How Could Anyone Love a Fox Like Me

by RiseAgainst522

Summary

Love, we crave it, chase it, dream of it. But what happens when someone is to afraid to accept it?

Nick has had a hard life and even though he wants to love he's scared. Judy is a determined rabbit who knows what she wants and will do whatever it takes to get it. Will she be able to push past Nick's fears? Will Nick be able to accept that someone actually loves him when he doesn't even love himself?

Follow along as their story unfolds starting after Nick and Judy trick Bellwether and continuing beyond where the movie ends see where life takes this dynamic duo. Through the academy, relationships, and dealing with the past, and fighting in the present for a better future.

This will be a Wilde ride. Wildehopps for life

Notes

Note: Hello people of this is my first ever Fanfiction and also my first writing attempt since I graduated. any comments or reviews would be greatly appreciated. if anyone wants to proof read or just get my chapters early ( like that would ever happen) let me know. I'm planning
on writing this story for a while hopefully you enjoy it. Ill try and post often I wont set a schedule Because I don't want to give any expectations. I promise to update as much as possible.

Hope you enjoy, questions, comments, and constructive criticisms welcome.

Edit 11/11/2018 - Hello reader, either re reading or a first go through I have a message for you, beware the first few chapters, they're rough and definitely could use some re-working. That being said I probably won't, I think using the beginning chapters as a sort of marking system to see how much I've grown as a writer and I promise if you can get past the first few chapters the later ones are better and I'd like to think I'm constantly improving. That's enough for now hope you give my story a chance and it brings you some joy.
Chapter 1 A New beginning for a Not so Old fox

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 has been re-uploaded because my editor, SaberGatomon, got to it.

The start to my long ass story. Starting from right after Judy hustles Bellwether and filling in what I think happened during the time skip.

Chapter Notes

Note: Hello people of this is my first ever Fanfiction and also my first writing attempt since I graduated. any comments or reviews would be greatly appreciated. if anyone wants to proof read or just get my chapters early ( like that would ever happen) let me know. I'm planning on writing this story for a while hopefully you enjoy it. Ill try and post often I wont set a schedule Because I don't want to give any expectations. I promise to update as much as possible.

Hope you enjoy, questions, comments, and constructive criticisms welcome.

Chapter 1

A New beginning for a Not So Old fox

"It's called a hustle sweetheart. Boom!" Judy triumphantly exclaimed as Bellwether found herself surrounded by the towering mammals of the ZPD lead by the imposing figure of chief Bogo.

After arresting the now former mayor, the ZPD then went about figuring out how to get both Nick and Judy out of the exhibit that they were stuck in. Eventually a ladder was located and as Nick helped Judy up all he could think was *I'm glad that's over, now to sneak away before anyone notices me.*

Fate however, had other plans it seemed because as soon as Nick cleared the edge of the exhibit his gaze was met with none other than the cold stare of the big bull himself. As the imposing figure glared down on them with a look of annoyance, anger and, with a small note of pride Nick and Judy could only imagine what would happen next.

"If you don't move he can't see you" Nick whispered

"I think that only works with the T-Rex in Zoorassic park, not angry cape buffaloes. Also, I'm pretty sure he can smell your fear." Judy replied trying to hide her grin.

"Fear must smell like sweat, explosions, sheep, and a hint of blueberry because that's all I can smell, anyways it was worth a try, do you think he can hear us talking about him?"
"I can" Bogo deadpanned "now if you too are done acting like teenagers who just got caught sneaking in after curfew, I would very much like to know what happened here."

As Judy recounted the events of the past day, with Nick throwing in details as necessary, Bogo looked on impassively. Stopping to ask questions as needed, by the end of the story Bogo was both impressed and hopeful. Impressed by the skills and dedication shown by Hopps, and the fox, not that he would ever tell either of them that.

Hopeful that with the newly acquired pellet of modified night howler serum that a cure could soon be created, and the savage animals brought back to normal.

However, both he and Judy had failed to notice that her leg had started bleeding again during the recounting of the day’s events.

"As much as I would like standing around and shooting the shit with you Chief, Officer Hopps really needs to get her leg looked at." noted Nick with a hint of impatience.

"Actually, I'm no longer a cop Nick" Judy sheepishly stated looking to the ground in embarrassment.

"I quit after realizing how much damage I had done to the city, and how much I hurt you." Judy trailed off feeling suddenly timid.

"Carrots, you came back, you fixed your mistake and you have nothing to feel bad about." Nick stated reassuringly, as he used a finger to gently lift her chin. Looking into her big lavender eyes Nick continued.

"And you know I already forgave you for what happened between us."

"As touching as this is, you really should get that leg looked at, Officer Hopps."

Startled and realizing he had been looking into Judy’s eyes for longer than what would be considered normal. Nick quickly looked back to Bogo and tried to forget about the small feeling growing in his gut.

Judy on the other hand had focused entirely on the words "Officer Hopps" that had come from the cape buffalo’s mouth.

"Chief Bogo, we both know I'm no longer an officer, no matter how much I wish that would change, rules are rules." Judy said, voice heavy with regret. With the hint of a smile Bogo turned to Judy.

"Right you are Hopps, rules are rules, and I just realized that you never gave a two week notice, or a letter of resignation. So as far as I am concerned, you were on unpaid leave for the past week and a half. Now I hope you enjoyed your time off, because you have a lot of work ahead of you"

Judy, not believing her luck but wanting to stay professional merely gave a crisp salute "Roger that chief."

"With that all taken care of, we unfortunately don't have any ambulances here, so you will have to be taken to the hospital in a squad car." Bogo gestured to one of his officers.

"Wolford, take these two to the hospital and make sure they get checked out." Bogo commanded

A large gray and white wolf who was most likely Wolford, approached the pair and introduced himself
"Derek Wolford, nice to see you again Judy and this is?" directing his muzzle towards Nick.

"Nick Wilde, nice to meet you. So, will you be our escort for the evening?"

"That seems to be the boss buffaloes plan speaking of Bogo we should probably head out before he gets mad." Not wanting to draw the ire of chief Bogo, Wolford quickly escorted the two to his cruiser.

"Your chariot awaits." Wolford joked bowing as he opened the passenger side door.

While Wolford was helping Judy up, being careful to avoid any of her injuries. Nick decided since she would be taken care of now he would not be needed anymore and decided to make his exit. Slowly backing away from the cruiser door hoping to make a clean getaway, he should have known it wouldn't be so easy especially not with that bunny. Before Wolford had even shut the door Judy shouted out.

"Nick, where do you think you're going?"

Turning back to the cruiser with his hustler’s smirk plastered on his face. Nick readied himself to convince the bunny in the cruiser, to let him go home.

“Well fluff, I was going to head home, seeing how you’re in the capable hands of officer Wolford here. You don't need this scruffy old fox hanging around, and hospitals give me the creeps, so I'll see you around."

"Nick, you could be hurt too, you need to come to the hospital to get checked out as well." Judy said voice full of concern.

“I'm fine carrots, I'm a big fox if I need to get checked out, I will. But for now, I could really use some sleep.” With that Nick turned to walk away but, Judy had other plans.

“Wolford, what did the chief ask you to do again?” she asked innocently

“He said to get you to the hospital and to make sure you got checked out." he said unsure where the little rabbit was going with this,

“Actually, if I remember correctly, he said, "take these two, to the hospital, and make sure they, get checked out." Adding extra emphasis to the words " those two," and "They" to get her point across. So, unless you want to disregard an order from Bogo, you need to make sure Nick comes along.” Judy proclaimed somewhat smugly.

With that Wolford grabbed Nick before he could run off. Sitting him next to Judy, and buckling them both into the same seat, despite Nick’s insistence that he was fine.

The ride to the hospital was rather uneventful as Judy had fallen asleep and was leaning on Nick for support. Even though Nick was uncomfortable with the proximity and the physical contact, he couldn't bring himself to push her away.

Wolford looked on in surprise, never having seen a fox and bunny so comfortable around one another. Writing it off as a friendship forged in the fire of a life-threatening situation. Knowing firsthand how situations like that could make even a mouse and an elephant friends.

In no time at all they arrived at Savannah Central General Hospital and were quickly ushered in to see the doctors. The examinations went quickly and in no time at all they were back in the lobby discussing their assorted injuries.
“See Fluff, I told you, nothing to worry about, just a few bruised ribs. Once I get some rest, I’ll be right as rain. How about you? What did the doctors say about your leg?” Nick asked, concerned that the cut was more severe than it looked.

“The cut actually looked worse than it was.” Judy stated, "long, but not deep so I got some stitches and I have to be careful, only light movement for a few days and in two weeks I should be good as new." Judy finished, happy that she wouldn't be out from work too long.

“Alrighty bunny and fox, it’s getting late and some of us have work in the morning. So as your driver for the evening, where will I be dropping you off?” Wolford asked hoping that it was close by so he could go home and catch some sleep.

"Sweet cheese and crackers,” Judy exclaimed "I just realized that I have nowhere to stay. I canceled my apartment lease after I went home. Would you mind letting me stay with you for a few nights Nick?"

Nick was not about to let Judy see where he lived, so after stuttering out a weak excuse about his lease not allowing cohabitants he decided to give Judy’s apartment manager a call and walked down the hallway for some privacy.

Judy was a little upset that Nick was unwilling to let her stay a few nights, not believing his flimsy excuse. She however, respected his decision even if she was a bit hurt. She understood some mammals were more private than others. Hopefully over time Nick will trust me enough to invite me over to his place. Judy thought to herself

After a few minutes of discussion Nick sauntered back, "Guess who got you your old apartment back?” Nick asked smugly. However, the next thing he knew his breath was gone as he got a rib crushing bunny hug.

“ThankyousomuchNickyouhavenoideaohowmuchthismeanstome,” Judy exclaimed breathlessly, and then released him from her vice-like hug.

"I'm glad I could be of assistance.” Nick grunted feeling the pain of the bruised ribs. "Now we really should get going before your landlady goes to bed and leaves you locked out of your apartment for the night."

After giving Wolford the address for the Grand Pangolin Arms and a short twenty-minute ride they arrived at Judy’s apartment. After meeting the landlady and getting the keys the three of them walked to Judy’s door. Nick however, insisted on carrying Judy up the stairs to avoid straining her leg. Judy argued at first, but finally agreed after Wolford threatened to tell Bogo she wasn't following doctor’s orders.

"Hey Wolford," Judy whispered getting the gray wolf's attention. "would you mind heading down now? I need to talk with Nick alone real quick," Judy asked quietly, hoping Nick would not be able to hear.

"Sure.” Wolford whispered back before making an excuse about needing to update dispatch of his location and heading back to the cruiser.

"Nick, I’ll be waiting by the car to take you home, don't take too long.” Wolford yelled over his shoulder, before descending down the stairs.

Judy stood before her door, arms behind her back looking at the floor. Nick, seeing she had something she needed to say waited for her to find the right words.
"Listen Nick," Judy started, not exactly sure how she would say what she wanted to say, but knew it was now or never. “I wanted to thank you for helping me fix my mistake and to put a stop to Bellwether's plot."

"Anytime fluff, it was, dare I say, kind of fun to run around playing cop with you. Since you’re back in town, and back on the force, be sure to look the other way if you see me and Finnick running Pawpsicles." Nick said brushing off her compliment not exactly comfortable with the recognition.

"Well if that's all, I got to go, it’s been a long day and I need my beauty sleep." Nick said as he turned to go

"WAIT" Judy shouted, grabbing his arm to stop him. Nick, shocked by her outburst turned back and waited for her to continue.

“Nick, I think we make a really good team, and I wanted to know if, since you forgave me, maybe you would think about becoming my partner on the force and turning in this"

Handing him back the application he had crumpled up back at the press conference. Holding the application in his hand, Nick noticed how worn it was, as if someone had open and closed it multiple times. It was also stained with what looked like tears. Making the paper seem much older than it was.

Nick looked back to bunny staring at him with that hopeful look in her eye and found himself speaking before he knew it.

"I’ll think about it, carrots. I'm probably not the best choice to watch your back, hell I'm probably one of the worst. And are you even sure you could even handle all this full time." Nick stated smugly as he gestured to himself smiling.

Judy, looking relieved laughed, “Ha! If anyone can put you in your place it’s me. But seriously, there's nobody I'd rather have by my side, than you.”

Judy said earnestly before unlocking the door and heading inside wishing Nick a goodnight. As Nick headed down to the cruiser Judy flopped onto her bed extremity tired and without changing, showering, or even pulling the covers over her, she decided to just go to bed.

Back at the cruiser Wolford was waiting and as he saw Nick walking out the door called out

"Hey, did you give Hopps a goodnight kiss before you left?"

"You know a gentlemammal never kisses and tells" Nick replied jokingly

"So, where am I delivering you to on this fine, if not slightly chilly, spring night?" Wolford said hoping that wherever it was wasn't too far away.

“You don't have to drive me home, I actually live not too far from here, so I'll walk. Besides you could use the sleep, and I could use the extra exercise." Nick explained hoping Wolford would believe him and head home for the night.

"Alright, if you say so, goodnight Nick it was nice meeting you." Wolford said, slightly uneasy about leaving the injured fox alone to walk the city streets. But before he had time to change his mind however, Nick was shaking his hand

"It was nice meeting you, as well. Goodnight." Nick replied, and with that he quickly walked off turning down an ally way.
Wolford just shrugged and headed back to the precinct so he could drop of the cruiser and head home.

As Nick was walking home, Judy was finding that sleep just wouldn't come. Her mind was racing at the thought that Nick might not want to partner up with her. The idea worried her more than she expected. She realized that having him as a partner, was now, just as big a part of her dream as doing actual police work. Judy was surprised, after only a few days the fox, known as Nick, had already become such an important part of her life.

Of course he did, you both nearly died together multiple times, and he stood up for you like nobody else ever had when you were ready to give up. Worried as she was about whether or not Nick would agree to be her partner, she knew that no matter what, they would still be friends at least, and with that her mind settled. She finally curled up and fell asleep with a big smile on her face.

Across the district, Nick was having an internal debate while walking to his spot under the bridge, having lied about living close by. Too ashamed of being homeless and needing the time by himself to think, he continued his trek home. Are you seriously thinking of joining the police academy? Do you really think someone like you would able to do something good with your life?

"Well, Judy seems to think I can. Maybe I should go on the straight and narrow." Nick replied to the voice in his head, hoping that nobody was around to hear him talk to himself. Be that as it may, his inner dialog continued, You and I both know you're not good enough to protect her. She needs a partner who isn't so pathetic.

"True, but who’s to say I can't change, I already know how to fight... Sort of, and I'm sure they will train me to be even better." Nick retorted to the voice in his head "Hell, I bet I would be a damn good cop, better than those bozos who I've dealt with in the past. That brings up another point Nicks brain continued, what makes you think they would want a conmammal around? Do you think with your past you could even get into the academy?

"That would be a problem, if they had any way to prove it. Since the only one who was able to catch me was Judy and she wouldn't sell me out, there's no proof. So, if that's all you got then I think we have our decision. You know that this is a mistake right? Remember what chief buffalo butt said they wouldn't trust a fox at all, let alone a fox like you. Nicks inner demons taunted, knowing just how to get to him.

“Yeah, you may be right about that, hell you probably are. But, maybe I can change that, and even if I can't I still know one mammal who will always have my back.”

With the doubts in his mind settled, at least for now and his decision made, Nick continued on his way. As he reached the bridge where he had set up his makeshift home he collapsed onto the chair that functioned as his bed. Hoping to get warm, Nick curled into a ball trying to retain all the body heat he could. Then throwing the one thin blanket he owned, covered in dirt and full of holes as it was over himself, Nick settled in for the night. As Nick fell asleep, he realized he had a few people he needed to talk to before he turned in his application. With those impending conversations on his mind Nick let sleep take him.
Chapter 2 - Dealing with the Past, In the Present, For the Future

Chapter Summary

Nick faces his past, Judy talks to her parents

Chapter Notes

Note: Hey guys and gals, chapter 2 turned out longer than expected nearly twice the size of the first one, I almost cut it back but decided to keep to my chapter outline so enjoy that. And I just want to stress again I'm by no means a writer so sorry if its poor quality, anyone who wants to proof read or anything like that shoot me a message,

Note 2: so in this story I use Italics to differentiate the characters inner monologue, however if you see Italics in a conversation it is because the character is putting emphasis on the word or words in question. I think I make it pretty clear in my story which is which but if it's confusing and I need to change it up for you all let me know,

Note 3: This chapter has been re-uploaded for edits.

Note 3: Caporegime- "usually shortened to just a capo, is a rank used in the Mafia for a made member of the crime family who heads a "crew" of soldiers and has major social status and influence in the organization" Just for reference

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 2

Dealing with the Past, In the Present, For the Future

The next morning found Nick pacing back and forth, trying to plan out how he was going to go about informing his old "Friends," about his new change of heart and career. Nick knew most wouldn't believe him, those that did, he knew, would defiantly be angry, and some will undoubtedly distance themselves from him immediately. Hopefully, nobody would think he was going to sell them out, because if they did, his new life might very well end before it even had a chance to start.

"Well, nothing will change if you just stand here worrying, get going and deal with the problems as they come." Nick said to himself, stretching his arms over his head while arching his back, popping a few joints in the process. With that, Nick began to get ready for the grueling day before him with a newfound sense of purpose.

Judy’s Apartment, Friday Morning, 6:30am

At around the same time, Judy had woken up and decided to get in a shower to wash the grime out of her fur. As she walked down the hall to the community showers, she realized she didn't have a towel or any kind of fur shampoo. Going to the only people, she had really gotten to know while she was here, Judy found herself in front of the door of her loud obnoxious neighbors Bucky and Pronk.
Gathering up her nerve, Judy knocked politely on the door and was immediately greeted with Bucky and Pronk's shouting voices.

"Someone's at the door," shouted one of them. Judy couldn't be sure which one it was.

"Obviously, are you gonna stand there like an idiot or are you gonna go see who it is." the other voice retorted.

"Hey, don't you call me an idiot, IDIOT."

"Well I wouldn't have to if you didn't act like such an idiot. NOW GO GET THE DOOR, I'M BUSY."

"SHUT UP! DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO, AND ALL YOUR DOING IS WATCHING TV"

"YOU SHUT UP."

"NO, YOU SHUT UP."

"NO, YOU"

This continued for a few minutes before Judy decided to knock again. This time the knock was met with silence before the door opened revealing Bucky. The Kudu was wearing a light gray button-down shirt with coal black jeans, the murderous look on his face could have stopped a tiger in its tracks.

"NOBODY'S HERE," Bucky shouted to Pronk.

"WELL THEN SHUT THE DOOR, YOUR LETTING THE HEAT OUT" Pronk replied.

"Excuse me." Judy called out.

Bucky looked down in surprise. Blinked a few times, then rubbed his eyes, as if he didn't quite believe she was really there.

"Hey Pronk, I thought you said the bunny cop moved out?" Bucky asked still looking at Judy like she was some kind of ghost.

"She did, I remember her packing up, muttering something about failing the city and hurting some guy, my guess is a bad break up, why?" Pronk said as he walked up behind Bucky wearing a dark blue sports jersey and pink and white polka dotted pajama pants.

Bucky, without breaking away from looking at Judy he just reached out and pointed his hoof at her. Pronk, upon seeing Judy mirrored Bucky's reaction, and started staring at her in disbelief, finally, Pronk broke the growing silence that had been forming.

"Hey bunny, I thought you moved out. What are you doing back?" He said, sounding somewhat pleased at her return.

"It's a long story and I'm sure you guys are busy, so I'll get right to it, I need to shower, but I don't have a towel or shampoo of any kind, I also have no money on me, so I can't go get anything. Soooo, I was kinda wondering if I could borrow a towel, and maybe some shampoo? Please," Judy said apologetically.

Bucky, after looking closer at the bunny, noticed she was filthy and her clothes were torn in various
places, and grew concerned.

"Are you alright, did you get jumped or kidnapped?"

"No, but I did go through hell yesterday and I would really appreciate your help. I'll even pay you back later." Judy said hoping to convince the pair to help out.

"Fine," Pronk responded Preemptively, knowing Bucky would already be willing to help the pitiful looking bunny.

"Wait here and I'll get what you need." With that Pronk left Bucky and Judy, and headed into the apartment.

"Thanks, you guys are life savers." Judy replied as she let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. Within minutes Pronk was back holding a properly sized towel, shampoo, and surprisingly, a change of clothes.

"A weasel friend of ours left his gym bag here a week or so ago, the clothes are clean, and you can return them when you get some more clothes, same with the towel, the shampoo is mine so return it when you're done, and you better not complain about the way it smells or I won't let you borrow it again." Pronk said curtly, handing her the bundle.

"Now Bucky, hurry up and shut the door, you're letting the cold in."

"Shut up Pronk I'll leave the door open if I want to, bye bunny."

After saying that, Bucky quickly shut the door in Judy's face, leaving her alone in the hallway.

"THANKS GUYS," Judy yelled from the hall, not wanting to forget her manners.

"STOP YELLING BUNNY, OTHER PEOPLE LIVE HERE" Pronk yelled back.

"DON'T YELL AT THE BUNNY SHE WAS BEING POLITE, AND YOUR WAY MORE INCONSIDERATE," Bucky shouted at Pronk, setting off yet another shouting match between the two.

Judy chuckled to herself, wondering what Nick would have said about her crazy neighbors. Probably something along the lines of "This is comedy gold; you could charge people to come listen in on their fights," and with that thought she headed to the showers humming happily to herself.

Stepping out of the shower, twenty minutes later, Judy felt refreshed. After drying off she got a look at the clothes she had been given. The shirt was a faded gray tee with the words "Witness My Fitness" on it, and the shorts were typical black basketball shorts. After putting on her underwear Judy tried on the clothes she was given. The shorts fit surprisingly well around her waist, only needing minimal adjustment before she was good to go, they were however, just a bit too long, looking more like Capri pants than shorts. The shirt was also slightly too long, basically looking like a night shirt on her, so she tucked it into her shorts and went back to her room.

Looking at her phone on the nightstand, she saw she had ten missed calls from her parents. Not wanting them to worry and also needing her stuff, she decided to muzzletime them. They answered on the first ring, Bonnie Hopps worried face appearing on the screen.

"Oh, thank heavens, STU, Judy called back." Bonnie exclaimed. A moment later Stu also appeared on screen.
"Judy, where are you? Are you alright? You left in such a hurry yesterday with no expatiation, when you didn't come home, your mother and I feared you had gotten hurt or that old truck had broken down, leaving you stranded somewhere." Stu asked concern clearly evident from the look on his face and the tone of his voice.

"I'm fine dad; I'm safe and sound in Zootopia, and I have some really big and exciting news." Judy said enthusiastically, she decided to not tell her parents about getting injured, knowing them, they would demand that she came home where it was safe.

"What news is that, hon?" Bonnie asked, a little confused. What exactly could have happened in the last twenty-four hours to cheer Judy up this much? Bonnie asked herself.

"I got my job back!" Judy nearly shouted, a smile breaking out on her face.

Stu and Bonnie's faces dropped, they quickly recovered however, trying to hide their disappointment.

"That's great honey. We're so happy for you, but how did this happen?" They said with smiles that were, just a bit forced. Judy noticed that her parents were forcing themselves to pretend to be happy for her. She decided however, not to mention it. Instead, she explained that with the information Gideon had given her; she had solved a big case, and because of that, chief Bogo decided to give her back her job. Judy didn't go into detail about the case however, as talking about cases that hadn't been tried in court yet was against the rules, and she didn't want to be in trouble before she even started her job again.

"Well, honey, your mom and I are just super proud and happy for you, but you are coming home for a bit, right? You still have the truck, and you need to get all your stuff." Stu asked.

Judy realized she had left the truck parked on some random street and didn't quite know where it was, she also was in no condition to go get it, let alone drive it all the way back to Bunnyburrow.

"About that…" Judy said sheepishly, "I can't leave the city; they need me to stick around in case they have any questions, is there any way you guys could come down with my stuff, and get the truck?" Judy asked, deciding to tell her parents a half-truth so they wouldn't worry.

"Well Jude, we're going to be busy the next few days, but we should be able to make it out on Monday, if you can wait that long." Stu explained, hoping that Judy would be ok without her stuff for a few days.

"Sure dad, I can manage, it's only three days, I'll pick you up at the station, let me know what time you're going to arrive." Judy said after thinking it over quickly.

"Well honey, we got to go, the kids won't get themselves to school, love you, have a great day," Bonnie said quickly rushing off screen

"Bye mom, dad, I love you both. See you Monday." Judy said before hanging up.

Now that she had fixed that problem, Judy decided to call Nick, hoping he remembered where the truck was parked. Going through the contacts on her phone Judy realized that she didn't have his number and had no way of getting it. At that moment Judy's phone started to ring. Seeing a number that she didn't recognize, Judy answered it hoping somehow Nick had gotten her number.

"Hello, Nick?" Judy asked cautiously.

"Hopps, It's Bogo," He said dryly.
"Oh, hello chief, what can I do for you?" Judy asked, confused as to why Bogo would be calling her now.

"I just received the report from the doctor on the condition of your leg; I'm putting you on three weeks of medical leave, make sure you rest up." Bogo told her in a tone that left no room for negotiation.

"But chief, the doctor said I would be ready in two weeks, and I want to get back to serving the city as soon as possible." Judy argued trying to change Bogo's mind.

"Listen Hopps, I understand your desire to protect the city, but the city needs you back at one hundred percent, to do your job properly, so stay out of trouble, understood?" Bogo explained.

"Understood Chief," Judy replied quickly.

"Rest up Hopps, three weeks will be over before you know it, goodbye," having said what he needed to, Bogo hung up, leaving Judy alone with her thoughts. Realizing that she was basically stuck here for the day Judy decided to get some more sleep, seeing as she was still tired, it was still only seven in the morning, and it wasn't like she had anything better to do.

Random Ally, Savannah Central, Friday Morning, 6:00am

Nick, having just arrived at his first destination of the day, walked down an alley toward a familiar van sporting an odd paint job of a brown wolf with a massive sword on his back holding a swooning white vixen as lighting struck behind them, on the side of it. Knocking on the back door loudly a few times, Nick was greeted with a small angry Fennec fox, wielding a baseball bat. His fur was in disarray, strands going every which way as if he'd just been woken up, and he was wearing only a white tank top and plaid boxers. Finnick looked more like he belonged in a trailer park than the city.

"Who the hell is knocking on my van at such an ungodly hour, don't you know mammals are trying to sleep." Finnick shouted, growling for emphasis. It still surprised Nick sometimes, even after knowing Finnick for years, how such a deep gravelly voice could come from such a small mammal. Standing there smirking, Nick waited for his soon to be former partner in crime to calm down.

"Hey Finn, if daddy let you sleep in, you would miss school. Now hurry up the bus should be here in twenty minutes," Nick joked.

"Shut up Wilde! You're lucky I need you to make some extra cash or I would've bitten your face off by now." Finnick replied, sitting down on the back of his van, placing his bat off to the side.

"So, what do you want? It's still too early to start on our usual hustle, unless you got something different planned for today." Finnick asked, slightly curious, as Nick almost never, woke up earlier than he absolutely had to.

"I know it's a bit early for our Pawpsicle hustle, but I was wondering if you had a minute to talk?" Nick asked, in a tone that made Finnick even more curious as to what the red fox was wanted to talk about.

"Sure Wilde," Finnick said patting the spot next to him, as he slid over so Nick would have room to sit down. "But if this is something stupid like the time you wanted to train fleas and start up a circus, I'm gonna beat your ass."

So, Nick sat down next to Finnick, and even though he had thought a lot about what he wanted to say on the walk over, now that the time had come Nick found himself speechless.
Finnick could see Nick was struggling. The red fox would open his mouth as if getting ready to say something, then his jaw would snap shut, and he would get lost in thought. Then a minute later he would open his mouth again repeating the cycle. After letting Nick do this for a few minutes, Finnick decided to take matters into his own hands. Giving him a swift punch to the ribs Finnick broke Nick out of the cycle he seemed to be stuck in. Doubling over Nick looked at Finnick and shouted "What the hell, mammal!"

Looking back at Nick Finnick just shrugged, "It looked like you needed that, now hurry up and tell me what you came here to tell me," Finnick said gruffly,

"Fine," Nick sighed "I'm done hustling. I know you needed the extra money and I'm sorry to spring this on you, but I'm done. You can find another way to make the extra cash without me I'm sure," Nick said, not looking at the little fox next to him worried that he was in for another punch.

"So, if you're not going to hustle, what are you going to do?" Finnick asked skeptically,

"I'm going to be a cop," Nick said, bracing for the verbal tirade that he was certain, was about to be unleashed upon him, but as seconds turned to minutes the fennec fox next to him said nothing. Glancing over at his friend Nick saw the look of utter disbelief on Finnick's face, and couldn't help but chuckle at it.

"This is some hustle, isn't it? Cus I know there ain't no way you would actually join the fuzz," Finnick said in disbelief

"This isn't a con Finn. I've decided to try and do some good. Honestly I've wanted to stop hustling for a while but could never find a job that I was fit for, no matter how many times I tried," Nick explained, hoping his sincerity was getting through to Finnick.

"Wilde, you've tried going legit before, and it always ends the same way. You work your tail off making money for some other mammal and a small pay check. Then, something goes missing, or someone complains about having a fox around and you get fired. What makes you think this time will be any different?" Finnick asked skeptically, trying to figure out what could have caused Nick to change so much in only a few days. After thinking about it for a moment Finnick realized exactly what must have caused Nick's sudden change.

"It was that bunny cop wasn't it?" Finnick said accusingly. "It has to be; I sent her to find you yesterday, hoping you would yell at her or something, and cheer yourself up. Now you want to change your entire way of life. Her naive optimism got to you didn't it. Or are you just trying to get in her pants, I can't say that I blame you that bunny has a fine ass. I'm sure an innocent girl like her will be nice and tigh-"

"ENOUGH" Nick roared, before Finnick could go any further.

"I'm becoming a cop because I want to do more with my life, not because I'm trying to get laid. Things will be different because that bunny cop, whose name is Judy by the way, will be there to help me just like I'll be there to protect her." Nick ranted pausing to take a breath. Before he could continue Finnick cut in.

"Alright, alright, don't have a heart attack." Finnick said,

"So, you want to be a cop and leave your conmammal days behind you, OK. Is that all you needed to tell me or am I under arrest now?" Finnick joked, knowing Nick would never turn him in.

"I would never turn on you, Finn. But is that all you have to say?" Nick asked expecting more of a
reaction from the notoriously short-tempered fox. "Are you going to be ok without me?"

"It's sweet that your concerned about little old me..." Finnick mocked,

"Emphasis on the little" Nick quipped back

"Watch it! My bat is still within arm's reach." Finnick warned before continuing.

"Anyways, don't worry about me, since you're going straight, I guess I'll try to as well. That diner I cook at part time was asking me to pick up more hours anyways, so I'll be fine. More importantly, as your oldest friend I'm not going to stop you, if working for the fuzz makes you happy, then do it, I'll have your back even if it does end up crashing down around you in the end."

"Thanks for that vote of confidence Finn. Still you've always had my back, so thank you." Nick said trying to avoid getting emotional.

"Yeah, Yeah, Yeah. Don't start crying, I may have been cool with you switching sides, but you know that most of our other..." Finnick paused throwing up air quotes "associates" won't be so understanding, some might even come after you." Finnick warned.

"Don't you worry about a thing old buddy; this fantastic fox has a plan to deal with all of that." and with that said, Nick hopped off the back of the van and headed out of the alley.

As Nick turned the corner and went out of sight, Finnick couldn't help but think to himself, that fool is in love with a bunny and doesn't even know it. Hopefully it all works out for him. Deciding to go back to sleep, Finnick shut the door, threw himself on the mattress and promptly passed out.

Nick spent the next several hours or so going from "associate" to "associate" explaining how and why he would no longer be around to work with any of them. Most reacted with disbelief at first, thinking it was some sort of long con, after convincing them that he was serious, many then became angry. Saying they would never speak to Nick again, and some even threatened him. Most, even tried to convince Nick that it would never work out, despite all that Nick pushed on.

Heading to the last person he needed to inform of his change in career paths, Nick couldn't help but wonder if his former associates were right. Even Finnick, despite supporting him, didn't seem to believe it would actually work out well. Even though Nick felt confident about this new life choice, he couldn't stop the little voice in his head that was trying to convince him to just stick to what he knew best.

"You know they're right; you'll never make it, stick to hustling it's what you do best. Why make life harder for yourself just for some dumb bunny you barely know? Even if you did become a cop, everyone will still see you as just a sly fox." The little voice whispered in Nick's ear

Shaking his head trying to ignore that little voice that was actually starting to make some sense, Nick realized he was almost to his final destination. You know he may kill you, Nick thought to himself.

"But it has to be done." Nick said to no one, steeling himself for what he knew would be a tense
conversation to say the least, and with that, Nick headed up the long driveway to the Big's estate.

Big's Estate, Tundratown, Friday Afternoon, 4:45pm

As Nick approached the front gate, a large snow white polar bear walked out from the guard house to meet him.

"Hey Kevin, how's the family? Good, well, I'm glad to hear it. Hey, I was wondering if I could ah, go in and speak with the big boss?" Nick said hoping to just be let in without trouble.

Grabbing Nick by the scruff of his neck Kevin brought him to eye level.

"You were lucky to leave here alive last time, now, vell since I still have orders to kill you, goodbye Nicholas" Kevin said unemotionally, as if reading from the dictionary, bringing a sharpened claw up to Nick's cream-colored throat.

"Wait wait wait wait," Nick sputtered out. "I called ahead to set up a meeting; I'm expected, tell them,"

"The old Caporegime "Red" has come for a sit down, and it has to do with an old truth coming to light."

Kevin looked suspiciously at the fox. As it hadn't been passed down to him that Nick was coming. But mistakes have happened before, and it wouldn't be good to just kill a guest by mistake, when he could just as easily call up and ask to be sure. Nick, of course, had lied. He knew that calling in advance would have ensured he would be six feet under before he even saw the gate. This was a calculated gamble on Nick's part, hopefully, Big would be curious enough about "an old truth coming to light," to let Nick through alive.

Kevin, still holding Nick by the scruff went to the guard house. After closing the door behind him Kevin grabbed the phone and called up the main house. After explaining the situation and passing on Nick's message Kevin listened intently for a moment before grunting a reply and hanging up the phone.

Looking at the slender red fox in the ridiculous shirt, Kevin sighed, setting Nick down on the floor.

"Well, the boss will see you, but you will wait here for an escort, and if this is some kind of con the boss will make you wish you had died here." and having said that, Kevin turned back to the monitors trying his best to ignore the fox next to him.

Nick, after dusting himself off and rubbing at his neck, stayed silent, knowing the bear could still kill him if he really wanted to. So, they sat in silence, fifteen minutes later another polar bear came to get Nick, after leaving Kevin behind Nick and this new bear headed towards the mansion.

It wasn't long before Nick was ushered into the same room he had almost died in not even a month ago. The room looked exactly the same as it had that night. The ominous lighting, the solid oak desk, placed in front of the red and white patterned rug, which sat on top of the trap door that lead to the icy pool, which spelled death for all who entered it. The picture of grandmama still hanging on the wall, lit by two red candles, even the snow and ice on the shelves looked like they hadn't been touched.

Nick had waited only a few seconds before Koslov entered the room carrying Mr. Big, after setting him on the desk and turning his chair around Koslov stepped back respectfully. Before Nick could even say anything Mr. Big held out his ring expectantly, Nick quickly and carefully kissed the tiny ring that was no bigger than a pin, and with the formalities out of the way Mr. Big spoke.
"Nicky my boy, why do you show yourself in front of me now? You're lucky I didn't have you killed the moment you stepped on my property. So explain what, old truth, is coming to light, before I decide to send you to an icy grave,"

"Well, Mr. Big, sir, the truth is there is no old truth coming to light, but I needed to explain something to you, something that if you learned about later from someone else might cause a Misunderstanding, so I had to lie to get you to hear me out." Nick explained quickly, hoping to convince the old shrew to hear him out instead of just killing him.

"Very well, you may say what you need to. However, if this is some trick, or if I deem the information useless, you will take a long ice bath. Also, if you ever lie to me again, no matter the reason, your silver tongue will become a trophy on one of my shelves." Mr. Big explained, with a tone that sounded more fit for discussing the weather, not talking about ending another mammals life.

"Now hurry, because every second you waste on silence is a second closer to you being iced merely for my amusement."

"Well, Mr. Big sir, I came here today to tell you that I, Nicholas Wilde, will be submitting an application to the ZPD." Nick said, sounding far more confident than he felt. "I wanted to come to inform you personally of my decision, as to avoid any possible misunderstandings,"

"Nicky, Nicky, Nicky," Mr. Big said shaking his head "did you really think I will let you become a cop. With all you know, you have intimate knowledge of my businesses, if I don't kill you here and now my whole empire would be in danger, so this is goodbye," then Mr. Big snapped his fingers and two burly polar bears entered the room.

"Ice Em," Mr. Big commanded.

Grabbing him by the back of his shirt one of the the polar bears hauled Nick into the air as the other pulled off the carpet and opened the trap door. Nick struggled as he was being slowly dropped into the freezing water.

"I'M DOING THIS TO PROTECT JUDY," Nick shouted, hoping that Mr. Big would be curious enough to stop his impending death if only for a moment. As Nick felt his tail drop into the bone chilling water, he struggled even harder, trying to get free somehow. As Nick's feet entered the water, he silently apologized to the few people who would mourn his passing. Thinking about Judy, Nick realized how much he had really wanted to make her proud, to see her face light up with a smile again, then, remembering how he treated her when they first met, Nick regretted how he would never be able to make up for it, and truly apologized for how he acted, and how he wouldn't be able to spend more time with her, and be there for her, the only mammal who really believed he could be something more.

"Stop," Mr. Big said, his voice clear and commanding. Watching as the bear lifted a shivering Nick out of the ice pit Mr. Big spoke.

"Now Nicky, would you care to elaborate on how exactly your plan to become a cop aids the little rabbit who is like family to me," Mr. Big asked, intrigued.

Still in the grasps of the polar bear, icy death still waiting below, Nick quickly explained his plan.

"Well sir, Judy has asked me to become her partner on the force. She is skilled, there's no doubt about that. But she needs someone to watch her back, and I don't completely trust the mammals at
the ZPD to be there when she really needs it. I mean look at how they treated her during the missing mammals case, no back up, no resources, and they tried to take her badge before the time limit was even up. Anyways, as you know from the work I've done for you, I'm very quick on my feet, and can talk my way out of almost any trouble I find myself in. I know the city and its underworld like the back of my paw, who else, other than me, would be better to protect her"

Mr. Big sat in his chair silently contemplating what Nick had said, and after what seemed like an eternity he spoke.

"I agree the ZPD alone can't be trusted to protect her, and it is true, you have either the luck or the skill of the devil himself, if half of what I've been told by those who've worked with you is to be believed," Mr. Big said motioning, for Nick to continue.

"Exactly. I want to use those skills to not only protect Judy, but also do some good for Zootopia and its citizens, I know she is like family to you, but as it is right now, there is very little you can do to protect her once she gets back to work, so, I'll protect her, with my life if need be." Nick said sincerely.

As Mr. Big contemplated Nicks proposal seconds passed like hours, the room in total silence, the only sound was Nicks own ragged breathing, and the sound of the water droplets from his tail and feet dropping onto the floor rhythmically, As the seconds turned to minutes Nick silently prayed to every god he didn't believe in, that the shrew in front of him would accept his proposal, because if he didn't, Nick knew he wouldn't make it out of here alive.

"Nicky, while your plan has merit, how can I be sure you won't betray me and tell the ZPD everything you know about me and my operations?" Mr. Big asked.

"Well you don't." Nick said honestly "But, that being said, you know I'm not one to go seeking out trouble. You also know that I know, that if I did betray you, no one could protect me. I don't plan on going after you, or anyone for what I know from my past. The other reason I came to you was because I hoped you would be willing to spread the word around, so people wouldn't get nervous and try to take me out. I won't tell the ZPD anything from the past, you have my word. That being said, with Judy as my partner, I won't be able to look the other way for any crimes from here on out." Nick explained laying all his cards on the table, and wondering if it would be enough for the crime lord.

"I can't say that your proposal sounds good to me." Mr. Big began. "However, I do want to see the bunny protected, and as it stands now, you're the best mammal for that." Mr. Big explained.

"But let me warn you now, If you do decide to betray me, or you cause any harm at all to come to Judy, Nick my boy, I will not hesitate, to hunt you down, and have everyone you've ever known or loved, killed, right before your eyes, and you know better than most that I don't make idle threats." Mr. Big said menacingly, hoping to get his point across to the red fox being held before him.

"So, do we have an understanding?" Mr. Big asked expectantly.

"You bet! No complaints here, everything is just dandy," Nick said quickly. Letting himself really breath for the first time in what felt like hours.

"Put him down," Big commanded.

"I will spread the word of your new change in occupation and alleviate any concerns others may have about what you might say to your new employer. Now get cleaned up and leave my property, before I change my mind," and with that Koslov picked up Mr. Big and took him away.
Nick was set down on the cold floor and provided with a towel. Nick was then given ten minutes to get dry before he was kicked out back into the cold.

After leaving the Big's estate Nick looked at his watch, seeing that it was only 5:30, he decided to head to Precinct One determined to submit his application as soon as possible. Happy that he had had dealt with his past, at least as much as he could, Nick was excited to start walking on the path to his new future.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed, questions, comments, and constructive criticisms welcome. Thanks for reading, as always feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect.
Chapter 3 - The Future, The Past, and Other Important Things.

Chapter Summary

Nick goes to the ZPD, then meets up with Judy, read to find out what happens.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys and gals, welcome to chapter 3! hope you enjoy,

Also I was thinking of maybe setting a posting schedule of sorts, something like every 10 days, as of right now I just post when I finish a chapter. A set schedule would allow me to possible create a backlog of chapters, which would be helpful if real life gets in my way, it would also let you guys know exactly when to expect the next chapter. The con of it would mean you would have to wait even if I finish a chapter quickly. I'll put it up to you all, vote down in the reviews or send me a message.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My lawyer (Mr. Google), said I don't really need a disclaimer, but to be safe and to appease our Disney overlords I'll add one. So just in case you thought I owned these characters or Zootopia in general, I do not, Disney does just like they own almost everything else nowadays

Chapter 3 - The Future, The Past, and Other Important Things.

Precinct 1 was a massive, multi-story building, designed to be accessible to a range of mammals, from small, to medium, to extra-large. The building's subdued shades of layered orange paint, made it look like it was built out of sandstone, and not simply concrete. As Nick walked up the precinct steps he was impressed at the size and design of it. Having avoided police stations like the plague the majority of his life, he couldn't deny how strange it was to be entering the precinct, not in pawcuffs, and of his own free will.

The main lobby was notably empty, having multiple levels and abundant space it looked as if it could have housed at least a hundred tiger or wolf sized mammals, all walking around without stepping on each other's tails, however at the moment, the lobby contained only a few cops chatting in groups, and one reception desk with a disgruntled zebra sitting behind it.

Nick couldn't help but notice the stares and whispers directed at him as he walked up to the front desk.

"Wonder what the fox is doing here?" a rhino cop whispered to the sheep next to him.

"Probably here to turn himself in or to report that someone stole his stolen car," the sheep replied,
sneering at his own joke.

"Well either way we need to keep an eye on him, there's no telling what he might be up to" the rhino said

"Yah," the sheep said nodding his head in agreement, "everyone knows to watch your wallet when a fox is around."

Unbeknownst to them Nick had exceptionally sharp hearing, not nearly as good as say a bunny, but better than a normal fox; A fact that had saved his tail more than a few times during past hustles. While having heard what they said, Nick decided to let it go, as it would be more trouble than it would be worth to confront them, and instead continued making his way to the front desk. As he reached the desk, the zebra whose name tag identified him as Officer Stripes, had noticed Nick and sighed.

Officer Marty Stripes was annoyed, he didn't want to be placed at the front desk, he preferred being out on the beat, however, the cheetah who normally ran the desk on this shift was relegated to records because of the savage scares, leaving the receptionist position vacant. And since his partner was out sick, Marty was the obvious first choice to man the desk. Glancing at his watch he saw it was 5:45, only fifteen minutes left in his shift. Happy that the day was almost over he noticed a red fox heading his way and couldn't hold in a sigh, Marty just knew this was going to be a pain in the tail. Never one to put in only half effort, Marty mustered all the enthusiasm he could and greeted the fox.

"Good afternoon sir, welcome to Precinct 1, how may I help you today?" Marty asked, proud he had managed to sound enthusiastic and professional.

Nick, seeing how tired and irritated the zebra looked, decided to hold back the snarky retort he felt rising in the back of his throat. Instead of commenting about how the zebras greeting sounded about as enthusiastic as a tiger kit saying he was about to take a bath. Nick instead got straight to the point of his visit.

"Good afternoon officer Stripes, I was wondering if I could get an application to join the ZPD please?" Nick said, mustering all the politeness he could.

Nick saw the zebra's face change, from tired, to shock, to amusement, all in the span of about a minute. Try as he might, Marty couldn't stop the laugh that escaped his muzzle, it took him 5 minutes to regain his composure. Nick's smile fell for just a moment. He had hoped that his application would be taken seriously, but it seems the universe wouldn't be so kind to him. Quickly throwing his hustler mask back in place, Nick waited for the zebra to calm down.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry" Marty said, wiping a tear from his eye.

"That was the funniest thing I've heard all week, a fox cop, like that would ever happen, so what really brings you here?"

