “This is where your story comes apart. Either you trusted me to take care of myself, or you didn’t. But my life and safety is mine. My responsibility. You don’t get to just decide to omit what would help me make a real informed choice and then expect me to understand!”

“I didn’t think of that, okay? I didn’t – I didn’t have time to look at it from all sides. I didn’t have time to second-guess myself. I did what I had to do to keep you safe, knowing that it was possible you might not forgive me. It was better to keep you alive than keep our relationship afloat.”

“Oh, I forgive you,” I tell him. His face opens up with hope and I go in for the kill. “After what you pulled, I know that you’re not worth the energy of holding a grudge. I’m forgiving you, because forgiveness is easier. It’s less stress on me. But if you think for one second that I’ll ever take you back…you’re more of a fool than I thought you were. Maybe if it had just been me you hurt, we could have salvaged a friendship after a while. But you kidnapped Nick. You put my best friend in a position to be tortured because you trusted Ruffstein’s enforcers over your girlfriend and your own team. You allowed him to think that he was going to be killed by unknown assailants. And your machinations led to Porcino’s death. She was a horrible mammal, but she didn’t deserve that. Nick and I didn’t deserve the hell you put us through. So I may forgive you, but as of today, I never want to see you again. I never want to hear even the whisper of your suit.”

“What can I do,” he blurts, tears forming in the corners of his eyes. “God, Judy, what can I do to make this up to you? I would spend the rest of my life atoning, if I could. What will it take?”

My lip curls and my heart sinks into my stomach, venom eating at it as I realize the implications of his begging. He intended to win me over here. He may have said that he knew our relationship might not survive, but he was still banking on my forgiving nature. Even if he doesn’t know it himself, I can see clearly that this whole honesty thing is just a ploy; otherwise, he’d just leave me be. He assumed I would listen to his sob story and take him back when I realized how gallant and heroic his treachery really was, like some idiot damsel in a bad spy movie. Well, screw that, and screw him, too.
“It won’t take anything.” I step close to him and put my paws around his shoulders and hope that Nick and Castleberry don’t get the wrong idea. Leaning up to put my mouth against his cheek, I tell Jack, “I want Jack Savage to remain an ugly, unpleasant stain on my history. Spend the rest of your life feeling guilty, if you want, or feel indignant that I’m not falling for your stupid excuses. It means nothing to me either way. I want you out of my life for good. What else could possibly teach you to respect those you claim to love?”

I let go of him. His mouth has fallen open and he’s looking at me as though he’s never seen me before. Hello, Jack, it’s nice to meet you. This is who I really am. This is the mammal Nick knows me to be. I’m not the sweet, adoring, perfect bunny you want to pretend I am. I’m not the beautiful jewel you put on your pedestal. I’m an adult mammal who has scars and faults and aspirations. I make mistakes and I’m really bad at vocal cues and I can be a right bastard. The fact that I always try to do the right thing and be kind doesn’t mean I’m a nice mammal. It just means I know the difference between right and wrong.

“You could teach me,” he says. Begs, if I step back a little and listen carefully. “I...God, you could punish me however you wanted. Beat me, step on me, make me writhe in pain, just...you might not believe it right now, but I love you, and I don’t want to lose you.”

I grin suddenly. I’ve wasted too much time here. Knowing full well that my co-conspirators can hear me, I tell him, “Jack, honey, if I beat you and stepped on you, it wouldn’t be a punishment. I know you get off on that kind of thing.”

I hear Nick choke through the earbud in my ear, and I’m sure that quiet hiss is Castleberry snickering. Well, whatever. It’s none of Castleberry’s business, and Nick...well he has more dirt on me than something as trivial as my barely even kinky sex life. He has a photo of eight-year-old me in a leotard, crying my silly little eyes out because I only placed second in a dance competition in Podunk.

I turn away. If I let Jack continue to run this conversation, we’ll be here until next week. He calls after me, but I don’t want to hear him say he’s sorry anymore. I gave him plenty of chances to apologize for the things that matter, but all he could do was make excuses. I have better things to do now. Like get back to my friends, the ones who’ve had my back from the beginning.

Castleberry and Nick meet me at the alcove. Castleberry throws her rifle case in her car, yanks out her earbud, and says to us, “Well, as amusing as that was, I’ve got to go bleach my brain. I don’t want the memory of listening to someone that stupid. How’d he become an agent, anyway? Victor needs a swift kick under the tail.”

I watch her drive away as I lean into Nick. It’s not a conscious thing, usually, but I’ve been hyper-conscious of our proximity ever since I got him back. He settles his arm around my shoulders, and it doesn’t mean anything more than it always has, but that’s okay. After I confess my feelings, it will either mean something more or it won’t, and I’ll still take comfort in it. In him. Nick has always been my hero, even if he’s not always (or even usually) the one doing the saving. I hope I’m the same for him.

“So, Mistress Carrots,” he says slyly into my ear. I know that he’s got that stupid smirk on his face even though I can’t see him, because I really do know my partner. After all the doubt I had to face while he was tied up in that silo, it’s such a relief to be able to say that. “You like to step on the mammals you’re dating?”

Inspiration strikes. I turn and meet his eyes with a smirk of my own. “A lady would never kiss and tell, Mr. Wilde, but for an unlimited time, I’m willing to give you a demonstration, free of charge.”
No matter what he says next, I will cherish that wide-eyed, gobsmacked look for the rest of my life.

Chapter End Notes

I’m an unapologetic piece of shit.

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