"Well officer Stripes, as funny as it seems, I really am here to apply for the ZPD, so would you be so kind as to get me an application?" Nick said gritting his teeth hoping the zebra would just hand him an application and let it end here.

Luck however, was not in Nicks favor, as the smiling zebra quickly scrunched up his face into a sneer and looked down at Nick.

"Listen Fox," Marty said, spitting out the last word as if it was somehow dirty, "the jokes over, we
don't hire foxes and even if it we did, nobody would trust a fox cop, so, if you don't have anything important you need help with, stop wasting my time"

Nick went to argue, but before he even had the chance to defend himself he was interrupted.

"If you're going to cause a scene, I'll have no choice to lock you up for disturbing the peace, so before you say another word, think carefully, is this little joke really worth a night behind bars," Marty said, effectively stopping Nick in his tracks. Realizing it wasn't worth it, Nick decided to come back tomorrow and hope the next mammal would be a bit more helpful. As he turned to walk away Nick couldn't help but fire off a parting shot.

"You know what I just realized, I do have something I need to say to you" Nick said as he started to walk backwards, heading for the door.

"And what might that be" replied Marty curiously

"I was wondering if you're ever going to decide if you're a black horse or a white horse, or maybe you are just an overgrown ass who decided to dye his fur so he could be special." Nick said laughing

"Horses, Zebras, and Donkeys are all different mammals, you specist prick," Marty yelled out to the now retreating form of the rude red fox.

Nick chuckled sadly to himself, still walking backwards and not realizing that he was on a collision course with another mammal. The mammal in question was carrying a stack of boxes and files so tall he wasn't able to see Nick. Luckily for both of them the boxes were light, so when the two of them collided, the boxes and files went flying, but both mammals stayed upright. Nick, turning to apologize, saw what might have been the largest cheetah he had ever seen.

Benjamin Clawhauser was by no means a very tall cheetah, around average height actually, but what he lacked in height he made up for in circumference. Clawhauser's gut stood out a good six or more inches from his waist line, and his neck was nowhere to be found.

"I'm sorry about that, I wasn't watching where I was going," Nick said sincerely, hoping the portly cheetah wouldn't get angry and try to arrest him on some bogus charge. Much to Nicks surprise the cheetah beamed back at him.

"Oh no problem at all, If I wasn't carrying so many boxes I would have seen you, so I guess we are both kinda at fault," Clawhauser said as he began to pick up the spilled files and put them back in order. Nick, wanting to get out of there as soon as possible, but also feeling bad about the mess decided to quickly help clean up.

"So, what brings you to the ZPD today?" Clawhauser asked, still wishing he could be at the front desk. Even though the cheetah seemed nice, Nick decided to lie to him, not wanting to deal with anymore mocking mammals today.

"Oh no problem at all, If I wasn't carrying so many boxes I would have seen you, so I guess we are both kinda at fault," Clawhauser said as he began to pick up the spilled files and put them back in order. Nick, wanting to get out of there as soon as possible, but also feeling bad about the mess decided to quickly help clean up.

"Oh no problem at all, If I wasn't carrying so many boxes I would have seen you, so I guess we are both kinda at fault," Clawhauser said as he began to pick up the spilled files and put them back in order. Nick, wanting to get out of there as soon as possible, but also feeling bad about the mess decided to quickly help clean up.

"Oh no problem at all, If I wasn't carrying so many boxes I would have seen you, so I guess we are both kinda at fault," Clawhauser said as he began to pick up the spilled files and put them back in order. Nick, wanting to get out of there as soon as possible, but also feeling bad about the mess decided to quickly help clean up.

"So, what brings you to the ZPD today?" Clawhauser asked, still wishing he could be at the front desk. Even though the cheetah seemed nice, Nick decided to lie to him, not wanting to deal with anymore mocking mammals today.

"Oh, I just by to ask if my wallet had been turned in, I lost it the other day and I can't seem to find it anywhere," Nick said casually, hoping that the cheetah would buy it and not ask any more questions.

That was a lie, and Clawhauser knew it, if someone had asked him how he knew it was a lie, he wouldn't have been able to explain it, but he just knew, that what the red fox in front of him had just said, was a lie. Clawhauser had been working the front desk for years, and had seen many mammals come in, too reluctant to tell him what they really needed, but somehow, he could always tell when a mammal wanted to say more. He had a sort of sixth sense that came from years of experience. Deciding not to push the issue Clawhauser continued cleaning up the files on the floor.
"Did we have it?" Clawhauser asked curiously

"Nope, but I gave the officer up front my number, and he said he would call if it was found," Nick said as he picked up the last file, handing it to Clawhauser.

"Well, I gotta go, sorry again about walking into you," Nick said, hoping to make a quick exit.

"Oh, well it was nice meeting you Mr.… ugh?" Clawhauser said, trailing off, realizing they had never exchanged names.

"Wilde, Nick Wilde," Nick said, deciding to use his real name, considering he might end up working with the cheetah.

"It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Wilde, and I hope you find your wallet soon." Clawhauser said, extending his paw.

"Likewise, Officer… Clawhauser," Nick said shaking the cheetahs extended paw, and headed towards the front door.

What a nice fox, Clawhauser thought to himself as he picked up his stack of boxes and files and headed back to the records room. I wonder what he really came here for? As he passed the front desk Clawhauser decided to chat with Marty for a bit. Setting down his boxes Clawhauser leaned against the desk causing the wood to creak and bend slightly.

"Hey Marty, how's the front desk treating you?" Clawhauser asked

"Not too bad, but I never realized how boring it can be" Marty said

"I don't know how you dealt with it, you're either bored out of your mind or dealing with mammals who just want to waste your time, like that fox who just left" Marty continued as he pointed to the now closing door Nick had just walked out of.

"Oh really, what did that he want?" Clawhauser asked, hoping to find out why Nick had actually come to the precinct.

"Nothing important, he wanted to waste my time by pretending he was interested in joining the ZPD, I laughed it off at first, but had to put my foot down when he tried to keep the joke going, after I told him off he made a specist remark and left," Mary said indignantly as he, turned to face Clawhauser.

The cheetah however, was gone. Quicker and quieter than Marty had thought was possible for the portly cheetah, Clawhauser had grabbed an application from behind the desk and ran off, determined to find Nick.

As Clawhauser made it out the door, he hoped Nick hadn't gotten too far, looking slowly from left to right Clawhauser scanned the sidewalk for Nick, suddenly, Clawhauser noticed a distinct shade of red not thirty feet away, sticking out like a sore thumb in the crowd of mammals that walked along the sidewalk.

"Mr. Wilde, Mr. Wilde, NICK WAIT," Clawhauser called out, causing the surrounding mammals to stop and stare for a moment before continuing on their way. Nick, hearing his name, decided to ignore it and continue on his way, he really wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone else at the moment, no matter how kind the cheetah had been to him. Nick was about to continue on his way when he felt a rather large paw on his shoulder. Turning around Nick saw Clawhauser resting against a wall panting, as beads of sweat ran down his face.
"You all right their buddy?" Nick asked, slightly amused at the sight before him

"Yah… I'm… Fine… Just… Let me … Catch my breath" Clawhauser said, as he tried to regain his composure. After several minutes Clawhauser was finally able to speak normally again.

"Whew," Clawhauser said still sweating rather profusely, "that was the most cardio I've done all year"

"Well officer, what did you need, as I'm sure you didn't run after me just so we could chat some more… or maybe you did, I wouldn't blame you, I am irresistible," Nick said wiggling his eyebrows jokingly.

"You certainly are interesting to say the least, however I came to give you this" Clawhauser said, handing him a yellow sheet of paper.

"What's the citation for?" Nick said not actually looking at the paper.

"It's not a citation you silly fox, It's an application, you wanted to join the ZPD right? That's why you really come here So if you fill it out quickly I will personally give it to Chief Bogo," Clawhauser said, smiling at the look on Nick's face.

Nick was shocked, not exactly sure how Clawhauser had known that he wanted to join, unsure how to proceed, Nick looked at the application in almost disbelief. Nick became suspicious however, why would this cheetah go out of his way for some random fox he had just met not ten minutes ago? Looking some ulterior motive, or a trap of some sort, but unable to find one Nick decided to fill out the application.

"Hey Clawhauser, you wouldn't happen to have a pen by chance?" Nick asked, realizing he didn't have one on him.

"Oh sure, here you go," Clawhauser said as he rifled through his pockets and produced a black ballpoint pen.

As Nick started filling out the form Clawhauser decided to get to know his possibly soon to be colleague.

"So, Nick, what makes you want to be a cop?" Clawhauser asked

"Well, I just want to try and do some good, I haven't lived the best life so far, but I think that I can make a real difference and actually help mammals," Nick said sincerely.

"That's very noble of you, I'm sorry Marty laughed at you, especially when you seem to really want to join the ZPD and help others," Clawhauser said apologetically.

"It's fine, I'm used to it, I was just going to come back tomorrow and hope that whoever I spoke too would be more open minded," Nick explained, his tone even and unemotional.

"It's not fine!" Clawhauser asserted, "you shouldn't have to be belittled and mocked like that, especially not by an officer of the law."

"Thanks Clawhauser, I appreciate it, but it's not a big deal, just part of being a fox," Nick explained hoping the cheetah would just drop it.

"I still don't like it, but I'll let it go for now, and my friends call me Ben," Clawhauser said
"Well Ben, are you sure you want to befriend some random fox? I could be a criminal trying to infiltrate the ZPD," Nick joked

"I highly doubt that Nick, I can tell you really want to do good and help others, and the ZPD could always use more mammals like that, so I'm happy to call you a friend for now, and when you graduate the academy I'll be even happier to call you a brother in blue," Clawhauser said, and Nick, who could see a lie from a mile away could tell the Ben truly meant, every word of it.

"Well then, I better not fail, I'd hate to disappoint a friend." Nick said happily, glad he had found another mammal who seemed to believe in him.

"Here you go," Nick said as he handed Ben his freshly filled out application, "my fate is in you paws."

"I'll make sure it gets to Chief Bogo right away," and with that Nick and Clawhauser went off in their separate directions. As Clawhauser headed back to Precinct one he couldn't shake the feeling he had seen Nick somewhere before, but ignored the it as he headed up application in paw to see chief Bogo, and also with something he needed to say. Nick, looking at his watch and seeing it was only 6:30 decided to pay Judy a visit and give her the good news, and maybe get some dinner as well.

As Nick reached Judy's apartment he couldn't help but worry. Isn't it weird showing up uninvited to someone's apartment? Maybe she won't want to see me, I should probably just go home, Nick thought to himself. Nick's body however, decided to move on its own and without even realizing it, Nick was in front of Judy's door, paw raised, and ready to knock. Hesitating for a moment, Nick decided since he was already here he might as well see her. Nick knocked three times and waited for a moment in silence. Not hearing any noise from inside the apartment Nick quickly knocked again, louder this time, thinking maybe Judy hadn't heard it. After a few more seconds of silence, Nick, figuring Judy wasn't home, turned to leave. As he headed down the hall he heard a familiar voice call out to him.

"Nick?" Judy said hesitantly, not completely sure that it really was Nick. Hearing the rabbits voice Nick turned around and smiled.

"NICK!" Judy shouted excitedly, "it really is you, what are you doing here?" She asked unable to stop her tail from moving wiggling side to side.

Nick smiled, seeing how excited Judy was to see him made him unusually happy.

"Well Carrots, I came to deliver some good news to an odd country bunny, but I see you've decided to ditch the country bunny look and went for gym nut instead," Nick said, motioning with his paw to her new attire. "That being said, the look suits you"

"Well Slick, my choices were rather limited, it was either this, country bunny who got mugged, or naturalist, considering my options this was the best choice," Judy said, walking to her apartment door.

I kinda wish she had went with the third option, Nick thought to himself as he started to picture what Judy would look like in the fur. WAIT, HOLD ON A MINUTE.... just what the hell are you imagining right now. Nick said, chastising himself, she's your friend, also, she's way too good for you, so mind out of the gutter Wilde.

Judy, not noticing Nick's internal struggle stood at the door waiting for Nick to come in.

"You just gonna stand there like a statue or are you coming in?" Judy asked. Nick, realizing he had
been standing there like an idiot, quickly got his dirty mind in line, but before he could start moving Judy had grabbed him by the tie and pulled him inside the apartment. Saying the apartment was small would be an understatement. Nick had a hard time even classifying the room as an apartment, it was basically a broom closet someone had thrown a desk and bed inside.

"Judy, how much do you pay to live in this shoe box?" Nick asked incredulously, hoping the sweet naive bunny wasn't being ripped off. Judy looked around at her apartment, she knew it was small, but it was the best she could afford at the moment.

"Oh, I'm not paying that much, anyway enough about my apartment what's the news you wanted to tell me?" Judy said quickly, trying to change the topic. Nick saw right though her attempt at redirecting the conversation, but and being a rather stubborn fox wasn't about to let it slide.

"we can discuss my good news after you tell me how much you pay to live in this overgrown hole in the wall Fluff." Nick said hoping humor would get the bunny in front of him to open up.

"well…" Judy said as she started fiddling with the tip of Nick's tie that was still in her paw. "I pay about 3,000 a month, which includes utilities"

"Carrots that is ridiculous, you could find a much better apartment for the same price, I happen to know a few mammals in real estate if you want to get a better place." Nick said, shocked by how much she had been paying for such a run down and tiny apartment.

"I couldn't ask you to do that Nick," Judy said, not wanting to take advantage of Nick's kindness too much. "You've already done me a favor by getting me this place back, anyway, what is the good news you had for me?" Judy asked, curious as to what exactly Nick had come all this way to tell her.

"First of all Carrots, you didn't ask, I offered, so you should take advantage of the connections I have, as for my news, I came to tell you I've decided to join the ZPD, I actually submitted my application before coming over here."

Judy suddenly released her grip on Nick's tie, looking over at her Nick thought she might explode. Judy was literally vibrating with apparent joy, and to Nick's surprise, Judy seemed to be letting out a sort of grinding noise, from her teeth.

"Nick this is fantastic, were going to make a great team, it's going to be so great working together." Judy said excitedly as she started to hop up and down.

"Judy calm down," Nick said, placing his paws on her shoulders to stop her moving. "if you keep this up your going to pop a stitch or something."

Judy, realizing Nick was right, stopped hopping, "sorry Nick I'm just so excited, I couldn't imagine having someone else watching my back." Judy said sincerely. After hearing that Nick was trying hard and keep his emotions in check, noting that ever since meeting Judy it was getting harder and harder to follow one of his oldest life mottoes and never let her see that she got to him.

"well I'm glad your excited, however I still need to be accepted, survive the academy, and if I can do all that, then maybe old buffalo butt will let me be your partner," Nick said, not wanting Judy to get her hopes up.

"Nick, your gonna do great you're definitely smart enough, you're charming, a good mammal, and after I help you train, you will pass the physical tests with ease." Judy said, not wanting Nick to put himself down.

"Anyway, I was wondering, if you hadn't eaten yet if you wanted to order pizza and celebrate a
"I would love that," Judy said, still excited from the news she had just gotten.

So Nick and Judy ordered a half cheese half carrot pizza and a large Koala Cola. As they waited for it to arrive, Nick was worried they might sit in awkward silence, however they found plenty to talk about. Sitting on Judy's bed Nick would ask Judy questions about her kithood. Judy described Bunnyburrow and what life was like growing up as a farmer's daughter, as well as how hard it was being the weird bunny who wanted to be a cop. Nick was a good listener, he was attentive and asked questions, and offered his sympathies about how she had been treated. Judy tried to ask about Nick's life growing up, interested in how the confox know as Nick Wilde had come to be. Nick, however was reluctant to share. Instead Nick would just give a half answer and ask her another question to distract her. They continued passing time like that for a while Judy even telling Nick about the play she and her friends had put on for Carrot day.

"I wish I could have known little Carrots, she sounds like a smart headstrong kit who knew what she wanted, and I bet she was super cute as well," Nick said, imagining a miniature Judy, with the same boundless enthusiasm and naive world view. Judy, upon hearing the word cute, threw a punch that could have staggered a rhino right into Nick's shoulder.

"OOWWW, what the hell Carrots, that punch might have broken my arm" Nick said, rubbing his arm melodramatically.

"Oh it wasn't that hard you big kit, I never knew foxes were so sensitive," Judy mocked. "Also, don't call bunnies cute it's degrading."

"I resent that, I'm a very tough fox, and I didn't think bunnies could hit like Rocky Bearboa," Nick joked.

"Rocky Bearboa, never heard of him" Judy said

"You've never seen the Rocky Bearboa movies," Nick said shocked, "Well I'm going to have to fix that right now."

"I don't see how you're going to accomplish that, considering I don't have a laptop or TV, and unless you're magically going to produce either of those we won't be able to watch anything tonight," Judy said. Doubtful that they would be watching the movie tonight.

"Well lucky for you, I have a phone, and a Furflix account, while it may not be the big screen it should be enough for tonight," Nick explained.

"Speaking of phones, you never gave me your number Mr. Wilde, I would like it if you wouldn't mind," Judy said, hoping Nick would be ok giving her his number.

"Sure Carrots, give me your phone and I'll program it in, just don't share it around, I'm a very sought-after fox and I would hate to have to switch numbers again," Nick explained, quickly taking Judy's phone and putting his number in, under the name "Foxy Guy." Judy, after getting her phone back rolled her eyes at the name Nick had given himself,

"You would put that as your contact name," Judy said deciding she would change it later, and putting her phone away.

A few minutes later the pizza and Cola arrived, Nick offered to pay for it, he had expected Judy to argue with him, however to Nick's surprise she said nothing. Seeing as she had no cash for the next three days, Judy let Nick pay, promising herself she would pay him back later. After getting situated
with the pizza and drinks Nick moved Judy's nightstand to the center of the room. After propping up his phone so they could see the screen, Nick sat on the bed and leaned back against the wall.

They watched the movie as they munched on pizza, Nick commenting every once in a while, either to explain something Judy didn't understand or to tell her to pay attention to the next scene. Judy was enjoying the movie and as she went to get another slice she happened to look over at Nick. Nick wasn't doing anything strange, just eating a slice of pizza, however Judy found herself staring at his fangs. They seemed to glow in the dim light of the movie, and Judy couldn't help but be intrigued by them. Judy found herself remembering how it felt when Nick had pretended to bite her in the Natural History Museum, the way his fangs had brushed against her throat. Judy couldn't stop the shudder that ran through her body, the feeling of her natural predator's teeth around her neck should have terrified her, but to Judy's surprise, she hadn't shuddered in fear, but arousal. Judy was shocked, she had never had a thing for sharp teeth before, hell she had always liked bucks, but she couldn't deny the effect seeing Nick's teeth was having on her. This is new, Judy thought to herself, well Nick is a really attractive mammal, with his slender toned body, and striking eyes, and those fangs and claws, Judy thought to herself shuddering again.

Nick was watching the movie intently, one of his favorite parts was coming up soon and he didn't want to miss it. However, a strange scent filled his nostrils breaking his concentration. The scent was earthy, like freshly laid mulch, but it also had a sweet almost fruity tinge to it. Trying to catch the scent again Nick inhaled deeply through his nose. Nick was expecting the scent to be fading, barely noticeable at all, but he was wrong, it was even stronger than before. The scent was driving Nick crazy, he couldn't put his finger on what it was. Even though it seemed so familiar, the meaning behind it escaped him. Even though Nick couldn't figure out what the scent was, it called to him, tugging at his brain in a way he couldn't quite understand, the effect on his foxhood however, was clear as day. Quickly readjusting his pants and tucking his growing erection up into his waistband, Nick turned to Judy hoping she hadn't noticed the state he was currently in.

Nick, looking at Judy, saw her wide eyed and staring at him, as her nose twitched, Nick was worried at first that she had seen what he had been trying to hide in his pants. Looking at Judy however, Nick realized she was staring at his face specifically, so it seemed she hadn't noticed, but what was she looking at? Nick quickly wiped his paws along his face to see if he had any food stuck to it. As his paws went over his muzzle however, Nick realized he had been chewing with his mouth open. Good job moron, Nick said berating himself you forgot to chew with your mouth closed like you were taught, and now you've scared Judy.

"Hey Carrots," Nick said pausing the movie and breaking Judy out of her stupor.

"Sorry about that, I forgot to chew without showing my teeth like I had been taught, it won't happen again." Nick said, fearing Judy would not accept his apology and was now scared of him.

"Oh don't worry, I wasn't scared," Judy said trying to reassure Nick. As Judy gathered her thoughts, however one thing Nick said had stuck out to her making her curious.

"Hey Nick, what did you mean when you said, you forgot to chew without showing your teeth like you had been taught?" Judy asked wondering who would have taught him such a thing.

"Well Carrots, when I was a kit in elementary school, all predators had to take a class on how to act around prey mammals to avoid scaring them, not that I paid much attention to that, but my parents also explained how I shouldn't growl, let my claws out, bare my fangs or show my teeth while chewing, to avoid trouble with prey," Nick explained

"That's awful!" Judy exclaimed, "predator kits shouldn't have to be taught to suppress themselves and tip toe around prey, that's just unfair," Judy said, clearly upset.
"It's not that bad Fluff, and if I had listened I could have avoided scaring you a minute ago," Nick explained, trying to calm Judy down.

"No Nick, it's unacceptable, and I wasn't scared of your fangs I was exci…. interested," Judy said quickly catching herself before continuing, "I've never seen predator's teeth up close before, and was intrigued not scared, anyway, if sharp teeth were enough to scare me, I wouldn't have become a cop," Judy said defiantly.

"Yah you're probably right Fluff, but that's how it is," Nick said, deciding not to push the issue any further.

As Nick started the movie up again he made an effort to chew properly, despite Judy's insistence that she wasn't scared. As the screen went black and the credits rolled Nick realized that it was now 10:30 and decided to call it a night. Before he could say goodnight however, a resounding boom went off outside, and the sound of rain pounding down soon followed it. Nick sighed, it was going to be a long walk back in the now pouring rain.

"Well Carrots it was fun hanging out with you, but, as it's getting late, I'll be heading home." Nick said as he grabbed his phone and headed for the door. Judy, realizing Nick was about to walk home in the cold and rain without a jacket, umbrella, or even a hat to provide some cover reached out to grab his arm.

"Wait Nick, you should just stay here for the night, if you go out in this weather you'll catch a cold for sure, and I wouldn't want you to get sick," Judy said

"Well as tempting as that sounds, where would I sleep, you don't exactly have a spare bed laying around," Nick said. Even though the thought of cold rain and possibly getting sick was extremely unpleasant, he didn't want to impose.

"well, we could share the bed, I mean I'm not that big so it should be fine, or if you're uncomfortable with that, I can take the floor," Judy said trying to convince Nick to stay.

"Judy, I don't think that would be a good idea, and I'll be fine there's a bus station not too far away," Nick said trying to convince Judy he would be fine.

Judy decided since Nick wouldn't listen to reason, she had no other choice but to pull out her secret weapon.

"Please Nick, just stay the night, if you don't I'll worry.' as she said this Judy gave Nick the bunny eyes. Nick, looking down at Judy, saw the look she was giving him, wide eyes, ears down along her back, a twitching nose, and a wobbling lower lip, and he was powerless to resist. Damn she looks so cute, fine what's the worst that could happen, Nick thought to himself.

"Alright Judy, if it means that much to you I'll stay, but I'm taking the floor, nonnegotiable," Nick said sternly, hoping Judy would accept. Judy's face changed in an instant, gone was the cute pleading bunny face and in its place a triumphant smirk. I just got hustled, AGAIN, still I gotta say she looks cute even when smirking. Get it together Wilde, Nick muttered to himself.

"What was that?" Judy asked innocently

"I said I can't believe you hustled me, and by the way that look should be illegal," Nick replied

"Illegal or not, I really did mean it when I said I would worrying about you, and I won't need to use it on you Slick, just agree with me to begin with and there will be no need," Judy said still smirking.
"You know Judy you might just be part fox, either that or I'm having a bad influence on you," Nick retorted as he lay down on the floor. Judy chuckled at the thought, a bunny fox mix, *I wonder if that's even possible, and what would you call it, a Funny? Or a Box*, Judy thought to herself. Nick took his charger from his pocket, plugged it into the wall outlet and set his phone on the nightstand to charge. Realizing Judy probably needed to change, Nick started heading for the door. Before he could reach it however, his way was blocked by a rather annoyed looking gray rabbit.

"You're trying to leave," Judy said accusingly, foot tapping rapidly in annoyance. "Did you really think it would be that easy to slip out when my back was turned?" Judy asked

"I'm not trying to leave Fluff, I just figured you would want to change into nightclothes so I was giving you some privacy," Nick explained

"Like I told you before, I don't have anything else to wear, so I have to sleep in this," Judy said, still not moving from the door.

"Wait a minute, why don't you have anything else to wear," Nick asked, slightly confused.

"Well, I kinda came back in a hurry after I figured out what night howlers were, so I didn't pack anything, also I figured after the way I messed up, tearing apart the city with that disastrous press conference, and hurting you in the process, I figured I wouldn't be staying in Zootopia once I solved the case," Judy said sadly, tears beginning to well up in her eyes.

"Carrots…. Carrots look at me, come on Fluff," Nick said, trying to get Judy's attention. Seeing that his words were not having any affect, Nick went a step further. Even though Nick wasn't really ok with physical contact he decided to ignore his own discomfort for Judy's sake. Pulling Judy into a hug Nick leaned down to whisper in her ear.

"Judy, you can't keep beating yourself up for what happened, you were put up there with no coaching, no help, and no idea what to say, you were obviously overwhelmed and just said some stupid stuff that you didn't really mean, and yes the city went to hell, but it was because of what Bellwether did, she's to blame, not you," Nick whispered softly, but with an intensity that showed that he really meant it.

Judy was surprised when Nick pulled her into a hug, but decided not to fight it, instead she buried her face into his chest in an effort to stop herself from crying.

When Nick said her name, Judy was taken aback, it also allowed her to feel the full weight of Nicks words, there was just something about him saying her real name that showed her her really meant what he said, and also made her feel really special. As she listened to him Judy couldn't help but agree, Nick made some good points, and while she still felt some guilt about what she had said, Judy felt significantly better about everything that had happened.

After a few moments Judy broke the hug, looking up at Nick still slightly teary-eyed Judy smiled up at him.

"Thanks Nick, I really needed to hear that, you're the best," Judy said.

"Think nothing of it Fluff, I think I'm getting used to dealing with you emotional bunnies" Nick joked

After giving Nick another good punch to the arm, Judy climbed into bed and settled in. Laying on the floor Nick got as comfortable as possible curling up into himself and resting his head down on a real pillow for the first time in years.
As Nick waited for sleep to claim him, he found that his mind was restless. He couldn't stop thinking about Judy, and while you couldn't tell by looking at him, Nick was having a fierce internal debate, trying to quash some rather confusing feelings about a certain rabbit. This debate started when a rather explicit image of Judy found its way into Nick's imagination catching him off guard and causing Nick to question himself,

"I've never found bunnies attractive before, I've only ever been into vixens" Nick thought to himself.

"Then again, you've never seen a bunny with curves and a tight body like Judy's before, you like what you see, there's nothing wrong with that," a sympathetic voice in Nick's head countered,

"You're a dirty prey chasing freak, it's not like Judy would ever want you anyways," Nick's inner demon chimed in.

"It's just a passing physical attraction nothing more," Nick thought, trying to reason with himself.

"Are you sure about that? You seem to like her quite a bit, even though you've only known her for like a month," the logical part of Nicks brain argued.

"We're just good friends, that's all," Nick countered.

"Really… that's what you're going with, kind of a weak excuse if you ask me, and you are me, you're changing your entire life for just a friend, sounds like a load of shit," Nick's logical side shot back.

"Fine, I may have a small crush on Judy," Nick relented, not able to deny the truth in his own thoughts any longer. Instead of being relieved however, knowing he had feelings for Judy terrified Nick, the only thought that brought him peace was the taunting of his inner demon, the ironclad fact that Judy couldn't, wouldn't, ever feel the same way about him. Confident in that fact Nick fell asleep a look of agitation etched on his face. Little did Nick know that the bunny not even a foot away, was kept up, by thoughts of him.

Judy's inner dialog while having a similar topic to Nick's was not nearly as dramatic.

"so, Nick's teeth, what was that about?" Judy inner voice asked

"I have no idea, I've only ever dated or been interested in bucks, so why did Nick's teeth turn me on so much?" Judy thought to herself, hoping some other part of her brain would know the answer.

"Well, you might have had a thing for preds and not known because you've never gotten close enough to one physically or emotionally, or maybe it's not preds in general, just Nick himself," Judy's analytical side added.

"So, I'm either a predo, or I'm attracted to my best friend?" Judy asked herself

"You may be a predo, but the fact that you're attracted to Nick is undeniable, you even consider him your best friend, even though you barely know him, so, what do you plan on doing next? Is this just a school girl crush or something more?" Judy's inner voice questioned.

Judy found she didn't have an answer to whether or not her feelings for Nick went deeper at the moment, only time would tell. Judy however, was determined to find out, and if it ended up being something more, Judy found that she was ok with that.

Nick was a nice guy, smart, funny, caring, and he believed in her dreams, I've dated a lot worse, and haven't known many better mammals. Judy thought to herself, as a new voice added itself to the mix. "Yah, but would he want to be with a bunny?"
Judy decided to ignore the voice of doubt that had popped up in the back of her mind, instead focusing on the happiness that came to mind when she thought of a certain fox. So, with a smile on her muzzle Judy found sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Lastly as always Thanks for reading, enjoy, and feel free to drop a review, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want, ect

Have a day (good or bad, it's up to you)
Chapter 4 - When the future rings will you pick up the phone?

Chapter Summary

Nick meets with Bogo, how's it gonna gogo, read it and you'll know, woah

Chapter Notes

Hey guys and gals, welcome to chapter 4! hope you enjoy

AN: nobody on FanFiction.net voted on me using a posting schedule of sorts I'll just keep going like I have been, but you all can still vote if you want, also if anyone was curious as to how long it takes to write a chapter I timed myself on this one, 17.5 hours total, 4 hours of editing, 13.5 hours of writing, roughly. These times are purely working hours, time spent at the computer typing only.

Still looking for an editor and or someone to storyboard with, if anyone's interested message me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer- Do I really need to do this? No, No I do not. Will I do it to cover my ass? Yes, Yes I will.

Just so you all know I don't own Zootopia, or any of these characters... Yet, Disney does... For Now

Chapter 4 - When the future rings will you pick up the phone?

Precinct one, Bogo's office, Saturday morning, 5:00 am

Chief Bogo sat at his desk hunched over, and rubbing his temples with his hooves, trying desperately to relieve the pounding headache that had been plaguing him since the arrest of Bellwether. The resulting pandemonium of arresting the second mayor in less than four months, was enough to drive any mammal crazy. The city council was in disarray, trying desperately to find a new mayor and bring the city back from the brink of chaos. Bogo's headache didn't end with the council however, he also needed to prepare a press release, coordinate security for a pro-pred rally, finish a mountain of paperwork, and to top it all off, a fox decided to apply to the ZPD. It was this last point that had Bogo's headache pounding the worst, the council would get itself together, they just need a good kick in the tail, Bogo knew how to coordinate his officers and handle the press better than any other chief, but he couldn't help but be concerned that a fox was trying to join the academy. There had to be some angle, some con this fox was running, foxes were sly, untrustworthy, petty criminals, these weren't prejudices, just facts, facts that Bogo had learned from his years walking the beat. So why
would a fox try to join the ZPD if he wasn't planning some con or prank.

When Clawhauser had brought the application to him yesterday Bogo had almost let out a laugh; but seeing the strangely serious look on the cheetah's face stopped Bogo in his tracks. Bogo had just taken a pause in writing up the report on Bellwether's arrest, reaching into his desk Bogo grabbed his bottle of Tomatin 36-Year Single Malt Scotch and poured himself a double. The Whiskey was an expensive gift from Lionheart, and as much as Bogo disliked the maned politician he wasn't about to pass on a fine scotch. Bogo rarely drank, it dulled the senses, made mammals act foolishly, and with the pain it brought the next morning, the drink really wasn't worth it in Bogo's opinion; however, after the day he had, it was definitely needed. As Bogo was taking his first sip of the fine amber scotch before him, he heard a knock at the door. Setting the glass down on the table Bogo couldn't help but sigh, hopefully whoever was on the other side of the door had some good news for him.

"Come in," Bogo said, his deep voice rather subdued, revealing just how exhausted he really was. Looking up to see who had decided to disturb his moment of rest, Bogo was surprised to see Clawhauser. Benjamin Clawhauser was definitely one of his more boisterous officers, prone to squeegeeing, shouting, and gossiping, but even though Bogo always appeared annoyed by Clawhauser antics, Bogo secretly enjoyed having Clawhauser around. The normally giddy cheetah was nowhere to be found though, this cheetah, was serious, not even a hint of a smile, instead the look on his face was indignant, and in his paw was a sheet of paper.

"Is that his resignation?" Bogo thought to himself fearing the worst. He had lost quite a few officers in the recent weeks, some felt unappreciated, some were concerned that they were making prey mammals anxious when they patrolled, others were just scared, so to protect their families they either stayed home, or moved out of the city, just trying to find somewhere safer for them and their kits.

Maybe I can convince him to stay, talk to him, explain how much the ZPD needs him, or maybe give him the front desk job back, Bogo pondered, as he waited for Clawhauser to speak. Looking at Clawhauser, Bogo noticed that the cheetah seemed to be struggling, as if he needed to say something but couldn't. Fearing the worst but wanting to get it over with, Bogo broke the silence.

"So Clawhauser, what can I do for you today? If this about some new Gazelle app or something she posted on Muzzlebook I don't have the time right now," Bogo said, prying that's all that Clawhauser wanted to say, but judging by the look on his face today wasn't Bogo's lucky day.

"Well Chief, now that you mention it, I did hear some interesting news about the angel with horns, but that's not why I needed to see you." Clawhauser said, his tone switching from bubbly to stern as he quickly changed topics.

"First, I came here to give you this," Clawhauser said, sliding the paper across the mahogany desk to Bogo.

Looking at the paper, Bogo kept his features calm, determined not to react as he came face to face with... an application to join the ZPD. Bogo was slightly confused, why was Clawhauser handling this application, and not the new front desk officer Stripes? What had the Cheetah looking so serious? And why did this application need his personal attention?

Applications normally went to the Candidate Assessment Division, after receiving an application the mammals of the C.A.D would perform a background check, then, if that came out clean, they would scour social media to search for anything dubious, risky, or things that just didn't fit with the image of a ZPD officer. If anything was found, it would then be reviewed by multiple mammals, and possibly disqualify the applicant, after a final decision had been reached they would send out an acceptance or rejection letter accordingly. As the chief he had almost no interaction with applications, unless a unique situation arose, and in his ten years of being chief he had only personally dealt with three
applications, most notably and recently was in the case of Judy Hopps, with some "persuasion" from the mayor he had reluctantly accepted her to the academy figuring she would give up and drop out. It had been one of the few times he had been wrong, after solving two cases that none of his veteran detectives could figure out, Bogo couldn't deny she had a bright future, and her enthusiasm and kindness was refreshing, not that he would ever say any of this to her.

Thinking maybe the application would stand out in some way if he actually looked at it, Bogo quickly skimmed over the paper. Name, Nicholas Wilde, not someone recognizable, he is a Zootopian citizen, only 4ft tall and 80 pounds, maybe it was because this was a smaller mammal, but he hadn't dealt with any small mammal application since Hoppes's case had set a precedence for the Mammal Inclusion Initiative, so it probably wasn't that, going back to the application Bogo continued, This Nicholas Wilde is a predator, still nothing unusual, seeing as about half of his officers were predators. As Bogo continued onto the next question the answer he saw written there gave him pause, species, fox. Was this some sort of joke? Before Bogo could let out a hearty laugh he caught the look in Clawhauser's eye and stopped, Bogo realized this was no joke. Figuring he needed more information Bogo decided to play it cool, quickly skimming the rest of the paper for more information, Bogo noted that it this fox wanted to become a cop, how ridiculous. Bogo prayed that Clawhauser would suddenly break into a smile and say it was all a big prank, or some sort of clerical error; but looking back at Clawhauser and seeing just how earnest the cheetah was, Bogo realized this was no joke, prank, or error of any kind.

"So, a Fox, this, Nicholas Wilde, wants to join the ZPD, while I find that extremely, interesting and all, I don't see why this needed my personal attention Clawhauser, why didn't you just submit this to the C.A.D like you're supposed to?" Bogo asked choosing his words very carefully, as he raised one eyebrow slightly, face devoid of emotion.

"Well chief… it's just…I wanted to make sure… it was handled… properly" Clawhauser said cautiously, trailing off slightly at the end. Bogo just silently stared at Clawhauser gesturing for him to continue, Clawhauser stayed quiet, nervously looking around the room, trying desperately to avoid eye contact. Realizing he would have to prod a bit more to get to the bottom of this Bogo sighed.

"Clawhauser, would please explain exactly why you believe that I needed to be given this application, to ensure it was properly handled?" Bogo asked, his tone leaving no room for negotiation. Clawhauser, realizing that there was no way he could lie, silently apologized to Nick, sorry Nick I was going to let it go because you asked me too, but I have no choice. Preparing himself to say what he knew needed to be said Clawhauser inhaled sharply.

"The reason why I brought this to you specifically chief, is because of the reaction the fox, Nicholas, got when he tried to get an application" Clawhauser explained. Bogo, seeming rather interested gestured for Clawhauser to continue his story.

Getting the hint Clawhauser continued, " well sir, officer Stripes laughed at Nick when he first asked for an application, then when Nick asked again Stripes still refused to give him one, going so far as to tell him off for trying to joke around so much, so after I got Nick an application to fill out I realized that unless it was given to the proper person it might "go missing." Clawhauser said making air quotes before continuing

"So, after thinking about it for a bit ,I realized there was only one mammal I trusted to make sure everything was done properly, since you would never let bias affect the rules, bringing it to you was the best choice," Clawhauser said smiling.

"Well, thank you for bringing this to my attention Clawhauser, I'll make sure Stripes is spoken too and that this application is handled properly, if that's all I have a lot of work to do," Bogo said
"I knew I could trust you chief, and don't be too hard on Marty I'm sure he didn't mean any harm," and with that said Clawhauser left a much happier mammal. Bogo quickly downed the scotch on his desk and went back to work; however, even as he worked on more urgent matters, his mind kept wondering back to the fox and his application. After finishing his work for the day, Bogo went home, deciding that after a good night's sleep to clear his mind, he would be better able to deal with the issue of the application.

Even after going home and getting a good night's sleep however, Bogo hadn't been able to figure out what to do. Looking at his watch Bogo groaned it was only 5:15 and he already had a pounding headache, today would not be a fun one. Turning back to the problem at hand Bogo tried to figure out what he was going to do. You could always shred the application, nobody would know, A little devil version of Bogo whispered, as he appeared on Bogo's shoulder wearing a blood red robe and wielding a pitchfork. Bogo contemplated it for a moment before discarding the idea, what if Clawhauser asked the fox about it later, there would be no way to explain it without either getting caught or throwing some innocent mammal under the bus.

If you don't want to shred it you could always just reject it now, just make up some reason and be done with it, the devil Bogo said. It was a tempting idea, but before Bogo could even decide whether or not to do it, an angel Bogo appeared on the other shoulder, wearing a pure white robe with golden halo floating over his horns. You know that would be wrong and remember how much faith Clawhauser had in you. The angel shot back almost mockingly, as Clawhauser's words played in his head over and over again.

"That may be so, but I'm still concerned as to why this fox wants to join the ZPD" Bogo said, before realizing how crazy he must look talking to himself. Well why don't you do a quick check on him, and if that doesn't satisfy you then you can interview him yourself, and if you're still worried after all that you can dig deeper into his past. The angel reasoned.

What a great idea, why didn't I think of that, well I guess in a way I did, Bogo thought to himself, with his moral dilemma solved, both the images on his shoulders vanished in identical puffs of smoke.

Searching Nick's name in the ZPD's database was easy enough, and with a few taps on his keyboard Bogo had all the information about any crimes the ZPD had connected to Nick. That being said, Nick had always taken great care to fly under the radar and with how little was on his file he had done a good job. Looking at the file Bogo was astonished, this Nicholas Wilde seemed like the perfect citizen, no arrests, no tickets, no complaints of any kind. Bogo scrolled through the file some more, looking for something, anything, out of place. The more Bogo looked, the less he felt he would find something, and after looking through the whole file twice and not finding anything Bogo sighed as he realized there was nothing here to find. As Bogo was about to close out the page he noticed an odd red flag next to Nick's name. Bogo clicked the flag, curious as he had never seen a flag like that on a file before. The flag was linked to a page filled with notes and rumors from officers and detectives, all centering on a mammal known as Nick Wilde. Reading further Bogo found that although none of his officers had ever met this mammal, all their contacts in the underworld knew of him, there was nothing concrete, no evidence to back up the rumors, but the tales listed in this document were an interesting read to say the least. Now Bogo was even more suspicious as to why this mammal would want to join the ZPD, looking over all the crimes he may have committed Bogo noticed something strange, none of his dealings really harmed anyone, and some weren't even crimes, but skirted the blurry line of legality. This Nick Wilde wasn't all bad. However, Bogo decided he needed to meet this fox in person, Bogo knew if they talked in face to face he would know for sure what type of mammal Mr. Wilde was, and if he was serious about becoming a cop. Looking at his phone and seeing that it was already 6:00 am Bogo decided to call the fox and set up a meeting.
Nick was not a morning mammal, his morning routine usually consisted of turning over and falling back asleep multiple times before actually getting up. This morning however, Nick was wide awake, as soon as he realized he was in an apartment and not laying on his chair under the bridge Nick jolted into a sitting position. After a moment, memories from last night came back, and Nick relaxed slightly. Worried he might have woken Judy up, Nick glanced over at the bed. Seeing the slow rhythmic rising and falling of the sheets informed Nick that Judy was still sleeping. Nick figured now was as good a time as any to get up, so he did, and then Nick started to gather up his things. Grabbing his phone and charger off the nightstand, Nick quickly threw both into his pocket. Glancing over at the bed again to make sure Judy was still asleep Nick was suddenly stopped in his tracks. The sun had just begun to raise, the early morning light had just started trickling in through the window, bathing Judy's face in a warm orange glow. Nick couldn't take his eyes off of Judy, taking in every detail, he was captivated, the way her ears fell down along her back, the way her eyes were closed, her face relaxed, looking so peaceful and carefree, how the light made her gray fur shine almost silver, or the small smile on her muzzle. She looked breathtaking, Nick couldn't resist taking a quick picture, sliding his phone of his pocket Nick quietly unlocked it and snapped a picture. With a small click the picture was taken, and at that moment Judy shifted in her sleep. Worried that Judy would wake up and catch him staring at and taking a picture of her, and be weirded out, Nick swiftly turned around and pretended to be on his phone. Nick didn't know how much time he had been watching Judy sleep, it could have been a few seconds or twenty minutes. After having almost been caught Nick decided to leave right away, he needed time to think. and to get his head on straight. So as quietly as possible Nick opened Judy's door and walked into the hall, carefully closing the door behind him, Nick then made his way outside. As Nick walked back home he tried to distract himself from what had just happened, however to his displeasure Nick couldn't stop his mind from wondering back to thoughts of Judy.

"What is it about this rabbit that has me so mixed up?" Nick asked himself, trying to get to the source of his dilemma.

"It's not like I haven't had crushes before, this should be no different, once I just accept the fact that I have no chance I can move on, no reason to ruin a good friendship and make it awkward," Nick reasoned with himself.

This had been Nick's approach to every crush, once he had rationalized in one way or another that the relationship was impossible or wouldn't work out, he would be able to forget the growing feelings, and eventually he wouldn't feel that way anymore.

"It's not like Judy would like me anyway, she's cute, smart, kind, overall just amazing, and completely out of my league, hell I bet she probably has bucks lined up around the block just waiting to date her, she wouldn't want a fox like me, someone who's got a checkered past, no real future, not much to look at, and nothing to offer her other than snarky comments and street smarts, she definitely wouldn't like me back, so I can just shut off those feelings," Nick said, continuing to talk to himself, happy that there wasn't anyone else around.

As Nick continued down the sidewalk he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. Nick wasn't expecting any phone calls, not many mammals had his number, and those that did would never call so early in the morning. Taking the vibrating phone out of his pocket and looking at the screen Nick saw a number that he didn't recognize, thinking it could possibly be an old acquaintance who had changed numbers Nick answered.

"Hey, if you're a telemarketer trying to sell me something, I've got four little words for you: do not call list..." Nick said preemptively, figuring that if it was a telemarketer then it was better to get that out of the way quickly.
"Hello, may I speak to a mister Nick Wilde." The mammal said with a voice that was deep, smooth, and rang out with the clear air of authority. Not recognizing the voice Nick decided to play it casually and see what the mammal wanted.

"You've reached him, who are you, and what can I do for you today?" Nick asked

"Well Mr. Wilde I'm Adrian Bogo, chief of Precinct One and I was wondering if you would be able to come to the station today, I wish to discuss your application to the ZPD." Bogo said, trying to stay polite and professional.

"Sure, I'm free today, what time did you have in mind," Nick asked,

"Well I'd like to meet as soon as possible, so how does 9 o'clock sound?"

"That doesn't really work for me, I have some things I need to take care of right now, how about 12 o'clock?"

"12 o'clock works just fine, I will see you then Mr. Wilde, just come to Precinct One and let the front desk know who you're here to see, have a pleasant day," and with that Bogo quickly hung up leaving Nick with only silence.

Throwing the phone back in his pocket Nick continued on his way. About 10 minutes later Nick was back at the bridge that he called home, realizing that he should probably clean up if he was going to have a meeting with his future boss Nick headed over to a small grouping of trees nearby.

The trees were nothing special really, tall, brown, with green leaves, and some small bushes gathered around the bases, they were unassuming, and that's exactly why Nick chose them as his hiding spot. Nick, being poor and homeless, didn't have much, just a few boxes filled with a couple of his pawaiian shirts, some pairs of shorts, toiletries taken from various hotels, a small stash of cash, and some miscellaneous personal items. Taking out a new shirt and shorts, along with some fur shampoo and a white towel, Nick then headed over to the nearby warehouse.

At the warehouse, Nick had managed to set up a makeshift shower by using a large black tub on the roof, some PVC piping, and a cutoff valve. The way the shower worked was rather simple, the tub would catch rain water, and given time in the sun, even heat it slightly, then when the cutoff valve was opened the water would go through the pipes and onto Nick. Now Nick didn't use the shower much as it used a lot of water; and getting his fur completely dry was a pain in the tail, but Nick knew he needed to look and smell clean if he was going to meet with a possible employer. Nick made full use of the shower, taking care to wash every part of himself and making sure to be thorough getting the shampoo all the way down to the skin. After an extensive drying off Nick threw on his clean clothes, grabbed his stash of cash and headed out.

Nick made several stops while taking care of his business, heading to a wide array of places from thrift stores and malls, to convince stores and a candy shop. Nick ended his trip at the Zootopian Postal Service building, Savannah central, carrying two boxes, both taped up and ready to be sent out. Behind the desk sat an elderly brown bear, wearing the standard light blue button up uniform shirt of the ZPS, the bear slowly moved through the line handling each customer with a kind of tired politeness that bordered on indifference. Nick waited in line, one headphone in his ear listening to the Fur Fighters on Ewetube. Soon enough he was at the front of the line and was being called up to the desk.

"Next," the bear said with an enthusiasm that rivaled a sleep deprived sloth. Nick stepped up to the desk carefully placing the packages on the counter. Looking up at the old bear before him Nick threw on his award-winning smile
"Good afternoon, Mrs. Berenstain, might I say you're looking lovely today," Nick said, still holding his smile. Mrs. Berenstain looked down at the fox, taking a moment to recognize him, before breaking out into a smile as well.

"Nicky my dear, how good to see you, you flatterer," Mrs. Berenstain exclaimed, enthusiasm and joy suddenly radiating out from her, as she looked over quickly at her calendar "I should have expected you, first Saturday of the month, just like always,"

"Mrs. Berenstain, you know I never flatter, only speak the truth, you know that, and yep first of the month just like always, however I also have another package going somewhere else as well,"

"Well I'll thank you for the compliment then, this graying fur isn't really in style you know, anyways Nicky I already know where one is headed, just tell me where to send the second."

After explaining which package was going where and some pleasant conversation Nick looked up at the clock behind the desk and realized he needed to hurry up if he wanted to make his meeting.

"Well Mrs. Berenstain, as much as I would love to stay here and chat some more, I sadly have to head out, so how much do I owe you this time?"

"For you, that would be 23 zollars and 45 cents dear,"

"shouldn't it be more?" Nick asked confused "23.45 is how much it usually costs."

"Oh I know dear, but since you are a regular and such a kind young mammal I gave you a little discount"

"You don't need to do that for me Mrs. Berenstain, just tell me how much it really is, I have plenty of money," Nick lied, "plus I don't want to get you into trouble"

"I know I don't need to Nicky, I want to, you're always so kind to this old bear, even though you don't need to be, so let me do this kindness for you," Mrs. Berenstain explained. Nick reluctantly accepted, realizing there was no point in arguing. After paying for the shipping Nick said his goodbye and turned to head out, but before he could leave Mrs. Berenstain stopped him.

"Nicky, are you sure you don't want to put a name or return address on either of these, I know I tell you this every time but if they get lost or sent to the wrong place nobody will know where to send them back to,"

"I know, Mrs. Berenstain, but I have faith that the wonderful mammals at the ZPS will get it right, no need to give a return address, and the packages will be better received without my name on them."

"If you say so Nicky, thanks for coming in, it's always brightens up my day, don't be a stranger," Mrs. Berenstain said waving Nick off.

Precinct 1, Bogo's office, Saturday afternoon 12:00pm

Bogo had lost track of time, it happens to everyone, you get really focused on something, and before you know it, time has jumped forward. Right after his conversation with Nick, Bogo had gone right back to searching everywhere he could, trying to learn as much as possible about the fox before he showed up to the meeting. In the middle of his search Bogo was interrupted by a phone call, looking at the phone in irritation Bogo picked it up.

"What," with that one word Bogo was able to convey exactly how he felt, letting the mammal on the other end know to get to the point or else.
"Sorry to bother you Chief, but I have a fox here who says he has an appointment with you, a Nicholas Wilde, should I send him up?" The voice on the other end asked, a slight tremor in his voice. Looking at the clock in the corner of his computer screen Bogo saw the time and nearly shouted, 12 o'clock! how the hell is it that late already.

"Yes, send him up," Bogo said, retaining his composure. Bogo quickly closed out the tabs on his computer and organized the files on his desk, hiding out of sight any evidence of his search.

After being told where Bogo's office was, Nick climbed up multiple flights of stairs until he stood in front of the door labeled Chief Bogo in big gold letters. Nick was nervous, although he didn't show it on his face, on the inside he was terrified, this was potentially the most important meeting of his life, one screw up and his new life would end before it even had a chance to start. Knocking on the door Nick felt an enormous pressure, as a deep voice instructed him to enter, Nick's instincts were telling him to run, hide, or do anything other than open the door. Ignoring his instincts, Nick stretched his arm up, grabbed the handle, and pushed the door open. Stepping into the office Nick was surprised at how mundane it looked, the walls were mainly bare, with only a few medals, a picture of the Chief with former mayor Lionheart, a couple of plaques, a map of Zootopia and its districts, and an oversized police badge, were hanging up.

The room may have been bland and unremarkable, but the mammal behind the desk was anything but. The barrel-chested bull before Nick was quite the impressive figure, unwilling to make a snarky comment just yet, Nick climbed up onto the too big for him chair and sat down. Nick was unable to get a read on the buffalo that was sitting stone faced and silent in front of him, deciding to try and break the silence with humor Nick went for a greeting and a joke.

"Good afternoon Chief Bogo, so do you know why fish live in salt water?"

Bogo sat silent, his mind racing, trying to place where exactly he had seen the fox seated in front of him before. As the fox greeted him Bogo was able to remember precisely where he had seen him before, this was the fox who had helped Hopps during the Missing Mammals case, and the Nighthowler conspiracy, and most importantly, this was the fox who had stood up to him when he tried to take Hopps's badge. Bogo hadn't gotten his name the other day because he figured a fox's testimony wouldn't count for much. Now, here was the same fox trying to join the ZPD. Realizing he still hadn't greeted the fox or even acknowledge his presence Bogo quickly tried to remember what exactly the fox had said.

"Good afternoon Mr. Wilde, I'm sure you're wondering why I called you in," Bogo said, trying to play off the fact he couldn't remember what the fox had said.

"It's because pepper makes them sneeze," Nick said flatly as he finished his joke.

"Pardon?" Bogo asked, wondering who "Them" were and what sneezing had to do with anything.

"That was the punchline, do you know why fish live in salt water?, It's because pepper makes them sneeze, I figured I would finish my joke even if you weren't going to acknowledge it," Nick explained.

"Ah I see, so anyway Mr. Wilde, I called you here to discuss your application to the ZPD, why exactly would someone of your... background, want to join the ZPD?, surely you would be better suited to something else?" Bogo asked before quickly adding, "Police work is very physically demanding, not many smaller mammals can handle it."

Nick felt his stomach drop, he knew exactly what those words meant, having heard variations of them his entire life. The Chief of the ZPD was tacitly asking why a sly fox would want to be a
Why did you think it would be different? you should just tell him it was a joke and forget this pipe dream, just go back to hustling. A little voice whispered to Nick, the urge to quite was strong, while his life wasn't the best he had managed so far, he could still turn back. But in that moment of doubt something stopped him, it was Judy, the image of her face as she bounced around in excitement at just the possibility of working with him, filled Nick with a warm feeling of happiness. How could he just turn his back on that, on her, on one of the few people who believed in him and wanted to be around him. After realizing that, Nick found a resolve he never thought he had, in that moment Nick vowed to himself to see this through to the end, if not for himself, then for Judy.

Turning back to Bogo Nick couldn't resist messing with the bigoted buffalo just a little bit. Leaning back in the chair, sly smirk growing on his face.

"well chief it's like this, normally joining the ZPD wouldn't cross my mind, but my previous line of work can't compete with having such a steady income, medical benefits, paid vacation, job security, and best of all, the fact that ladies love a mammal in uniform," Nick said, waiting for a reaction from Bogo. Chief Bogo's did not disappoint, the look on his face was priceless, the look of sheer indignation, and anger that flashed across his features was perfect. After a moment however, Bogo settled down, and even started to smiled. Nick was not expecting the buffalo to start smiling, and he was also not expecting a smile to unsettle him so much.

"Well Mr. Wilde, I can say for sure that the ZPD is not the place for you, if those are the only reasons you want to become an officer I don't really see a place for you here, so if that's all I wish you good luck in the future, have a nice day,"

Nick stopped in his tracks realizing his mistake, Bogo was looking for a reason to deny him, and Nick had just handed him one on a silver platter. If he was going to have any chance at fixing this Nick knew he would have to choose his next words carefully, and really show his sincerity.

"WAIT," Nick shouted, startling Bogo, "I'm sorry about that, honestly I was nervous, and when I get nervous I try and cover it up with humor,"

Bogo almost told the fox to leave, but his curiosity got the better of him, so Bogo decided to see where the fox would go with this,

"Continue Mr. Wilde," Bogo said, pinning Nick in his chair with only a stern look

"Thank you Chief," Nick said as he took a minute to compose himself. Pausing for a moment, Nick took in a deep breath, held it for a moment, then exhaled, deciding to lay his cards out on the table Nick spoke.

"The main reason I want to join the ZPD is actually pretty selfish, I do actually want to make the world safer and better place, but only for one person, to have that person be proud of me, and I only want to make a better name for myself, so I can become a person who's worthy of her, now don't get me wrong I still want to help others and make the city a better place for everyone, but that's all secondary, because at the end of the day as long as she's safe, happy, and even the slightest bit proud of me, that's all I really need"

Nick had prepared a heartwarming speech about being a better mammal and making the world safe by putting away the bad guys, but found under Bogo's gaze he couldn't lie. Nick had actually let slip far more then he had intended. lowering his head Nick readied himself for Bogo to tell him that the ZPD didn't need selfish cops like that, surprisingly Bogo said not a word. Lifting his head to get a look at Bogo, Nick found the buffalo's face was far from being harsh like he had expected, but instead had softened slightly.
Bogo had been prepared for a stream of honeyed words, he was in no way expecting the honest expression and emotionally charged speech that came from the mammal in front of him. Bogo was taken aback, he had never expected that the fox’s reason for joining the ZPD would mirror his own. Bogo had joined the ZPD many years ago, the desire to protect and make proud the mammal he loved was a powerful driving force for him, and looking into the foxes eyes Bogo could tell that Nick was equally if not more driven then Bogo had been. Bogo knew that as long as that force was there pushing Nick he wouldn't stray. I guess I can give him a chance, if he's really motivated like I was he'll be top of his class, no matter the struggles.

"Well Wilde, if you're really sure you want to put yourself through the ringer for a flimsy reason like that I won't stop you, however, you won't be able to work with Hopps…"

"Hold on a sec, why not?" Nick nearly shouted, interrupting Bogo mid explanation, "she and I make a great team, we've already proved as much solving two cases together,"

Bogo waited for Nick to stop his rant then held up a hoof,

"First of all, DON'T, interrupt me again," Bogo said darkly "If you had waited for me to finish I would have been able to explain, you won't be paired up with Hopps unless you qualify to get into Precinct One, that means you need to be in the top ten percent of your class, and if you don't make it then you will be placed somewhere else, those are the rules, no exceptions, do you think you can handle it?"

"Yes sir, I think I can manage that, I apologize for interrupting you,"

"Not a problem Wilde, just don't let it happen again, now the academy starts a new class at the beginning of each month, you unfortunately missed the start of this month's so you'll have to wait until next month, before you go you will need to sign these papers, and here take this packet it contains, general information about the academy like, location, duration, what to bring, what to expect, and other important things to keep in mind, use the next three weeks wisely." Bogo said as he handed Nick the packet, and the documents outlining his employment. After looking through the paperwork and signing where necessary Nick said goodbye and after hopping off of the chair headed out the door.

Alone in his office Bogo started the paperwork to fast track Nick's application. As the Chief of Precinct One his signature held enough weight to push any applicant through, however Bogo still decided to make a few calls, Major Friedkin would definitely want to know about this new recruit. As Bogo went about all this he couldn't help but think fondly of the fox remembering the look of pure determination in Nick's eye, maybe he won't be so bad, even if he's a fox, but first he's gotta make it, the academy is no cake walk, he'll need that determination if he's gonna make it, Bogo thought to himself suppressing a shudder at the memories of his time at the academy, before continuing his work.

As Nick walked down the precinct's steps he felt the tension leave his body in one big wave and nearly collapsed.

"Well that could have gone better," Nick said to no one,

"It could have gone a lot worse too, so look on the bright side you're in and on your way," an optimistic voice commented, sounding strangely like Judy. Thinking of Judy Nick pulled out his phone figuring he might as well text her the good news. Pulling up his contact's he didn't even need to scroll through to find the contact name he had picked for her, looking at it Nick couldn't suppress a smile "Carrots", complete with a little emoji carrot. Nick shot off a quick text informing Judy that he had been accepted and would be going to the academy next month. Before he could even put his
phone back in his pocket it had started ringing. Not even needing to look at the caller ID Nick answered the phone,

"Sup Carrots,"

"NICK," Judy shouted nearly blowing out Nick's ear drum,

"I can't believe you got into the next month's class that's unheard of"

"Is it really that big a deal?" Nick asked

"Nick, normally it takes at least five to six months to handle all the administrative work, we need to start training you right away,"

"Isn't that a bit extreme Carrots, I'm sure I'll be fine as I am, I'm more athletic then you give me credit for,"

"Unless you can run five miles in under 40 minutes, do 40 push-ups in 1 minute, 60 sit-ups in 1 minute, and that's not even taking into account the obstacle course, then no you will not be fine."

Nick gulped "Alright you may have a point, when would you like to start training?"

"Today, meet me at Grove Park, at 3 o'clock"

"Sounds like a plan fluff, should I bring anything special?"

"Just normal workout attire and a water bottle, but actually Nick I just remembered, I kinda need a favor from you,"

"Sure what do you need?" Nick asked slightly concerned, 

"It's not anything big, I'll just need you to get the truck after the workout, do you remember where we parked it?" Judy asked, hoping Nick remembered because she couldn't for the life of her recall where they had parked it. In all the days excitement it had slipped her mind. It took Nick a moment to remember exactly where they had parked the old truck but after thinking about it for a minute he had remembered the location.

"Yah I remember where it is, after the workout I'll run over and grab it, no problem."

"Thanks Nick, you're the best," Judy said sighing with relief, 

"Yah, I know I am pretty great aren't I," Nick said smugly

"Don't get too big of a head there Slick, we'll see how great you feel after you get done with the workout I have planned," after saying their goodbyes Nick hung up and headed out. Feeling a vibration in his pocket Nick took out his phone, seeing a text from Judy, Nick opened it wondering if she had forgotten to tell him something

Judy: Hey Slick, I forgot to tell you how psyched I am that you got in, can't wait to be partners,

/) (/)
( ^.^
C (”) (”

Putting his phone back in his pocket Nick continued walking down the street, Grinning like a fool.
Chapter End Notes

As always Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect.

Also this is the last chapter up on FanFiction.net so you will have to wait for more, i'll keep working on writing
Chapter 5 - 100 Push-ups, 100 Sit-ups, 100 Squats, and a 10 Km run.

Chapter Summary

Workouts, a truck, some studying, lots of feelings, not gonna say more

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 5, sorry it took so long I've been getting ready to move for work, hopefully after the move my schedule will settle down but I make no promises other than to promise to write as much as I can. Also I'm over 30k words and here are my story stats so far.

User Subscriptions:1 Kudos:11 Comment Threads:5 Bookmarks:6 Subscriptions:14 Hits:301 so thanks everyone for the comments, subscriptions and kudos. It means a bunch

AN: Try and find the references or don't, also a quick question to everyone, do you want smut? I've thought about it but I'm not sure, it would be later down the road but what do you think?

Still looking for someone to edit or storyboard with if you interested let me know.

Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: I still don't own Zootopia or it's characters, and I never will if the FBI agent that watches me through my computer keeps ratting me out.

Judy's Apartment, Saturday afternoon, 1:00pm

After shooting her quick text to Nick, Judy rushed over to the drawers under her bed. Flinging them open, ready to grab some fresh workout clothes, Judy was met only with empty space.

"I have nothing to workout in, how could I have forgotten, what am I going to do," Judy said frustrated,

pulling her ears over her eyes in irritation, Judy spent the next few minutes trying to think of a solution, before coming to the inevitable conclusion, that with no money and no clean clothes to
"I could just instruct him, I don't have to join in the workout, but on the other hand I want to, plus working out with someone is always more fun then just being told what to do,"

As Judy continued to try to find a solution she heard a knock at the door. Walking over to the door Judy was curious as to who it could be since she wasn't expecting anyone. As she opened the door Judy was met with a tiger, he was wearing a light blue polo shirt, and dark blue short shorts, and carrying a brown box and a clipboard.

"Good morning, would you happen to be Miss, Judy Hopps?" the tiger asked politely.

"Yes, I am, what can I do for you,"

"Well Mrs. Hopps, I have a package for you, so if you could just sign here, I'll give it to you and be on my way,"

After quickly grabbing and signing the clipboard, Judy was then handed the package, although the tiger had easily managed the box with one paw, it was big enough that Judy had to use both. After saying goodbye and wishing the tiger a good day, Judy took the box inside. Looking the box over, Judy was surprised to see no name or return address on it. Despite that, Judy decided to open the package, figuring that the ZPS would not have shipped it if it was dangerous, with no knife to cut the tape Judy just use her house key, and in no time at all the box was open.

Not knowing what to expect, Judy just dove right in and started to pull items out. The first few things Judy pulled out were just clothes, nothing special, just a few pairs of jeans, a couple nice shirts, some plain workout tops, yoga pants, and a few pairs of underwear, bras, and even some sports bras. The next items Judy started pulling out were some toiletries, things like a toothbrush, some toothpaste, a bottle of two in one fur shampoo and conditioner, a stick of deodorant, and a fluffy orange towel. Lastly, Judy found some miscellaneous items, a phone charger, a bag of candy carrots, two crime drama books, and an envelope. Judy, hoping it would contain a note, or letter that explained the contents of the package, and who had sent it, opened the envelope immediately. Instead of a letter or note, Judy only found a pawfull zollar bills, the amount of which came to 150 zollars.

Judy was astonished, who would have sent her all this stuff, Judy racked her brain trying to come up with an answer. At first, she thought maybe her parents, they could have sent some stuff over to help her out until they got to Zootopia, but Judy quickly dismissed the idea, if it had been her parents the clothes wouldn't be new, and they would have put their name and return address on the package. It wasn't her siblings or anyone back home either, for the same reason. Before Judy could ponder this mystery any further her phone suddenly chimed notifying her of a text. Going over to her phone and bringing the charger with her, Judy swiftly plugged in her phone, so it could charge. Looking at the notification and seeing the text was from Nick, Judy opened it.

Nick: Well Carrots, I'm glad your excited, but I still have to get through the academy, but, I'm looking forward to working with you too partner.

Judy couldn't help but smile, she was so excited to be partners with Nick. It would be great, getting to spend everyday working side by side with him, they made such a great team. As Judy started to daydream about working with Nick, her eyes fell to the fluffy orange towel that was laying on her
bed with the rest of the contents of the package. Now that she looked at it, Judy found the towel wasn't quite orange, the towel also had a tint of red to it, a sort of russet-orange just like the fur of color of a certain red fox. Looking closer at it, Judy felt the towel was a dead ringer for Nick's fur color, and it looked just as fluffy as his tail did. As Judy pictured Nick, with his fluffy tail and his piercing eyes she realized Nick could have sent the package, who else knew of her situation, and would care enough to help, also sending it anonymously totally fit his "don't show how kind you really are, or how much you care" nature. The more she thought about it the more certain Judy was that Nick had sent her the package, nothing else made sense.

"I can't believe Nick would get all this for me, he's such a great friend" Judy said aloud.

*Is that all he is though? He does more for you than, "just a friend" would*, a voice asked,

"He's just being a good friend, it's only some clothes and some money, I'm sure he expects me to pay it back," Judy said, as she began pacing back and forth in her tiny room.

*"If he expected you to pay him back, why didn't he put his name on the package?"

"I'm sure it's a prank or something, and he's going to tell me when we meet up to work out, even if he didn't ask me to pay him back he is just being a good friend,"

*"But would someone change their entire lifestyle for only a friend? Being a cop is hard, he definitely knows that, and he won't be making 200 zollars a day anymore, who would change all that for someone who's exclusively a friend?"* the voice in Judy's head asked. Judy thought about it for a moment but found she wasn't able to explain it.

"So maybe he does like me then," Judy said, smiling as a warm feeling filled her from the soles of her feet to the tips of her ears.

*"But if that is really the case, do you like him back?"* a different voice asked.

Judy had had some time to think about her feelings during the day, having nothing to do, or any way to entertain herself left Judy with a lot of time for reflection. Judy hadn't been able to come up with a concrete answer about how she felt, she knew she enjoyed Nick's company, he was able to cheer her up if she was sad, he believed in her and stood up for her, Judy knew she trusted him and felt safe with him, and he was easy on the eyes to be sure. Despite all that, Judy just wasn't sure if that was enough, was it love, or something else? Having never actually been in love before, Judy just couldn't be sure if that's what she felt for Nick.

"It might be, but I need more time with him to figure it out," Judy replied to the new voice.

*"And what will you do if it is?"

"If I find I love him, I'll go after him, I may be a dumb bunny sometimes, but If I want something I will always try to get it," Judy said confidently.

*"Are you prepared for what that might cause, the repercussions of dating a predator?"* a nagging voice of doubt asked.

"What's the worst that could happen? This is Zootopia, and it's not the 1900's I'm sure nobody will even care if Nick and I dated," Judy replied, ever the optimist.

*I wouldn't be so sure, the world isn't as nice as you think it is,"* the voice mocked, *"and what about your family? what would they think? or even just your parents, do you think they will be ok with you dating a pred?"*
Her parents… Judy hadn't thought about them. Looking back, they hadn't been the most tolerant mammals, but they were getting better, even working with Gideon, but would they be ok with her dating Nick? Judy remembered a few years ago when one of her sisters dated a hare, it had the family talking and arguing for days before they settled down and moved on to a different topic.

"Thiiiss makes things a bit more complicated, I can deal with whatever other mammals say, I've dealt with that before, but what if my family wasn't supportive, or even outright hostile, what would I do?" Judy asked herself.

Stopping in the middle of the room, Judy couldn't help but start tapping her foot as she started getting lost in thought, would I be able to fight with my family? What if they disowned me? Would they actually do that? Would it be worth it? Before Judy could spiral deeper into her current train of thought she stopped herself. This was getting her nowhere and she knew it.

"I'll just have to wait and see what this really is first, and if it really is love, then I don't care what other mammals will say, and my family wants what's best for me so I'm sure it will be fine, and if not, if it really is love then I'll fight for it, 100%," With that settled, at least for now, Judy started trying on her new clothes and was surprised to find everything fit rather well, even the underwear and bra, which to her dismay were both covered with little carrots. Judy was curious as to how Nick was able to get the sizes right, maybe he's been paying closer attention to me than I realized, the thought of Nick's piercing green eyes examining her, and poring over her every curve, made Judy's heart race unexpectedly, and instead of making her angry like it normally would have, actually caused her face to heat up and her tail to start wiggling in joy. So, with an extra spring in her step Judy got ready to workout.

Grove Park, downtown Savanna Central, 3:00pm

Nick stood at the entrance to Grove park, old tattered gym bag slung over his shoulder, wearing a black tank top that was just a bit too small for him, which showed off his very lean yet muscular build, and made the russet-orange color of his fur pop.

As Judy approached the entrance to the park she couldn't help but stop and stare, black really is his color, Judy thought to herself. As she looked him up and down she saw how lean he was, and Judy couldn't help but think, he's not in bad shape, but he looks a little too thin, then again, the only other fox I know is Gideon Gray and he's definitely not the average fox. As her gaze traveled further down Judy's eyes caught sight of Nick's tail and locked on. Incapable of looking away, Judy followed the gentle swaying, captivated by the fluffy appendage, she wondered what it would feel like if she grabbed it, and with that thought in mind Judy slowly creeped up on Nick. Her eyes never moving from her target, stalking like a predator, Judy closed in for the kill. As Nick stood there, eyes on his phone, and headphones in his ears, he was completely oblivious to the impeding danger.

Checking the time on his phone Nick saw it was 3 o'clock on the dot, but before he could even wonder where Judy was he felt a paw grab his tail. The grab wasn't painful, and admittedly it was soft, nice even, but that didn't stop Nick from jumping into the air and letting out a sharp yip.

As soon as Nick shot into the air and let out his yip Judy let go of his tail, embarrassed, Judy looked around and noticed a few mammals glaring at Nick, feeling bad Judy quickly apologized.

"I'm so so sorry Nick, I didn't mean to hurt you, I just thought..." Judy trailed off, what could she say so that she wouldn't admit she had been staring at him or his tail. Thinking it over, Judy decided to play it off as a joke, or a prank of sorts.

"I just thought you might need a jump start to this workout, seems scaring you like that did the trick,"
Judy said as she awkwardly chuckled, hoping Nick would buy the excuse. Nick was silent, he just stood there, clutching and brushing his tail tenderly, a few minutes went by in silence, then Nick looked up at Judy a serious look on his face.

"Officer Hopps, I would like to report an assault, some evil mammal grabbed my tail, and they need to be punished, harshly," Nick said a slight tremor in his voice as if he was traumatized. Judy, seeing what Nick was doing decided to play along.

"Can you describe the culprit for me Mr. Wilde?" Judy asked, taking on a tone of authority.

"Well officer, she was about two feet tall, three feet if you count her massive ears, she had gray fur, with a white section under her chin, the tips of her ears were black, and her eyes were this stunning shade of lavender, she was wearing black leggings and a sky-blue workout top,"

Judy was a bit flustered by Nick's comment on her eyes, but decided to try and hide it, putting up her air of authority she continued,

"Is there anything else you can remember about the culprit Mr. Wilde; any little detail helps"

"There was one more thing, but I doubt it would help," Nick said, a mischievous tone creeping into his voice.

"And what might that be," Judy asked cautiously

"Well officer, this mammal looks extremely cute when she's flustered," Nick said, unable to keep himself from smiling anymore.

Judy just stood there in silence for a moment, her brain fried, he called me cute, cute, what do I say, what do I do, but before Judy could freak out any further another voice chimed in

"he doesn't know what that word means to bunnies, don't get crazy about it, just give him a good punch to remind him who's boss," the voice reasoned. Judy decided to listen to the voice's suggestion even though she was still pleased he called her cute, she couldn't let it pass. So, with great speed, strength and accuracy Judy landed a solid punch on Nick's arm.

"aahhhh, Carrots, what the hell, why is it always violence with you," Nick said as he dropped his tail and started vigorously rubbing his arm.

"That's what you get, maybe if I punch you hard enough you'll remember to not call bunnies cute," Judy said, tapping her foot rapidly pretending to be more annoyed then she really was.

"You grabbed my tail, it's only fair I get to do something back," Nick argued, still rubbing his arm.

"I am sorry about that, but don't be such a kit, I apologized already and anyways I didn't yank your tail I just lightly grabbed it," Judy said, trying to play the whole situation off.

"Judy, touching a foxes tail is very… um… personal, more so for foxes than for other mammals, some foxes are less sensitive about it, but to most of us it's almost sacred, we typically never let others touch it, there are exceptions of course, kits, relatives, and mates, but that's pretty much it," Nick's tone was serious and even if it hadn't been, Nick had Judy's full attention as soon as he said her real name, and as what he said sunk in Judy's ears dropped behind her head as a feeling of guilt wormed it's way into her stomach.

"I'm so sorry Nick, I didn't realize, if I had known how much your tail meant to you I never would have grabbed it, it's just that bunnies are very tactile by nature, especially with those we are close to,"
Judy said as she began to ramble, on the verge of tears.

"Don't worry about it fluff, I just told you just so you know not to go grabbing fox tails in the future, I don't personally care all that much, I mean, I wouldn't want a stranger grabbing it, but that's about as far as I go, and I think that's common for all mammals with long tails," Nick said reassuringly,

"Are you sure you're not mad at me Nick?"

"Carrots it's no big deal, trust me, if I wasn't ok with it would I do this," Nick said as he maneuvered his tail wagging it in Judy's face, wiping the tears that had formed in the corner of her eyes, as well as tickling her face in the process, getting her to let out a blissful, bubbly laugh, that was music to Nick's ears.

"Stop it Nick, I get it, I get it," Judy said in between fits of giggling, as she swatted at his tail trying to stop it from tickling her face. Despite the swatting Nick's tail continued relentlessly, so Judy decided to grab it again to get it out of her face. Tail in hand, Judy decided to hold on tight as it tried to wiggle out of her grasp, lest it escape and continue the attack on her face. As she looked up at Nick, Judy couldn't hold back the smile on her face.

"I'm glad to see the gloomy bunny is gone, now, I never thought I'd say this, ever, but let's get this workout started," Nick said, as he ruffled Judy's ears, hustler mask firmly in place, as he tried not to show exactly how good it felt to have Judy holding his tail.

"Alright Slick, let's get this party started," Judy said as she let go of Nick's tail and walked into the park. As Judy walked ahead looking for a good spot to stretch out she couldn't help but think about Nick's tail.

"IT'S SO FLUFFY IM GONNA DIE, I would have never believed something could be so soft, warm, and cozy, just imagine using it as pillow or a blanket, I could curl up with that tail every night. With thoughts of Nick's amazing tail in her head Judy lead on, eventually settling on a clearing of open grass edged by tall oak trees, that blocked out the glaring sunlight.

"Now before working out you should always stretch, I'll run you through all the stretches I normally do, and if you have any others you want to do let me know," Judy explained as Nick walked over and stood next to her.

"First, we'll start with something easy, just touching our toes," and before Nick could say anything, Judy was already bent over, giving Nick an eyeful. Nick knew he shouldn't look but a little voice in the back of his mind called out to him

"It won't hurt to look just a second, just don't get caught," and so as he reached down to touch his toes, his eyes were getting a workout of their own by running up and down Judy's impressive figure. There was not an ounce of excess fat to be found on her body, Judy's training had done wonders for her, her arms while looking small, were well defined and strong. Looking further down Nick noticed Judy's legs, they were so completely and perfectly trained that they looked sculpted, and those perfect legs ran up to and met with her fine backside and her cute little tail. Nick had always had a thing for a nice ass, it was the most attractive aspect of a mammal's body, at least in his humble opinion, and he couldn't deny how perfect Judy's was, especially with the view he was getting during this particular stretch, and her tiny tuft of a tail looked so soft and fluffy, Nick just wanted to grab it. Realizing he should stop admiring before she noticed his lecherous stare, Nick quickly faced down concentrating on the stretch, holding it for a few more seconds before Judy called out the next one.

Judy had not noticed Nick's stare, having been focused completely on the stretch and after calling out a few more stretches Judy was done,
"So, that's all I got, you have any you want to do Nick?"

"I got a few I picked up during my track and field days, you probably shouldn't do them because of your leg so just give me a minute, Carrots."

As Nick set off on a new set of stretches, including cross armed skips, lunges, arm over the head triceps stretch, and a few others, Judy continued where she left off before she had the bright idea to grab Nick's tail. Looking at his figure Judy was impressed Nick's chest, arms, and legs all had good definition, and Judy was enjoying the show Nick was unintentionally giving her, especially when during one of his stretches his shirt rode up giving her a glimpse of his abs.

"you know I shouldn't be that surprised, he was able to carry that huge Popsicle up a drainpipe, two stories, all by himself, still I can't help but feel he does look a little too thin," Judy said to herself.

After Nick had finished his stretches he jogged back over to Judy,

"So, what's on the menu today coach?"

"Well slick, for you, I have an ancient and fabled workout, it is said that if you do this work out every day for three years you will gain unfathomable power, and you will be unbeatable in any physical contest," Judy said quietly, motioning for Nick to lean in, as if she was sharing an important secret.

Nick was excited, and he had to restrain himself from bouncing on the balls of his feet, he really wanted to know what this amazing workout was, so he leaned closer to Judy.

Judy had to fight to contain her giggling, "you must do 100 push-ups 100 sit-ups 100 squats and a 6.25-mile run."

Nick's face dropped, this wasn't some amazing workout it was just a few simple exercises for a ridiculous amount of reps.

"Fluff, that workout's not gonna do anything amazing, it's just normal exorcises," Nick complained.

"Don't say that until you've done it Nick, and trust me this will be plenty for your first day, I promise you will have more interesting workouts later, you can do the push-ups, sit-ups, and squats in the clearing, for the run you'll need to do two laps around the walking trail, now get started, if we don't hurry up it'll be dark before you're done," Judy said as she got ready to do her own workout.

"Fine, I'll trust that you know what you're doing, but what are you going to do?" Nick asked, curious, since she wasn't supposed to workout her leg.

"I'm going to do a "ladder" style workout, basically I'm doing 30 push-ups 30 sit-ups and 30 Zussian twists, then 29 of each, then 28, then 27, all the way down until I only have to do one of each, and I'm going to try and do it as fast as possible," Judy explained. Nick was dumbfounded, that workout sounded crazy, and he didn't want to imagine what she would have been doing if she was in perfect health. So, without further conversation Nick and Judy started their respective workouts.

Judy handled her workout well, pushing herself but still managing to make it look easy in Nick's eyes. Nick, on the other hand started out good, but toward the end of each set struggled and fought for every rep. They worked out in relative silence, throwing out encouragement to one another from time to time, and After his 100th squat Nick wanted to quit, his legs felt like lead and he was already panting. As he walked over to Judy, Nick thought about stopping here, or at least shortening the run.

"Hey Fluff, how's the workout coming along?" Nick called out as he got close. Judy didn't hear him however, she was completely focused on her workout, moving steady and constantly as if in a
trance. Nick couldn't help but admire her athleticism and ability, seeing Judy's determination Nick couldn't help but be inspired. So, having gotten a second wind, Nick headed out for his run.

As Nick started his run, all he could think of was Judy and how she touched his tail, as much as he wanted to ignore it, or make the thoughts go away, his mind would always stray back to Judy and his tail. He hadn't really lied to her when he described the significance of tails to foxes, he had however, downplayed it a bit. In reality, every fox knew how important and special touching another foxes tail was, and no fox he had ever meet, was ok with their tail being grabbed by someone who was not a relative or their mate. Nick didn't want to imagine what would have happened if another fox had seen Judy grab his tail, or what they would have thought when he used his tail to tickle her face. As much as Nick wanted to forget the incident he just couldn't. Nick had told Judy he didn't care about her touching his tail, but that was a lie. Having lived on the streets alone for years, and never getting too close to anyone, Nick had been left a little touch starved, so when Judy touched his tail his body couldn't help but want to jump for joy, his mind on the other paw wanted to run and hide. These conflicting reactions and feelings had Nick's mind in a knot and now that he was alone with his thoughts the battle had begun.

The two opposing forces had fought many times in the past, both armies were seasoned veterans and knew where and when to strike. On one side was Nick's lived experiences, and the resulting life philosophies from said experiences, these were hard learned lessons acquired from many rough years of life. These experiences were like an army defending a wall, unyielding, strong, and always ready to stop any dangerous enemies from taking hold. On the other side, was Nick's emotions and desires, these emotions wanted what they wanted no matter how potentiality dangerous the outcome was, or how disastrous it would be if it backfired. These emotions formed a flexible, ever changing, ever growing army, intent on getting through the carefully crafted defenses of logic and reason. Normally the forces of logic and lived experiences won easily, but ever since that fateful meeting with a certain bunny cop, the tides of war were turning, and Nick was stuck in the middle, helpless to stop it. So as Nick ran, his mind in conflict, he had no choice but to sit back and try to sort it all out.

"you know it felt really good when she held your tail," a voice said as the army of emotion made its first move, "and when she leaned into you in the cruiser, or touched your arm in the gondola, you pulled back instinctively but you liked it don't try and lie to yourself." The army's attack was powerful and stuck a chord. Nick saw the truth in those thoughts, but before he could succumb to the idea Logic struck back.

"Don't fall for it, that's just you being emotional, don't get all worked up over a few touches, you know it would never work," Logic countered, trying to stop the attack, and mitigate the damage.

"you don't know for sure that it won't work, if anyone could manage dating a fox like us, then it would be that unstoppably determined bunny," Emotion fired back.

The battle was getting fierce now, both sides giving it their all, and just like how the waves will crash endlessly into the cliffside and wear it down over time, emotion was actually making a dent in logic's defenses. But logic wasn't finished yet, and made one final push forward, intent on finishing this fight.

"Oh come on, a fox and a bunny, that's ridiculous, and she doesn't like us that way and you know it, so it's a moot point, don't fall into this trap, you're just going to make yourself miserable when she rejects you,"

"Ridiculous or not the possibility is there, no matter how slight, and Yah, if you're wrong it will hurt, but if she feels the same how much better off would you be, I mean look at yourself for a moment, in all this time, no matter what you've tried with all your "logic," you weren't really happy were
you?" And for the first time Nick's logical side had no response, it was an undeniable fact that for longer than Nick cared to remember he hadn't been happy, he wasn't miserable, or sad all the time, but he defiantly wasn't happy. But the few day's Nick had spent with Judy had been some of the most enjoyable in recent memory, and Nick had been, if not happy, then closer to it then he had been in a long time.

"I'm doomed," Nick said to himself as both armies retreated, leaving him to sort through the wreckage that was his mind. The battle had left Nick with a lot to think about, and as he continued his run Nick found a few realizations in the aftermath. First, his feelings for Judy were a bit more than just physical. Second, he would under no circumstances make any advances toward her, because she definitely made him happier than most mammals, and losing her as a friend would be devastating. Third, the fact that Judy was this important to him was a terrifying thing. Forth and finally, he would let Judy get touchy if she wanted to, since it was in her nature, and despite himself, Nick did enjoy it, but he would draw the line if he needed to. But, despite having accepted his situation, Nick still held onto the comforting thought that Judy would never feel the same, because if she did, it would change everything, and in his mind, not for the better.

After finishing his run Nick walked over to Judy who was resting in the grass and drinking a bottle of water. As he got closer Nick saw Judy's face light up as she saw him approach.

"Nick you're back, how was the workout?" Judy asked, curious to see how he fared.

"Well fluff, I have to give it to you that workout was rough, I don't think I want ultimate power if I have to do that every day, so you ready to head out?"

"Not quite," Judy said, shaking her head "after your workout you should stretch again to avoid soreness tomorrow," Judy explained; And as they stretched Judy and Nick both tried to check the other out without being caught, and both were completely oblivious to the quick peeks of the other.

"Hey fluff I got one last stretch we should do," Nick said as they sat in the grass having just finished stretching out their legs.

"Oh yah Slick, and what would that be?"

"It's very simple, as you stand up just throw your fists in the air, throw out your chest and yell, victory, just like this," and without a second thought Nick was standing up, arms up chest out, letting out a long winded "Victooccrrrryyyy." Suppressing a giggle Judy soon followed suit with a victory cry of her own.

"So, what muscles did that move stretch exactly?" Judy asked as she turned to face Nick.

"Well, it stretched the arms, the chest, and the shoulders for sure, but more importantly, even if it looks a little silly, it fills you with energy and a sense of accomplishment, which is a great way to end a workout if I do say so myself, now let's go get the truck" Nick said as he threw his gym bag over his shoulder.

"Fair enough," Judy said as she grabbed her stuff and walked over to Nick, "So, how far is the truck?" Judy asked.

"Not too far fluff, just a few short miles and we're there," Nick said sarcastically, as he lead the way out of the park.

Nick had been worried that their walk to the truck would be filled with either forced conversation or
awkward silence, but Nick had been worried for nothing. As it turned out Nick and Judy were able to keep each other's interest, and the conversation flowed between them, comfortably and continuously. They chatted about anything and everything that came to mind. Nick asked questions about the academy, hoping to get a better idea of what he was in store for. So Judy shared stories of her academy days, including all her gruesome "deaths," getting Nick to both laugh and wince as he realized he would have to get through his own "deaths." Judy took this chance to try and get to know Nick better, but she found Nick wasn't very open to sharing his personal life, so she decided to ask Nick about some of his past hustles. Nick had plenty of stories about his hustles, and he had Judy laughing in no time, especially after telling her about how a failed hustle had ended up with Finnick tied up in a diaper, hanging from a tree, while wearing a golden wig, and being completely covered in honey, while Nick was running from a mob of very angry raccoons.

After walking a few miles in this way Nick couldn't help but smile, he was happy, it had been so long since he had just talked with another mammal like this. Looking down at Judy Nick just took in the sight of her, she was in the middle of describing some of the shenanigans her siblings had gotten into, using hand gestures and moving around to emphasize points in the story. As he watched her tell the story Nick noticed something off about Judy, with every step she seemed slightly unsteady, almost dragging her leg along trying to keep her weight off of it.

"Her Leg!" Nick realized suddenly, *this long walk must be straining it, and of course being the dumb, strong willed, independent bunny, she is, she wouldn't tell me it's bothering her, well I guess I'll have to do something about that then.* Nick decided, a mischievous smile making its way onto his face. Falling out of step slightly so Judy wouldn’t notice, Nick crept up behind her. Reaching out Nick swiftly got his paws under Judy's arms and lifted her over his head and placed her on his shoulders before she could even let out a squeak.

"Nick, what the purgatory are you doing!" Judy exclaimed as she found herself no longer on the ground but instead on Nick's shoulders.

"Well Carrots my dear, I happened to notice a certain bunny was trying to hide a limp, and being an observant and chivalrous fox, I took it upon myself to assist,"

"I didn't ask for your help," Judy sighed as she grabbed onto Nick's head.

"Oh don't be such a pouty bun, I'm just making sure you don't hurt yourself, and you wouldn't have asked for help, you would have kept at it until you tore a stitch or something, and you know, when someone helps you it's polite to say thank you" Nick explained as he wrapped his arms around Judy's legs so she wouldn't fall off.

Judy huffed, Nick was right, Judy knew she wouldn't have asked for help even if she needed it, and getting injured because of her pride wasn't worth it.

"Thanks Nick," Judy said begrudgingly

"Could use more enthusiasm... but, I accept, you're welcome," Nick said, unable to resist teasing her just a little bit more. Balling up her fist Judy gave Nick a light bop on the head before muttering "dumb fox," under her breath.

So, while carrying Judy on his shoulders Nick walk continued on to the truck. As they started to walk again they fell back into their easy conversation, however, this time they were drawing glances from many mammals they passed, some were curious, most were surprised, and a few were looks of outrage. Both Nick and Judy noticed these looks, Judy brushed them off, deciding that they weren't worth thinking about. Nick was used to getting dirty looks, so it didn't phase him either, but the realization that they would get looks like that even if they were just friends stuck with him. Nick
didn't want to imagine how mammals would react if him and Judy were ever to go further. *Just another reason she and I couldn't be together, I wouldn't want to put her through that,* Nick thought to himself.

In no time at all Nick and Judy reached the truck, upon seeing it Judy's face fell. Not only had all the tools in the back of the truck been stolen, but a parking boot had been placed on it.

"Sweet cheese and crackers Nick, everything's gone, how could this have happened," Judy asked exasperated.

Nick took a quick look around before grabbing Judy off his shoulders and gently placing her on the sidewalk.

"Well look around you Carrots, this isn't the best neighborhood, honestly, I'm surprised the truck isn't tireless and sitting on cinder blocks," Nick explained, scratching the back of his neck as he walked around the truck.

Taking a look around Judy suddenly realized how rough the neighborhood actually was. The buildings were old, made of chipped and worn out brick, and a few of the buildings were starting to be covered with a vine-like vegetation, as if mother nature was trying to reclaim them. plywood was covering the shattered remains of most of the windows, and metal bars were covering the rest. The sidewalk was cracked, uneven, and littered with broken bottles and food wrappers, and grass was peeking out between the cracks, and the street was more pothole than road.

"No wonder the nearby station closed down, this place is trashed, do mammals even live here?" Judy asked in disbelief. Hearing Judy say that gave Nick a small pang of sadness. Even though he knew she couldn't know that what she said rubbed him the wrong way it still left a sour taste in his mouth. *This neighborhood wasn't much worse than where I grew up and is significantly better than where I lived now.* Nick thought to himself, *but then again, it's not like she would understand the struggles of poverty, yah she had to help her family and work the fields, and they would struggle after a bad harvest but compared to my family they lived like kings.*

"Mammals definitely live here, if they didn't there wouldn't be bars on the windows," Nick said flatly, deciding not to bring up how pretentious Judy sounded.

"Well they should take better care of their neighborhood then," Judy said very matter of factually. Nick sighed, brushing Judy's comments off,

"So what do you want to do about the truck? That boot won't be coming off until Monday afternoon if you're lucky, and that's if you can pay the tickets," Nick explained

"That's no good, my parents are coming to grab it Monday morning, what are we gonna do?" Judy asked as she started to pace back and forth, pulling on her ears in despair.

"If you want the boot off right now I can make that happen," Nick said nonchalantly. Judy paused mid step, let go of her ears and turned toward Nick.

"Nick this is serious, stop pulling my leg, there's no way to get that boot off without having the key, and since you're not a parking enforcement officer I doubt you have one,"

"Am I a parking enforcement officer, no, no I am not, but I may know a few ways to get the boot off, it may not be legal, and you'll have to deal with it later, but if you want the boot off before your parents get here this is your best option,"

Judy studied Nick's face for a moment, looking for any sign he was joking, darting eyes or even a
hint of a sly smile, finding nothing Judy decided to believe him. Now she had a whole new dilemma, should she have him take the boot off? On one paw she really needed to give the truck to her parents, but on the other it was a crime, even if she paid the fines later. The harder Judy thought about it the more frustrated she became, soon her foot was tapping at Mach speed and her nose started twitching. Seeing the state Judy was in Nick decided to intervene before she popped a blood vessel.

"Fluff, I'm sure if you take the boot in and explain the situation to old buffalo butt later then everything will be fine, I mean you are a hero, and you only got the tickets because you were literally saving the city, the least the city can do is forgive your parking violations,"

*Nick makes a good point, Judy thought to herself, what's the harm I mean I'm planning on paying the tickets anyways, I'll even pay any fines I need to, so I'm sure it will be fine. Having settled the conflict in her head Judy gave Nick the all clear to take the boot off.*

For the next few minutes Judy watched as Nick studied the boot and the truck's tire. Judy had no idea what Nick was looking for, but after a few moments he got up and strolled over to her.

"Well, there are a few ways I can go about this Fluff, I just have a few questions for you before I start,"

"Shoot slick,"

"So, there are two ways I can see taking this boot off right now, one involves letting the air out of the tire, and the other needs a few tools, so is there a toolbox in the cab of the truck? If not, are you ok with driving with a flat until we find a gas station?"

Judy thought about it for a moment before taking out her keys,

"I don't know if there are tools inside, but let's check first, if not then we can let the air out," Judy said as she walked over to the truck.

Looking inside the truck Judy was pleased to see the cab of the truck hadn't been ransacked, even the radio was still there. Searching under the seats for a moment, Judy recovered a small red toolbox,

"Will this work?" Judy asked as she handed the toolbox to Nick.

"It should do the trick," Nick said after quickly rummaging through all the tools, and grabbing a few.

"So, what exactly are you going to do to get the boot off?" Judy asked, interested in how exactly Nick was going to get off the seemingly uncompromising boot.

"Well, I'm going to break the welds holding the lock-box to the frame, you see for all the effort that the boot-makers put into developing an impregnable locking mechanism, lock-box is actually very loosely attached to the rest of the boot, it's kind of Amazing actually, only four flimsy spot-welds hold the entire padlock-and-cover-plate assembly to the main boot frame," Nick explained as he took out a flat-head screwdriver and a mallet and got to work breaking the welds.

"Will it take long?" Judy asked, amazed that the boot, which looked so sturdy, was actually so easy to remove,

"It shouldn't take too long, for an expert it would take just a few seconds to chip away one of the welds, and for an amateur with little to no arm strength it might take a minute or two per weld, I'm no expert but I'm not too far off," Nick explained

"what do you do after you have the lock box off?" Judy asked, intrigued despite the fact that they
were currently breaking the law.

"Once the lock-box is liberated from the frame, the entire boot can be dismantled and removed quickly with a ratchet and standard 16-inch socket wrench," Nick said as he continued his work.

After a few more minutes Judy heard the loud bang of metal on concrete, looking over at Nick Judy saw the boot lying in pieces on the street. Judy was impressed, Nick had made short work of the parking boot. A mammal being good with their paws was a trait Judy both appreciated and found very appealing.

Nick grabbed the pieces of the boot and tossed them in the back of the truck, figuring that the city would probably want it back at some point.

"Nick, you're Amazing, I can't believe you got it off so quickly, and I'm sorry I snapped at you before, I don't know what came over me," Judy said, feeling bad about her outburst.

"Don't worry about it Carrots, you were a bit stressed I understand, it happens to everyone, even amazing mammals like myself, So, you ready to go?" Nick asked, turning toward Judy as he brushed himself off.

"Sure slick, and thanks for being so understanding and modest, would you mind driving? My leg could use the rest"

"Anytime Carrots, and no I wouldn't mind driving, in fact, if you hadn't asked I would have insisted, but be warned my driving's a bit, rusty… then again so is that truck" Nick joked as he got in the truck.

"You're terrible, you know that?" Judy said as she buckled herself in.

"You know you love me," Nick shot back, before instantly regretting it. Why the hell did I say that, didn't I say I wasn't gonna make it awkward. Before Nick could backtrack, Judy replied.

"Do I know that… Yes, yes, I do, now get moving I want to make it home before midnight,"

"Yes ma'am," Nick said, thankful that Judy hadn't thought to much about what he had said. Without further discussion Nick started the truck and drove off.

Judy's Apartment, Saturday Night, 6:30pm

The ride back was relatively quick, which Nick was thankful for, the fatigue was hitting him, and he wanted nothing more than to go back and collapse into his chair. Pulling up in front of Judy's apartment Nick parked in one of the spots designated for residents and turned off the truck. Nick insisted on carrying Judy to her apartment door again, and this time Judy accepted without a fight. The ride atop Nick's shoulders was nice, if not a bit bumpy when climbing the stairs, and in no time at all they had reach Judy's apartment. After setting Judy down in front of her door Nick checked the time on his phone, and seeing it was already 6:30 decided it was about time he left.

"I'm gonna head out Carrots, text me when you want to meet up and workout again alright?" Nick said

Judy's heart dropped, she didn't want Nick to go just yet, she had enjoyed his company immensely and wanted to hang out more.

"Wait Nick," Judy said, stalling as she tried to think of some reason for him to stay. What could I use? Judy asked herself, I don't really have anything entertaining to do, we could play cards or
something… except I have no cards to play with and even if I did I don't really know how to play any card games, the only cards I've ever played with were flash cards to study at the academy. Study… study… study that's it! Judy realized suddenly, I bet if I offered to tutor him a bit he would stick around.

"What's up?" Nick asked

"I was wondering if you wanted to stick around for a bit and study for the academy, you're gonna need to learn a lot if you want to get in the top ten percent, and who better to teach you than a former valedictorian," Judy said hoping Nick would accept.

Nick thought it over for a moment, it wouldn't be a bad idea to study, if I'm gonna get into Precinct One I'll need every advantage I can get, but then again, I would really like to rinse off and go to bed,

"It's tempting Fluff, really it is, but I need a shower and something to eat, so let's just call it for the night,"

"You can just use the showers here Nick, and we can order out again, how does Chinese food sound?" Judy suggested, trying to entice Nick to stay.

"Alright I'll stay, if only for the Chinese food, but I'm taking first shower" Nick said pretending it was the food and not the idea of a long hot shower that had made up his mind.

"Noted, food is the way to get you do what I want," Judy joked before continuing "and while you shower I'll find a place to order from," and so Nick went to shower as Judy entered her apartment.

As Nick showered, making sure to take his time and thoroughly enjoying the access to unlimited hot water, Judy searched for a Chinese food place that would deliver. When Nick was done Judy headed into the shower, and Nick called in the food.

When Judy got back from her shower she dived right in to teaching Nick. Judy decided teaching Nick the police radio codes first would be best, as knowing the codes could mean the difference between life and death in the field. Nick was able to quick to learn the codes, Judy had only gone over them a few times and Nick was already able to remember most of them. After going over them a few more times and quizzing Nick to make sure he remembered them, Judy decided to move on to tactics. Judy taught Nick the basics of clearing a room, chasing down a perp, and the always interesting stakeout.

Nick was surprised, far from being bored out of his mind like he had expected, he found he was actually interested and was even enjoying himself. Time passed quickly and soon the food had arrived. The two decided to watch a movie while they ate, so at Nick's suggestion they watched another Classic film, "Reservoir Foxes." Judy found the movie interesting, it wasn't the best movie she had ever seen, but it was definitely a good watch.

After the credits rolled and all the food was eaten Nick decided it was time to go home, seeing as it was now 9:25 and he still had a long walk ahead of him. Nick Jumped off the bed and brushed away the crumbs of food from his clothes; before grabbing his phone from the nightstand.

"I'm gonna call it a night for real this time Carrots, but make sure to text me when you want to work out again." Nick said as he headed towards the door.

"Sounds good Nick, if you want we can meet up around the same time tomorrow, I can even pick you up at your house if you want, I'd love to see where you live, just tell me where to go," Judy suggested, optimistically thinking Nick would let her see his house this time. Luck however, was not
on Judy's side. As Nick just coyly replied,

"I bet you would fluff, but you gotta work harder than that to find this foxes den, let's just meet up in front of the park again, goodnight, sweet dreams Fluff," and without another word Nick was out the door, leaving Judy alone with her thoughts.

As she laid in her bed Judy thought about how she could find out where Nick lived. She thought about asking Finnick, but disregarded the idea, there was no way to find him other than driving around aimlessly like last time. As Judy brainstormed ways she could find out Nick's address she realized she already had seen it once before, on his tax form. Judy spent the next few minutes with her eyes screwed shut, trying desperately to recall what Nick's address was before she finally remembered it. 1955 Cypress Grove Lane, Ha! I got you this time Wilde, I'll surprise you tomorrow morning, and you'll never see it coming. So, with a plan forming in her head, Judy got ready for bed, set an alarm, and went to sleep

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

Second Disclaimer: DO NOT REMOVE A PARKING BOOT, IT IS A CRIME, and I do not endorse it, but it's your life, and I'm really just trying to cover my ass.
Chapter 6 - 1955 Cypress Grove Lane

Chapter Summary

Judy Goes to 1955 Cypress Grove Lane and Nick has no idea, what will happen? what's Judy gonna find? get reading and you'll know

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 6, sorry it took so long, I made my long drive and started my new schedule so I'll keep doing what I can for you all. Also Happy belated 2nd anniversary for Zootopia

AN: Say Thanks to my new editor SaberGatomon, who caught my errors and helped with the flow of the writing.

You want to storyboard for me? you like reading my chapters early and Sharing ideas for FREE, you say? Well shoot me a message and we might have something to talk about.

In the next Chapter I'll answer some personal Questions you lovely people have for me. Things like, What do I do for a living? or Why did I decide to write this story? Or What my favorite color is? ask in the comments, I'll either answer you directly or answer in the notes of Chapter 7, or don't one less thing I need to do for the next chapter

AN Part 2: everyone's apparent desire for smut has been recognized and will be incorporated at a time when I see fit, and I will be praying nobody see's me writing it, Oh God what have I started?

Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 6 - 1955 Cypress Grove Lane

- Judy’s Apartment, Sunday morning, 5:30

Judy woke up seconds before her alarm, like usual. Silencing it quickly before the screeching from hell could wake up her neighbors. As Judy got ready she couldn’t suppress her smile. She was going to show that smug fox today that he shouldn’t underestimate Judy Hopps. After a quick shower, Judy dried herself off with her new towel, it was just as soft as it looked, but paled in comparison to Nick’s amazing tail. *The towel is nice, but nowhere near as soft as Nick’s tail. I wonder if Nick will let me feel it again sometime*, Judy thought to herself. After drying off and getting dressed Judy took a minute to Zoogle Map Nick’s address. Seeing that it was only a short 8 mile walk away, Judy was tempted to just leave the truck at her apartment and walk it, but she decided against it. Thinking to
herself, you don’t want to re-injure your leg now do you? Then you’d be out even longer. So, after grabbing the keys and looking up popular nearby café’s, Judy headed out, making sure to lock the door behind her.

The bakery was packed with mammals of all sizes, with an equal mix of predator and prey. While Judy waited in line for her turn to order she tried to imagine what Nick’s face would look like when she showed up on his doorstep. The image of the normally composed fox’s face turning into one of utter shock was going to be hilarious. But as Judy stood there, lost in thought, she suddenly felt an odd tension in the café. Judy was unable to place it at first, but she could feel it, lying there, just under the surface. Mammals were smiling and chatting as they stood in line or ate their food, but their chatter and smiles seemed forced somehow, because despite the pleasant atmosphere most mammals seemed to be more focused on the crowd then the mammal in front of them. Their eyes moving back and forth, as if they were watching and waiting for the moment one of the predators inside would go crazy and attack. And as the paranoia started to get to Judy too, her phone suddenly vibrated in her pocket, startling her and causing her to jump a little bit. As her “try everything” ringtone rang out, Judy calmed down and realized it was only a phone call and chided herself for getting so worked up over nothing. Pulling out her phone and seeing it was Chief Bogo’s number Judy quickly answered it.

“Hello.”

“Good morning Hopps. How’s your leg feeling?”

“Good Chief, it aches a little if I walk too much, or stand up for long stretches of time, but I’m making sure to limit how much time I spend on my feet, so it’s fine”

“Good to hear Hopps, be sure to keep off it as much as possible, we need you back at 100%. Now I didn’t call you just to check in with you about your leg, I’m sure you’ve noticed that the ZPD still hasn’t announced that we found and out and put a stop to the cause of the attacks and I bet that you were probably wondering why,” Bogo said attempting to steer the conversation.

“Actually, now that you mention it Chief, I was. I figured you would have put out a statement as soon as possible, especially since tension in the city is still on the rise.” Judy said as she looked around at the mammals in the café again.

“Well Hopps, there were two reasons for this. First, I wanted to get all the facts straight before letting Zootopia know that, another mayor got arrested. The second reason was, I wanted to try and smoke out Bellwether’s co-conspirators.” Bogo explained

“Wait Chief, are you saying there were more mammals, besides the sheep we caught with Bellwether, involved in the plot?” Judy asked, concerned by the new information.

“I’m not sure Hopps, but I have my suspicions. Now this is just speculation, but an assistant mayor doesn’t make nearly enough to fund an operation of this size, and after looking into Bellwether’s background, we found no obvious connection to anybody in the underworld, so we believe that she must have gotten help. That being said, since the ram known only as Doug was never caught, and Woolther White and Jessie Pinkfleece were either unwilling or unable to provide any useful information; we haven’t been able to figure out much.” Bogo sighed, sounding tired and worn out.

“Chief, are Nick and I safe?” Judy asked, worried that they might be targeted for their part in stopping Bellwether’s plot.

“It’s hard to say Hopps,” Bogo started, not exactly filling Judy with confidence.
“I don’t believe you or Mr. Wilde are in any immediate danger of retaliation. If this was the work of a group, like we believe, they most likely will be lying low for the time being, especially with the entirety of the ZPD and all federal agencies on the lookout for them. That being said, be vigilant nonetheless. If anything happens, call the ZPD right away. You’re in no shape to take on anyone right now.”

“Roger that Chief. I’ll make sure to stay alert and call in if anything happens.” Judy replied quickly before adding, “Was there anything else you needed from me chief?”

“Yes, there was one more thing, as I said before we were holding off on having a press conference, but since tensions are still rising, and we weren’t able to find any new information, the city council and I have decided that it is time to hold one, and since you solved the case I wanted you to be there to say a few words.”

Judy froze, not another press conference, she thought to herself as she recalled how disastrous the previous one had been. How she had spewed some speciest rhetoric, tore the city apart, and nearly destroyed her budding friendship with her now favorite mammal.

“I will be there if you need me to be Chief, but do I need to be the one who speaks about the case?” Judy asked hesitantly.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but I think you should be the one to do it, you singlepawedly solved the biggest case in recent history, and saved the city. Plus, it would give you a chance to fix the mistakes of your last press conference. If you don’t want to however, I understand, but take some time to think about it. But even if you don’t speak however, I will still need you to be there in uniform,”

Judy let Bogo’s words sink in for a moment, giving another press conference would allow her to fix the mistakes she made, and not everymammal gets the chance to do that. But what if I make another mistake. I could just make things even worse. Judy thought to herself. Well, if I take some time and plan out what I want to say, then I should be better off. Being put on the spot was the problem last time, plus if Nick helps me then I’m sure I’ll be ok, as Judy came to this conclusion she realized something else. Nick didn’t get credit for helping me last time. I’m not gonna let that happen again, especially not when we saved the entire city of Zootopia.

“Chief Bogo, I’ll consider speaking at the press conference, but I have a request.” Judy said more confidently then she felt.

“Oh really, and what might that be Officer Hopps?” Judy could almost see the raised eyebrow on the Chief’s face as he spoke.

“Well Chief, last time I solved the case with Nick’s help and he got no recognition for it, since he saved both the city and my life this time, I would like for him to be there and share the spotlight with me.”

Judy’s request gave Bogo pause. While the police had recognized mammals who had assisted officers in the past, the help that had been provided was always minimal. It was never for big cases like this. It might make the ZPD look bad if they needed to get help from a fox to do their job properly. Then again, Bogo thought to himself, that fo-, um Mr. Wilde did practically save the city. If it ever got out that the ZPD did nothing to recognize his efforts, then it would look even worse. Plus, I guess I should give credit where it’s due.

“Alright Hopps,” Bog sighed “if Mr. Wide wants to come to the press conference, then I’ll allow him to stand on stage with you, and even speak with you if he wants, but you better make sure he dresses
well and doesn’t embarrass himself or the ZPD,”

“YES! THANK YOU CHIEF! You won’t regret it.” Judy shouted, drawing a few curious looks from the mammals in line around her.

“I better not.” Bogo said sternly “The conference is scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. It will start at 5 o’clock, but I want you and Mr. Wilde there at 4:30 so we can go over what you’re going to say.”

“Why Wednesday Chief? Wouldn’t it make more sense to let everyone know as soon as possible?” Judy asked

“It would Hopps, but as of right now the city still has no mayor. So we are holding off on the press conference until the city council picks a temporary mayor, the conference will be both, a brief of the case and the announcement of the new temporary mayor.”

“I guess that makes sense. Any idea who it will be?”

“Not a clue. If I spent all my time trying to keep track of and figure out all the pointless, behind the scenes political moves, I would never get any work done. Speaking of which I have another stack of paperwork I have to get back to so, enjoy your day and remember 4:30 Wednesday,”

“You got it Chief, have a great day,”

After getting off the phone with the chief Bogo, Judy waited patiently for her turn to order. Judy decided to get two coffees, both black with cream and sugar on the side, one sized for a bunny and one for a fox, and some muffins to go with them. As she got up to the counter, Judy took a moment to browse through the fresh muffins in the display case. Deciding on a carrot muffin for her and a blueberry one for Nick, Judy placed her order. After a few minutes Judy’s name was called and she paid for and picked up her order, then hopped back in the truck ready to surprise Nick. After buckling her seatbelt, Judy sent a quick text to Nick to make sure the lazy fox was up.

Judy: Hey Nick you up? If not, you should be. Academy days start early, 5:30 at the latest. So no sleeping in!

Then Judy punched Nick’s address into Zoogle Maps and pulled out onto the road ready to surprise Nick.

As Judy made her way to 1955 Cypress Grove Lane, Nick was in his chair, fast asleep. When the ping of a text notification woke him up, he pulled his phone out of his pocket to see who had messaged him. Nick looked at the time and saw it was only 6:30 in the morning. He wondered who in the world would text him at such an ungodly hour. As soon as he noticed the text was from Judy, a small smile found its way onto Nick’s muzzle. After reading Judy’s text, Nick begrudgingly decided to get up. Only to find that every muscle in his body decided to protest movement of any kind.

“Damn I’m sore. That’s what I get for neglecting my fitness. Better do some stretches and see if I can’t convince my body to work properly.”

So, Nick sat up and started to get out of his chair, only to find that his muscles were so tight, that he was moving about as fast as Flash did before his cup of morning coffee. After a few minutes, Nick
was able to make his way out of his chair and over to his hiding spot in the trees. Nick spent the next
ten minutes in the clearing, doing various stretches, trying to work out all the kinks in his muscles.
After his stretches, Nick rifled through his boxes, and a few moments later he pulled out a can of
Musk Mask. Nick, deciding not to take a shower, gave himself a good once over with the scent
blocker. Figuring that taking a shower after his workout would be better than wasting water by
taking two showers.

*I could really go for some coffee, especially If I’m gonna be up for the rest of the day, I should really
get something to keep me going,* Nick thought to himself as he walked back towards the bridge.

*On the other paw, since I’m no longer hustling and won’t have any other way to earn money, at least
not until next month I think I’ll hold off on the frivolous spending for a while.* Nick sighed, he
normally skipped meals and it always sucked to do so, but for the next three weeks he was going to
have to skip more meals than usual, and now that he was working out he was going to be even
hungrier than before.

“I Just gotta hold out for three weeks, it’s not that bad. I’ve dealt with worse.”

As he took out his phone again, Nick sent a quick text to Judy to let her know he was up and about.

After the text was sent, Nick noticed his phone was close to dying. So, after grabbing his wallet,
charger, and a pocket knife, Nick headed out to find a place to charge his phone, blissfully unaware
that Judy had just reached her destination.

1955 Cypress Grove Lane, Sunday Morning, 7:00

Judy couldn’t believe her eyes as she pulled up to the place her phone had lead her. The street wasn’t
abandoned, but it was close to it. Graffiti covered the buildings, and the street cameras were either
destroyed or blocked out with paint. Homeless mammals lay in the alleyways not even trying to beg
for money from the mammals that walked the streets. The mammals on the street were a few distinct
species of predator, foxes, some raccoons, weasels, and the occasional hyena. All of them looked
weary, and downcast. Those who were just getting in from work were covered in dirt and grime and
looked like they were about to collapse, while those going to work looked cleaner but just as
rundown. Judy noticed how most of them kept their gazes down at the ground, as if trying to ignore
the abhorrent conditions they were living in.

Pulling into an available parking spot Judy couldn’t help but be concerned for Nick. *How can he live
in a place like this, especially with how much he made in a day, it’s not safe, especially after he
becomes a cop, maybe I can convince him to move,* Judy thought as she got out of the truck and
locked it behind her. Going over to the other side of the truck Judy saw the parking meter was
destroyed, only a mangled pole was left to mark the spot where the meter should have been. Shaking
her head, Judy headed over to the apartment complex that was 1955 Cypress Grove Lane. The
building was three stories high, made of red brick, and it, surprisingly, had all its windows intact. The
windows on the building were also barred to prevent intruders and, compared to the rest of the street,
it actually looked like an alright place to live. As Judy walked up the steps of the stoop and entered
the apartment complex she wondered exactly how much Nick’s rent was.

The lobby of the complex was surprisingly well kept, if not a little dated. The wallpaper was peeling
in places, and the stairs, while sturdy, were chipped and cracked in various places. Judy headed over
to the apartment mailboxes looking for Nick’s name. After a few minutes of searching Judy was only
able to find a box with an old faded piece of paper with the letters Wil- barely readable before the
rest of the word faded and a plaque with the inscription C-6 next to it.

“I’ve got you now Slick,” Judy said. Smiling as she walked up to the third floor, taking care not to
spill the coffee or drop the muffins. Soon enough Judy found herself in front of apartment C-6 and without a second thought Judy gave the old door three swift knocks and then waited eagerly. Ears up trying to catch any sound from inside. After a moment Judy heard the shuffling of paw against hardwood and a moment later the sound of multiple locks being undone before the door opened slightly and a red fox muzzle poked out and a distinctly female voice called out,

“Yeah, who’s there?”

Judy’s ears and heart dropped simultaneously as only one thought ran through her mind, he’s got a girlfriend, he’s got a girlfriend, of course he has a girlfriend, why wouldn’t someone as smart, funny, handsome and kind as he is not be taken? What was I thinking? As Judy stood their heart in her stomach and lost in thought, the mammal at the door was getting impatient,

“Hey Bunny? You need something? Bunnnyyyy? Ground control to Major Cotton tail? HEY cute, cotton tailed rabbit, are you there?”

Like a magic spell the word cute snapped Judy back to reality in an instant, and like a recording Judy started the speech she always used when she got called cute.

“Don’t call a bunny cute! Only a bunny can call another bunny cute, if other animals do it, it’s condescending.”

The fox in the apartment started to laugh, as she closed the door in Judy’s face. Before Judy could let loose a tirade of righteous fury however, she heard the slide chain move and the door opened the rest of the way. Standing before her was an attractive vixen, her coat was a darker shade of red than Nick’s was, but with a similar cream-colored throat and her eyes were a light chestnut brown. Judy could see the vixen’s figure was impeccable even as it was partially hidden by a baggy shirt that was tucked into a pair of old grey sweatpants. This vixen had a modest, but firm bust, with a slim waist that flared out to accommodate her ample hips. As Judy mentally compared herself with the vixen in front her she couldn’t help but feel she was lacking in almost every aspect.

“So, what brings you to my door, little-Miss don’t- call-bunnies-cute?” the Vixen asked as she leaned against the doorframe.

With the door open fully Judy got a quick peek at the apartment, she wasn’t able to see much however, the shades were drawn, and the lights were dimmed. Judy could see the outline of some furniture in the living room and a decent sized television. But what really drew her eyes was the wallpaper of the apartment, it was the same floral Pawaiian pattern as Nicks favorite shirt. Realizing she still hadn’t answered the question she had been asked Judy quickly snapped back to reality.

“Well… I uh, came to see Nick Wilde. The tod who lives here. I figured we could hang out a bit before we worked out this afternoon. Oh, I’m Judy Hopps, by the way, I’m not sure if Nick mentioned me, but I’m helping him prepare for the academy. Sorry if I’m interrupting anything. I-I’ll go, just, just forget I was here, Nick never mentioned he had a girlfriend, but it was nice to meet you. Have a good morning,”

Without making eye contact or saying another word, Judy turned and left as she felt the heat rise to her face. But before she could get very far however the vixen called out to her,

“Hey Judy! Come back here for a moment”

Judy almost broke into a run, the urge to ignore the vixen and just escape this embarrassing situation was strong. But Judy fought it, turned around, and walked back over to apartment C-6.
“Yes?” Judy asked nervously, eyes glued to the floor, determined not to show her face until she stopped blushing.

“You seem to be mistaken on a few things. So I figured I should set you straight.”

“What do you mean?” Judy asked, curiously.

“Well Judy, can I call you Judy? I’ll just call you Judy. First, I ain’t nobodies Girlfriend. If a fella wants to be with me he’s paying, in cash. I can’t be putting out for free. Secondly, I live here, just me, nobody else. I don’t know any tod named Nick Wilde, and I don’t know nothing about you, or any academies.” The vixen explained

“Oh… um… well I’m sorry then, my friend lives in this building, and I saw what I thought was his last name on your mailbox, so you don’t know any other red fox tods that live in this building?” Judy asked confused, she was certain she was in the right place, and no other mailbox had anything close to Wilde written on it.

“Nope, I’ve never seen any other red foxes in this building, a few fennecs and an arctic, but no reds like me, and I’ve lived here for around five years now, you might try asking some of the other tenants maybe they know sumthin’.”

“I see, well sorry to have bothered you, Miss… ugh”

“Just call me Vivian,”

“Alright, sorry to have bothered you Vivian, bye.”

“Bye”

As Vivian closed the door Judy just stood there for a moment trying to wrap her head around what had just happened. As Judy processed all the information she had just got, a voice called out to her from a few doors down.

“Miss, hey Miss Bunny. Did you say Nick Wilde?”

Judy looked to her left trying to locate the voice. Standing in the hallway waving at Judy was an elderly badger in a light pink sweater, and a long blue skirt that fell down to her feet.

“Yes I did. Do you know him?” Judy asked as she walked over to the badger.

“Yes I knew the Wilde’s. They were such a nice family. They lived here for years, then suddenly left around twelve years ago. Nick was one of their sons, he was such a cute kit, and so polite too.”

Judy couldn’t believe her luck. Maybe this badger could give her some more information on Nick’s past.

“Really, I’m a friend of Nick’s. I was trying to find him, you wouldn’t know where he or his family moved to, do you ma’am?”

The old badger shook her head slowly, “I’m sorry sweetie, I don’t know where the Wilde’s went. I only know when they left, and some rumors that I heard years ago,”

“Oh, I see.” Judy said, visibly deflating. “Do you know anyone that does? If not, I’ll even take the rumors. Anything you know could help, ma’am”

“Call me Honey. Ma’am makes me feel my age. If you want to come in for a bit, I’ll tell you all I
“Sure, that would be lovely,” Judy said as she followed Honey into her apartment.

The apartment was well kept, if a little dusty. The walls were lined with black and white photos that sat in decorated frames. One picture showed a young badger couple, the male was dressed in a military uniform, medals shining bright on his chest, the female was in a simple white dress cinched at the waist with a ribbon. Another showed the same couple a few years later, but now there were a few young kits in the shot, all dressed up in their Sunday best. As Judy was led to the living room she was surprised how nice the apartment was considering the condition of the neighborhood. As she sat on the antique couch she wondered what stories Honey would be able to tell her.

“I’m sorry I don’t have any food to offer you, my grandson is supposed to take me grocery shopping tomorrow, but I can get you a coffee or some tea if you’d like.”

“Don’t worry about it, I had actually brought muffins for me and Nick to eat, but since he’s not here you can have his if you want Honey, it’s blueberry.” Judy said as she placed the bakery bag on the coffee table.

“Oh thank you dearie, I love blueberry,” after taking a few bites of the muffin, Honey continued. “This is delicious, thank you very much. Now where was I… ah yes, I remember, you wanted to know more about the Wilde’s. Well Mr. Wilde was a handymammal, he fixed just about anything that could break. Cars, refrigerators, doors, vacuums, you name it and he could fix it. It was hard work, but he was able to make a living that way, and he was always ready to offer a hand to those who needed it, a real gentelmammal.”

Judy listened intently, taking in every detail.

“Mrs. Wilde stayed at home, taking care of their three kits, Mike, Hannah and Nick. They were such a loving family, until one day Mr. and Mrs. Wilde got divorced. None of the neighbors knew why, but that didn’t stop them from spreading rumors. Some said Mrs. Wilde cheated, others said Mr. Wilde did or that he was abusive, but I don’t believe that. Like I said though, nobody knew for sure what happened except the Wilde’s and they weren’t talking. So, Mr. Wilde left and started paying child support, only seeing his kits every other weekend, and Mrs. Wilde had to get a job to keep the family going. After the divorce everything changed. The family started closing themselves off. They stopped talking to their neighbors, and the kits either weren’t home or stayed indoors, never interacting with anyone in the building.” Honey said, her voice taking on a solemn tone.

Judy was on the edge of her seat. What could have happened? Why did the Wilde’s close themselves off? And what happened next to make Honey sound so somber?

“Things continued like that for a few years, getting progressively worse as time went on. Mrs. Wilde had a few boyfriends and even remarried a few times. Then one tragic night while the kits were with their father, Mrs. Wilde passed away.”

Judy gasped. She couldn’t imagine losing her mom, especially at such a young age. Poor Nick, I hope he made it through alright.

“Then a few days later, the family up and left. No goodbyes, barely a trace that they had been there at all. Not a word to anyone of where they were going, at least nobody I know, knew where they went. Sorry I couldn’t help you locate them. But I hope the stories were useful at least.” Honey said.

“You’ve been a great help Honey. It may not be exactly what I wanted to know, but any new information is helpful, so thank you very much.” Judy said smiling. She might not have gotten
Nick’s address, but a few pieces to the puzzle that was Nick Wilde’s past was still better than nothing.

Judy stayed and chatted with Honey for a while longer, mostly listening as Honey told tales from her long life, and after an hour Judy headed home, promising to keep in touch and even visit again, if she had the time.

Judy’s Apartment, Sunday Morning, 10:45am

After getting back from her morning adventure Judy felt exhausted. Even though the day wasn’t even half over yet, Judy sprawled out on her bed, determined to rest a bit before meeting up with Nick, or “The enigma” as she had taken to calling him.

After learning a bit about his past, Judy was only more curious as to the real story behind the rumors.

“I wonder what happened to his mom? How would I even begin to ask about that?”

“You shouldn’t, that’s insanely personal. If he wants to share it with you he will. Boundaries Judy, boundaries,” Judy’s voice of reason said firmly.

“I know, but I can’t help it. I have so many questions. Where are his siblings? Does he talk to them? What about his dad?”

“I understand you have questions, trust me, I do. You know, cus I am you. But there is a time and place for everything. You need to start by building up trust with him and eventually he’ll tell you everything.” the voice of reason said softly.

“How does he not trust me already? I mean we saved each other’s lives, saved the city together. What more do I have to do?” Judy asked angrily

“Well, some mammals have a hard time trusting others, and being a former hustler, Nick probably didn’t trust many mammals to begin with. He definitely wouldn’t be sharing his life story with anyone he worked with, but he’s already started a bit with you. I mean he told you that story on the gondola, and he forgave you after you screwed up, so you’ve made progress already.” Judy’s compassionate side pointed out.

“I guess you’re right, but how can I get him to trust me if he always has those walls up? He’s gotta give me something, so at least I can prove that I’m trustworthy.” Judy said sadly, not knowing what to do.

Judy felt trapped. She wanted to know so much more about Nick, but he seemed so unwilling to share. It seemed like trying to learn anything about Nick was like pulling weeds. It was never-ending, tiring, messy and hard work. Even if you did eventually dig something up, there was most likely a root deeper down that you missed. It was maddening to Judy, and as she tried to rest she found herself constantly going over what she learned today and trying to piece something together from it, or at least trying to think of a way to get Nick to open up and tell her the truth.

“UGGHH, this is impossible!” Judy shouted in frustration, “How can I get that dumb fox to tell me what I want to know?”

“You could try getting him drunk. After a few drinks he will probably tell you whatever you want to know.” a dark voice whispered in the back of Judy’s mind

“No! Not only is that wrong morally, we don’t have the money for it. Even if we did, he definitely
has a higher tolerance for alcohol than we do. Also, who knows what drunk Judy would end up doing. Nope, too risky, and again morally wrong” Judy’s voice of reason countered.

“Yeeeaahhh, that’s off the table. But what else can I do?”

“Well you could always threaten him. Lying on a federal form is illegal and he blatantly lied about where he lives.” The dark voice whispered back.

“NO, no no no, NO! I WILL NOT blackmail a friend, especially not for something as silly as this. I only did it last time because I had no other choice, and honestly I probably wouldn’t have even gone through with it, even if he had said no. Because, I’m not that kind of mammal.” Judy said firmly.

“Fine, but how else are you going to get that hustler and notoriously sly fox to give you a straight answer?” The dark voice asked.

Thinking hard about it for a moment Judy tried to think of some way to get Nick to be honest with her. To tell her straight out what she wanted to know. Judy knew she didn’t want to trick, or manipulate him in any way. As Judy thought long and hard about what she could do, the idea suddenly hit her.

“I got it! If I want to get the truth out of Nick, I should make a bet with him. If I know him like I think I do, that smug fox will jump at the chance to beat me in a competition. When I win he won’t have any way to escape.” Judy said as she let out an evil laugh and wrung her paws dramatically.

Unbeknownst to Judy, both Bucky and Pronk had just got home; but had stayed uncharacteristically quiet as they listened in on the end of Judy’s conversation.

With ears pressed against the wall, the brothers looked at each other, eyes wide.

“Bucky,” Pronk whispered, doing his best to keep himself quiet so the now maniacally laughing rabbit wouldn’t hear him.

“Yeah Pronk?” Bucky whispered back.

“I think we should avoid making the bunny cop mad. We don’t want to end up like that poor fox is going to.” Pronk said, half joking.

“I’m sure that sweet bunny isn’t planning anything crazy. We only heard the back half of the conversation, so who knows what she wants from the fox.” Bucky said, trying to be reasonable, but right after he said that, Judy’s laughter got even louder and crazier.

“But just in case, let’s stay out of her way, for the time being.”

After Judy’s laughter died down, she got to work creating a workout/ bet that would not only be challenging and fair to both sides, but even a little fun. As the plan came together, Judy had only one thought in her mind. “By the end of today, I WILL know where you live Nick Wilde, and you’re going to be the one to tell me.”

Chapter End Notes

Well that’s it for now, The next chapter should be interesting, What’s the game gonna be? who will win? and will you find out anytime soon? all this may be answered next
Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.
If I were a betting Mammal

Chapter Summary

Take a bet. add one workout, some Wildhopps, A few questions, and some hard truths, mix well and spend lot's of time writing and editing. The result is Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 7, I'm getting used to my new schedule so I was able to deliver this supersized chapter to you earlier than normal.

AN: Say Thanks to my editor SaberGatomon, who catches my errors and helps with the flow of the writing.

You want to storyboard for me? you like reading my chapters early and Sharing ideas for FREE you say? Well shoot me a message and we might have something to talk about.

Nobody had any questions, so I have one for you all. Are you or anyone you know a good artist? specifically an artist who would draw stuff for free(Or for the promise of getting your work seen) If so drop the name or where i can find them in the comments or in a message to me.

Much appreciated,
Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: After buying plane tickets and infuriating Disney World I was unable to find the Rights to Zootopia(Did Find a Cool severed head frozen in ice though). So Like Usual, I Don't own Zootopia or any of its Characters.

Chapter 7
If I were a betting Mammal

Grove Park, downtown Savanna Central, Sunday Afternoon 3:15pm

I’m late! I’m late! What’s wrong with me I’m never late, then again, in my defense, today has been a rather strange day. Getting up early was strange enough, but then I get sidetracked, running into
Finnick, at the library of all places. Then I pop a button on my shirt and have to go back “home” to sew it, then, realizing I forgot my phone, I have to go all the way back to the library to get it, luckily it was still there, and on top of all that I’ve had this strange feeling of dread all day. Nick thought to himself as he jogged down the sidewalk, almost to the entrance of the park. As Nick turned the corner and the entrance came into view so did Judy and what a view it was. She was only wearing a simple lavender sports top with plain black leggings, but Nick still couldn’t take his eyes off her. The top complimented her eyes, while the leggings hugged her curves perfectly and showed off her “assets.” Nick also noticed a strange, almost primal, sense of satisfaction that he was getting from seeing Judy wear the clothes he had bought her.

“It’s not like she had anything else to wear, plus she still doesn’t know you sent them, so chill out.” Nick’s rational voice chastised.

As Nick got close he saw the look of irritation on Judy’s face, and paired with the rapid hind paw tapping Nick knew he was in trouble. Slowing down his jog Nick made his way over to Judy.

“Hey Carrots, sorry I’m late. You would not believe the day I’ve had.” Nick said, flashing a quick smile, hoping to placate the irate rabbit.

Judy stared stone faced, her icy glare and deafening silence sent a shiver up Nick’s spine.

Well I guess she’s really angry, note to self, from now on, don’t be late. Nick thought to himself as he rubbed the back of his neck hoping Judy would speak soon. Time slowed under Judy’s silent scrutinization and even though it had only been a minute to Nick it felt like a lifetime.

“I really am sorry Fluff, I got caught up in some stuff and lost track of time, it won’t happen again, I promise.” Nick said trying to calm Judy down with an apology. Judy wasn’t budging however, and after a few more seconds of silence Nick spoke again.

“Alright, what do I have to do to get you to forgive me? If apologizing won’t work, would begging for forgiveness on my knees be better, or will this apology cost me somehow? Either way you’re not going to get what you want unless you tell me what to do.”

After hearing Nick say that Judy almost asked him her questions straight out, but she decided against it. If she really wanted to get to the honest to goodness truth out of Nick, she needed to beat him fair and square, not force him to tell her as some sort of apology.

Dropping her glare while still maintaining a mask of indifference Judy spoke.

“Fine Nick, if you’re really sorry, then I want you to make a bet with me, and I want your word that if I win you’ll pay up,”

Nick felt suddenly uneasy, what kind of bet? And what would I lose if she wins? As Nick worried about it more he realized that this was Judy, not one of his former associates, even if he lost the bet there was no way she wanted anything bad. What does she want then? thinking about it wasn’t getting Nick anywhere so he decided he was better off just asking outright.

“Sounds interesting Fluff, what exactly do you have in mind?”

“Oh, nothing excessive, just a friendly wager. The workout I have planned for today is more of a competition, and a bet makes it much more interesting don’t you think?” Judy said innocently.

“I guess I can see your point, but what do I get when I win?” Nick asked smugly,
“When I win you will have to answer five questions of my choice, and you have to answer honestly, no half answers or avoiding the question in any way, and if somehow I lose you get to ask me any five questions. Sound good?”

Nick was hesitant, there were a lot of things he didn’t want Judy to know, things he’d done wrong, things he’d done right, things he was embarrassed about, and things he didn’t even want to think about, let alone discuss. Despite all that however, Nick decided to accept, what’s the worst that could happen, Nick thought to himself it’s not like she’ll win, and even if she does I’m sure she just wants to know about my kithood or something, and I can tell her stories of the good times.

“Alright Fluff, you’ve got yourself a deal,” Nick said holding out his paw.

“You’re on Nick, and I want your word that you’ll answer my questions truthfully, when I ask them. No walking away and hoping I forget, or saying you’ll get back to me with the answer later. Ok?” Judy said extending her paw out to meet his.

“You have my word as a hustler, that if I Nick Wilde, lose then I will answer truthfully any five questions you ask, when you ask them.” Nick said as they shook paws.

“Great!” Judy exclaimed as she hopped into the air, the stern look on her face vanished in an instant and was replaced by a joyful smile.

“Alright Slick move your tail, since someone was late we need to hurry and set everything up.” Judy said as she took Nick’s arm and dragged him towards the clearing they had stretched in yesterday.

After they both stretched out, once again secretly sneaking peaks at each other, and warmed up, Judy reached into her gym bag and pulled out a deck of cards.

“Cards Carrots? I thought we were gonna workout not play poker, but if you’d rather play card games then that’s a workout I’m not opposed to.” Nick joked, secretly wishing Judy actually wanted to play cards.

“We’re not playing cards Nick, these are for a workout game, It’s called catch 52, and it’s pretty simple, you get into the starting push up position and I’ll throw the cards one at a time, you catch as many as you can while staying in the push up position, after all 52 have been thrown we’ll count up all the cards you caught and any cards that were deemed uncatchable, that will be your score, then we switch,” Judy explained as she pulled out the jokers from the deck.

“Alright, sounds interesting, so whoever catches the most wins the bet?”

“Not so fast their Slick, that’s only the first of three games, best two out of three, that way there’s no whining when I beat your fluffy tail.”

“You know Carrots I think you might have a thing for my tail, the way you keep mentioning it.” Nick said as he wiggled his tail and winked at Judy.

“W-w-what, n-n-n-no, it’s just a saying, I do NOT have a thing for your tail, no matter how amazingly soft it is.” Judy stuttered out, as her face turned beet red.

“I think red is a good color for you fluff,” Nick said, starting to laugh as Judy attempted to cover her face with her ears, which only caused Nick to laugh even harder.

“I think I’m just gonna go find a hole to crawl into now,” Judy said from behind her ears.
“Don’t be like that, I promise I won’t tease you anymore today,” Nick said as his laughter slowly died down.

Peeking out from behind her ear, Judy looked up at Nick with one of her big lavender eyes and asked, “Really, you promise?” in a small voice.

Looking down at Judy and seeing the look she was giving him Nick felt a pang in his chest, and in that moment, she could have asked him to do almost anything and he would have agreed without a second thought, that being said teasing was in his nature.

“I promise I will refrain from teasing you for the rest of the day … unless you give me something else to tease you with. A mammal only has so much restraint,”

“Alright Nick I’m holding you to that. Anyway, let’s get started. I’ll go first, but remember, if the card is uncatchable it’s a freebie, and if I drop from the push up position the catch doesn’t count.” Judy reiterated as she handed Nick the deck of cards.

After getting down into the push up position Judy took a moment to get herself ready, laying her ears flat along her back and lifting her head up, before telling Nick to start. As soon as Nick started tossing cards Judy became like a mammal possessed, grabbing almost every card thrown and by the 20th card Judy had only missed five.

Nick was impressed, he knew it couldn’t be easy maintaining balance and holding a push-up, but Judy made it look so simple, snatching cards out of the air like a frog catches a fly. As Judy continued catching card after card Nick started to get concerned, if she keeps this up there’s no way I’ll beat her, maybe it’s time I add a little flair to my throws, Nick thought to himself mischievously.

Judy was in the zone, focused only on catching the cards and holding the pushup, there was no room in her mind for scheming foxes. As the next card came into view Judy reached out to grab it, but right as her paw was centimeters away from the card it suddenly curved inward and hit her supporting arm. Confusion broke through Judy’s concentration, but she quickly shook it off and refocused on her task as another card came flying into view, only to again curve out of her grasp again. Judy started to get frustrated, and instead of trying harder and getting angrier, Judy decided instead to stop and take a moment to observe. Watching as Nick threw Judy noticed the odd way his wrist flicked, and how he seemed to change the way he threw the card each time. The slight change in throwing style combined with the odd flick of the wrist was making the cards flight path change ever so slightly and throwing Judy off. That clever fox, changing the way he throws to make me miss, well done, but this game is far from over. Judy spent the next few throws not trying to catch the cards but just observing Nick, and after a while Judy felt she was getting used to it and started trying to catch the cards again. Catching some and missing others Judy started to feel the strain in her arms and as the last card was thrown Judy didn’t even try to catch it but instead just collapsed into the grass.

“I gotta say Fluff, 38 out of 52 isn’t half bad, but I think I’ll be able to beat that.” Nick said confidently as he jogged over to Judy’s sprawled out form and started picking up the cards.

Judy just laid there for a moment catching her breath before propping herself up and sitting cross legged. A smile on her face as sweat dripped down it,

“I’m sure you can Slick, but to make it fair I’ll let you have a few throws to practice if you want, it might hurt your little fox ego if you were to lose too badly.” Judy mocked as she started grabbing cards too.
“I’m gonna make you eat those words Bunny, just you wa…” Nick suddenly froze as his paw which had been reaching for one of the last cards grabbed a warm, soft, and surprisingly small paw, instead of the, cool, smooth, waxy texture of the playing card. As Nick looked up he locked eyes with Judy and was frozen in place, it was as if Judy’s touch was electric and locked his muscles in place. Time seemed to slow down as Nick’s heart started beating uncontrollably, and he started to take in every detail of Judy’s face.

The way the light shimmered on her grey fur, or the way the grey fur gave blended into the snow-white fur around her mouth, the beautifully deep lavender color of her eyes that sparkled like a polished gem, Nick took every detail in down to the slight twitching of her cute little nose. Getting caught up in the feeling of the moment Nick started leaning forward slightly, closing the already small distance between him and Judy. As Nick’s muzzle inched closer and closer to Judy’s, Logic gained control once more, and Nick suddenly realized exactly what he was about to do and quickly jerked his paw away and turned his head to the side thankful his fur color would hide his blush.

“Just… Just you wait, ha ha,” Nick finished trying to play off what just happened.

“You’re vastly underestimating this game Slick, and I’m going to enjoy watching you flail around like a fish out of water trying to catch cards.” Judy said as she stood up and walked over to Nick.

“Now are you going to hand me the cards or are you going to keep stalling for time?” Judy asked, paw outstretched waiting for the rest of the deck.

“Stalling for time. Yeah, keep telling yourself that. Those delusions will come crashing down around you soon enough.” Nick said as he very carefully handed Judy the deck, making sure not to touch her paw accidentally again.

Judy noticed the extra care Nick was taking not to touch her but filed it away for later examination, just like she had done with the moment before, as taking a trip on that train of thought might take an hour or longer to complete and she had a bet to win.

So, with only a few more words spoken between them they started Nick’s turn of catch 52.

Nick had been confident when he got into position and even as the first card flew he figured he’d be alright, but as the fifth card flew past his outstretched paw and he lost his balance and crashed into the ground again Nick felt nothing but dread. As Nick picked himself up and got back into position he could hear Judy trying to stifle her laughter.

“You’re really showing me Slick, I never knew eating my own words would taste so good.”

*I deserved that,* Nick thought to himself, *but there’s gotta be a way I can do this, I just gotta think my way to the win.* As Nick thought about it a few more cards had past him by, but by the time the tenth card had landed Nick had his plan. Focused entirely on the card as it was thrown Nick tracked it as it got closer to his left side. Lifting his right leg and reaching out with his left arm allowed Nick to better balance himself, stretch his arm out further, and grab the card out of the air easily. Armed with this new technique Nick started to catch almost every card that came his way and as Judy’s card pile started getting lower and lower she figured a change in tactic might be in order. Seeing how Nick was catching, Judy decided to start throwing the cards as close to in between Nick’s arms as possible.

Nick was quick on the uptake however and devised a new strategy. As the card flew in between his arms Nick would push up launching his upper body into the air and grabbed the card with a clap, before landing back in position. The new strategy was somewhat effective, but Nick wasn’t always able to time it right or even get himself high enough into the air. So as the last card came flying
towards his left Nick reached out as far as he could, but as he was about to reach it, a stray breeze blew in out of nowhere and carried the card out of reach. Finished Nick let himself fall to the ground exhausted.

Looking up at Judy as she approached, Nick in his exhaustion forgot his embarrassment from before and just focused on regaining his breath. After a few minutes of heavy breathing Nick was able to ask about the results.

“So Carrots, how’d I do?”

Judy, refusing to look at Nick, just mumbled a reply.

“What was that?” Nick asked, having heard what she said but wanting her to repeat it.

“I said you won, 39 to 38, alright? You smug jerk.” Judy said trying to sound angry.

“I seem to recall someone offering me practice time out of pity. It seems you should have been more worried about yourself, too bad. One more win and you have to spill all your secrets to me.” Nick joked, seeing through Judy’s attempt at anger.

“You only won because of that gust of wind at the end, if it hadn’t come, you would have missed the catch and it would have been a tie. Also, don’t get to comfortable the next game won’t be so easy,” Judy said defensively.

“Sure, sure, sure, so while I lay here trying to coax breath back in my lungs and feeling into my arms, wanna explain the next challenge?” Nick asked as he continued to lay in the grass flipping himself over to look at the sky.

“If you insist.” Judy said as she sat down next to Nick.

“The next game is called “catch the criminal,” it’s a workout you’ll do in the academy as well, but I had to modify it slightly because of my injury. We will both start at the same place, when I say go you will have to do 20 sit ups I’ll do 10, right after the sit ups you stand up and start running around the cones that I’ll set up. Because of my leg injury I’ll be walking and the distance I’ll walk will be about half the distance of your run, whoever reaches the end first wins, best two out of three. You can just rest up for a bit while I set up the distance markers.” Judy explained as she stood up and walked over to her bag.

Judy took out 7 little traffic cones from her gym bag and started to place them. She set out the first four in a square shape, each cone was roughly 50 meters from the other, then taking the remaining 3 Judy created a smaller square within the big square. With the smaller square sharing the start and end point with the bigger square. Each cone in the smaller square was roughly 25 meters from the other and with the cones in place, the stage for the next challenge was set.

“You ready Nick?” Judy called out to the still prone fox.

“If I have to be,” Nick grumbled as he peeled himself off the cool refreshing grass and made his way to the starting cone.

“Alright, let’s get this started,” Judy said as Nick appeared at her side,

“Once I say go, get into the sit up position and start going as fast as you can, and remember first one back here wins the round.”

“Alright Fluff, bring it on!”
With both Nick and Judy at the starting line ready to go, Judy began the countdown.

“3, 2, 1…GO!”

As soon as the words were out of her lips both Nick and Judy nearly threw themselves onto the ground and started their sit ups. Judy form was a gray blur and in less than 15 seconds she had finished her sit up and began walking.

Nick was astonished at Judy’s speed, quickly finishing the rest of his sit ups, Nick went right into his sprint. Going full speed Nick quickly reached the first cone, only to overshoot it and nearly fall as he tried to take the turn. Continuing his sprint no longer at full speed Nick rounded the second corner with ease and made his way to the third cone. As Nick rounded the third cone and entered the straightaway he saw Judy was nearly back to the starting point already. Putting out one more burst of speed Nick ran like a mad mammal to the finish, but he was too slow. Nick reached the cone only a few seconds after Judy, disappointment evident on his face.

“Hey not bad for your first time, those sharp corners are killer, aren’t they?” Judy asked, deciding Nick could use some encouragement instead of taunting.

“You can say that again,” Nick said in agreement, “take them too fast and you waste time as you overshoot the turn, take them too slow and you’re out of the race.”

“Yep, that’s the point of this exercise, when chasing a criminal knowing how to take corners without losing too much speed is key, and there’s a trick to it. You can figure it out I’m sure, you’re a smart guy after all.” Judy said, trying to help Nick without handing him the answer, and by extension the game.

As they rested, Nick spent the time thinking hard about the problem at hand. *I could slow down right before the corner… nah that would take too much time and I’d lose too much speed, maybe I could do a type of jump and sorta push off and change direction faster… but I doubt that’s possible, UUGGHH what should I do, I need to win this race.* Before Nick was able to find a concrete solution to the problem at paw it was already time for the next set.

The second set started out just like the first one, with Judy taking the early lead with her 10 sit ups. When Nick finished his sit ups he began his sprint he decided to try out the ideas he had come up with.

At the first cone Nick tried lowering his speed and taking the corner as sharply as possible. Even with the decrease in speed however, the momentum was still too much, and Nick almost fell over. Sprinting to the second cone Nick tried springing off his outside foot to round the corner faster, but found that between the jump and the landing it wasted too much time to be practical. As Nick rounded the second cone with his jump a brief flash of inspiration came to him, and Nick headed to the third cone at top speed. Coming up to the third and final corner Nick tried widening his turn and starting it earlier and found he was able to retain most of his speed while going around the cone. Even though the move had worked it hadn’t been enough. As Nick enter the final straightaway he saw Judy was just finishing, deciding not to give up Nick once again pushed himself to top speed. Despite the effort Nick put out he was unable to pass Judy and having won two out of three, the game was over.

“You almost had me at the end there Slick, we can go on to the next challenge if you don’t want to do the last set,” Judy offered, trying to give Nick a break. Judy had expected Nick to take the offer and move on to the next event but was surprised when she heard Nick say “No, I want to finish,” in between gasps for air.
“Are you sure Nick? There’s no need to, we’ve worked out quite a bit already, and missing out on one set isn’t gonna kill us,” Judy reasoned.

“That may be true, and normally I’d be all over stopping, but I think I might be on to something and even though I’ve lost this challenge I still think I can win the next set.” Nick said confidently.

Judy smiled, *Nick really is something else, then again that sounds like something I would have said if I was in his position,*

“Alright, let’s see what you’re made of then Mr. Equestrian bolt,”

So Nick and Judy lined up for the third and final set of “catch the criminal.” On Judy’s mark they began, and after finishing his sit ups Nick started his sprint. As he reached the corner Nick set his plan into motion, maintaining his speed Nick started to take a wide turn, way outside the cone and leaned his body into the turn to counter the momentum and slingshot himself forward. Nick continued this tactic at each corner and found himself getting faster and faster, and as he rounded the last corner Nick saw Judy rounding her last cone as well. Pushing himself as hard as possible in the final stretch Nick flew by Judy, reached the finish line, and threw his paws into the air victoriously.

Judy walked past the finish line and as she walked over to Nick, Judy couldn’t help but smile at his display.

“Congrats Slick, it seems you figured out how to run around sharp corners, like I said before that skill will come in handy when chasing a fleeing suspect,” Judy said as she started picking up the cones.

“Let me grab the cones Carrots, considering you set them up and all. And thanks, I just wish I had figured it out sooner, then I would have won the bet, but whatever we still have one more challenge,” Nick said, as he jogged over, grabbed the other cones, and handed them to Judy.

“Thanks,” Judy said, taking the cones from Nick’s paw and putting them in her bag.

“And we’ll see if you still be able to beat me once my leg is fully healed and we play this game for real, but that will have to wait. The third and final challenge is a simple one, but a grueling one none the less, and will not end until one of us give up, so prepare your body and soul.” Judy said, pausing for dramatic effect.

“Oh, get on with it, drama bun,” Nick said mockingly

“I’m a drama bun? Then you’re the Dali Lama of drama, and fine. The last test will be a plank off, whoever drops first loses, and I’ll have you know I can hold a plank for at least 10 minutes on a bad day,” Judy said defiantly.

Nick gulped, “T-That’s not that impressive, I’ll beat you for sure.” Nick said trying to sound confident but failing.

“Alright if you’re so confident then I’ll start a timer and we can get started,” Judy said smugly.

Getting into the plank position both Nick and Judy had victory on the mind, both determined to win but for different reasons. For Nick the questions were secondary, the bragging rights were a far more important prize. Judy on the other paw wanted her questions answered and wasn’t gonna stop until she found out what she wanted to know. So with their minds set on their respective prizes the plank off began.

The first few minutes went by with relative ease, with neither mammal budging, but as time wore on
Nick could feel the burn of strained muscles and no matter how much he tried to distract himself, the pain would always come back to the forefront of his mind. Nick decided to lift his head and check to see if Judy was fairing any better, only to regret it instantly. The bunny in front of him was a vision of stability and grit, seeing her steadily planking with apparent ease made Nick want to drop on the spot. But as Nick watched Judy a bit longer and a bit more closely, unable to keep his eyes off of her, he noticed a slight tremor that shook Judy’s frame. Seeing even a small crack in Judy’s plank, gave him the confidence to push forward. Nick continued to watch Judy’s plank rationalizing that if he did he would be able to keep motivated. In the back of his mind however, Nick knew it was a flimsy reason, but it was easier to keep going when watching the mammal, he… loved? No, don’t go there, I just… ahhhh admire her, and care for her like a friend does, yeah that’s it, admiring a friend and NOTHING ELSE.

“I gotta stop thinking to myself, it’s dangerous,” Nick said quietly through his clenched teeth. As he refocused on Judy, Nick noticed the sweat droplets on the side of her face, were running down in an odd pattern. As the fell from her forehead and reached her cheek, instead of continuing straight down like they should have, the droplets of sweat would stop, change direction and move horizontally for a short time, before continuing their trip down to the dirt. Straining his eyes to look closer, Nick noticed three little raised lines under Judy’s left eye, those look like claw marks, Nick thought to himself angrily. Who and what would dare claw Judy, it didn’t happen during the Missing Mammals or Nighthowler case, or I would have seen it, but no matter when it happened when I get my paws on whoever did it they’ll be begging for mercy, maybe they need to see how it feels to get clawed. Nick thought as the anger started to cloud his thoughts, and a low growl escaped his chest, hearing it caused Nick to calm down slightly. Get a hold of yourself Wilde, Nick chastised, relax and put your claws away, they aren’t going to be doing any slashing today. Looking down at his paws, Nick was shocked to see his claws were not retracted like usual, but instead were digging into the soft cool earth. Embarrassed, Nick quickly brought them back and tried to clear his mind and forget the anger that had suddenly bubbled up out of nowhere.

As Nick closed his eyes and focused on quelling this newly discovered rage, he failed to notice the pair of amethyst colored eyes that had been watching him intermittently for the past few minutes.

Judy had spent the first few minutes of the plank off, eyes closed, and mind focused on the task at hand, but after some time had passed Judy, needing a distraction decided to peek over at Nick, just to check on the competition Judy assured herself. But after checking on Nick and looking away quickly, Judy felt her eyes drawn back to him again and again. Eventually Judy got control of her wandering eyes and focused back on the plank that was getting rather hard to keep up. A few more minutes passed in silence as Judy fought to hold the position and sweat began to drip down her face. Then all of a sudden Judy’s concentration was broken again by what sounded like a low growl. Looking around trying to locate the sound, Judy couldn’t find anything, and as she looked back at Nick Judy saw his face scrunched up, teeth partially bared and his claws digging into the ground in apparent agony. He’s trying really hard to win, but sorry Nick I have some questions that I need answers to, so you’re going down, Judy thought to herself as she continued to watched Nick struggle.

Nick, having calmed down, decided to look over at Judy again, just to check on the competition, Nick reasoned with himself. Looking up from the ground Nick’s emerald eyes locked on to Judy’s amethyst eyes and instead of looking away both mammals held their gazes. As the burning in his muscles got worse and worse, Nick realized he wasn’t going to be able to keep this up for much longer and decided to end it. Taking in a deep breath, Nick scrunched up his face, puffed out his cheeks and let loose a long wet raspberry.

“THHHHHBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT”
Seeing the ridiculous face Nick was making combined with the sound that followed, caused Judy to burst out laughing, before immediately regretting it. As laughing not only hurt immensely but made her lose some of what little strength she had left. **Well two can play at this game**, Judy thought to herself as she tried to hold back her laughter at the new face Nick was making. Fighting fire with fire Judy quickly puffed out her own cheeks, crossed her eyes, raised one of her ears, and tilted her head slightly, causing Nick to burst out laughing; and with that the race to make the other lose by laughter was on, and as Nick and Judy tried their hardest to hold the plank and make the other lose they both found themselves face down and gasping for air, having fallen milliseconds apart. After taking a few minutes to compose themselves Nick and Judy got up, grabbed their things and headed back to Judy’s apartment too exhausted to speak. Checking the timer Judy was impressed, Nick had been able to hold the plank for 15:36.

**Judy’s Apartment, Sunday Evening, 6:45pm**

“Wait, which one of us won the bet then?” Nick asked. Suddenly realizing as they entered the apartment that they hadn’t discussed the outcome.

Judy thought hard about it for a moment, **I can’t say for sure which one of us fell first, and even though I really want to ask my questions, I shouldn’t lie.**

“To be honest Nick, I don’t know which one of us fell first, so I’m ok with calling it a tie if you are.” Judy said as she walked into her apartment and threw her bag onto her bed.

“Sounds good to me Fluff,” Nick said as he leaned up against the wall of the apartment and slid down, sighing in relief as his butt reached the cool wood floor, “That just leaves the question of the bet, since it was a tie do we both lose?”

“Well we could both lose, or we could both win?” Judy suggested nervously as she twiddled her paws.

Nick looked up at Judy curiously, “What do you mean by that?”

“Well, since neither of us won outright we could both get a partial reward for winning, that way the whole bet wasn’t for nothing,” Judy explained, hoping Nick would go with it.

Nick thought about it for a while and well a small voice in the back of his mind was yelling out to him **“It’s a Trap,”** desperately in an attempt to get his attention, Nick ignored the voice because he also now had a question he wanted the answer to.

“That sounds like a good idea to me, a win-win of sorts, but since we both also lost let’s have a penalty of sorts as well, like we each only get three questions instead of five, sound fair?” Nick suggested, thinking if Judy only had three questions, he might be safe.

“Sure!” Judy said happily.

“So, for my first question……”

“Hold your carrots their Carrots, let’s shower and change first, I don’t know about you, but I don’t like sitting in smelly gym clothes.”

“Oh, hahaha. Yeah, you’re right, let’s shower first,” Judy said, slightly embarrassed that she had jumped the gun.

Luckily more than one shower was free and both Nick and Judy were able to shower without having to wait. Nick spent his shower reveling in the warm water again, enjoying the experience for all it
was worth; but even as Nick enjoyed the shower a cynical voice in the back of his mind warned him, don’t get too used to this, remember friends can and will leave you in the blink of an eye.

“I know, I know, but Judy’s different,” Nick replied.

“Don’t think like that or it’ll hurt even worse when it happens, NOBODY sticks around, you know better than to think otherwise.” The cynic shot back.

Nick decided to ignore the voice in his head and went back to his shower taking his time to soak though his fur and really get down to the skin.

Judy spent her shower deep in thought, she had intended it to be a quick in and out shower but found her mind wandering to what happened at the park. Judy tried to ignore the thoughts wanting to examine what happened later but found herself unable to stop playing the scene when her and Nick’s paws touched over and over again.

“You were about to kiss him, weren’t you,” a voice asked.

“I-I- ah… Maybe, but I just got swept up in the moment, that all” Judy replied.

Thinking back to Nick’s rough paw pads on her fur, the look in his brilliant emerald eyes, and the things she had felt in that moment, Judy was unable to deny that if Nick hadn’t pulled back she would have kissed him back.

“So, there’s your answer then right? You definitely have feelings for him and judging from his actions he must have some for you too.”

“I don’t know,” Judy said uncertainly, as she started shampooing her fur.

“What’s there not to know, you find him physically attractive, and you definitely enjoy spending time with him and want to know more about him, what else is there?” the voice asked impatiently.

“Well… What if that’s not love, though. What if I just happen to find my friend to be an attractive male. If we tried to date and it failed that would ruin our friendship, and I don’t want that,” Judy said as she watched the water pour over her and rinse the suds down the rain.

“You can’t be sure it’s love right away, but dating is the first step to finding that out. Also, you don’t know that it will end badly, and are you really ok with wondering what could have been?” The voice argued.

“No, I don’t want that, but there’s no guarantee Nick feels the same, I could end up looking like a fool.”

“He was about to kiss you. What more do you need?”

“He pulled back, then he wouldn’t even touch my paw afterwards, maybe I just thought he was gonna kiss me because that’s what I wanted to see.” Judy said as she started putting in her fur conditioner.

“You’ll never know unless you try,” the voice said as it faded away.

“One step at a time. First let’s find out where he lives, then I can worry about these feelings I seem to be having for my best friend later.” Judy said firmly. Having settled that, at least for now, Judy
finished her shower quickly, dried off, and then headed back to her apartment in clean clothes.

A few minutes later Nick was back in the apartment as well wearing his signature shirt and khakis. Seeing Nick in that awful shirt again Judy couldn’t hold back a comment.

“Nick, how can you keep wearing that same awful shirt day after day?” Judy asked jokingly.

“Well Carrots, since this is one of your three questions I’m obligated to answer, but I promise you the reason isn’t nearly as exciting as you might expect,”

“whoa, whoa, whoa, that’s NOT one of my three questions, it was a joke, nothing more.” Judy argued as she walked over to her bed and sat down.

Nick walked over to the bed as well but instead of sitting down next to Judy he grabbed the chair next to the nightstand, spun it around and sat down resting his chin on the back of the chair and pointed at Judy.

“You should have specified, an unintentional question is still a question, but it’s still a pretty good story, so I promise you your question isn’t going to be wasted, alright?”

“Fine,” Judy huffed, “But so help me Wilde, if this story is lame you’re going to get such a punch, you won’t be able to move your arm for a week”

“Such a violent bunny.” Nick said chided playfully as he leaned forward on the chair causing it to tip slightly.

“It’s not a terribly long story but it is worth it I promise. So, a few years back I happen to get a job from some poor retail mammal that had ordered a few hundred shirts by accident. These shirts were as tacky as they come, and even though they were 100% silk and amazingly comfortable, nobody touched them for months. So, the mammal wanted me to break into his shop and “steal” the shirts, he was gonna pay me a decent amount because once they had been “stolen” the insurance company would cover the cost and then he wouldn’t get fired.”

Before Nick could continue he was cut off as Judy jumped up ears up in agitation and shouted incredulously. “Those shirts are stolen! Nick you shouldn’t have taken that job. Even if it helped that mammal out, it was still wrong,”

Nick chuckled at the outburst.

“What is so funny about stealing, Nick?” Judy asked angrily.

“Well Fluff, it’s the fact that you should really let a mammal finish his story before you cry out in righteous indignation. If you had, you would have found nothing to shout about” Nick explained.

“Oh, sorry, continue,” Judy said meekly, ears folding back as she sat down quietly.

“Don’t worry about it, I find that side of your personality cuuuuu- endearing,” Nick edited quickly.

“Now, back to the story. After taking a look at the shirts and I saw some potential in them, and offered to buy them, all at a severely reduced price I might add, and with the shirts purchased legally both I and the retail mammal walked away happy.”

Judy scratched her head thoughtfully, “I guess that makes sense… sort of, but what potential did you see in them exactly, and why wouldn’t you just take them, get paid, then wear them anyway? You could have made even more that way,” Judy asked
“Well Carrots I had a similar thought myself, but since I wanted to use them for hustles I couldn’t have them being reported stolen. The shirt itself is very recognizable. So, if they were reported stolen and I was seen walking around in them it would be way too easy to get pick up by the ZPD. Also, I do like to stay on the right side of the law as much as possible when I hustle. As for the protentional it’s really simple, most mammals I dealt with in the past, were people I don’t want to recognize me if the hustle went bad. When I’m wearing the shirt they focus on that and not my face, I can change a shirt quickly and easily, my beautiful face, not so much.” Nick said, flashing Judy an award-winning smile with a wink to go with it.

Judy’s heart skipped a beat when Nick flashed her his smile, but she recovered quickly.

“I guess that makes sense, and I’m glad you didn’t try to break the law when you hustled, even if you did bend it until it screamed,” Judy joked,

“So, what’s your first question for me?” Judy asked.

Nick thought about it for a moment, trying to decide whether to get straight to the point or save the big question until the end.

“If you could become any mammal you wanted right now, but you couldn’t change, back would you? And if so, what mammal would you choose and why?” Nick asked, deciding to hold off on the bigger question until later.

Judy thought about it for a moment, Would I change myself if I could? I’m sure my family would still love me even if I suddenly wasn’t a bunny and becoming a cop would have been a lot easier if I had been born a tiger, but as Judy thought about how different it would have been as a tiger she came to her conclusion.

“No, I don’t think I would change my species permanently. Even if police work would be a lot easier, and I’d probably get more respect if I was a large predator, it would diminish everything I’ve done until now, and I’m proud of all the hard work I put in to get to where I am today,” Judy said confidently.

“That makes sense, but if you could change species, for let’s say a week, what mammal would you pick?” Nick asked, curious to see what Judy would pick.

“A fox.” Judy blurted out before she even had the chance to think.

“W-wh-why in the world would you want to become a fox?” Nick asked.

Judy froze for a moment, sweet cheese and crackers, what did I just say? I gotta think of a way out quickly, think, think, Brain Blast! I got it.

“Well, I figure from what you’ve told me, being a fox is harder than I thought, and if I really want to change myself for the better, I would need to understand how the more disparaged species feel, and there’s no better way to do that then to walk a week in their paws, or something like that…” Judy said nervously. Looking up Judy found Nick just staring at her and she found herself pinned under his gaze, only able to squirm slightly under the scrutinizing look he was giving her.

“I guess that’s reasonable,” Nick said shrugging his shoulders, “but I definitely would have chosen another mammal if I were you, but then again I’m sure you’d make a fine fox…” Judy raised an eyebrow and Nick realized how what he had said could have been taken,

“Ah I-Ah, um, meant that I’m sure you’d be a good fox, like that you’re sly enough, not that you’d be attractive…err… not to say you wouldn’t be, I-I-I’m sure you’d look great… ugh I’ll just stop
now.” Nick said flustered.

Judy couldn’t contain her giggling, “It’s not every day I get to see a flustered Nick Wilde, it’s nice to see even you can lose you’re cool sometimes. Anyways that’s two questions down for you, use your last one wisely.”

“Don’t expect to see it too much cotton tail, and what do you mean two questions, I didn’t…” Nick trailed off as he realized he had in fact asked more than one question. Throwing his paws up into the air dramatically Nick cried out.

“Oh, come on, you can’t count that, it was a follow up question to my first one not a stand-alone question.”

Judy just chuckled, “I’m playing by your rules Wilde, “even an unintentional question is still a question,” and it was still a pretty good answer.” Judy said smirking.

“Fine, it counts,” Nick said crossing his arms and pretending to pout.

“Oh, you’re such a kit. My second question is. what mammal would you become if you could change for at least a week, or longer if you wanted to?”

A bunny, Nick thought to himself suddenly, *what the hell is with that answer, I can’t say that,*

“You’re going to lie, even after giving your word? A mammal’s only as good as his word, that’s the code you’ve lived by for most of your life,” a voice asked mockingly

“Fine,” Nick said under his breath.

“What was that Nick?” Judy asked curiously.

“If I had to choose it’d probably be a bunny, go ahead laugh it up,” Nick said bitterly.

“Nick, I would never laugh at you when you’re being sincere, but if I might ask without losing my last question, can you elaborate on that for me?” Judy said as she reached out and put a paw on Nick’s forearm.

Nick sighed, “I won’t make you use your last question. There are a few reasons for it, one big one is perception. Even if you bunnies get looked down on for being cute, in my humble opinion that’s better than being seen as a dirty criminal, or just a lowlife with no future, hell I could use being seen as cute to my advantage in some situations, but there is nothing good at all about being seen as a shifty criminal even when you’re only a kit.”

Judy squeezed Nick’s arm trying to show him she was there for him.

“And the other reasons?” Judy asked gently.

“Community, comradery, or something like that, it would be better if I explain I guess. I doubt you’ve had the chance to observe foxes much, so you’ll just have to take my word for it but, foxes tend to be solitary mammals, even if we live in the same area with a bunch of other foxes, we still maintain a respectful distance from one another, keeping to ourselves as much as possible. We are usually close with relatives, but I’m not that close to my family anymore. From what I’ve seen of the few bunnies in Zootopia however, is that they stick together, form little communities wherever they are, and being a part of something like that seems nice. To know there are other mammals to watch your back, not because they want something from you, but because they just care about your wellbeing.” Nick said flatly as he looked down and started tracing the lines on the wooden floor, in
an attempt to keep his emotions in check.

“Oh Nick,” Judy said softly, “I couldn’t imagine not having anyone around to support me, but I promise as long as I’m around, you won’t be alone, and my support comes no strings attached, guaranteed” Judy said, giving Nick’s arm another reassuring squeeze.

“Thanks Fluff, Now I guess I should ask my last question,” Nick said trying to shift the conversation away from himself.

“If you want to Nick, I’m ready to answer whatever you want to know.” Judy said, deciding if Nick wanted to move on she wasn’t going to push the issue any further right now.

“Alright, tell me about your cheek,”

“What about it?” Judy asked nonchalantly, hoping Nick wasn’t asking about what she thought he was.

“What happened to cause these?” Nick asked, in almost a whisper as his paw gently caressed her cheek running over the small bumps of the scars.

“How did you notice those?” Judy asked, “They are hidden really well by my fur and I thought they were unnoticeable unless you knew about them beforehand.”

“They are definitely well-hidden Carrots, but when we were planking I just happen to notice the unusual way the sweat droplets moved down your face, and after looking closer I noticed the scars, so my question is simple. What happened?” Nick asked, his voice still gentle and soft but suddenly very serious.

“Oh, it wasn’t anything serious Nick, some bully was picking on my friends and stole their ride tickets on Carrots Day, when I stood up to him he pushed me down, then I kicked him in the face. He didn’t take to kindly to that, and he slashed me with his claws, but it wasn’t that big a deal, I got the tickets back and it strengthened my resolve to become a cop and never give up. Honestly I haven’t thought about it in years.” Judy explained hastily, hoping Nick wouldn’t dwell on it or ask any other questions.

Nick was angry, really angry, who would dare claw another mammal, especially Judy. Even though Nick’s mind was clouded slightly by anger he did notice how Judy had tried to breeze through the story, giving almost no detail at all, and it only made him more curious.

“That doesn’t sound like nothing, can I ask you to elaborate a bit more?” Nick asked patiently.

“Too bad you’re out of questions Wilde, plus I still have one for you and it’s a doozy,” Judy said quickly, trying to push past Nick’s line of questioning.

Nick could tell something was off and decided he wasn’t ready to let it go just yet.

“I think it’s only fair you elaborate a bit, I mean I did it for you without costing you a question,” Nick argued.

“You right Nick, you get ONE extra question, use it well.” Judy said, holding her breath for what she feared was coming next.

“Thanks Carrots, it’s a simple question I promise you, I just want to know what type of mammal was this bully.” Nick asked calmly, biting back on the anger he was feeling.
“He was a jerk, that’s the type of mammal he was,” Judy said instantly, knowing what Nick was really asking but hoping in vain that he would accept the answer.

“Judy,” Nick said gently as he put a paw on her shoulder, trying to mimic what she had done when offering him reassurance. “That’s not what I meant, and you know it, what species of mammal was he?”

Judy’s breath caught at the sound of her name and then her heart skipped several beats at the contact on her shoulder, *if Nick ever knew how much power he had by just saying my name and grabbing my shoulder, I would be done for,* Judy thought to herself.

“Fine,” Judy sighed, resigning herself to what would come next.

“I’m going to be totally honest with you, since that was the agreement. The bully’s name was Gideon Gray, and he was a fox."

Nick felt like he had been punched in the gut, even though he had suspected as much hearing it for himself changed everything. Letting his paw fall from Judy’s shoulder Nick sat back in the chair.

“I’m sorry,” Nick mumbled, as his head fell to his chest.

“What did you say Nick?” Judy asked, having been so focused on Nick moving his paw away she hadn’t heard him speak.

“I said I’m sorry,” Nick repeated.

“Nick what are you apologizing for, you didn’t slash me, and it happened 15 years ago I don’t even remember it that well anymore,” Judy explained trying to cheer up the suddenly sullen fox.

“That’s not what I’m sorry for,” Nick said still keeping his head down.

“Then what Nick? Because I can’t see anything you should be apologizing for,” Judy asked frantically.

“For what I did at the press conference and how I ran out after. I regretted doing it almost immediately after it happened, but I felt justified because of what you said and how you reacted, but now I find out that even my flimsy justification was wrong, so now all I can do is apologize. So once again, I’m really sorry Judy,”

Hearing the genuine sadness in Nick’s voice was almost too much for Judy.

“Nick it wasn’t your fault, I was the one who was wrong. I said a bunch of stereotypes with no basis in reality, because I was flustered, and I definitely didn’t have any reason to reach for that fox repellent. I was just being a dumb bunny, so you have nothing to apologize for.” Judy said trying to make Nick see that he really didn’t need to apologize.

“Judy, you were attacked by a fox when you were only nine years old, he clawed your face and left you with scars, and then another fox bears his teeth and claws at you, no wonder you reached for your repellent, hell I’m surprised you didn’t spray me,” Nick said angrily.

“Nick I shouldn’t have even had the repellent, let alone reached for it. No matter what happened in the past I shouldn’t have let it affect me. You were right, carrying that repellent would have shown every fox I met that I didn’t trust them, and if I don’t trust them, then why would they ever come to me for help. That’s not how a good cop should make their citizens feel, and I definitely shouldn’t have even tried pulling it on a friend, so I’m sorry.” Judy said as she stood up and walked over to
Nick, placing a paw on his shoulder this time.

“That all sound’s good Judy, but the past affects us whether we want it to or not, and after learning all that, I will be saying sorry to you for a long time.” Nick said, trying to shrug off Judy’s justification for his actions.

“How about this then? I’ll forgive you for what you think you did wrong, and you forgive me for what I think I did wrong, and that way we can both forget about it and move on, alright? Because I don’t know about you but saying sorry back and forth for hours sounds exhausting.” Judy suggested kindly.

Nick sighed and turned toward Judy thinking to himself, *I don’t deserve a friend like her.*

“Alright, if that’s what you want to do, then for the last time, at least on these subjects, I’m sorry, and I forgive you.”

“Thank you Nick, and I’m sorry, and I forgive you, too,” Judy said before pulling Nick into a deep hug.

Nick froze in the hug for a moment but decided he could let it happen, at least this time, and wrapped his arms and even his tail around Judy, enveloping her almost completely in fox.

Feeling Nick’s arms around her Judy burrowed deeper in the hug, pressing her face into Nick’s chest trying to suppress the tears that were fighting to come out. As Judy tried not to cry she took in a deep breath and caught an oddly calming scent, it was a musky smell with a hint of flowers and something akin to the smell of the forest after rain, and even though it was strong, almost overbearing in its intensity, Judy found she liked it none the less.

After a few blissful moments Nick dropped the embrace and both Nick and Judy felt much better, about the press conference, and where they stood with each other.

“Alright Nick, are you ready for my last question?” Judy asked as she sat back down on the bed.

“Sure Fluff, hit me with your best shot, there’s no way it could be worse than what just happened,” Nick said confidently.

“Yeah, you’re right Nick, it’s nothing big, I just want to know the answer to one simple question, and I will accept nothing less than the truth,” Judy said, as she stared down the fox in front of her like a predator that had finally cornered its prey.

Seeing the look in Judy’s eyes Nick suddenly felt the room get lot colder as the voice in his head returned to shout out one final time, though it was too late to stop it now, *IT’S A TRAP.*

Judy mischievous smile lit up the room as she delivered the question she had been waiting to ask all day.

“Where do you live?”

*Chapter End Notes*

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all, also
the validation from your comments feeds my soul.
Chapter 8 The Truth will out

Chapter Summary

Nick is caught in Judy's trap and there is no way out. How will Judy take the news?

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 8, This one wasn't as long but makes up for it's lack of size with a lot of emotions.

AN: my editor SaberGatomon, was unable to get to this in time so I'll re-upload later with his fixes

You want to storyboard for me? you like reading my chapters early and Sharing ideas for FREE you say? Well shoot me a message and we might have something to talk about.

AN PT2: Also it came to my attention thanks to a little research prompted by Mask+A, that one of the directors who worked on Zootopia tweeted that Nick's mom is alive... well not in this story she isn't, so if that's a deal breaker for you now you know.

Also Anteroinen brought up a good point about how many cards could Nick and Judy actually catch. Honestly I did probably set the final score too high If i had thought about it some more I would have lowered it. My rational when writing was that not every point they got was from a catch a lot of cards would have been "Uncatchable" thus a free point. I should have made it clearer or lowered the final score. so I admit my mistake, sorry about an confusion.

Still on the lookout for an artist, but I may have found one. Maybe. Fingers crossed. Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: It's late, do I really need to add this, what's the worst that could happen? (One Google search Later) So nothing big, except maybe losing the story or getting sued for money I don't have. I'll play it safe for today. I do not own Zootopia or any characters thus far.

Chapter 8 The Truth will out
"Where, do you live?"

The question rang in Nick’s ears as his stomach started to churn, and his heart began racing. In that moment Nick felt a kinship to the prey of old having now felt the absolute terror of being caught with no foreseeable way out, the feeling was overwhelming.

"SHIT! SHIT! SHIT! Why did she have to ask me that? What should I do? What can I do? How do I turn this situation around?" Nick asked himself, as he tried to ignore the feeling of dread that was radiating out from his stomach.

"Lie." The word rung out from deep within Nick's mind, less of a conscious thought and more of an instinct, built up from years of necessity. So, without even realizing it, Nick threw up his hustler's mask and spoke.

"Oh Fluff. You didn't have to waste a question on this. Especially since you already have a way to learn the answer you only need to look up my records. So, knowing that you can find the answer on your own, I'll let you change your question, because I'm such a good guy and all, but only this once."

Judy noticed the shift in Nick's demeanor instantly, this isn't Nick, it's "The Hustler" but I'm not gonna be fooled this time.

"Nick," Judy sighed heavily before continuing, "You promised not to lie to me. I know the address you use on your taxes is fake. I wish you would trust me more." Judy paused for a moment and looked Nick directly in the eyes, staunch determination etched onto her face. As the seconds passed in silence Judy's face gradually began to fall and her ears drooped, resignation replacing the fierce determination she had just displayed.

"I don't understand why you won't tell me Nick, but I guess I'll accept it and change my question. Sorry for being too pushy." As Judy said sadly as she finally dropped her gaze and gave Nick his way out.

"you're going to lose her," a voice called in Nick's mind. It was a new voice to Nick's subconscious congregation, but a familiar one none the less. This voice was soft, soothing, sweet, gentle, and kind, but also firm, holding no room for negotiation in its tone.

"Mom," Nick whispered, voice so low that the sound almost didn't even reach his ears.

"Got it in one my smart little kit. You will lose that bunny if you don't start telling her the truth. Open up to her, or risk pushing her further and further away," The voice explained.

"What are you doing here? Also, How and Why are you, trying to give me advice?" Nick thought back at the voice angrily.

The voice laughed, and Nick's heart strained in his chest as he heard it. "Nicky it's not really me, and you know that," the voice said before suddenly changing, taking on the deep gravelly tone of Finnick. "Don't be such a fool, Wilde. The voice is only a voice, since you're talking to yourself here."

"Fair enough, but still why would I want to hear her voice," Nick retorted.

"Don't be like that," Nick's mom's voice said softly with a touch of sadness, "and don't try to change the topic of conversation, you need to be honest with Judy, or you will lose her."
"What are you talking about, Carrots said it was fine, and she doesn't need to know anyway." Nick argued

"Just like when you say you're fine?" The voice asked sarcastically.

"You've got me there, but telling her will hurt her, and hurting her is the last thing I want to do." Nick thought back.

"Look at her Nick, we both know that you are already hurting her by closing yourself off like this, and it will only get worse the longer you wait."

Nick sighed as he looked over at Judy. She hadn't raised her head, and her ears were still drooping, arms now crossed as she tucked into herself. Nick could even hear a faint sniffling sound coming from her. That sniffling was the final straw that broke Nick's resolve and he steeled himself for what was going to come next.

"Good choice," Nick's mom's voice said happily.

"You're done for. After you tell her the truth, nothing will be the same," Nick's inner cynic said tauntingly. Nick ignored the voice and instead focused on figuring out exactly how he was going to do this.

As Nick's internal dialog played out Judy had stayed silent, trying to regain control of her emotions. Nick's immediate reaction of throwing his walls up had hurt a lot more than Judy had expected. As Judy tried to sort through it all she realized she needed to be alone for a bit. Before she could ask Nick to go home however, he spoke, his voice low and serious.

"Judy, I'm sorry. I promised you an answer and I'll give you one. You have a choice however, as to which answer you want to hear." Nick said as he moved to sit next to Judy on the bed.

Judy's ears had perked up and her heart began to race at the sound of Nick calling her name again, how many times have I heard him say my name today, and it still has this effect on me, strange. Judy thought to herself as she felt the bed shift as a new weight pressed down on it. Glancing over at Nick, Judy could tell he was worried but there was a hint of something else in his eyes that she couldn't quite place.

"A choice?" Judy whispered, as if speaking any louder would shatter the moment.

Nick looked at Judy, and even though doubt and worry plagued his mind, and screamed at him to stop, he spoke.

"Yea Fluff, a choice. I can give you a few different answers to your question. The first choice, is a comforting lie. Neither of us will have to think too hard about it or get hurt because of it, and we can go about the rest of the night happily watching a movie, sharing silly stories, or something else equally fun. The second option is a less comforting half lie, with a hint of the truth and topped with a joke. You'll laugh, maybe feel a little bit bad, but we would be able to move on with the night just like we did with after talking about the press conference. The last choice is the full truth. It will be a bitter pill to swallow, and it might change a lot, but it you deserve it. Not only because we bet on it, but because you're my friend and I should be at least a little more trusting of you. I promise you however, that both of us will be better off if you pick the first option."

As Nick told Judy her options, she could see just how agitated the tod had become, even if he was trying his best to hide it. Nick's fluffy tail was swaying back and forth erratically, as his eyes darted around the tiny room, and his paws fiddled with the hem of his shirt, unable to keep still. Judy
hesitated for a moment, why is he so agitated? It's not that big of a deal. Or maybe it is. Maybe I shouldn't ask him after all, it might be better to just pick something else. After mulling it over in her mind for a moment Judy decided to go for choice number three. Thinking to herself, I've come this far, might as well see it through to the end.

"Nick, I want the unabashed truth, no matter what it is, I'm sure I can handle it," Judy said confidently.

"Alright Carrots, but remember, you asked for it. So, let's start with the day we met, how well do you remember it?" Nick asked.

"I don't remember it perfectly, but it's a day I won't soon forget, A day that seemed terrible at first, but looking back I wouldn't change it in the slightest." Judy said honestly, as the corners of her lips turned upwards in a small smile.

A similar smile found its way onto Nick's muzzle as well, "I would have to agree with you their Fluff, but not exactly the point I was getting at. Do you remember what I said after you confronted me, specifically about how you would end up if you stayed in Zootopia?"

Judy's eyebrows furrowed slightly in annoyance, "Nick, while I don't mind the trip down memory lane, what does this have to do with your living arrangements?" Judy asked, worried Nick was still trying to give her the slip.

"Just try and remember for me alright? I promise it's related, I'm just trying to tell you without having to actually say it myself." As Nick said this a little red flag went up in Judy's mind, she decided to ignore it however, passing it off as Nick just making her work for her answer.

"Alright Nick, I'll try, but if I can't figure it out for myself you're gonna have to step in and help me, deal?" Judy asked as she flashed a quick smile at the fox sitting next to her in an attempt to calm him down a bit.

"If the great bunny detective can't figure it out, I promise I will give you another clue." Nick said as he chuckled nervously. Unable to relax in the slightest as his every nerve was on edge for what was about to come.

Judy thought long and hard for a moment about the conversations she did have with Nick that day, only remembering it in fragments. As she replayed that day over in her head Judy started to remember the specific conversation Nick was talking about.

"I think I'm starting to remember Nick," Judy said as she closed her eyes trying to picture exactly how the conversation had gone. You started out so condescendingly, "Naïve little hick with good grades and big ideas decides, Hey, look at me, I'm gonna move to Zootopia, where predators and prey live in harmony and sing Kumbaya..."" Judy said, repeating both his words and gesture from that day in an attempt to do a good impression of Nick.

"Go on," Nick said solemnly, not even reacting to the impersonation.

"After that you went on to degrade my job and my dreams, "...that dream of becoming a big-city cop? Double whoopsie! She's a meter maid. And whoopsie number three-sie, no one cares about her or her dreams...""

"Yah, I was a jerk back then, and I never did apologize to you. Sorry about that, I didn't want to admit it at the time, but you had really gotten under my fur a bit with your naive idealism." Nick said, laughing a bit at the memory of Judy the meter maid. "Even still, I shouldn't have said what I did"
"Forget about it Nick," Judy said as she waved her paw in the air dismissively, "I profiled and spoke down to you without even knowing the first thing about you, and since I don't want to start another apology war, I'll just say I forgive you and move on. Now let me try and remember what you said next."

Nick tried to gulp but found that his throat was dryer than Sahara Square in the summer. He knew Judy was close to figuring it out and he still wasn't ready to face it.

For her part, Judy continued to think hard about the conversation they had that day, and just like that the final piece of the puzzle fell into place. "And soon enough those dreams die, and our bunny sinks into emotional and literal squalor, living in a box under a bridge." Judy was stunned, there's no way that's what he's talking about, no, no, no. Nick makes 200 zollars a day, tax free! So he could definitely afford a place to live, I must be misremembering or something. Judy reasoned with herself, as her stomach began to drop.

"Nick, I can't remember anything else from that conversation, can I get another hint please? Maybe one that's… less vague?"

"If I have too. You remember where Finn told you to find me? The place where we made up and I forgave you?"

"As if I could ever forget that place, I'll never forget that moment as long as I live," Judy whispered quickly under her breath.

"Yah Nick I do, so is your house near there or something?" Judy asked, still clinging to the hope that her first thought wasn't right.

"Fluff. Come on. You're smarter than that, Finnick sent you to my "home" the place I rest my head at night, and the place I spent most of my time when I wasn't hustling. I live, in emotional and literal squalor, in a box under a bridge." Nick said completing the speech Judy had tried so hard to ignore.

"Homeless," Judy whispered, and even though the word was no louder than a passing breeze, it echoed in the silent room. As Judy's heart broke for the fox in front of her, Nick was already trying to pass it off.

"It's not that big a deal really," Nick said quickly, as he avoided looking over at Judy. "Honestly, it's kinda nice, a lot like camping. Plus it's free, so no bills to pay, and since I have no neighbors, I can be as loud as I want."

But Judy wasn't listening to a word Nick said, all she could think of was him out alone in the cold and rain, or being attacked by another mammal while he slept, and it brought her to tears.

"He can't live like that, I won't allow it," Judy thought to herself.

"Oh great, here comes the pity. I don't need charity or help, I'm just fine on my own," Nick thought to himself bitterly as Judy kept speaking.

"… So stay here with me alright? And then maybe we can try and find a place together if you want to, that way it won't cost so much." Judy offered genuinely, as she wiped her tears and hoped Nick would accept.

"Yep, it's the same as always, "you poor guy, let me help you out, since your hopeless on your own," honestly, I rather people avert their eyes instead of offering me their pity." Nick thought annoyedly.
"Judy, I'm fine. I don't need any help, so you don't need to bother yourself with it."

"What are you talking about Nick? I'm going to help you," Judy said as she stood up, throwing her paws on her hips, "and there's nothing you can say or do to stop me."

Nick was starting to get irritated, _who does she think she is? There's nothing I can say or do about it, she doesn't even really know me. What power does she think she has over me? Well we'll just see about that._

"Oh really, so tell me, how is a little bunny like yourself is going to force _me_ to do anything." Nick said with a sneer.

Judy was stunned at Nick's shift in demeanor, _why is Nick acting like this all of a sudden? Especially when all I'm trying to do is help him?_

"Nick, why won't you let me help you? Aren't we friends?" Judy said, ears drooping slightly again as she tried to bit back the on sadness and anger that were welling up inside of her.

Nick turned to face Judy thinking to himself, _now if I just push her away a little bit more, I'm sure she'll let it go._

"Yeah Fluff, we are friends. So as my friend, drop it. You don't know what you're talking about, it's also not your problem to deal with, it's mine. I don't want, or need, to get any help from some naive country bunny that's lived with her parents her whole life, and whose biggest concern before recently, was when to pick the carrots, and what Mom was making for dinner."

As Nick spoke his voice got louder and faster, and before he knew it his anger had gotten the better of him and Nick had said far more and put a lot more venom into his words than he'd meant to. _Shit! I went too far at the end there, but at least she will drop it now, and after a few day's I'll apologize to her, and we can act like this never happened._

Nick was expecting Judy to kick him, or shout a bit about how he was wrong and dumb, and then tell him to leave. Unfortunately for Nick he had underestimated Judy Hopps once again and he ended up only being partially right.

Judy was furious, _how dare he! I try and offer to help him and that's how he's going to treat me._

"Now listen here you dumb fox," Judy said as she walked right up and got in Nick's face. "You have no right to start attacking me just because I want to help you out. I may be naive but that's not going to stop me from trying to help others. So, if you think just because you have had a rough life that means you know everything and you don't need any help from anyone you're in for a rude awakening. I'm helping you, And. That's. Final!" As Judy finished she punctuated the last three words with three hard pokes to Nick's chest, before pulling back and crossing her arms defiantly.

Judy braced herself for the hot-blooded argument that she was sure was coming. What she got instead however, was a cold fury that stopped her in her tracks.

"Did it ever occur to you that maybe I don't want your help?" Nick asked calmly.

"That maybe you shouldn't just stick your twitching little nose into another mammal's business, just so you can feel better?"

"W-w-what are you talking about?" Judy asked as her anger began to fizzle out.

Nick, without saying another word, got off the bed and walked over to the door.
"N-N-Ni-Nick, where are you going?" Judy asked, stuttering as the tears filled her eyes again and dread filled her heart.

"I'm going back "home" I need some time to cool off and so do you. I'll talk to you later when we've both had some time to think." Nick said as he opened the apartment door and stepped out into the hallway.

"Before I go, I do have one last thing I want to say to you Carrots. Your "I'm gonna help you even if you don't want it," attitude, is not only unnecessary and annoying, but it's also quite condescending. I'm not some charity case, I have managed on my own for longer than you could imagine, and I don't need you, or anyone else trying to come in and "save me" so save your pity for someone else. Besides, you're only trying to help me to make yourself feel better about my situation, and helping mammals for that kind of reason is worthless, and will only make the mammals you do help feel even more pathetic."

With that, Nick shut the door and headed out into the night. Instead of going back to the bridge like he said would, Nick decided to walk around for a bit and clear his head. As the cold night air hit Nick's face, he started replaying the fight in his head, and as he went over what he said Nick realized he might have crossed a few too many lines this time.

As if sensing Nick's distress the inner cynic called out to him laughing as he said. "Ha ha, I told you it wouldn't last, but even I didn't think you could screw it up that badly. I doubt we'll hear from that bunny any time soon, if ever again."

"There's no way, after a few days I'm sure this whole event will blow over." Nick said as he started walking, no real destination in mind.

"You rejected her help, belittled her, and made her cry. If you really think Judy will just move on and be your friend again, you're more naive then you claim she is." A different voice said coldly.

"Bullshit. I may have been a bit harsh, but I wasn't that far outta line, any way's I'm not in the wrong here. She can find another charity case, some other poor soul to save."

"That's what you're going with? Really? Are you sure? Maybe think back a bit, because in reality, we both know deep down she was trying to help you, not because you're a charity case or some mammal that needs saving, but a friend that she cares about. You just lashed out because you're embarrassed about how you live, aren't you?"

As if to remind Nick how badly he screwed up, the image of Judy's face right before he had left filled his mind. How Judy's ears were flat against her back, the slight part of her lips as they formed a sort of shocked frown, and how the lower lip quivered slightly as she bit down on it, trying to stop the impending tears. Or How her brilliant lavender eyes were wide open and shining as they glazed over with tears she tried desperately to hold back.

Nick shook his head vigorously as he tried to expel the image that had formed in his head, hold on to his self-righteous anger. It was pointless however, and as the anger started to fade and be replaced with guilt, Nick tried desperately to convince himself that he had been in the right.

"No, no way that's true. She just wanted to make herself feel better or wanted something in return. There's no other reason anyone would help a worthless fox like me out? She has no real reason to care about me, nor I her, so why do I feel so bad about this?"

"Because you know you're in the wrong again. You imposed your view of the world on Judy, misinterpreted her kindness, and shoved her away. Now you've hurt her, someone you care deeply
for, over nothing. Not to mention despite your best efforts you have undeniable feelings of an
undetermined nature for that amazing ball of positive energy and kindness, and that scares you to no
end. Because for all your talk of being in control of yourself, you are still a scared little kit whose
afraid to get close to another mammal because you don't want to get hurt again." Logic chimed in
bluntly.

"Damnit!" Nick shouted in anger as he realized how wrong he had been, "What's wrong with me. I
should've know better than this but got attached anyways. Even worse than that however, is I
unintentionally hurt Judy because of my own fear. I'm a bad mammal, and an even worse friend."

And just like that, Nick's anger at Judy had been redirected at himself and as Nick cursed himself out
for his actions, he found he couldn't keep complete control over his emotions anymore. His tail
thrashed about violently, his ears were pinned against his skull, and Nick was barely able to suppress
the chorus of yips and whimpers that were trying to escape his throat as he walked the lonely city
streets.

(A Good Sad Song is: Grace is Gone by Dave Matthews)

Feeling that enough was enough, Nick headed back to the bridge, deciding to get some sleep, and
figure out how exactly he was going to apologize to Judy in the morning. So, with his feet and tail
dragging along the sidewalk, having finally lost his range and gone limp in sadness. Nick plugged in
his headphones, found some sad songs on EweTube, and started the long trek back. Muttering to
himself the whole way how much he had messed up, attracting a few glances from the random
mammals he passed by on the sidewalk.

Judy's Apartment right after Nick stormed off

Judy sat on her bed, tears spilling over her cheeks as she tried to figure out how the night could have
gone so wrong. How could I have known one small question would lead to this? Judy asked herself
as she worked through the maelstrom of thoughts and emotions in her head. The more Judy thought
about Nick living out in the cold and rain the more she wanted to cry, but she also couldn't let go of
the anger she felt at Nick's verbal attack.

"I feel so bad, not having a home for all these years must have been horrible for Nick, but there was
no reason he had to be so rude. When all I wanted to do was help that stupid fox. Even still, I hope
he's all right, jerk or not he is my friend."

"Are you sure about that?" The voice of insecurity asked.

"Of course I'm sure. Nick may have been angry, but he'll cool off. I'm sure by tomorrow, or
Wednesday at the latest, everything will be back to normal."

"Don't be so sure, the last time Nick got angry like that and left he didn't come back at all. You may
not understand why Nick's mad, but it had to be pretty big to break through the walls he's put up."

That got Judy worried. "Carrot sticks! You might be right, even though I think it's no big deal maybe
it goes deeper for Nick." Judy started pacing nervously. "So, what should I do? Do I go after him?
Call him? Text him? Or do I just go to bed and try to talk to him in the morning?" Judy asked herself
anxiously.

"Remember what Mom always use to say, "Never go to bed angry, just like weeds in a garden can't
be given time to take root neither can anger. It doesn't matter if you need to talk it out until the sun
comes up, its better than letting the weed of anger grow between you and the mammal you care
for." The voice of reason answered quickly.
"I'm not angry though… not really anyways. Ok, maybe just a little bit, but that's not what's important here. Also, I'm pretty sure that Mom was talking about fights between couples and not friends when she gave me that advice." Judy replied as she grabbed her phone and keys, and got ready to go, having already made up her mind.

"Your anger is just as important as Nick's is. Some if the things he said did hurt you didn't it? If you don't talk to him about it and settle it now, then you'll find it hard to let go later. Also, even if you aren't a couple, Mom's words of wisdom still fit, and you know it."

"Yah, I guess so." Judy said, sighing as she shut and locked the door to the apartment behind her.

"Just you wait Nick, even if it takes all night, we are going to settle this." Judy said as she headed down the hallway, determination filling Judy's heart once more, and taking the place of the hurt and sadness she had felt moments ago.

Nick's Bridge, Abandoned industrial area, 10:00PM

It took Judy a while to find the bridge again, having partially forgotten the directions Finnick had given her a few days ago, before one of the most exciting and stressful times of her life. Walking down the dried-up river bank Judy, unable to see in the dark, quickly turned on her phone light, illuminating the surrounding area. As she looked around, Judy found Nick's chair but noticed there was a distinct lack of fox.

"I wonder where Nick is?" Judy asked the cold night.

The night sky gave no reply other than a strong gust of wind that caused Judy to shiver. Having only a long-sleeved shirt and jeans on Judy was ill equipped to face the weather. Deciding to look around some more out of curiosity, as well as the need to stay warm, Judy took a closer look at the surrounding area.

A tattered and worn green and white beach chair that looked more at home in the garbage dump, A wooden crate that sat next to the chair and hid a thin, hole riddled, dirty, brown blanket. An odd collection of dull knives, sharpened sticks, and an expired bottle of multi-mammal pepper spray. All these little details were things Judy had missed when she had first found Nick here that day. Details which painted a depressingly cold and dangerous picture of life that broke Judy's heart all over again. Unable to stop herself from shivering from both the cold and the onset of crying, Judy grabbed the dirty old blanket and wrapped it around herself to warm up, and settled into Nick's chair, Ready and willing to wait up all night for the fox to return.

About an hour later…

As Nick arrived back at his bridge he took out the headphones from his ears and turned off his phone, needing to save the battery in case he got an important call in the middle of the night. Stopping at the top of the bridge Nick took a moment to glance up at the night sky, the stars were shining brightly while the moon was nowhere to be found.

"A new moon eh, too bad there are no new beginnings for an old, stuck in his ways, fox like me."

As Nick continued to look up at the sky in contemplation, he heard a slight rustling down below.

Someone's in my spot. Nick thought to himself as he patted down his pockets until he located his knife.

Luckily, I brought this with me. Nick thought as he pulled out the blade, I just hope I can scare the mammal off, a fight wouldn't really end well for either of us.
As Nick slowly advanced down the riverbank, heart pounding as his eyes swept side to side, trying to locate the mammal and any possible companions they might have. Nick noticed the moving pile of blanket in his chair.

*Alright, target acquired. Maybe if I can scare them well enough they'll just run off without a problem.*

With that in mind Nick approached the chair phone in paw, ready to turn on the flashlight and blind the mammal. As Nick reached the chair, just as he was about to reached over, yanked off the blanket and turned on his phone light, he noticed a rather large pair of ears sticking out from the bundle. Curiosity getting the better of him, Nick put away his knife. Gently moving the blankets to get a better look at the mammal in his chair. As the blankets moved and the mammal's familiar features came into view Nick's breath caught in his throat.

"Judy?"

Nick whispered in disbelief. Even though she was right in front of him Nick couldn't get his brain to accept it. As Nick just stood there thinking to himself, *I must be dreaming*, over and over again. Suddenly the bunny's large lavender eyes began to open slowly, and a tiny yawn escaped her lips, she whispered back only one word.

"Nick?"

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

Also I'm sorry about the Cliffhanger, I promise to write quickly and maybe not end the next chapter with one... Maybe. Anyways the next chapter is going to be a big one so be prepared. I hope that doesn't drive anyone crazy with anticipation or anything lol.
Chapter 9: Sometimes You Can't let Sleeping Foxes lie

Chapter Summary

Nick and Judy have a talk, does anyone even read this? Just go read the chapter.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 9, This one was brought to you quicker than normal by writing during break time! Real Life has been creeping in lately but I'm working hard on keeping it at bay.

AN: Thanks to my editor SaberGatomon for getting the edits done at super speeds today.

AN, PT2: Still on the lookout for an artist, but I may have found one. Maybe, finger crossed.

Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: I hear there is a band of WildeHopps Pirates that are trying to steal the rights to Zootopia. I don't know who started them or where they are currently but if they are reading this I Want. In. But until that day I still own nothing about Zootopia or any characters in this story.

Chapter 9
Sometimes You Can’t let Sleeping Foxes lie

Nick’s Bridge, Abandoned industrial area, Sunday Night 11:00PM

The moment Judy opened her eyes Nick’s mind started racing at warp speed trying to figure out what exactly she was doing here.

“Maybe she’s here to apologize,” A naively hopeful voice suggested.

Don’t be stupid, that would never happen. Nick shot back, effectively shutting down that line of thinking in its tracks.

“I bet she’s here to yell at us,” A different voice threw in.
Now that’s more likely, Nick agreed, as he began to imagine the well-deserved verbal thrashing he was about to receive. As Nick imagined what Judy was going to say to him the cyn-Nick saw an opening and decided to strike.

“Maybe she’s here to tell you she’s done with you,” cyn-Nick said maliciously.

Nick thought about the possibility as he watched Judy raise her arms over her head to stretch, as she stretched a cute little yawn escaped her lips. As he watched Judy, a strange warmth spread throughout Nick’s chest. She would never give up on me, or anyone for that matter, Nick thought back at the cyn-Nick

“Are you sure about that? Why else would she come all this way in the middle of the freezing cold night? She could yell at you anytime, but if she wanted to tell you she was done with you, that would need to be said right away.”

A sliver of doubt and worry wormed its way into Nick’s mind, maybe she is done with me, well if that truly is the case I will have deserved it. As Nick accepted this possibility he saw Judy looked up at him, face full of determination and worry and realized he had nothing to fear.

“Nick… Nick, is that you?” Judy asked as she sat up straight in the chair.

“Of course it is Fluff. Do you know of any other devilishly handsome foxes living around here? Nick joked, trying to use a little humor to lighten up what was surely going to be a tense conversation,

Judy chuckled a bit at the joke before becoming serious again. “Well Slick, I didn’t know anyone lived here until very recently, so pardon my ignorance. As for seeing, I lack night vision, so I really can’t see any foxes, let alone a scruffy, average looking, bigheaded fox.” Judy teased, also trying to ease the tension she was feeling.

Nick, not wanting Judy to be worried in the dark, quickly grabbed his phone and turned on the flashlight so that his and Judy’s faces were slightly illuminated in the all-encompassing darkness.

“Better?”

“Much better, thanks. Now Nick, I believe we still have some things we need to talk about. Wouldn’t you agree?” Judy asked as she shot Nick a look to show him just how serious she was.

Nick scratched the back of his neck and turned away, unable to look Judy in the eye.

“I don’t really want to get into it right here and now Fluff. It’s late, and you’re clearly freezing, so let’s just drop it for tonight and meet up tomorrow morning to talk. Alright?” Nick asked, knowing he wasn’t really in the best frame of mind to continue this conversation.

Judy was having none of it, grabbing Nick by the sleeve and turning him around, so that he was face to face with her.

“Nick, I will not leave this spot, or sleep even a nanosecond until we talk about what happened back in the apartment. I don’t know why you were so upset, but I want to. You also need to know how what you said hurt me. If we are going to move forward as friends and eventually colleagues, then we need to talk this out now, so that neither of us resents the other later.” Judy said as she tried to ignore the pounding of her heart brought on by being in such close proximity to Nick’s face.

Nick sighed, I could never resent you Judy. That being said you’re not going to give this up, well then, I might as well mammal up and get this over with.
“Alright, if you’re really sure that you need to bring this up here and now, then I’ll talk with you about it.”

“Yes Nick, I really am sure that we need to talk now, but do you think we could find a better place have the conversation? I have nothing against this location during the day, but I’d like to be able to see you better, and maybe get out of the cold too.” Judy asked, as she let go of Nick’s sleeve but still maintained eye contact with him.

Nick straightened up and tried to think of a place that would be open at this time of night. Someplace decent, that would serve both pred and prey, and preferably somewhere that we can talk in relative privacy. After thinking about it for a moment, Nick realized the perfect place.

“Well Carrots, I do happen to know of a little hole in the wall that happens to be open 24/7, the only problem is it’s a bit far away, but I’m up for the walk if you are.”

“Actually Nick, I brought the truck. So, you can drive us there.” Judy said as she hopped off the chair, grabbed Nicks paw and fumbled around heading in the direction of the truck.

Nick let himself be pulled along as he got caught up again in how velvety and soft Judy’s paw was. It didn’t last long however, and after nearly tripping muzzle first over a rock, Nick decided to focus on where he was going, as well as warn Judy of any tripping hazards along the way. In no time at all, Nick and Judy were in the truck and heading towards the diner. The silence on the drive over was deafening, as both mammal’s minds were focused on the conversation that was about to take place.

The Mid-Bite Diner, Downtown Savannah, 11:45PM

Sitting on the corner of Baobab and Acacia, was the Mid-Bite Diner. A stereotypical greasy spoon, looking just like the hundreds of other diners found throughout the city of Zootopia. Built with a simple sheet metal exterior with red neon lights running along the top and a big sign over the door with blue neon around its perimeter, the diner didn’t look like much, but looks could be deceiving. Nick wasn’t sure when the place had opened, but he was so glad that it did. The food was cheap and delicious, the portions were generous, and the waitstaff was almost too friendly. So, whenever Nick had the money to spare he would try and come here. Nick told all this to Judy as they walked into the diner. As soon as they stepped in an older vixen greeted them. Her hair was puffy like something straight out of the 60’s, with grey streaks running through the faded red fur, she wore a typical waitress uniform dress with red and white horizontal pinstripes.

“Nicky my boy, how have you been?” The vixen called out as she waved, causing the many bracelets on her wrist to bounce around and jingle quietly.

Nick just smiled and waved back as he walked over to the podium with Judy in toe.

“Hey Helen, I’ve been OK, thanks for asking. Still kickin above ground, so I can’t complain too much.”

“Ain’t that the truth. So what breeze brought you to my doorstep again, not here to take my cook away are you?” Helen said, giving Nick a reproachful look as she asked.

Nick’s smile didn’t falter under the look as he answered quickly, “Helen I promise you I won’t be taking your short order chef ever again, alright.”

The vixen held the stern look for another moment before bursting out laughing.
“Nicky you’re such a card. But don’t let him hear you say that though, or you’ll lose your good looks, and then you got nothing. Cus it’s not like people keep you around for your brains.”

Judy watched the interaction with interest, but decided to make her presence known, or else they might stand here all night. Stepping up next to Nick Judy coughed politely into her paw.

“Sorry to interrupt but Nick do you think we could sit down, we have a lot to talk about and I’d kinda like to talk while I’m still young at least.”

Both Nick and Helen looked down at Judy, Nick with an apologetic look and Helen with one of intrigue as she gave the bunny before her a quick once over.

“Nicky who’s this sassy lassie with a classy chassis? Your new squeeze?” Helen asked, looking over questioningly at Nick, as she raised an eyebrow.

Nick laughed awkwardly, “Real funny, Helen. You know me better than that. This is a good friend of mine; her name is Judy.”

“You’re right, I should know better than to expect the eternal bachelor to have found himself a girl to go steady with, but an old lady can dream. Well pleasure to meet-cha all the same Judy. I’m Helen, and I’ve been working here and watching over that foolish fox over there, for going on 10 years now.” Helen said as she stuck out her paw.

Judy took it happily, “It’s nice to meet you Helen, and 10 years, that’s a long time. I bet you’ve got some good stories about Nick then, mind sharing some?”

“Oh, hunnie I have more stories than you could shake a stick at. Like this one-time Nick and Finn come here after a con gone bad covered in feathers with half their tails shaved, it turns out they ha-”

“All righty then Helen. Would you mind showing Judy and I to a table, preferably a corner booth? We have some things to talk about and need some privacy.” Nick cut in quickly, attempting to cut off Helen before she could continue the story.

Taking the hint, Helen grabbed two menus and some cutlery, then directed Nick and Judy to follow her. She lead them to a secluded corner booth just like Nick had asked for, placing the menus and silverware down on opposite sides of the table.

“The buttons on the side control the height of the bench so you can adjust accordingly. Can I grab you anything to drink before I go?” Helen asked as Nick and Judy got seated in the booth.

“I’ll just take a coffee thanks,” Judy said as she finished adjusting the bench, so she was sitting just below eye level with Nick.

“Just a water for me Helen,”

“Roger Dodger, one coffee and one water coming right up, take a gander at the menus if you’re hungry, and I’ll be right back with your drinks.” Helen said as she walked towards the kitchen.

Nick insisted on waiting until they got their drinks before talking seriously. So, until Helen returned with Judy’s coffee and a glass of water for Nick they just bantered back and forth like normal. It was almost enough to make Nick forget about what was going to come next, but after Helen had left Judy jumped back in to the problem at paw just like Nick had known she would.

“Alright Nick, now that we’re here, let’s talk.” Judy said after taking a sip of her coffee.
“Fine. Say what you need to say, ask your questions and I’ll try and answer them.” Nick said dispassionately as he prepared himself mentally for the worst.

“Alright then, here it goes Nick.” Judy started calmly, taking a deep breath before continuing. “You really hurt me back there. You not only dismissed my friendship, but attacked my upbringing and my good intentions.”

Judy was calm as she spoke, being careful not to raise her voice or cast any blame at anyone, just state the facts. This was torture to Nick. He had been ready for yelling, or at least some name calling with a raised voice, not this calm and collected laying out of his mistakes.

“I honestly wanted to help you, not for any self-satisfying reason, or to have you owe me in some way. I don’t know how I can show you how I feel, but whether you believe it or not your problems are my business because you’re my friend and, for no other reason than that, do I want to help you.”

As Judy continued talking, Nick decided he would have much rather she yelled at him. At least then he wouldn’t feel as guilty as he did currently.

“That’s about it Nick. I want to know why you didn’t tell me about your situation sooner? Why you lashed out at me, and why wouldn’t you let me help you? Answer these questions for me and tell me how you feel, that way we can move past this together.”

Nick was silent for a moment, as an internal war waged in his mind. The walls he had built up were starting to crumble slightly and the desire to justify his actions to Judy, were too strong. So much like a prisoner being released from the big house on parole, a few stories that had been locked up in his mind, were being let out into the custody of one Judy Hopps. Time to apologize, and to give the, “not good enough” reason for why I did what I did.

“I’m sorry Carrots,” Nick started, as he looked Judy directly in the eyes.

“Honestly, my reasons for doing and saying what I did are petty and weak excuses. The reason I didn’t tell you, or anyone except Finn about my living situation, was because of shame.” Nick explained as he broke eye contact and looked down at the table.

“Shame?” Judy asked curiously.

“Yea Fluff, Shame. Foxes are looked down upon in regular society just for being born foxes, to have the added stigma of homelessness thrown in on top of that, it’s too much. Since I can’t change my species, I can at least trick people into believing I have a home, that I’m able to support myself. That’s also why I got so mad, I was angry not at you but myself. I’m an able-bodied adult, I should be able to provide for myself without needing help. It’s not a good reason, but that’s all I’ve got, so I’ll say it again, I really am sorry Judy, from the bottom of my shriveled heart.” As Nick spoke Judy could hear the sadness and humiliation in his voice and her heart broke again. Judy struggled for a moment trying to reach across the table and grab Nick’s paw, but was falling just short of it, when all of a sudden Nick lifted his head.

Seeing Judy stretched out across the table reaching for him was a funny sight to say the least, and if not for the situation would have gotten Nick to laugh. Nick brought his paw half way across the table and allowed Judy to take it for a moment before pulling back and continuing.

Unbeknownst to Nick and Judy they were being watched by the two mammals running the restaurant that night. Helen stood next to the cook, leaning on the bar as she watched the pair of mammals in the corner with sharp eyes.
“Nicky’s on the hook, isn’t he?” Helen asked the grumpy chef.

“Yea that idiot’s definitely in love with the bunny cop, but I don’t know if he knows it yet.” The deep angry voice of the chef replied.

“Why don’t we try and give’em some food on the house? I mean it’s not like we got anything else to do right now and Nick is your friend, so I think I can look the other way this once.”

“You’re the boss Helen, whatever you say goes,” the cook replied as he got started on making some food.

“Thanks Finney, you’re a peach.” Helen said, quickly giving the cook a peck on the cheek before turning back to watch the two mammals in the corner.

After taking a minute to collect himself, Nick continued.

“As for why I didn’t trust in your, or anyone else’s, good will. That is another kithood story, and I won’t be offended if you just want the abridged version.”

Judy just shook her head slowly and said, “You already know my answer to that Nick.”

Nick smiled softly before speaking, “Yeah, I did, but I still felt I should offer you a choice.”

Nick took a big swig of his glass of water, gulping down almost half of it before putting it back on the table and continuing.

“Now I don’t remember the details perfectly, so you’re going to get a semi-abridged version.” Nick said as he began his story.

“I was about ten, or twelve years old at the time this happened. My mom was struggling to get by and had been working overtime to make ends meet. Now back then my mom had lots of people she had been close with in the apartment complex, but many turned away when she started needing help from them. All except one, her name was Lisa Twigs, a brown bear single mother that had moved in across the hall right around the time we had gotten there. My siblings and I played with her kits and she got along great with my folks. After my parents split she would help out my mom, doing little things here and there. My mom never asked for much help, but when she did Lisa was there to do it. Make dinner for us kits, Lisa was on it, throw in a load of our laundry into the wash, Lisa had it covered, and all for nothing in return.”

As Nick spoke Judy could tell something was off, he was telling a story and it didn’t seem like he was lying, but something was off in the delivery. The content was there but not the emotion, Nick seemed like he was reciting a fairytale to a kit, or telling a story he had read about in the news, as opposed to something that had really happened to him and his family. This had Judy worried, *He’s distanced himself from the memory, trying to cut out the emotions so he won’t feel them, if it’s that bad then maybe I should stop him*, Judy thought to herself.

“Nick, are you ok? You don’t have to continue if it’s too much, I think I get the gist of it.” Judy said, silently hoping Nick would take the out.

“I’m fine Carrots, honestly it doesn’t even bother me anymore.” Nick said changing back to his old self for just a moment before going right back into the story.

“Now where was I… Oh yeah, and all for nothing in return. My mom would always thank Lisa and try and return the favor when she could, but Lisa would always shrug it off and never ask for help. Then one day out of nowhere, Kit Protective Services came knocking on our door when my mom
was supposed to be at work. Luckily, she had switched shifts with a coworker and had been catching up on some cleaning. They came in and had a look around, then started asking me and my siblings a few questions about our living situation. We all understood vaguely what was going on, so we lied and said everything was fine, and as they were about to leave my mom was able to ask them why they had come. At first, they tried to hide the truth, but my mom was persistent. Finally, they told her the truth, “We got a call from a neighbor, she told us that you were a hopeless drug addict, and she had been taking care of your kits while you were out doing god knows what. Now since we are required to investigate every report, we came out, but even if you are unfit to raise your kits we wouldn’t spend the time or money on trying to pursue this. So, have a nice day, I’m sure you will never see us again.”

My mom knew right away who had called and she stormed over to Lisa’s apartment to confront her. Lisa didn’t even try and deny it, instead she just threw every favor she had ever done my mom back in her face, calling her a “worthless deadbeat mother who didn’t deserve kits.” Or something to that effect.

Judy’s heart broke for the fox in front of her once more and she couldn’t recall how many times today she had felt this way, but before she could even process these feelings there was one thing she needed to know.

“Why?” Judy asked.

“What was that Fluff?” Nick said, voice returning to normal.

“Why did your mothers close friend turn on her like that? What was the reason behind it?” Judy clarified.

Nick just nonchalantly shrugged his shoulders and looked off to the side, “Not sure, my mom had her suspicions, mainly that an ex-boyfriend of my moms had either coerced or bribed her to do it, but I don’t think I’ll ever really know the truth. No matter the reason why, it broke my mother’s heart, she never knew for sure why Lisa did it. Mom never stopped trusting others though and kept getting stabbed in the back right up until the end, never learning her lesson. I did though, and from that day forward I learned not to take anything from anyone, no handouts, no friendly assistance, nothing, because you never know when the helping hand will turn around and punch you in the snout. Silver lining, that lesson was really useful living on the streets, so it’s not all bad.”

Judy, without saying a word reached across the table and grabbed Nick’s paw again, causing Nick to look over and see the glistening in her eyes as she began to speak.

“Nick, I want you to… no I NEED you to listen to me right now, do you think you can do that?” Judy asked, her tone so serious and layered with emotion. Nick completely ignored the fact that they were holding paws again and just nodded his head.

“Good, now listen very carefully. I don’t know how or why this Lisa bear did what she did, but I promise you, nothing in this or any other world would get me to betray you. Not even under threat of my life would I do something like that to you. I can’t speak to your past self and explain it to him, so the best I can do is show you that things can be different in the future. So please, start trusting me and letting me help you. Ok?”

Nick said nothing for a moment, as he was lost in his own thoughts. Is it really ok for me to trust her? He asked himself cautiously.

“No, trusting people is foolish, you’re just gonna get hurt again,” the cyn-Nick replied.
“Don’t listen to him, you should give it a try, she’s never given you a reason to doubt her. Take it slow, and you’ll see, she won’t let you down.” Emotion said, attempting to counter the cyn-Nick.

The ever-harsh logic simply pointed out that Nick had seen how trusting others had worked out in the past, and there was no guarantee that this would work out any better.

Nick pondered the different arguments for what seemed like an eternity until he finally came to his own conclusion.

“Alright Fluff, I’ll try and start trusting and letting you help me more. It will take some time, and I can’t promise anything, but if you’re up for it, I’ll give it a go.” Nick said warmly as he smiled down at Judy, still holding her paw.

Judy smiled up at him and Nick felt the world light up around him as a sense of calm and happiness washed over him. Nick and Judy stayed that way for a while both of them caught up in the moment, but the moment ended as Helen appeared like a ghost out of thin air. She was carrying two plates of food on a tray, a pot of coffee, and a pitcher of water.

“How’s everything goin? You folks doin alright?” Helen asked, deciding to break the spell around the two mammals.

With the moment gone and Nick suddenly realizing exactly what he was doing, he quickly broke eye contact with Judy, pulled his paws away, and tried to act like nothing had happened.

“Hey Helen, everything’s great, thanks for asking. What’s with the food?” Nick asked quickly in an attempt to distract Helen.

“The chef got bored and cooked these up for ya. He said you better eat’em or else.” Helen explained as she set down two stacks of pancakes on the table, one in front of Nick and on in front of Judy. Nick eyed his plate hungrily, the pancakes looked divine and it was torture. Perfectly cooked, fluffy, golden disks, flecked with spots of blue that hinted at the addition of Nicks favorite fruit, all topped off with a pad of melting butter that was beginning to run down the side of the stack. It was with a heavy heart and an empty stomach that Nick decided to decline.

“Tell the chef that daddy appreciates the gesture, but I’m not actually that hungry, so I’ll have to pass.”

Helen frowned, she had hoped Nick would just accept the food without an argument. Helen knew that Nick wasn’t eating enough, and it had been that way since the day she’d met him. Knowing this she always gave him extra portions when he ordered food or tried to serve him something even if he hadn’t ordered, but like usual, Nick declined the food. Before Helen could take the plate however, Judy spoke up.

“Just take the pancakes and stop lying to her Nick.”

Helen’s lips turned up slightly in a small smile as she thought to herself, You put that boy in his place, Judy.

“Moi, a liar? You slander my good name, Carrots. What proof do you have to back up these claims?” Nick asked melodramatically.

Judy couldn’t prevent the smile that found its way onto her muzzle because of Nick’s antics. So, instead of trying to remain serious and possibly confrontational, Judy decided to beat Nick using his own style.
“Well, it’s elementary my dear Foxson. You claim not to be hungry, but your body betrays you and tells a different story. The Hungry look in your eyes, combined with the saliva currently dripping down your chin and the constant rumble emanating from your stomach all point to the fact that you are, without a doubt, hungry, and should eat the delicious looking pancakes in front of you.”

Nick raised his paw to begin his defense, but right as he opened his mouth to speak, his stomach let loose the loudest growl Judy had ever heard a stomach make.

“Traitor,” Nick grumbled as he looked down at his stomach.

“Nick, just take the pancakes.” Judy said as she slowly slid the plate closer to him.

“I don’t have the money to pay for them alright, and you know how I feel about handouts or owing people.” Nick said softly as he slowly pushed the plate away again.

“Nicky, you know I’d never try and manipulate you with pancakes of all things. Now I’m gonna go, if those pancakes aren’t eaten by the time you leave they’ll be thrown out and wasted.” Helen said cheerfully as she topped of their drinks and placed a bottle of syrup between them.

After Helen left the table Nick sat and stared at his plate for a few minutes.

“They’re just pancakes Nick, no need to think so hard about it,” Judy said as she began to eat her own stack.

“Oh, sweet cheese and crackers! This carrot pancake is amazing! It honestly rivals my mom’s.” Judy exclaimed, so caught up in the taste she hadn’t realized she was talking with food still in her mouth.

“Yeah, Finn’s a great cook, much better than the other guy who works here,” Nick said as his fork danced along the edge of the plate. I should just eat these, Nick thought to himself, I honestly doubt Helen or Fin are trying to stab me in the back, plus if I don’t the food’s gonna go to waste and that’s unacceptable. The cyn-Nick side of Nick’s brain tried to disagree but was pushed back by a combination of hunger and the newly re-discovered optimistic voice that seemed to be gaining some power recently.

“I’ll say, although I’d have never expected it from him.... Say, Nick... why couldn’t you afford a house, or even dinner for that matter considering you make 200 zollars a day?” Judy asked carefully.

“Because I don’t,” Nick said dejectedly. “I lied to you and bragged about how much I made in an attempt to shut you up. In actuality I probably make around 50-60 zollars a day in profit on average, from selling the Pawpsicles, and any other hustles I might do that day. I don’t even keep most of the money I make though. I send a lot of it to my sister each month to help her get by.” Nick explained bitterly as he began cutting up and pouring syrup on his pancakes.

“Why do you send money to your sister every month Nick? Considering your living situation, shouldn’t you save it for yourself?”

“Well Carrots, it’s because my sister is in over her head and needs help. She had a kit really young, the father was a decent guy, but he ended up getting sick and passing away. So now she’s stuck raising the kit alone and she also has to pay off the medical bills, luckily the hospital let’s her pay it off monthly instead of trying to get it all at once. Even still though she struggles to make ends meet, I’m her brother, so I have to help her out, family is the most important thing, even a fox like me who hasn’t seen his family in years knows that much.”

“That’s really noble of you Nick,” Judy said sincerely.
“Nah, it’s just a little money. Skipping meals and sleeping outside can’t replace not being there for so many years.” Nick said dismissively as he reveled in the tangy deliciousness of the pancakes. Not realizing he had accidentally reveled more than he meant to.

“Nick, I have known mammals who wouldn’t share even a portion of the massive fortune they had amassed. You not only give up most what you make you even sacrificed a home and food…” Judy trailed off, suddenly realizing what Nick had said and the implications behind it.

“Nick,” Judy said, her voice taking on a far darker and more serious tone as she stopped eating and set down her silverware.

“Yes?” Nick replied questioningly, as he wondered what could have caused Judy’s shift in demeanor.

“Let me see if I have this right. Not only are you homeless because you send money to support your sister, but you also starving yourself as well. Did I get that right?” Judy asked calmly, eyes locked onto Nick’s.

Nick who had a mouth full of pancake swallowed hard, “I wouldn’t say I’m starving myself, I just only eat like once a day, or go a day or two without eating sometimes, no big deal really.”

“Call it what you want Nick, but you are going without so much to help your family, so that brings me to another question. Why in the world, if you’re doing all of that with what little money you have, would you buy and send all that stuff to me?”

Judy saw Nicks eyes go wide for a moment before returning to normal. Figuring that Nick was planning on lying again Judy decided to nip it in the bud.

“Before you try and lie to me again Nick, just know I already know it was you. You were the only one outside of my parents who knew of my situation. My family would have sent my used clothes not brand-new ones, and nobody else knew of my situation.

“Alright, alright, you got me Carrots.” Nick said, paws raised in mock surrender. “But in my defense, I wasn’t going to lie this time. The reason I got you that stuff and sent it to you was because you needed it and I could provide it.”

Judy was taken back a bit by Nick’s openness, thinking to herself, *it’s a small step in the right direction, but a step forward is still something.*

“But why Nick? You could have used that money to help yourself. Save it, use it for food, or even send it to your sister, why did you spend it on me?”

“Who knows…” Nick said wistfully before pausing to think about it for a moment. “I guess if I was pressed to give you an answer, it would be that the money was better spent on you than me. I had already sent my sister her money for the month, so she was all taken care of. As for my situation, it would take a lot more money to fix that than the relatively little I spent to help you. If I had kept that money my situation wouldn’t really change much, but buying that stuff for you improved your life. So why wouldn’t I do it?”

Judy just sat there shocked, as Nick just shrugged off his actions, like they were nothing. *Nick really is amazing, even though he hides it behind his cynical exterior, he really is a kind mammal, and when he gets praised for it he just shrugs it off like any mammal would do what he did, even though that’s far from the truth.*

“Nick, you are, by far, one of the strangest mammals I’ve ever met, but you have my thanks for
everything you’ve done for me. I know you won’t accept it, but I will pay you back for everything somehow.” Judy said as a look of determination took over her face.

Nick just shrugged his shoulders again in resignation, “If you say so, at the end of the day I’ve realized it’s not like I can really stop you if you feel that strongly about it.”

“That’s right, at least you’re starting to learn,” Judy said with a smile and a quick wink as she began eating again.

“Wait a min… Ugh, you know what, never mind,” Nick said, dramatically throwing his paws in the air, smiling all the while.

The meal then fell into a companionable silence after that, neither Judy or Nick feeling the need to say anything as they ate. Instead they just simply enjoyed the food and the company and as they finished up their meals it was Judy who finally broke the silence once more.

“So, Nick, where does your family live now? If you don’t mind my asking”

“My sister and Dad live in Foxborough, it’s a medium sized town north east of Zootopia, as for my brother, I don’t exactly know. He moves around a lot. Also, I know the past day probably has you worried about asking me things, but you can ask me anything Fluff, I just might not answer. So, don’t be afraid if you have a question I promise I’ll try and not freak out anymore.” Nick said as he slid his now empty plate away from him.

“Alrighty then Nick, I got another question for you.” Judy said, happy Nick was going to start opening up more.

“Then I might have another answer for you.” Nick replied.

“How do you know what’s going on in your family’s life? You said you haven’t spoken to them in years, so where are you getting your information from?”

“I have a few, ugh, acquaintances, that live in the area and are friendly with my family. They keep me up to date on anything big that happens, plus I added my sister on MuzzleBook under a different name, so I check on her that way too. That’s also how I know how I keep tabs on my dad and a few others.” Nick explained.

“I see, I see.” Judy said as she nodded her head, ears bending forward and leaning back slightly with the motion.

“You ever think about seeing them again Nick?” Judy asked as she finished off her cup of coffee.

“I think about it sometimes, but I doubt it’d go well. Honestly, I think everyone will be better off if we don’t see hide nor hair of each other. Nick said solemnly.

“But they’re probably worried about you, shouldn’t you at least call them?” Judy asked, getting slightly worked up.

“Fluff, just drop this one for now, alright. I really don’t want to get into my family problems, especially considering the emotional hell we’ve both been through in the past 6 hours or so.”

Thinking about it for a moment Judy realized Nick was right. This could wait. She also then realized how exhausted she was.

“You’re right, Nick, I’ll drop it for now, but expect to talk about it at some point. Also has it really
only been 6 hours, it feels like a week or two has passed, I am exhausted. Let’s call it a night.” Judy said as a yawn escaped her, as if to prove a point.

As if triggered by Judy’s yawn Nick felt a yawn of his own coming on but remembered to be polite and cover his muzzle beforehand so his teeth wouldn’t show.

“Sounds good to me, let’s settle up on the bill and head out.” Nick said before motioning Helen over to the table.

As summoned by magic Helen appeared right as Nick raised his paw in the air.

“Hey Nicky, you need sumthin else? Or are you all good to go?”

“Hey Helen, what does “Change the signs” mean?” Judy asked curiously as she stood up and hopped of the bench.

“Helen you know how I feel about that,” Nick said uncomfortably.

“Hey Helen, what does “Change the signs” mean?” Judy asked curiously as she stood up and hopped of the bench.

“Helen you know how I feel about that,” Nick said uncomfortably.

“Nick, I think it’s fine to let it go this once, plus I don’t have my wallet with me.” Judy said sheepishly.

Nick sighed, he also didn’t have much on him at the moment, hence why he hadn’t wanted to take the food in the first place.

“Alright you win, but the next time we come here I will be paying for my food, no exceptions.” Nick said, trying to sound stern as he got up from the table.

“Hey Helen, what does “Change the signs” mean?” Judy asked curiously as she stood up and hopped of the bench.

“Oh that, it’s just referring to the fact that this diner changes names from daytime to nighttime. The Mid-Bite Diner becomes The Bark of Dawn Diner at four in the morning. We used to change the sign by hand but then we found someone that was able to customize our sign for us, so now it changes at the push of a button.” Helen explained as she walked Judy and Nick to the door. At the mention of the changing sign, Nick subtly picked up the pace and avoided looking over at Helen and Judy.

“That’s really clever,” Judy praised as they reached the door.

After a few warm goodbyes, and a promise to come back soon Nick and Judy made their way to the truck, and Nick began the drive back.

- 

Nick’s Bridge, Abandoned industrial area, Monday Morning 1:30AM

The truck ride back was mostly silent, but it was a peaceful friendly silence, unlike the silence that had filled the truck on ride to the diner. As Nick pulled up to the bridge and put the truck in park he could tell Judy had something she wanted to say. Nick didn’t know what it was, but he knew it was something big by the way Judy was fidgeting in her seat, eyes and ears moving around randomly, as well as an agitatedly flicking tail.
“What is it Carrots?” Nick asked as he put his paw on Judy’s head and ruffled her fur.

“What do you mean?” Judy asked innocently.

“Fluff, if you were thinking any harder smoke might start coming out of your ears. I can tell you have something on your mind… so spill it.” Nick said, a smug look plastered on his face.

“You got me Slick. But be careful you don’t collapse under the weight of your own smug.” Judy retorted.

“Ouch, mean bunny. So, what did you want to say?” Nick asked again.

“Well, Mr. Sensitive Fox” Judy began, becoming suddenly bashful as she played with one of her ears nervously. “I was thinking, that maybe… we could get an apartment together. I know you need to help your sister and all, but once you join the academy you will have a steady, livable income, and if we rented a place together it wouldn’t be too expensive. That way you have a place of your own and I know you’re safe.”

Nick sat there in stunned silence, unable to form a response, so Judy kept going.

“I know you’re probably thinking something along the lines of, “what’s her deal? Why would she go so far for me?” Or something like that, so let me explain in very simple terms. You, Nicholas Wilde, are my friend, and you are very important to me, so I want to help you. If you need some justification besides that, then let’s say it’s because I don’t want to worry about your safety every night. As for your next thought of “I’ll have to pay her back somehow,” and “I don’t take handouts,” think of this as me paying you back for the supplies you sent me. So, it’s not a handout or something that needs repaying.”

Nick was again in stunned silence, as his mind tried to catch up and make sense of the fact that Judy had read his thoughts almost perfectly. After a minute or two of silence Nick was finally able to speak.

“I don’t know Fluff, I doubt many nice apartments would rent to a fox, but I’ll think about it. Are you ok to drive back to your apartment?” Nick asked as he opened the truck door and a cold breeze rushed in.

Feeling the cold as the wind entered the truck and sent a shiver throughout her body Judy realized in that moment she wasn’t going to let Nick sleep outside anymore.

“Nick, I’ll give you time to think about the apartment situation, but I insist you come stay at my place for now, even if spring is technically here it’s too cold for you to be sleeping outside.”

“Don’t worry so much, I have thicker fur than you, plus I do have a blanket. I’ll be fine, just go home and get some rest. OK?” Nick said dismissively.

“Nick, I’m not letting you sleep out in the cold alone. So, if you’re staying here, then so am I.” Judy said defiantly.

Nick glanced over at Judy, and seeing the look on her face knew he wasn’t going to convince her to go back without him.

“Let her sleep out in the cold then, give her a little taste of what you’ve been through,” cyn-Nick suggested.

“No,” a strangely forceful new voice said, almost overpowering Nick’s conscious.
“Who the hell are you?” cyn-Nick asked, not used to being defied this directly.

“Oh I am doesn’t matter, just go back with Judy. She will NOT be sleeping outside in the cold.” The voice demanded

Nick didn’t know what this new voice was and was slightly concerned by it, but found he agreed with it, at least on this issue. Nothing good would come from letting Judy spend the night in the cold, just for his stupid pride.

“Ok Fluff, you win, but I will be taking the floor, that’s non-negotiable.” Nick said as he shut the truck door and started the drive back to Judy’s place.

Judy’s Apartment, Monday Morning 2:00AM

As soon as Nick and Judy entered the apartment and close the door they felt the full weight of the day’s events hit them. Judy barely had the strength to toss Nick a pillow and blanket before collapsing onto her bed and passing out. Nick didn’t fare much better, as soon as he curled up on the floor and his head hit the amazingly soft pillow, he was out like a light. Both mammals were too tired to even dream, but they felt as if a weight had been lifted from their shoulders and fell into a deep and restful sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn’t, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

AN, PT3: You thought you were done with AN’s but It was ME PART 3!,

In all seriousness though, I started writing this story 3 months ago and I’m amazed how many people are reading, subscribing and coming back every time I post. I honestly didn’t expect anything when I started. So, thanks for sticking with me everyone, I appreciate all of you who keep with this story and take the time to review it.
Chapter 10: The Morning After

Chapter Summary

The morning after an emotional night,

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 10!, This one was brought to you quicker than normal by spending the entirety of Sunday writing! Real Life continued to creep in, so the fight for my right to write continues.

This chapter had more to it but I decided the stopping point was too good to pass up, plus the chapter would have been monstrously large and taken another few days to finish. Also I tried to integrate some music I hope it fits and you like it.

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

The art at the begining was done for me by the talented Shadeink over at deviant art who graciously assisting me with my little project of finding art. She's got lots of awesome art so go check her out at https://shadeink.deviantart.com/

Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: Still no word from the pirates sadly but I did find a guy who said he'd "Acquire" the rights to Zootopia from Disney for me if I sent him 2,000 dollars. The payment went through yesterday so until the guy get's back to me I still don't own Zootopia or it's characters
Chapter 10 – The Morning After

Judy's Apartment, Monday Morning, 9:00am

Nick woke up well rested for the first time in years, warm, comfortable, and feeling safe. It would have been perfect if not for the sunlight glaring in from the window. The light that came in from Judy’s window landed perfectly in Nick's eyes, blinding him. Throwing the blanket over his head, in a weak attempt at blocking the offending light, left Nick grabbing blindly at the nightstand trying to find his phone. Once he had it, Nick quickly checked the time, and seeing that it was still only nine o'clock Nick contemplated for a moment just going back to sleep. In a surprising turn of events however, Nick decided to get out of bed, the prospect of a nice, long, hot shower, too alluring to resist. So, Nick headed down the hallway toward the showers, tail slowly wagging slowly back and forth in anticipation. Bringing his phone along with him, so he could have some music while he showered. As he reached the shower Nick was surprised to find they were all unoccupied.

"Nobody in the showers, luck must be on my side today." Nick said as he opened the door to the communal shower stall, "Either that or everyone else is working at nine o'clock on a Monday morning, but whatever."

As Nick turned on the shower and waited for the water to warm up, he searched through his EweTube playlist trying to decide what he wanted to listen to. After a few minutes Nick had selected his, mixed music playlist, and hit shuffle. (Lola Montez by Volbeat begins to play: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdPpRdImfuA) As the steady guitar rhythm began playing from the phone Nick's eyes lit up and he broke out into a smile recognizing the song instantly.

"Hell yeah, I haven't heard this song in forever." Nick said, as he began tapping his foot to the beat and undressing.

As the chorus kicked in Nick couldn't help but sing along as he got into the shower.

"I forgot how much I loved Volebeat, I gotta listen to them more often," Nick said as the water cascaded down on him.

After his fur had gotten nice and wet, Nick stuck his paw out of the shower expecting to grab his bottle of shampoo but instead was met with empty air. Confused Nick pulled back the curtain and looked around the shower stall. As Nick looked around at the nearly empty stall, the realization hit him that he hadn't brought any, and as he chastised himself for forgetting something so simple, Nick then noticed that he also lacked a towel.

"I'm such an idiot," Nick said as he smacked himself in the forehead, "well nothing I can do about it now, I'll just have to text Judy later and have her bring me one."

As Nick just stood under the warm spray basking in its glory, his mind was only focused on the blissful feeling of the water and the beautiful sound of the music. Nick was thankful for the distracting music as he tried to avoid thinking about what Judy had suggested last night. For the most part Nick was successful in his aversion of the topic at paw, that was until finally, a certain song came on. (Three Days Grace, Never Too Late begins to play: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qOvNgEsZ9s). As the slow rhythmic notes of the guitar came from the phone, Nick knew what song was coming and what effect it would have but was unable to stop it. As the singer began his pre-recorded performance, Nick found himself singing along as in his mind he discussed the dilemma he was facing, arguing back against the song itself.
This world will never be
What I expected
And if I don't belong
Who would have guessed it?

"I already know this. I don't belong, so what's the issue I'm having now." Nick thought to himself as the drums kicked in.

I will not leave alone
Everything that I own
To make you feel like it's not too late
It's never too late

"Ah, that's right. Judy thinks I can, and she seems determined to make me think it too." Nick continued as the guitar got heavier with the intro to the chorus

Even if I say
It'll be alright
Still I hear you say
You want to end your life

"She may say it will be alright, but there’s no way to know that for sure, hell my life experiences would say otherwise."

Now and again we try
To just stay alive
Maybe we'll turn it all around
'Cause it's not too late
It's never too late

"Judy might not be wrong, maybe things can turn around for us," Optimism cut in as the tempo slowed again.

No one will ever see
This side reflected
And if there's something wrong
Who would have guessed it?

"But there are some sides of me and my life she doesn't know though, so how she can be so sure everything will work out is beyond me," Nick thought to himself.

"Well she's been seeing right through us lately, so maybe she knows something we don't," Optimism pointed out.

As the song continued, Nick thought hard about the fact that Judy seemed to be able to see through him more and more frequently. The thought that she might be getting too close to him, and realization that there was not much he could do to change that, scared Nick, but at the same time was strangely comforting to him as well.

The world we knew
Won't come back
The time we've lost
Can't get it back
The life we had
Won't be ours again

As Nick heard this verse he realized something important, something he had known for some time now, but hadn't been able to admit to himself. *I've been stuck in my past for too long haven't I?* And as he contemplated this, Nick came to the conclusion that he should try and listen to the point of the song he had been singing and make an effort to change because it's never too late.

'It's not too late
It's never too late (It's never too late)
It's not too late
It's never too late

As the final chord rung out Nick had made up his mind, despite his better judgement, he would try and get an apartment with Judy.

"But blind optimism is dangerous, have a plan, if the apartment hunting goes the way we expect it to." Logic added impartially.

"Fair enough, how about this then. I'll get her to agree to a deal, that if by the fifteenth apartment we still haven't found anyone willing to rent to us, then she has to call it quits and let me live where I have been."

"You know if you do that then you'll end up back on the streets?" Cyn-Nick said

"It's entirely possible, but if I try what's the worst that could happen? I was already on the streets, so if it can't get worse, then that means there's no harm in trying to make it better." Nick answered, sounding more optimistic than he had in years.

With that all settled, Nick decided he should probably get out of the shower soon. So, after shooting a quick text to Judy for a towel he waited, keeping the water running so he wouldn't catch a cold.

Back at the apartment, 20 minutes after Nick left

Judy was asleep, peacefully so. Despite normally being an early riser, the events of the previous night had taken their toll and the normally energetic bunny was out cold.

*Vzzzzzt, vzzzzzt*

A sudden noise in the otherwise quiet room rang out, causing Judy to stir slightly.

*Vzzzzzt, vzzzzzt*

The sound continued, Judy groaned at the offending noise and pulled the covers over her head, in an attempt to go back to sleep.

*Vzzzzzt, vzzzzzt*

A now mostly awake Judy glared angrily at her phone which had been the source of the noise. *I don't remember setting an alarm last night*, Judy thought to herself as she took the phone off the nightstand. Taking a look at the phone Judy expected to see the typical alarm screen with a snooze button and an off button, but was surprised to see her parents contact picture. *Sweet cheese and crackers why are they calling right now?* Judy asked herself as she wiped the rest of the sleep out of her eyes and pressed the green accept call button.

"Hey, it's my parents," Judy said with a semi-forced smile, as the faces of Bonnie and Stu Hopps
filled her phone screen. Stu Hopps was wearing his typical denim overalls and a yellow undershirt, topped off with a green carrot ballcap, his clothing was practical, sturdy, and simple, much like the buck himself. Bonnie was sporting a black, blue and white plaid sun dress that had a few stains from taking care of the kits.

"Hey, Jude the Dude, how have you been?" Stu asked as his eyes ran over the screen looking for any detail that might be out of place.

"I'm fine Dad. How's everyone back home?"

"That's good. That's good. No trouble with any mammals in the big city since you've been back? Haven't run into any foxes, right? I know you forgot your spray since you left in such a hurry." Stu asked nervously, completely ignoring Judy's question.

Judy sighed, "Dad, I'm fine, and you work with Gideon now, so you can't tell me you're still scared of foxes?" Judy asked incredulously

"Gid is different, a burrow-grown country boy, so there's nothing to fear, but a city fox, now they're trouble for sure." Stu said with confidence.

"He's got a point hunnie bun, city mammals in general are just a meaner breed, and much more dangerous too." Bonnie chimed in.

"Exactly!" Stu said enthusiastically.

"Mom, Dad, the city is full of mammals of all types, mean, nice, smart, dumb, dangerous, and harmless, that's what makes it so awesome here. Also, I won't be needing that fox repellent anymore Dad, I'm perfectly safe." Judy explained, thinking back to how much damage that little bottle had done to her friendship.

"If you're say so, sweetie. Now we are taking the 11:30 train into the city so we'll be at Savannah Central Station at around 1 o'clock, just so you know when to come pick us up." Bonnie said as she came closer to the phone, blocking out her husband's impending protest over Judy's safety. As she got closer to the screen, Bonnie started to grow concerned as she began to notice the state Judy was in. Clothes wrinkled, fur messed up, and the bags under her eyes all had Bonnie's motherly instincts sounding alarm bells.

"Ok Mom, I o'clo… wait what?" Judy asked as she suddenly realized what her mom had said

"Remember sweetie, we're bringing you your stuff today. Are you alright? You seem to be a bit out of sorts and look at the state of your fur and clothes." Bonnie pointed out, voice full of concern.

Giving herself a quick look over Judy realized how bad she looked, but she didn't feel like explaining the nights events to her mother, so Judy decided to lie.

"Oh, it's nothing Mom, a few friends from the precinct took me out last night to celebrate my reinstatement. I got home kinda late and just woke up."

"That sounds like fun, I'm glad you've made some nice friends at work, but don't make a habit of going out all the time, ok Bun Bun? It's not good for you." Bonnie said, happy Judy was not in any trouble.

"Come on mom, do you even know me?" Judy asked sarcastically.

"I would hope so, I only raised you for your entire life," Bonnie said light heartedly.
"And in all that time have I ever been the type to go out and party all the time?"

"No, you're right hunnie, I just worry since it's my job, no matter how old you get you're still my kit," Bonnie said, getting a little emotional.

"I understand Mom, and I appreciate the concern. If I'm ever in trouble I know who to go to." Judy said, trying to placate her mother before changing the subject.

"So, I'll pick you up at Savannah Central Station at 1 o'clock then?"

"Yes, your father is a bit nervous about being in the city, so if you could be waiting at the station for us that would be great." Bonnie said, cheering up slightly with the change in conversation.

"Of course Mom, I'll make sure to show up early. Well I should get up and take a shower so I'm gonna go unless you need anything else." Judy said as she shifted around on her bed.

"No that was it, we packed up all the stuff you brought back from Zootopia, along with your wallet and some of your favorite desserts from home, but was there anything else you wanted us to bring?"

Judy thought about it for a moment, scratching her head as she tried to think of anything else she might want from home. *My wallet takes care of the money issue, clothes and fur shampoo are taken care of as well thanks to Nick. Speaking of Nick, I bet he'd love some blueberries from the farm, oh and my study material from the academy too, with that I can give Nick a step up on the competition.*

"Actually Mom, could you bring my flashcards and textbooks from the academy, as well as a punnet of blueberries."

"Sure sweetie, not a problem, but why would you need your old study material?" Bonnie asked, slightly confused by her daughter's strange request.

"A friend of mine is going to the academy soon so I wanted to help him out, the blueberries are also for him, they're his favorite fruit," Judy explained casually.

"Ok, well I'll make sure to bring the best blueberries I can find for your friend, I'll see you later sweetie," Bonnie said before hanging up. *I wonder who this friend is, she never mentioned anyone to me, maybe I'll ask some of her sisters if they know anything,* Bonnie thought to herself as she went to grab the extra items.

As soon as her mom hung up the phone Judy flopped back onto her bed still exhausted.

"Hey, Nick, I'm sure that call woke you up too, we better get moving if we want to make it on time." Judy said, but silence was the only reply.

"Nick, get up you lazy tod." Again, no answer.

Slightly irritated at the lack of response Judy grabbed her pillow and sat up, ready to pelt the childish fox, only to find he wasn't on the floor.

"Nick?" Judy asked cautiously, still not getting a response.

"If you're hiding at the end of the bed to scare me, you'll regret it." Judy said as she leaned over and peered at the foot of the bed, only to find it empty.

*Where could he have gone?* Judy asked herself as she worriedly looked around the room finding no trace of Nick. *He couldn't have left while I was asleep, could he? Maybe he was only pretending to*
reconcile with me and he's really going to disappear again. Judy's mind became filled with worry, questions like, Will I ever see him again? Who will be my partner now? And what am I going to do without him? took over her thoughts. Despite all the worry and doubt one thought reverberated throughout Judy's head louder than any other. I Gotta Find Him No Matter What. Just before Judy was about to run out the door however, her phone vibrated in her hand. Judy almost didn't check it, she almost threw her phone in her pocket and ignored it, but Judy decided to check what the message was, just in case it was important. What she saw made her face light up. It was a text from Nick.

Nick: Hey Fluff, sorry to wake you, but I kinda forgot a towel when I went to go take a shower this morning and I just realized it now, so if would you be so gracious as to bring me one, or I will be standing here all-day trying to air dry. Before you say anything, trust me, I know, I'm a dumb fox. Knock four times and then knock four more times so I know it's you.

As she read those words Judy let out a huge sigh of relief, "don't scare me like that you dumb fox," she whispered to herself before grabbing a towel and heading off to the showers.

As Judy reached the showers at the end of the hall she was relieved to see only one of the three shower rooms was in use. Walking up to the door Judy delivered four swift knocks *Knock-Knock-Knock-Knock* paused a moment, then delivered four more *Knock-Knock-Knock-Knock* 

"Nick, it's me with your towel," Judy said impatiently.

After a few moments of silence Judy heard the door unlock and Nick's voice call out.

"You can come in. I'm behind the shower curtain, so it's safe."

As Judy stepped into the stall she suddenly felt really bashful, I'm in a room. Alone. With a naked Nick. As she processed that thought her heart started hammering in her chest. Relax, Relax, just leave the towel on the bench and get out, easy peasy, Judy thought, trying to calm herself down.

"Hey Fluff, thanks for bringing the towel, I would have flooded your tiny apartment if I came in dripping wet," Nick joked.

"Hahahahaha, that's a good one Nick" Judy said, fighting to keep her voice level.

"Would you be so kind as to hand me the towel Fluff," Nick said as he shut off the shower and stuck out his paw.

"Sure Nick, here it is," Judy said as she slowly stretched out one paw while covering her eyes with the other, trying desperately not to peek at her currently naked best friend. As strong as Judy's willpower was though, it was no match for her curiosity and her treacherous eyes. So, reluctantly, Judy slowly peeked out from behind her paw and turned her gaze to the fox in the shower, who's form was no longer obscured by the curtain.

At first Judy took note of how the cream-colored fur of Nick's muzzle and neck continued down onto his chest, lead to his stomach, and presumably further, but Judy held back on looking that far down, and instead stick to checking out Nick's torso.

As her eyes ran over Nick's torso, Judy took notice of how skinny Nick really looked with his fur plastered against his skin. He definitely hasn't been eating enough, Judy thought to herself as she noticed she could see the bottom outline of Nick's ribs. Having completed the tour of Nick's chest Judy's eyes began inching further downward.

That's enough now, let's not go any lower. Judy thought, trying to negotiate with her lecherous eyes.
"How about we do keep going, see how much of a "Fox" Nick is." a mischievous voice suggested. Judy tried to fight it, arguing about how wrong and inappropriate it was, but in the back of her mind she knew she was curious, and it was that weakness in her resolve that allowed her eyes move further down.

Judy only saw a glimpse of a red fleshy mass in between Nick's legs before it was covered up by a towel. Judy was both annoyed and relieved by the sudden disruption that allowed her to regain control of herself.

"The towel's a little on the small side, but it'll work. I'll meet you back at the room," Nick said, seemingly oblivious to what Judy had been doing.

"Sounds like a plan," Judy said as she turned around and headed back to her apartment as quickly as she could without full on sprinting.

Once she got back in the room Judy's mind went haywire. What did I just do? What did I just do? WHAT DID I JUST DO?

"Oh calm down, all you did was sneak a peek at a guy, nobody got hurt, no crimes were committed, so relax," The new mischievous voice said condescendingly.

"It was still wrong, I shouldn't have done that. Plus, now I can't get the image out of my head," Judy thought as she walked over and sat on her bed.

"And what an image that is," The voice added, accompanied by an image of a naked Nick lying provocatively across a big bed, fluffy tail draped over his waist just barely covering himself.

"Not helping, and not the point," Judy thought as she lingered momentarily on the image before banishing it.

"I shouldn't have done it, I should have more control over myself," Judy chastised.

"You know you loved it, even if you want to be a wet blanket about the situation." The voice shot back before fading out, leaving Judy lost in thought.

A few minutes later, Nick, now semi-dry, strolled into the apartment feeling like a new mammal.

"So, what's the plan today, Carrots." Nick said cheerfully as he closed the door behind him.

Judy, who had been lost in thought snapped out of her stupor.

"Oh, ah, well, we need to get your stuff from the bridge, drop off the parking boot somewhere, and pick up my parents from the train station at 1, by the way are you sure taking the boot off won't get us in trouble? Won't they get mad when we bring it back to them?"

"Don't worry about it I already have a plan for that... And did you say were picking up your parents?" Nick asked darkly, as his good mood melted away like a Pawpsicle in Sahara square.

"If you say so, and yeah, they're bringing me my stuff and taking the truck home, I told you that a few days ago. Remember?"

"It's been a long couple of days, Fluff." Nick said as he scratched the back of his neck nervously.

"So, your parents, the ones who gave you fox repellent before you came to the city, are coming here and you want me to go with you and pick them up." Nick asked skeptically.
"Yes, I do Nick, you're the mammal that saved my life, and my best friend. I want you to meet my parents, plus like I said they work with a fox now, so it'll be fine," Judy said reassuringly.

"We should go," The newest voice to Nick's inner debate added

"Are you fucking stupid, you must be the voice of insanity, cus that is the craziest thing I've ever heard," cyn-Nick shot back.

"Maybe Judy's right and it won't be so bad," Optimism added.

"It couldn't hurt to go, plus it does seem to mean a lot to her" Nick thought back.

"Am I the only sane one left. How can you all be so delusional?" cyn-Nick asked exasperated.

"Good choice," the new, strangely persuasive, voice said happily.

"I guess I'll come with, but you have to promise to protect me from fox tasers and repellent," Nick said only half joking.

"Thanks Nick, I'm sure my parents will love you." Judy said as she sent a blinding smile Nick's way, which caused his heart to skip a beat.

"Now, I'm gonna get ready and then we can go," Judy said happily as she grabbed her shower kit and headed out to the showers.

As Judy showered and got ready to go Nick decided to message Flash about the boot Judy was so worried about.

Nick: Hey Flash I got another shoe that didn't quite fit, would you mind taking it to the cobbler for me?

Having sent the text Nick pulled out his headphones, opened EweTube and continued listening to his playlist. After a few songs had gone by Judy had gotten back from her shower and was ready to go.

"Let's get moving Slick, we don't have much time if we don't want to be late." Judy said as she headed out the door, pulling Nick, who was busy looking at his phone, along by the tie.

As they got into the truck, Nick went to the driver's side without even needing to be asked.

"Thanks Nick," Judy said as she tossed the keys to him.

"No need to thank me, Carrots. It's not like driving is that hard." Nick said dismissively as he entered the truck

"If you really want to thank me then it should be for something bigger, something like taking care of the parking boot problem discretely."

"What do you mean discretely?" Judy asked, one eyebrow rose questioningly.

Nick smirked, "Well as you know, I do have friends in the DMV, and they keep records of tickets and such. So, I just explained the situation to my friend and he fixed the problem. So, we are going to drop the boot off with him and he'll take care of it from there."

"That doesn't sound very legal, Nick." Judy said, sounding displeased.

"It might not be entirely up to code, but it's the easiest and safest way to take care of the issue at paw,
plus the only reason you got those tickets was because you were saving the city. Like I said before, pardoning a ticket is the least they can do for you. I just sped that process up a bit."

"I see you're point Nick, but it still doesn't sit right with me."

"If you want to I can have my friend undo it, but if we do, do that, then we would have to go and explain everything, and probably pay some steep fines. Jail time is also a possibility, but I doubt they will go that far," Nick explained.

"JAIL," Judy shouted, "Nick I can't go to jail, my parents would go ballistic, I'd also be kicked off the force, and I don't think they'll give me my job back a third time."

"Don't worry Fluff," Nick said calmly as he put a paw on her shoulder, "If it came to that I'd take the blame for forcefully removing the boot. Since it was my idea and all, I'd also say I did it without telling you, so you'd be safe."

"You'd do that for me? Even if it meant you'd go to jail and lose the opportunity to become a cop?"

Judy asked bewildered.

"Of course, being a cop was your kithood dream, not mine, and I'm not gonna let your dream be ruined, especially not because of me. Now I'll just let Flash know about the change in plan and we can get going."

Nick said, taking his paw off Judy's shoulder and pulling out his phone to text Flash. Before he had even pulled up Flash's contact he felt Judy's paw grab his arm.

"Don't Nick."

"Really Fluff? Are you sure?" Nick said, turning to look at Judy.

"Yes Nick, even though I'm no entirely comfortable with it, just this once, I'll look the other way, but from now on we go through proper channels alright?"

"Alright Mrs. No-Fun-Bun, I promise to walk on the straight and narrow as much as possible from now on. Now, we should get moving we got a schedule to keep." Nick said sarcastically as he started the truck and drove off.

Nick's Bridge, Abandoned industrial area, Monday Morning, 10:30am

Nick stood under the bridge that had been his home for years, silent and still, lost in thought. Having packed up everything and put it in the truck there was nothing left but the old chair which had been here before Nick had shown up. Despite himself Nick felt a pang of sadness leaving this place, even if it had been a hard time in his life this bridge had sheltered him through some rough nights.

"Hey Nick, let's get moving, I don't want to be late," Judy shouted down from the top of the bridge.

"Just give me a minute Fluff," Nick said absentmindedly.

"Don't worry, we'll be back here soon enough," Cyn-Nick, said comfortingly.

"Yeah maybe," Nick whispered under his breath.

"What was that?" Judy asked as she appeared by Nick's side, seemingly out of nowhere.

"Oh nothing, I'm just reminiscing about all the good times, not that I had many here, but as rough as it was, I was still better off than most."
"Well I'm sure we will make lots of good memories at next apartment too," Judy said optimistically.

"Yeah about that, I have a condition for you before we start this apartment search of yours"

"And what might that be?" Judy asked defensively.

"It's nothing serious, I'll full heartedly search for a place with you, giving it my all, but if we can't find an apartment after fifteen tries you will give up and let me come back to the bridge. It's not a bad deal, plus if you're so optimistic about finding a place, then fifteen tries should be plenty."

*There's no way we could fail fifteen times, right? If nick tries to sabotage the buy, I'll call him out on it and the deal will be null and void so no worry there. I'll take his bet, there's no way I'll lose*

"Fine Nick, there's no way we will fail fifteen times, so you've got yourself a bet." Judy said confidently, sticking out her paw to seal the deal with a pawshake. Nick took Judy's paw and shook it gently

"Now I have a request of my own Mr. Wilde," Judy said as the pawshake ended.

"What might that be?" Nick asked curiously.

"Weeellll, do you remember how at that disaster of a press conference, before I went up to speak, I told you that you should have been up there with me because we did it together and all?" Judy asked nervously as she clasped her paws together behind her back and started rocking back and forth on her feet.

"Sure I do," Nick replied, not exactly sure where Judy was going with this.

"So, since we solved another big case, and arrested another mayor there's gonna be another conference, Chief Bogo says I have to be there, and he wants me to talk to the press again,"

"Makes sense, so you're nervous about the conference and want me to go with you, is that what you're trying to say?" Nick asked, thinking he had figured it all out

"Sorta, but there's something else…." Judy said before taking a deep breath.

"I convinced the Chief to let you come on stage and take credit for the case with me, even speak if you want to, so I wanted to ask if you'd come on stage with me," Judy finished quickly having not taken a single breath.

Nick paused for a moment, at first to decipher what Judy had said, and second to try and wrap his head around it and form a coherent response.

"I don't know if that's such a good idea Fluff. I don't like the spotlight at all, it's bad for business, plus I'm not a cop, and I am still a fox. Nobody will believe I actually helped you, at best I'll be pushed to the side and forgotten." Nick explained, hoping that Judy would let it go, but knowing she wouldn't.

"Nick your business is going to be police work from now on, so that's no excuse. If you're going to be my partner, as well as the first fox officer in ZPD history then you'll be in the spotlight for sure. As for being a fox and the stigma associated with it, this is the perfect chance to show everyone that a fox can be more than they ever thought." Judy countered, but even as she said it she knew Nick wasn't fully convinced. *Well maybe I need to push in a different direction,*

"I still don't think it's a good idea for me to be up on stage with you, I'll just go and support you from the sidelines. I don't want or need the recognition anyway."
"Nick, there is one other reason I want you with me." Judy said suddenly, her voice lowed to just above a whisper.

Nick took notice of the sudden shift in Judy's demeanor, the shy nervousness from before was gone, replaced with a sharp sadness tinged with shame. The sudden change cause Nick's entire focus to be set on Judy, with the rest of the world fading into the background, as she continued.

"I'm scared. I want to fix the problems I made last time, but I'm worried I'll mess it all up again. I know you said it wasn't my fault, and logically I understand that. But deep down I'm still really scared about what could happen. That's why I want you with me; because if you're there then I can be sure you'll step in if I go too far, or if the press starts to overwhelm me."

Judy was still looking at Nick, but the expression she wore now was like nothing Nick had ever seen on her before, she looked completely vulnerable and in need of protection. Seeing Judy in such a fragile state stirred somethin in Nick, and before the plethora of voices making up Nick's subconscious could weigh in he had already spoken.

"I'll go with you," Nick said softly.

"What?"

"I'll stand on stage with you. I won't say anything, I'll leave that to you since this is your chance at rectifying your mistake, but if you need me to stand beside you and support you, then I think even I can do that much."

Judy sniffled and wiped at her eyes before going in for a hug. Nick saw the hug coming but said nothing, and instead just let it happen.

"Thanks Nick, I knew I could count on you." Judy said faintly as she pressed herself into the hug even harder.

"Ah you bunnies, so emotional," Nick said warmly, as he wrapped his arms around Judy.

"Now I'm not sure if it's just me or not, but I think we've done something similar under this bridge before." Nick said, as he pulled back on the hug.

Judy chuckled, "Yeah I think you're right Nick. We need to find a more original place to have emotional moments from now on,"

"If not, someone might accuse us of being characters in some dry and unoriginal story, written by someone who has no real ideas of his own, and can't keep to a schedule." Nick joked.

"That would be terrible and speaking of schedules we still have to drop off your stuff at my apartment, give the boot to your DMV friend and I do not want to be late to pick up my parents, so let's get moving." Judy said, before beginning the walk back to the truck, with Nick falling in behind her.

"Hey Carrots, why are you so freaked out about being late to get your parents? I understand not wanting them to wait long, but you seem genuinely scared. Do you think someone will accidentally step on them, or is it that you're scared they might get robbed by some con artist?" Nick asked as he started driving to the meeting place.

"Ha, Ha, Ha, if it was as simple as that then I wouldn't really be so concerned. I'm more worried that my parents, specifically my dad will hurt someone else."
"Care to explain a bit more Fluff? Because other than you I don't know any rabbits that could be considered a threat to another mammal, unless you're worried they might step on a rodent or something?" Nick asked, curious as to how the Hoppses would hurt anyone.

"Well you see my father is a very… cautious, buck. He's easily scared by mammals bigger than himself, and I'm worried that he might try and bring a stun gun or something else ridiculous to defend himself. That's why I want to be there as soon as he gets into the city, that way I can calm him down and stop him from hurting another mammal, or even himself considering how clumsy he can be."

Nick's eyes widened slightly, "Yeah I can see why you might want to be on time, well I'll make sure to finish my business quickly, so we don't miss the trains arrival."

"That would be for the best," Judy agreed.

**Downtown Savanah Central, Parking garage, Monday Morning 11:35am**

"A parking garage, really? Isn't that just a bit too cliché Nick?" Judy asked as they pulled into the multi-storied parking structure.

"Ah, a cliché it may be, but there is a method to my madness, I promise. Just take a look around and try and figure it out," Nick teased as he drove further up.

"Alright, well there aren't many mammals around, and the higher up you go the less mammals there will be, also it's dark and there's lots of places to hide, so if something were to go wrong it wouldn't be too hard to escape." Judy pointed out.

"All correct, and good reasons to pick a place like this, but the biggest advantage isn't in what it has, but what this building lacks." Nick said cryptically.

As Nick finally reached an empty floor and parked Judy looked around trying to figure out exactly what was missing. Unable to figure it out Judy began to get frustrated and her foot began to thump.

Sensing the growing frustration Nick decided to take pity on the rabbit next to him.

"I'll give you a hint, the thing that is missing is something you'd find on almost every street corner and is used regularly by police to investigate an incident that they didn't personally witness."

"CAMERAS!" Judy exclaimed, having figured it out finally.

"Exactly, most parking garages have some cameras, but older ones like this one don't have them, and the mammals that own this place don't want to spend the money to install them. That fact makes this place perfect for some, less than legal trades," Nick said proudly before adding "Not that I'd know anything about that."

"I'm sure you don't, Slick. So, where is this contact of yours?" Judy asked as she checked the time on her phone impatiently.

"I'm sure he'll be here any minute," Nick said confidently, and as if to prove him right a blue four door sedan pulled up and parked two spaces down, before flashing their hazard lights.

"That's the signal." Nick said as he began beeping the trucks horn to the tune of twinkle twinkle little star.

"Now let's greet my old friend," Nick said as he got out of the truck.
Judy hopped out as well and followed Nick as he walked over to the sedan carrying the disassembled parking boot. As Judy approached the driver's side door she couldn't stop the groan from escaping her lips.

"Flash, Flash, Hundred Yard Dash," Nick said, greeting his pal from high school.

"Hey…. Nick…. How's it…. Hanging?" Flash asked happily.

"Oh, it's been crazy like usual, but what else is new? Now, to get straight to the point, since I don't have much time, here's the boot and you no longer owe me one." Nick said as he raised the boot up so Flash could see it.

"Alright…. Nick…. I'll take…. Care of…. This…. For You…. But what's with…. The Cop?"

"Oh Fluff here? Don't worry about it, she's gonna look the other way, this time." Nick explained

"Yeah, I won't mention this to anyone, I promise" Judy added, hoping it would get them out of here quicker.

"I'll… Trust you…. Nick…. Oh…. And…Is it…. True…. you're…… out of…. The game?" Flash asked as he popped the trunk of his car.

"It's true. I, Nicolas Wilde, will be joining the ZPD to fight crime and save Zootopia, or something like that." Nick joked as he tossed the boot in the empty trunk.

"I'm…. Happy… for You."

"Thanks buddy, not many people feel the same;"

"… Nick… I always…. Thought…. You were…. Meant…. for more."

"Thanks buddy, not many people feel the same, and I promise I won't mention anything about the past to my future employer." Nick said reassuringly as he shut the trunk.

"I'll see you around, feel free to message me if you're in any trouble or you just wanna talk." Nick said over his shoulder as he and Judy walked away.

As Nick and Judy walked away Flash just sat in his car observing the two. Flash took note of all the subtle cues, from the quick glances they were giving each other, to the fact that they seemed to be unconsciously moving closer before realizing it and separating once more. Most mammals thought sloths were stupid because of the pacing of their speech, and while some sloths were dumb, Flash was not one of them. Flash's mouth may have moved at snail's pace, but his mind moved faster than a sports car. Nick knew this and that's why he would consult with Flash on any new hustles, but even Nick sometimes underestimated his sloth friend. So, as Flash watched the interactions between the two, he came to the same conclusion that Finn and Helen had.

"Those two… Are totally…. Gonna… Bone,"

Savannah Central Station, Monday Afternoon, 12:50pm

"Come on, Come on, Come on, we gotta hurry to the platform." shouted a frantically running bunny, pulling along a distressed looking fox along by the tie. The odd pair turning more than a few heads.

"Calm down, we still have ten minutes that's plenty of time," Nick said as they finally reached the platform where train from Bunnyburrow was set to arrive.
"Sorry Nick, I just wanted to make sure we had enough time, plus you never know the train could have come in early." Judy said apologetically

"It's fine, but I should let you know now, that not once in my entire life has a train shown up early, and unless there is unforeseen trouble on the track, the trains don't show up late either. I don't much like the city council, or politicians in general, but to their credit, the trains in this city are very reliable."

"Really? Well that's good to know. So we got ten minutes to wait then." Judy said as she made her way to an empty if not oversized bench.

Nick followed suit and sat down next to her, "So, tell me a bit about your parents while we wait." Nick said trying to fill the time and get some information that might help with the impending first impression.

"Well, my dad and mom both grew up in Bunnyburrow, they met in high school, and, as you already know, they're farmers. My dad is a bit old fashioned in his approach to other mammals, but he's been trying to change his stereotypical views recently. As a mammal my dad is kind, supportive, hardworking, and family means a lot to him, mess with his kits or anyone he considers family at your own risk. One time he got into an all-out fist fight just because someone called one of his cousins a no-good lout. It's even funnier because my dad had said the exact same thing him earlier that day" Nick couldn't help but smile at the way Judy lit up as she reminisced about her father, Nick could tell she adored him, and she was definitely a daddy's girl.

"My mom, on the other paw, is the center of the family. She may seem passive and meek but that's just when she's out of the home or with friends. When she's home she becomes fearsome and powerful, directing the hordes of young bunnies with ease. While my dad may have control of the farm, my mom runs the home and when she puts her foot down it's the end of discussion." Judy said, admiration clear in her voice.

"Your parents both sound terrifying, Carrots." Nick said only semi-joking.

"They really aren't that scary… as long as you don't cross them," Judy said ominously, before bursting out laughing at the look on Nicks face.

"Nick, you don't need to be so scared, I'm sure they'll like you just fine and if they don't, it's not like they can do anything to you from Bunnyburrow, and while they're here I'll protect you."

Nick breathed a small sigh of relief before posturing up slightly.

"Like I would be scared of a few bunnies, now the army they command is a different story." Nick joked.

"It's a good thing you're not scared Nick, because it's about time to meet them," Judy said as the train began to pull into the station.

"Train from the Burrow is Arriving," the intercom announced, sealing Nick's fate.

*Gulp* "Yay, I can't wait," Nick said softly as his throat became suddenly dry.

As the train pulled onto the platform and the crowds of mammals file out. Nick and Judy stood up and tried to pick out Bonnie and Stu from the throng, and as the doors closed without a sign of them Judy started getting worried.
"Where are they? They should have been here, or called at least," Judy said as she continuously scanned the crowd of mammals.

"Don't worry so much Fluff. I'm sure they're here somewhere. Let's split up and search for them, that way we'll find them faster. Whichever one of us finds them, will call the other, so we can meet up." Nick suggested

"Alright let's do that. It's better than standing around waiting." Judy agreed.

So, Nick slipped off into the crowd leaving Judy to search on her own. After a few minutes had gone by Judy's search had reached the front of the station, with no sign of her parents and no word from Nick, Judy really began to worry. What if they got ab ducted, or stepped on, or taken into an alley and mugged. As Judy's mind ran through the worst possible scenarios she heard Nick's voice.

"JUDY," Nick shouted.

At the sound of his voice Judy bolted, darting through the legs of bigger mammals as they walked desperately trying to reach Nick. As Judy broke through the crowd she could only hear the crackling of a taser, as she watched her dad lunged towards Nick, anti-fox device in paw.

"NNNNNNIIIIIIICCCCCCKKKK"
Chapter End Notes

The art at the end of this chapter is an original by me who has never tried his hand at art before.

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.
Chapter 11 Meeting the Hoppses

Chapter Summary

The meet the parents moment, want to know more.... then get reading!!

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 11! I have two peopel to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen
and
LakesideMiners

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

The art at the begining was done for me by the talented Shadeink over at deviant art who graciously assisting me with my little project of finding art. She's got lots of awesome art so go check her out at https://shadeink.deviantart.com/

lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Disclaimer: So the guy I paid to steal the rights to Zootopia never got back to me, but then I realized, if the Multiverse theory is true then in at least one reality I do in fact own Zootopia, so take that Disney! Unfortunately this is not that reality, I still have to let you know I own nothing about Zootopia.

Chapter 11 Meeting the Hoppses

Savannah Central Station, Monday Afternoon, 1:10pm

As soon as he and Judy separated, Nick began his search for the Hoppses. Nick moved through the crowd with a practiced ease, flowing though the small spaces in between bigger mammals like water, and in no time at all Nick had made his way to the front of the station.

"Now, if I was two country bunnies, new to the big city, where would I be?" Nick asked himself as he scanned the crowd.

After a few moments of searching Nick located the information booth, figuring that was where they would most likely go, and lo and behold standing right next to it were two older bunnies. Now, Nick wasn't exactly sure that it was Bonnie and Stu Hopps, but the denim overalls the buck was wearing combined with the wide eyed darting glances he was making had Nick feeling confident that these were the bunnies he was looking for. Nick decided he should make sure it was them before calling Judy over, so he approached the pair carefully.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hopps?" Nick said cautiously as he got closer to the pair.

As soon as he spoke both bunny's ears perked and turned towards him, followed immediately by their eyes. Bonnie looked curious as she saw who had called her name, while Stu stared suspiciously at the fox that had appeared out of nowhere, both mammals however strengthened their grips on their bags subconsciously.

"Hey Mr. and Mrs. Hopps, I'm Nick Wilde a friend of Carro- Judy's." Nick said as charmingly as he could, flashing his most disarming smile, while extending his paw for a pawshake.

A minute passed by in awkward silence before Nick retraced his paw defeatedly.

"Where is our daughter?" Stu asked accusingly.

"We split up to look for you when we didn't see you get off the train, I'm sure she's looking for you two inside, let me just give her a call." Nick explained, deciding to ignore the accusatory tone in Stu's voice.

As Nick was explaining the situation to Stu, Stu's eyes were darting around looking for any accomplices this fox might have, not trusting the story this "Nick Wilde" had given. As Nick finished his explanation Stu saw something strange out of the corner of his eye, a shady looking weasel that seemed to be slowly and indirectly inching closer, paws in the pocket of his hoodie. The weasel was wearing a black tattered hoodie and black basketball shorts, and as he got closer and closer Stu could sense something was off. Slowly reaching his paw into the bag at his side Stu grabbed hold of the fox taser that sat on top and slowly took it out.

Nick, who was watching Stu's sudden change in behavior, knew exactly what was in Stu's paw before it had even completely exited the bag, well, he's got a fox taser, I should probably call out for
"JUDY," Nick shouted suddenly, startling both Stu and the hooded weasel.

Thinking he had been discovered the hooded weasel decided to make his move now before Nick’s backup came.

Stu watched as the weasel who had been slowly getting closer suddenly change course and head straight for the fox in front of him, while pulling something long and metallic out of the pocket of his hoodie.

"Sweet cheese and crackers that's a knife!" Stu realized suddenly.

Moving quickly and without thought, Stu's body charged forward, as if possessed by a will of its own.

A cry of "NNNNNNIIIIIIICCCCCCKKKKK" pierced the air.

Nick ignored the shout for the moment and focused on buck charging him with a taser. Quickly and smoothly moving to the left Nick narrowly dodged the taser and readied himself for the next attack that he assumed was coming. only to notice Stu kept right on moving and slammed right into the weasel that had been behind him, knife in paw.

"EEEYYYYYYOOOOUCH" the weasel exclaimed as he fell to the ground, Stu's taser finding it's mark in one of the holes of the tattered sweatshirt and sent 1,000 Volts and 2 milliamps through the weasel's body, causing his muscles to lock up.

Stu looked down at the now twitching weasel in shock and awe, "What did I just do?" Stu asked himself quietly.

Nick, who had watched in surprise as the even unfolded ran over to Stu and the weasel.

"Mr. Hopps are you alright?" Nick asked, noticing the buck was shaking slightly.

"Yeah, I'm alright, I'm just a little shook up," Stu said as he slowly looked up at Nick. Right as it seemed Stu was about to say something Judy came running up to the pair, breathing ragged from her mad sprint. After pausing for a moment to catch her breath Judy spoke.

"What the heck just happened Dad? It looked like you were about to tase Nick, but you ended up tasing this weasel instead."

"Oh, hey Jude, well the thing is, well ah… while your friend Nick was talking to us I happen to notice the weasel was moving toward us slowly. I thought he looked rather suspicious, so I pulled out my taser, then when Nick called out for you the weasel charged at him with a knife. So, I turned my "Fox Taser" into a "Weasel Taser," Stu said, somewhat proudly.

Judy just stood there, slack jawed in shock. "Dad that was incredibly risky, why would you stick your neck out for a complete stranger?"

"Judy, while I'm sure you know how I feel about city mammals, and certain species in general, that doesn't mean I'd want to see anyone get hurt. I couldn't live with myself if somebody got injured or killed when I could have stopped it." Stu said firmly.

While Judy and Stu talked, Nick decided to walk over to the weasel to check out who it was that wanted him dead. As he reached the collapsed and groaning weasel Nick made sure to kick the knife
further away from the weasel's paw, before reaching down to lift the hood. The weasel on the
ground had a typical build for a weasel, lean and narrow, a lot like Duke Weasleton's, but this
weasel's fur was a few shades darker than Duke's, more of a dirt brown, and he had three thin scars
across the bridge of his snout.

"So, you wanted to take me out huh, Allen short-tail?" Nick whispered as he leaned down, getting so
close that Allen could feel Nick's breath inside his ear canal.

"Ugghhh... you're a traitor Wilde, no way was I gonna let you go to the Fuzz and turn me in," Allen
grunted through clenched teeth.

Nick let out a long sigh, "Allen, if you had even bothered to listen I'm sure Finn or someone else told
you already that I was done, and I wasn't turning in anyone from the past."

Allen Tried to spit in Nicks face but it didn't clear his own chin.

"As if I'd believe a snitch like you, there's no way that I'd take you at your word now that you've
betrayed everyone."

Nick just shook his head, "I went to Big as well Allen."

"Bullshit, there's no way you'd still be alive if that were the case. Big would have iced you as soon as
you said the word cop."

"Normally you'd be right. I did almost die too, but I convinced Big that I wouldn't talk, and I got his
blessing. So, if you don't believe me ask your buddy that works for Big, Igor right? He'll tell you that
what I'm saying is true."

Allen just lay there for a moment, contemplating everything Nick had just told him.

"Fine Wilde, you're safe for now, but if you're lying I'll find you and end you. So, mind helping me
walk for a bit?"

"No can-do Allen, unfortunately for you the police are probably already on their way, I said I
wouldn't bring up the past, but the present is fair game." Nick said as Judy appeared by his side.

"Hey Nick, I called the police, how's the weasel?"

"Well your dad certainly did a number on him, but he's now awake, still not able to move completely
yet though, I don't suppose you have some rope to tie him up do you?" Nick said as he stood up and
wiped the dirt off his shorts.

"No I don't, we'll just have to restrain him until the police arrive. So, is it safe to assume that you
know this mammal?" Judy asked calmly.

"You could say that, he's an old associate that isn't too happy about my career change," Nick
explained as he began looking around for a way to hold Allen, that's when Nick spotted a light post
and an idea formed.

"Hey Fluff, I got an idea, help me carry Allen here over to that light post." Nick said as he grabbed
under Allen's arms and lifted.

With Judy's assistance they got a now squirming Allen over to the lamp post.

"We brought him over here, so what's the plan Nick?" Judy asked, still maintaining her grip on
Allen's legs as he wiggled about slowly.

"It's simple my dear Carrot's, I'm going to lift him up, you wrap one of his legs around the pole then tuck his other leg underneath him, making sure to hook the back of his knee with the foot of the leg that's wrapped around the pole," Nick explained as he demonstrated with his own legs how it was supposed to look.

"Alright if you're sure it will hold him let's try it."

So, with Nick holding Allen up in a full nelson, Judy got his legs into position and then Nick eased Allen onto the ground, so his full wait was on his now tangled legs.

"Are you sure that will hold him Nick?" Judy asked, looking skeptically at Allen, who was starting to try and get up.

"Pretty sure, I've done it before as a prank, it's called the pole lock and it's pretty decent at keeping someone stuck but can be dangerous if the person throws themselves backwards, so I added my own special touch." Nick explained as he walked over the side of the lamp post where Allen's arms were.

Nick then took off his signature tie and grabbed Allen's arms, turning them so his paws were facing outward, Nick then tied a sturdy handcuff knot around Allen's elbows.

"This will prevent him from falling backwards and also stop him from trying to pull himself up if he's strong enough." Nick explained as he dusted his paws off.

"If you say so, but we should still keep an eye on him until someone arrives,"

"I'll do it, just go over and keep your parents company, I'm sure they'll want to talk to you and probably stay far away from Allen and I." Nick said as he nudged Judy toward where her parents were huddled up talking.

"Nick..."

"Judy, don't argue you know it's true, let me keep my old pal here company until the police arrive, it'll be fine. Trust me," Nick said, cutting off any protest from Judy.

So, Judy slowly drifted back to her parents and made sure they were ok, all the while stealing glanced back at Nick, wishing she was at his side.

Nick was unaware of the bunny looking at his back however, as he was instead trying to talk to Allen a bit more.

"Allen...Allen... Allllleeeenezzzzznnnnn," Nick pestered as he began poking at the weasel's side.

"WHAT," Allen snapped, unable to maintain his sullen silence.

"Calm down buddy, I'm just looking for some friendly conversation," Nick said sarcastically.

"I ain't got nothin' to say to you…"

"Fine, I guess we'll play the silent game then," Nick said stubbornly, crossing his arms like a kit and turning his muzzle away from Allen.

"........"

".... Why?" Allen finally asked after a few minutes, breaking the silence.
"Why what Allen, be specific," Nick said, turning back to look at the restrained weasel.

"Why are you going to the other side, finding legit work never pans out for guys like us, and trying to be a cop is even more unrealistic, you'd have more luck changing species."

"Well, I found someone who believes in me, someone who thinks I can be better, and that person gave me a way out of this dead-end life. So I'm going for it." Nick explained as he looked fondly over at Judy.

"I'll end badly Nicky. Nobody just climbs out of this life, it ain't that easy, and do you think people are just gonna accept that you're out of the game?" Allen asked mockingly.

"I'll get out, and nobody's gonna stop me. This life's dangerous and there's no light at the end of that tunnel. Look at yourself Allen, the scars on your face, the scars hidden beneath your clothes, nobody makes it out of a life like ours unscathed, but I'm done collecting scars." Nick said gravely

"It's a fool's errand Wilde. Even if you manage to get out what do you think you're gonna’ change? Nobody will ever trust a fox cop, just look at those bunnies over there. You almost got stabbed and instead of checking to see if you're ok, they just stay far away from you, probably talkin' smack behind your back, and that's how it will always be. You'll risk your neck and they'll spit on you for it." Allen said, throwing his head in the direction of the Hoppses, who were still huddled up and casting glances in Nick's direction. To Nick's surprise, Allen no longer seemed to be mocking him, but actually sounded somewhat sympathetic.

"That may be the case Allen, but I'll know the truth, I'll be able to look at myself in the mirror every morning and know what I'm doing is right. Besides, everyone else can go stick their head in a hole, because at the end of the day, as long as one mammal believes in me, then I can keep going."

"She must be a pretty special girl Wilde. While I don't approve of your choice of profession, I guess I can respect your decision. Just don't get in my way, and I think we'll be square." Allen said, trying to sound tough.

Nick just laughed it off, "Yea she is, and thanks Allen, but I won't let you off if I catch you,"

"Ppssshhh, like you could ever catch me Wilde."

Nick said nothing merely gesturing to the clearly caught Allen.

"Don't count, that buck with the taser did all the work. If it's just you, then I know I can get away."

"Well, I guess when that day comes, let the best mammal win."

"I sure will." Allen said, before going silent again.

A few minutes later Wolford and Fangmeyer pulled up in a cruiser. Fangmeyer got statements from Bonnie and Stu while Wolford joked around with Nick after getting his statement, cuffing Allen, and putting him in the cruiser.

After looking around for any other witnesses and taking note of the cameras in the area Wolford and Fangmeyer were ready to go.

"Thank you for your time Mr. and Mrs. Hopps. If we need your testimony we'll be in touch, here's my card if you remember anything else." Fangmeyer said, pulling out a properly sized business card and handing it to Mr. Hopps
"Will do, Officer. Have a great day," Stu said, trying hard not to act nervous in front of the tiger.

As the cruiser drove off Nick and the Hopses were left with an awkward silence that nobody was quite sure what to do with.

"Sooooo, Mom, Dad, I know you've already met, but this is Nick Wilde, the mammal that helped me solve both the Missing Mammals case and the case I came back to Zootopia to solve." Judy said, gesturing to Nick.

"Oh… it's ah, nice to meet you Mr. Wilde, I'm Bonnie Hopps and this is my husband Stu." Bonnie said, sticking her paw.

"It's nice to meet you Mrs. Hopps, and just call me Nick, everyone else does." Nick said politely, as he took Bonnies paw and shook it gently.

"Now I think we got off on the wrong paw earlier, but I do have to thank you Mr. Hopps, you really saved me back there." Nick said as he extended his paw to Stu.

"You can say that again, why did that weasel try and attack you? Did you know him?" Stu asked coldly, as he ignored Nick's outstretched paw.

Nick withdrew his paw and stuck it in his pocket, "I couldn't say, I don't know him personally, and I haven't done anything worth being attacked over." Nick lied.

"It sure seems like you were pretty chummy with him when he was tied up," Stu said, his tone still neutral but hinting at an accusation.

"I won't deny that I tried to talk to him. I was hoping to get some information on why he wanted to attack me, but he wasn't giving me anything useful." Nick said, his voice flat and unemotional, mask firmly in place.

"Hey how about we go drop off my stuff at the apartment instead of standing around here talking," Judy said quickly, trying to salvage the situation.

"That sounds like a great idea. Let's go Stu," Bonnie agreed.

"I'll get the bags," Nick offered.

"I got it taken care of," Stu said as he struggled to carry everything.

"As you wish," Nick said, tail dropping slightly.

As they walked to the car Judy and her parents chatted while Nick took up the rear. It was from this vantage point that Nick noticed Judy was walking with a slight limp. Picking up the pace, Nick made his way to Judy's side.

"Your limping Carrots," Nick whispered, making sure it was low enough that only Judy would hear.

"Yeah I know Nick, I think I just strained my leg since I don't see or feel any blood, but I could be wrong," Judy whispered back.

"Lean on my arm a bit, it might help," Nick suggested as he dropped his shoulder slightly, and propped out his arm.

"Nick my parents are here," Judy protested.
"So? It's not like you're doing anything wrong, plus if you don't you could hurt yourself worse."

"That's true, but they don't know I got hurt, so if I start leaning on you it might look weird," Judy explained, lowering her voice even more to be sure her parents didn't hear her. Luckily for Judy Bonnie and Stu were having a rather spirited discussion on what was the best way to prepare carrots.

"Just say you think you pulled a muscle when you ran over to find me or something, you can't afford to reinjure yourself," Nick argued.

"Fine." Judy agreed angrily as she took Nick's proffered arm.

As they finally reached the truck Judy quickly dropped Nick's arm and got inside, once in the truck however, she noticed a problem.

"How are we going to fit everyone in the truck?" Judy asked suddenly.

"Well if we were in Bunnyburrow then I'd suggest your friend ride in the back, but I don't think that's exactly legal here." Stu said as he helped Bonnie into the truck before hopping in himself.

"There's definitely not enough room for me in there, don't worry about it, I can walk, and I'll meet you back at the apartment," Nick said before walking off without another word.

"Glad he understood. Now how do we get to your apartment Judy?" Stu asked, oblivious to the daggers his daughter was glaring at him.

As Wolford and Fangmeyer drove back to Precinct One their car ride was filled with the normal pointless chatter and banter that they were used to, but as they pulled into the Precinct parking lot Wolford decided to spring the question that had been on his mind since picking up the weasel.

"So, what do you think of Wilde and Hopps?" Wolford asked as they parked the cruiser.

"Wilde seems like an ok guy, I think he knows more about this weasel than he told us, but he didn't seem like a bad mammal to me. As for Hopps she is a good officer, I had my doubts like everyone else at first, but she blew those doubts away within her first week, she's got a good work ethic, a great personality and bright future ahead of her." Fangmeyer said matter of factly.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, but that's not what I mean, what do you think of them together?" Wolford asked, getting giddy like a kit who had just learned a juicy secret.

"It's a bit of an odd friendship, can't say I've ever seen one like it before, but from Judy's retelling of the Missing Mammals case, they work well together."

"I think they might be more than just friends," Wolford said, interrupting Fangmeyer as he struggling to contain himself.

"No."

"Yes."

"How can you tell," Fangmeyer asked, turning to face her partner so she could look for any hint of deception.

"It's all in the nose," Wolford said as he brought a finger to his snout. "Judy smelled heavily of Nick, much more than one would from just casual friendly contact, at the very least a few prolonged hugs, but nothing as far as rutting."
"Is that all?" Fangmeyer asked, still not convinced.

"Do I need more?"

"If your theory wouldn't get you a warrant, then I'm not buying it,"

"Fine," Wolford sighed, "Were you watching them at all? Cus I was. Judy was constantly looking over at Nick and I while we talked, Nick didn't notice because his back was turned. As for Nick, he's a bit harder to crack, but I heard from the spotted, donut loving, one mammal gossip machine that a red fox named Nick Wilde applied to join the ZPD, why else would he become a cop if not to be near Judy?"

Fangmeyer crossed her arms, she still wasn't entirely convinced, there just wasn't enough evidence, considering she hadn't seen what her partner had, and more importantly because a fox dating a bunny was to strange to be real.

"That's still not enough to start any rumors, so I better not hear anything around the Precinct about your little theory. OK?" Fangmeyer said, sounding as stern as possible.

"Come on, Clawhauser would go nuts over something like this," Wolford begged.

"No, I don't want to hear a word of it until you have something more substantial. Rumors can damage reputations, and break up friendships. Or would you like it if I decided to tell everyone in the Precinct about your little crush on that new cayote in forensics?"

"W-what, I don't have a thing for her Fangmeyer," Wolford protested.

"Exactly, and it would make things awkward between you and her if that rumor were to spread. You catch my drift Derek?"

"Yes Ma'am," Wolford said dejectedly.

"That being said, if you were to get more evidence then I might reconsider," Fangmeyer said in an attempt to cheer her partner up.

"Really? Well I best get some then," Wolford said happily as his face lit up and his tail began to wag. Fangmeyer just smiled and shook her head at her goofy partner.

While back in the truck Judy was at her wit's end. Her father had spent the entire ride talking bad about Nick and telling Judy how she should cut ties with him. Judy had put up with it for most of the ride, trying to calmly explain to her dad that there was a lot more to Nick, and that he was a really kind mammal when you got to know him, but Stu wasn't hearing it.

"No good mammal has someone trying to kill them, I bet you he's a criminal, he's probably running a scam on you, Judy." Stu ranted as they sat in traffic, unable to move more than an inch.

"Dad, you can't jus-"

"And how much do you really know about him? He probably told you some sob story, I bet it was all a lie too,"

"He's actually been throu-"

"Judy you can't trust a fo-"
"ENOUGH DAD!" Judy shouted, unable to listen to her dad's comments on Nick anymore.

Both of Judy's parents looked over at her in shock. As the car went silent Judy realized she had just yelled at her parents for the first time. Ever.

"I'm sorry for shouting Dad. But you don't even know Nick, so I don't see how you can talk bad about him like that." Judy said sincerely.

"Judy, Honey, I'm trying to look out for you. How long have you known this Nick? A few months at best, and that's not nearly long enough to get to know someone. He could be taking advantage of you. I know you like to see the good in mammals, but I'm worried for your safety. Even if he's not taking advantage of you, if he were to get attacked again, who knows what could happen to you."

Stu said, voice full of concern.

"Dad, Nick's not trying to scam me. While I might have only known him a few months, he's helped me more than you could imagine. He helped me solve the Missing Mammals case and stopped Chief Bogo from taking my badge before my time limit was up. Then, after I came back to the city he forgave me for hurting him and came with me to solve this new case even though it had nothing to do with him. He wasn't gaining anything, but he helped me anyway. I wouldn't have been able to solve that case without his help either. After that he got me back in my apartment, he bought me clothes and other necessities, so I wouldn't go without while I was waiting for you guys to bring me my stuff. Despite all that, he's never once asked for anything in return, I've had to force him to let me help him, even a little bit." Judy explained, emotion evident in her voice as she tried to convince her dad how good of a mammal Nick was.

"Jude, I had no idea,"

"Wait dad, I'm not done yet. As for his past, I might not know everything, but I don't need to. I know who he is now, and I know despite whatever his past may hold, he's trying to do better. He's even joining the ZPD despite how dangerous a job that is. If someone were to attack Nick again, I would step in just like I would for anyone else, because that's my job as a police officer."

"Judy, I just don't trust him, it has almost nothing to do with the fact the he's a fox, it's just a feeling in my gut, he's hiding something, I just know it." Stu said stubbornly.

"I know he is." Judy said plainly.

"Then why do you trust him!?" Stu asked exasperated.

"Because I do. He's never given me a reason not to, I'm sure in time he'll tell me what he's hiding, but he has to be ready to, I'm not gonna force it, and when he's ready, I'll listen and be there for him."

"But he could end up hurting you,"

"He won't." Judy said, voice so full of certainty that Stu was left speechless.

Bonnie, who hadn't said a single word, had been listening with rapt attention. Judy's really defending this fox, she even yelled at her dad for him, I wonder if there's more going on there? All conventional logic would say no, not only is a bunny dating a fox strange but Judy showing real interest in anyone is actually a stranger possibility. Despite that my motherly instincts are saying that might just be the case here. The way she defends him, the way she is willing to patiently wait for him, her certainty that he won't hurt her. Then there's that defiant look in her eye, the last time I saw that was when she told us she was applying to the ZPD, the moment I saw that look I knew there was no stopping her. Does she care that deeply for this Nick? I guess I'll just have to watch and wait.
For the remainder of the ride the truck was silent. Stu felt it was best to stay quiet, Judy was silently fuming over her dad's treatment of Nick, and Bonnie was lost in thought. After a few minutes of suffocating silence, the truck pulled up to the apartment complex and Stu saw Nick standing at the curb and finally spoke.

"How in the heck did he beat us here?" Stu shouted in surprise.

"He didn't have to wait for stoplights and pedestrians or get caught in traffic, Nick also knows the city like the back of his paw," Judy explained.

"I'm sure he does, knowing the streets probably helps if you're running for your life," Stu muttered under his breath.

"Stop it Dad, I don't want to hear you talking bad about Nick anymore, and you better be nicer to him too, if not, maybe I won't come home for a while," Judy threatened.

"Fine Judy, if you feel that strongly about it I'll try and be nicer." Stu said defeatedly as he parked the truck and shut it off.

Judy's Apartment, Monday Afternoon, 3:20pm

Nick arrived at Judy's apartment expecting to find the Hoppses truck parked and the bags already up in the apartment but was surprised to see no sign of the truck or the bunny family.

"They must've got caught in traffic or something," Nick said to no one.

_That meeting was a disaster, it was going bad even before Allen showed up, him trying to attack me was the tipping point though, there's no way I could fix that first impression._ Nick thought to himself as he remembered the look of suspicion on Stu's face after Allen had been taken away.

"I knew it was going to end up that way," Cyn-Nick gloated. _"Her parents think you're a dangerous criminal, there's no way they'll want you around their daughter now."

"That might be true, but Judy's an adult, she wouldn't abandon me, right?" Nick said, trying to remain positive.

_"She definitely wouldn't, she's too kind of a mammal to do that to you."_ Optimism agreed, followed swiftly by logic.

_"That would fit her personality."

"Yeah, that's right, I'm getting worried for nothing," Nick said happily.

_"What will you do if her relationship with her parents is strained because of you?"_ Cyn-Nick asked tauntingly.

"Tha-that wouldn't happen… Would it?" Nick questioned.

_"It's possible, so what will we do if that happens?"_ Logic asked coldly.

"I don't know. I don't want to cause a rift between Judy and her parents, but I doubt she would just give up on me, being the stubborn bunny she is," Nick said as he started thinking about what exactly he would do.

"I don't know what I'd do." Nick said, unable to figure out what he could or should do, if that happened.
"You need to think of something.″ Logic insisted, not wanting to be blindsided by the problem later.

"I'll just have to do my best to make sure that never happens. If I can get her parents to like me, then there won't be a problem. While my first impression wasn't the best, I can turn it around," Nick said optimistically.

"Pfft, I wouldn't be so sure." Cyn-Nick said disbelievingly, but before he could say anything else the truck full of bunnies pulled up in front of the apartment.

Nick could practically smell the tension in the air as Judy got out of the truck, clearly angry at someone, followed by Bonnie who seemed to be thinking hard about something, and taking up the rear was Stu. Who's face showed a mixture of concern and anger.

The rabbits silently began grabbing boxes out of the truck and began to take them inside without so much as hello to Nick. *I'm not touching this with a ten-foot pole,* Nick thought to himself as he jogged over to Judy and took the box from her paws.

"What the heck," Judy said angrily as she turned, expecting to find her dad.

"Oh, Nick, when did you get here, and why did you take my box?" Judy asked, as the anger seemed to suddenly melt away.

"Around 30ish years ago, and I took the box because you need to unlock the door with your key.″

"30 years Nick, isn't that a bit of an exaggeration, and I'm perfectly capable of holding a box and unlocking a door," Judy said as she began climbing the stairs.

"Not exaggeration, just perspective. You asked when I got here, since you didn't specify what you meant by here, I took it to mean this plane of existence, which I have inhabited for roughly 30 years″

"You're such a dork, Nick," Judy said, unable to stop a chuckle from escaping her lips.

"As for the box, the unlocking the door thing is an excuse, I don't want you putting any unneeded stress on your leg." Nick continued, making sure to keep his voice low.

"You're such a worrywart Nick, but thanks," Judy said, smiling as a warm feeling found its way into her chest.

Once the boxes were in the apartment Judy, Bonnie, Nick and Stu began to unpack everything. It didn't take much time since Judy didn't have much stuff, but Nick couldn't help but take note of a few things as he unpacked. Mainly the plethora of bunny plushies Judy seemed to own, taking up an entire box by themselves, but as Nick got to the bottom of the box he found one plushie that didn't quite fit in with the rest. This plushie was red, had short ears, a long tail and snout, and was undeniably a fox.

*I wonder why she has this one?* Nick thought to himself, but as Nick turned to ask Judy he realized it might be smart to save the question for a better moment with less mammals around.

"This apartment is rather small, and lacking in some important aspects, like a kitchen, or a bathroom, isn't it honey?" Bonnie asked as she sat with Judy folding and putting away clothes.

"It is, but it was the best I could do with my savings at the time, plus living in Zootopia is expensive,"

"I guess, but you should be able to afford a better place, now right?" Bonnie asked worriedly.
"I can. I'm already looking for a new place too, and I should be able to find one soon, but until then
I'm stuck here. It's not that bad living here though, at least I'm not out on the streets." Judy said as she
continued to put her clothes away.

"That's true, but if you need any help you know your father and I are here for you,"

"I know Mom, I know. So, once we finish unpacking do you want to go out for dinner?" Judy asked
as she put away her last shirt.

"That sounds like a great idea, I'm sure your father is hungry, and with the long drive ahead of us,
eating first would be a good idea. Do you think your friend Nick might like to join us?" Bonnie
asked, hoping to get a better look at how her daughter and Nick interacted with each other, as well as
get to know a bit more about the mammal himself.

"I'm sure he would, but let me ask first." Judy said before yelling out, "Hey Nick, you want to get
dinner with me and my parents after this?"

"Sure Carr-, care to tell me what you have in mind?" Nick asked, making sure not to use his favorite
nickname for Judy.

"Surprise me," Judy said, before turning back to Bonnie, "Nick knows the best spots in the city, so
I'll leave where we eat to him."

"Alright honey, lets finish up soon then, because I'm famished."

As they finished up unpacking, Judy tried her best to make conversation between her mom and Nick,
since any attempt at conversation with her dad was met with one-word replies. In no time at all the
boxes were unpacked and the Hoppses and Nick were back standing at the truck.

"So, the place I had in mind for dinner tonight is called "The Omnivore," it has a wide selection of
foods and it seats most average sized mammals, and best of all even though it's prices are reasonable
it's got great food. I'll walk and meet you there, so you'll have to find it using Zoogle Maps, when
you get there just get a table and if I take too long feel free to order," Nick said as he turned and
began to walk away.

Judy had a strange feeling as Nick started to walk away so before he could get very far she grabbed
his arm.

"I'm sure you weren't planning on leaving us and getting food by yourself, were you?" Judy asked
innocently.

"O-of course not, there's no room in the truck so someone has to walk, and since I know the city best
it makes sense that It would be me," Nick said, unable to keep the surprise out of his voice.

"That's true, but somehow I get the feeling you're trying to skip out on dinner, so just get into the
truck and we'll find a way to make it work." Judy said, her tone leaving no room for negotiation as
she pulled Nick towards the truck.

Nick just let himself be pulled along, realizing his plan had been seen through, and he had been
captured red pawed.

Bonnie and Stu had already gotten in the truck, and Nick could already see there was barely enough
room for him to squeeze in without his elbows digging into Bonnies sides.

"There's no way-"
"Just get in Nick," Judy said, cutting off Nick's protest.

Nick's shoulders slumped in defeat as he slid into the truck, making sure to make himself as small as possible so he wouldn't bury his elbow into Bonnie's side.

"So, where exactly do you think you're gonna fit in here?" Nick asked doubtfully.

"Right here!" Judy replied as she hopped up and sat in Nick's lap hitting him on the muzzle with her ears.

Bonnie, Nick, and Stu all looked at Judy in surprise,

"Well let's get moving," Judy said, deciding to ignore the stares.

Stu, not wanting to get on his daughter's bad side anymore, wordlessly started the truck and pulled out onto the road.

*What the hell, What the hell, What the hell, how in the name of Karma did it end up like this,* Nick thought as he now found himself with a lap full of bunny and a face full of ears. *Easy Wilde just take a deep breath, and don't make it weird.* But as he took a deep breath to calm himself Nick got a nose full of Judy's scent. The scent was not unpleasant, by any stretch of the imagination, in fact the problem was quite the opposite. Instead of calming down and gaining control of himself, Nick now had to restrain himself from sniffing Judy's head to smell her amazing scent as well.

As Nick fought to control himself the truck suddenly lurched forward as Stu hit a pothole. Nick's arms shot out reflexively, wrapping themselves around Judy's waist, stopping her from smashing her head against the dashboard.

"Thanks Nick, that was a good catch." Judy said gratefully.

"Don't mention it." Nick said absentmindedly, not realizing his arms were still around Judy.

Judy, noticing Nick hadn't let go, decided not to say anything, realizing she didn't mind being held, *it's safer too,* she reasoned with herself before settling into Nick's embrace.

Bonnie watched the scene with interest but said nothing, and Stu pointedly ignored it, trying his best to keep calm and drive.

Luckily for Nick and Stu the drive was short, and soon enough they pulled into the parking lot for "The Omnivore."

The Omnivore was a stylish modern restaurant, the low lighting and intricate art gave off an air of refinement, while the low jazz music and comfortable chairs created a relaxing environment to enjoy one's food.

Luckily there was no wait time, and the four mammals were seated in the medium mammal's section, Nick next to Judy and Bonnie, and across from Stu. Soon enough food and drink was ordered and delivered, all the while pleasant conversation filled the table. It wasn't until after the food arrived and everyone started eating that Stu spoke his first full sentence since the drive to the apartment.

"So Nicholas, what is it you do for work exactly?"

"Well, I'm actually out of work at the moment, I'm about to join the ZPD so I quit my old job," Nick explained before taking a bite of his pasta.
"So, you want to become a cop, not a job that a smaller predator like yourself would normally do."
Stu said as he calmly took a sip of his water.

"Well normally you'd be right, but a certain rabbit I know convinced me anyone could be anything,
so I figured even a smaller predator, like me, can become a cop." Nick said pointedly

"Sure, Sure, Judy really is an inspiration. The whole family is very proud of her. How does your family feel about your career shift?"

"Well, I ah, don't really talk with my family much anymore, we aren't super close, and they don't live in the city anymore," Nick said nervously.

As Nick spoke his tail began to move of its own accord, slowly finding its way to the back of Judy's leg.

"Hold up, what are we doing right now?" Cyn-Nick asked, just managing to stop the tail from touching Judy, and began slowly bringing it back to Nick.

"Oh come on, he's clearly nervous, some contact with Judy might make him calm down a bit." Emotion said pleadingly.

"Do you even understand the significance of that?" Cyn-Nick asked incredulously.

"A fox wraps his tail around mammals he claims as his own, strictly mates and kits, it's a deeply personal and significant gesture, Logic said impassively, as if reading from a textbook.

"EXACTLY," Cyn-Nick shouted, "do you really think he's ready for that in the slightest?"

"I wasn't gonna let him wrap it around her completely, just have it brush against her, so he knows he's not alone." Emotion said, feeling slightly embarrassed.

"Hey, should we let, "Nick" in on this?" Reason asked cautiously.

"Nah, he's got enough to deal with, we can handle this alone," The other voices said in unison.

"Now back to the topic at paw, Cyn-Nick you know Nick's feeling stressed right? You can allow him this little act of reassurance, can't you?" Emotion said, trying to reason with his cynical counterpart.

"You are going about this situation all wrong, but since I doubt you'll listen to reason,"

"Yes?" Reason said questioningly as his name was brought up.

"Not you Reason, I meant sound logic,"

"You rang?" Logic asked, knowing what Cyn-Nick had meant but wanting to have a little fun.

"Oh don't you start now, so where was I... oh yeah, since you won't listen to me I'll have to let you learn from your mistakes instead, go for it," Cyn-Nick said, sounding worn down and weaker than normal.

This inner exchange had taken no more than a second, so as Nick's tail made its way back to Judy, stopping itself just before wrapping around her, content to brush against the back of her legs, Stu continued his questions.

"That's a shame, but not every family can be as tight knit as my family is. So, you said you quit your old job to become a cop, what were you doing up until you decided to change professions?"
"Come on Dad that's enough. Are we playing 20 questions or something?" Judy asked, trying to step and help Nick out.

"I'm only asking a few questions, Honey, I just want to get to know Nick better, seeing how you and him are such good friends," Stu said innocently.

"It's fine Fluff, I used to sell Pawpsicles, it wasn't the most glamorous work, but it paid the bills," Nick said

"Did you just call Judy Fluff? A bit demeaning don't you think?" Stu asked angrily.

"It's a nickname Dad, I don't mind, it's actually kinda nice." Judy said defensively.

"If you say so," Stu said suspiciously, before continuing,

"Anyways, an entrepreneur, how nice, but not very demanding work, at least not physically, are you sure you're fit enough to be a police officer?"

"I'm training hard to make sure I am, but a good cop should be quicker of mind so they don't need to be as quick on their feet," Nick said confidently.

"Fair enough. So you know the city well then?"

"I've lived here my whole life, so I know it better than most, and not to brag, but I know everyone that's important to know,"

"I'm sure you do."

"Yeah he does. He actually has a friend at the DMV and he helped me look up a license plate for a case," Judy said attempting to turn the conversation around.

"Really, what a nice thing to do for a complete stranger, and it's even nicer because you did it for nothing in return." Bonnie said, trying to lighten the foul mood her husband had created.

"You're just a regular old saint aren't you Nick," Stu said suspiciously, as he ignored the angry look his wife was now giving him.

"Hey Dad, I forgot to tell you something about the truck," Judy interjected, stopping Nick from continuing.

"Is it about the tools?" Stu asked, having noticed right away that they were missing.

"Yes, unfortunately while Nick and I were solving the case someone came by and stole them. I'm really sorry I wasn't more careful, and I'll make sure to pay you back for them." Judy said, ears down in embarrassment.

"Don't sweat it Jude the Dude, it's not your fault, but you should be more careful, the city's full of criminals." Stu said, shooting a sideways glance at Nick.

"So Nick, Judy said you helped her solve her first case. Since she never tells us anything, I was wondering if you could fill us in on the details of that case." Bonnie asked, figuring this conversation path would be the safest.

"Well it all started when I sold a Pawpsicle to an otter…"

So, for the rest of the meal Nick told the story of how he and Judy met and solved the Missing
Mammals case, making sure to omit some of the more dangerous details as well as the reason why he helped Judy in the first place. Judy would add details here and there and by the time he was done everyone had finished their meals and the check had been paid.

"Wow that sounds like a crazy first case Judy. I'm glad Nick was there with you," Bonnie said in awe, as they walked to the truck.

"Yeah it was, but looking back, I wouldn't have done it any differently, seeing as it led me to meeting and becoming friends with Judy," Nick said sincerely as he got into the truck.

"Aww, Nick, you big softy. I couldn't agree with you more," Judy said as she hopped back onto his lap.

After a short somewhat tense ride back to the apartment, and few teary goodbyes Bonnie and Stu Hopps headed back to Bunnyburrow.

As they climbed the stairs back to Judy's apartment Nick scooped up Judy in his arms bridal style without saying a word.

With her legs as sore as they were Judy decided not to protest and she simply wrapped her arms around Nick's neck, allowing him to carry her to her apartment.

"Nick, I'm sorry my Dad was acting like such a jerk. I promise I'll be giving him another stern talking to tomorrow, if my mom doesn't beat me to it."

"Don't sweat it Carrots, I'm used to dealing with much worse. Plus he did have a pretty valid reason to be suspicious of me." Nick said, hoping Judy wouldn't be too angry with her dad.

"It's still unacceptable Nick, and my dad should know better than to treat another mammal like that regardless of his suspicions." Judy said stubbornly.

"You might be right, but he just wants his little girl to be safe so cut him some slack. OK? I mean if I can, you should be able to, as well. Right?" Nick asked as he set Judy down in front of her door.

"I guess I can, but my Mom will definitely have words for him." Judy said firmly as she unlocked her door and walk into the apartment.

"Well I wish him luck then." Nick said as he followed Judy inside and shut the door behind him.

"Stewart Hopps." Bonnie said sternly as the truck merged onto the highway.

"Yes Dear....." Stu said nervously, knowing from experience that he was about to have a very unpleasant conversation with his lovely and extremely angry wife.

"Let's have a little chat about how we should treat our daughter's friends..."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.
Lastly go listen to

Baby Driver OST - Jon Spencer Blues Explosion - "Bellbottoms"

It's a great song
Chapter 12 – Eating Crow

Chapter Summary

The dreaded Press conference, get reading if you want

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 12! I apologize it was later than normal, I don't really have an excuse I just slacked a lot so my apologies, hopefully this chap makes up for it.

I now have two people that I will be permanently be thanking for adding some ideas for this chapter making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen
and
LakesideMiners

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

The art at the begining was done for me by the talented Shadeink over at deviant art who graciously assisting me with my little project of finding art. She's got lots of awesome art so go check her out at https://shadeink.deviantart.com/

Challange game: two tests for you all to accomplish, my idea guy's are excluded from playing,

1st- Find all references
2ed- Explain why you think the new mayor is the species he is.

First person who get's both get's... bragging right's and maybe I'll say who winner was in the next chapter's notes, I can't offer much more lol.

lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Disclaimer: I hear if you watch Zootopia 10,000 times you get to own the rights to it so that's my new plan see you all in a few years... Oh and I still don't own Zootopia or it's pre-established characters, I think I own the ones I make up. Right?

Chapter 12 – Eating Crow

Judy's Apartment, Wednesday Morning, 9:30am

Warmth, all-encompassing warmth, and the feeling of comfort and security, those were the sensations Judy woke up to. Covers…. So comfy…. Judy thought blearily as she snuggled herself deeper into the comforting warmth of her blanket. As she did this she felt a deep rumbling combined with the covers wrapping themselves around her tighter. Blankets don't rumble... or wrap themselves tighter! Judy thought as her eyes shot open and her brain kicked on, she was only stopped from bolting out of bed by the pair of fox arms that were wrapped around her midsection.

Nick, Nick's in my bed… and he doesn't have a shirt on!

As Judy began to take in the fact that she was in bed with a shirtless Nick she started to hyperventilate as a slight panic set in. Why in the name of all that's sweet and caroaty am I in bed with a shirtless Nick? Judy asked herself.

"Hold on, let's just calm down for a moment, there must be a rational explanation for this, there's no way Nick and I did anything." Judy whispered to herself as she calmed down and tried to remember what exactly happened last night.

"Ok, I remember Nick and I preparing for the press conference and having a late dinner, what happened after that," and as Judy thought long and had about it the rest of the evening started slowly coming back to her.

"Alright Carrots I think we've prepared as much as possible tonight, now you should get a good night's sleep, can't have you looking or acting like a Zombie in front of the press tomorrow." Nick joked as he hopped off of the bed and walked over to the light switch, flipping it and plunging the room into darkness.

"You're right Nick, goodnight." Judy said as she wrapped herself up tight in her blanket and forced her eyes closed, not feeling tired in the least.

"Aren't I always." Nick joked as he laid down on the floor. "Goodnight Fluff." Nick said softly.

A few minutes went by in relative silence, the only sounds being the rustling of blankets as both mammals tried to get comfortable and fall asleep, but as Judy tried to relax and fall asleep her mind was wide awake and running faster than an over caffeinated cheetah. Try as she might to calm down and sleep Judy couldn't stop herself from imagining all the ways tomorrow could go wrong. Would the press laugh at her? Would they attack her with questions? What if she said something wrong again? All these fears and insecurities began to play out in Judy's head and showed no sign of stopping.
"Hey Nick, are you still awake?" Judy asked the darkness softly, figuring maybe Nick could offer some comforting words or even show her a trick to falling asleep.

"Yeah Fluff, what's up?" Nicks disembodied voice asked back, tone low but without a hint of sleepiness.

"I can't sleep,"

"You don't say." Nick said sarcastically before continuing, "Let me guess. You can't sleep because you're nervous about tomorrow, and you're wondering if I have some magic trick to help you fall asleep."

"Uh huh… so… do you?" Judy asked hopefully.

"I might have just the thing, but you have to tell me something first."

"What do you need to know?" Judy asked.

"What subject do you find most boring? It can be anything, but it has to bore you to tears." Nick explained as he slowly got off of the floor.

Judy thought about it for a moment, racking her brain for something she found really boring.

"I guess if I had to pick a subject it would have to be math, there's just something about sitting at a desk with long strings of pointless numbers for any stretch of time that shuts my brain down." Judy said as she sat up in her bed.

"Perfect, then do I have just the thing for you," Nick said happily as he turned on his phone and plopped down onto the bed next to Judy.

Pulling up the Furflix app on his phone Nick quickly typed a few key words into the search bar, found the title he was looking for, clicked on it, and then let it load.

"So, what exactly are we gonna watch, and how can you be sure I will be able to sleep through this movie?" Judy asked, doubtful that any movie could put her to sleep, even one about math.

"Oh trust me Carrots, this movie could put even a bunny kit on sugar bender to sleep, It's called "X-treme Employment," and if you're looking for a documentary that is as hard-hitting as it is interestingly thought provoking… then you should look somewhere else, because this documentary is more boring than Flash reading the dictionary." Nick said softly, causing Judy to chuckle as she waited for the documentary to start.

*Five Minutes Later*

Judy could feel herself falling asleep and knew no matter how hard she tried it was already too late. So, with eyelids heavy and closing fast, Judy focused on the steady droning of the narrator as he described in great detail every painfully slow action of Sid the Sloth Accountant, with a voice so dull and monotoned Judy was surprised he hadn't put himself to sleep. As her eyes closed for the final time Judy unconsciously snuggled back into the fox who had fallen asleep mere seconds before her.

"Ah, Nick was just helping me again, that makes sense." Judy whispered as she settled back into Nick's embrace eliciting another strange rumbling sound from the sleeping fox.
"You do know we're still being held by Nick, right?" Judy's logic asked, voice even-toned and without a hint of judgement.

"Yes I do, and while I normally would be against being held by a shirtless male, I gotta say this feels rather nice, so warm and fluffy, especially with this tail right in front of me." Judy thought back as she began absentmindedly stroking Nick's sinfully soft tail.

"I could get used to this." Judy thought to herself as Nick's grip on her tightened a bit as he started making a strange whining sound.

Before Judy could even consider the noise Nick was making she began to feel a growing pressure and heat push against her back.

"Now what might that be?" A sultry voice asked suddenly.

"That, that's not what I think it is… is it?" Judy asked herself, as she tried to ignore the new heat coming from her back and the one that was building in between her legs.

"I bet it is, but there's only one way to be sure." the voice said temptingly.

"No, I won't, that would be so wrong and a breach of Nick's trust." Judy thought back, and unlike the time in the shower, Judy's firm resolve held out and the voice went silent.

As Judy stayed in Nicks embrace she contemplated her next move. Should she should try to get up and wiggle out of Nick's grasp, or… just ignore the thing poking her back, and just stay in the comforting embrace and go back to sleep.

"I should get up, if Nick woke up right now he might freak out or get really uncomfortable." Judy thought to herself as she started slowly wiggling out of Nick's grasp.

After a tense ten minutes of slowly moving and praying Nike wouldn't wake up Judy finally managed to free herself, but as she did she felt the coldness of the apartment against her fur she almost dived right back into Nicks warm embrace.

"No, I'm up and that's that." Judy told herself firmly before walking over to where her phone was.

"I wonder what time it is, though?" Judy said to herself as she turned on her phone and looked as the screen before nearly dropping it.

I wonder what Bogo wants, Judy thought to herself, but before she could even press the call button her phone started ringing.

Judy quickly stepped out of the apartment, so she wouldn't wake Nick. "Good morning Chief, what can I do for you?" Judy greeted as she put the phone up to her ear.

"Morning Hopps, I was just calling to let you know that for various reasons beyond my control the press conference has been move up to 12:30, so I'll need you and Mr. Wilde to show up at the precinct at 12 o'clock, I know the change is rather sudden but it out of my hooves, so I expect you to be there on time" Bogo explained.

"Will do, Chief. We'll be there," Judy said, voice calm, not hinting at the meltdown her mind was currently having as it tried to calculate exactly how much time they had to get ready.

"See you soon, Hopps." Bogo said before hanging up, leaving Judy with empty silence.
The silence lasted for only another minute before Judy burst back into the apartment in a frenzy.

"WAKE UP, NICK!" Judy shouted as she quickly gathered up the pieces of her service dress uniform.

"Wha-What's the emergency," Nick asked as he sat up, still a little groggy.

"We have to get ready, the conference got moved to 12:30 so get up and get your tail in gear," Judy said as she rushed out the door and headed to the bathroom.

Nick just sat on the bed in a daze for a moment, wondering what exactly was happening and why he was in Judy's bed. I guess Judy took the floor for me last night, that was nice of her, but I should get moving before she kills me, Nick thought to himself before slowly getting out of bed and shuffling over to the box of his belongings in the corner. Picking up a bottle of detangling spray and his fur brush Nick got to work making himself look presentable, and after getting his fur in order Nick threw on a clean shirt and pair of shorts before quickly spraying himself down with Musk Mask. After quickly looking himself over in the mirror Nick felt he looked presentable enough and decided to check his phone for any messages. As he walked over to the nightstand where he phone was charging Nick unplugged it and turned it on, still no messages, what did I expect, Nick thought to himself as his phone seemed to mock him with its lack of notifications.

A few minutes later Judy burst back into the apartment fully dressed in her service uniform, and Nick couldn't stop himself from staring just a bit. Judy didn't notice however, because after she took a quick look at Nick she frowned.'

"What's the matter?" Nick asked, seeing the look of disappointment on Judy's face.

"You are not wearing that to the press conference." Judy said bluntly.


"Exactly! This press conference is a big deal Nick, you're going to get recognition for helping to save the city, you need to dress better than that," Judy said

"Bu-"

"No buts Wilde. Besides, do you really want everyone in Zootopia to see you in your normal con-mammal attire, someone you hustled might recognize it and you," Judy said, throwing out a simper as if to say, "you know I'm right."

"That's… actually a good point. Fine, I'll find something else," Nick said begrudgingly, as he slowly walked over to his box.

"Not so fast," Judy said as she rushed over to the box, "If I let you pick it out then you'll probably pick something else atrocious, so just stay over there and let me find something suitable," Judy said as she began digging through the small box of clothes.

Nick just sighed and let Judy do as she pleased, but as she dug through the box Nick couldn't help but catch an eyeful of her backside, which looked great even in dress pants. Ever the gentlemammal, Nick politely said nothing and looked away. But as if pulled by a tractor beam Nick couldn't stop his eyes from wandering back to Judy's tail and the fine backside that accompanied it. Luckily Judy was none the wiser, as she finally straightened up and handed Nick a black button up collared shirt paired with a red tie.

"This should go well with your fur color, plus it doesn't have that hideous Pawaiian pattern,"
"That pattern is classic," Nick argued as he swiftly changed into the new shirt and tie, before grabbing his wallet and phone.

"That shirt has never been anything but awful, Slick. Now let's hurry up, we have to meet with Bogo at noon." Judy said as she turned to walk out the door followed closely by Nick.

Precinct 1 Lobby, Wednesday Afternoon, 11:50am

Today was the big day, the press conference where it would be revealed that another mayor had been arrested, this time for causing mammals to go savage instead of just imprisoning them. This conference was key to settling down the rising tensions in the city and every cop in the building knew it. Much like after the missing mammals case the stage was being set and the press would soon arrive, but unlike the last time officers had been called in from patrol to be on standby in the lobby, both for security reasons and as a show of strength to the public. Two such officers were Derick Wolford and Nadine Fangmeyer, standing with them was Benjamin Clawhauser, who was discussing the latest office gossip, just happy to be out of records, as well as a few other officers who had also been called in.

"So, today's the day they finally tell the public about Bellwether's arrest, I wonder how the city will take it," Fangmeyer said

"I'm not sure but it should at the very least ease the tension in the city," Wolford replied

"That would be great, I hate the looks of fear I get from prey mammals when I walk down the street," Ben said sadly, both Fangmeyer and Wolford nodded in agreement having gotten similar looks both on and off duty.

"Hopefully now that the attacks have stopped, and we have a suspect in custody the mammals of the city can begin to relax." Fangmeyer said getting a few "Hope so's," and "I won't believe it till I see it" from the other officers in the group, but as Fangmeyer finished she saw the two mammals she had been expecting enter the lobby.

"Looks like the stars of the show have arrived," Fangmeyer said as she waved over the Fox and Bunny who began walking towards the group.

As the duo approached they continued whatever conversation they had been having. Whatever it was had Nick laughing hysterically and Judy blushing furiously, followed by a swift punch to the shoulder and a laugh from Judy.

"Those two seem to be really close, it's kinda cut- adorable." Clawhauser said, making sure to catch himself before saying the "C-Word."

"Yeah they are, did I tell you ab- Ooofff" Wolford gasped as his sentence was cut short by a tiger sized elbow finding its way into his gut.

"What was that Wolford?" Clawhauser asked.

"Ughhhh. Nothing. Forget I said anything," Wolford said as he clutched his stomach.

"Hey guys, how's it going?" Judy asked happily as she approached the group followed by Nick.

"Hey Judy, it's nice to see you're looking well," Fangmeyer said as Judy got closer.

When Judy got close enough Fangmeyer, Wolford and Clawhauser all caught whiff of the heavy fox musk coming from the rabbit, causing all three mammals minds to short circuit temporarily.
"Hey Judy, Nick, I didn't know you two knew each other." Clawhauser said, as he was the first one to regain his mental capacity, as he recognized who the fox next to Judy was.

"Yeah, Nick's the one who helped me solve the Missing Mammals case and this new one, last time I didn't get to give him credit, but that's not happening this time," Judy said firmly.

"All against my will I might add," Nick said jokingly.

"Oh really, I didn't know that. Well then, on behalf of the ZPD, thank you Mr. Wilde for helping us find the 15 missing mammals, and putting a stop to former Mayor Bellwether's plot." Fangmeyer said respectfully.

"Yeah, thanks Red," Wolford agreed.

"It was nothing. I mainly followed Judy around, no big deal." Nick said trying to play off the compliments.

"Nick, if you hadn't helped me out I never would have found those mammals or gotten enough evidence to convict Bellwether and you know it." Judy said firmly.

"HOPPS, MY OFFICE," Bogo shouted from the balcony.

"Well looks like you're being called by the boss buffalo, I don't envy you Carrots." Nick said.

"You're coming with me Slick," Judy said as she walked towards the elevator, making sure to grab his tie and pulled him along behind her.

Nobody said a word as Nick and Judy walked away. It wasn't until both mammals were in the elevator and safely out of earshot that Wolford finally spoke.

"Soooooooo, anyone else catch how much Judy smelled like Nick?" Wolford asked, still unsure if his nose hadn't been playing tricks on him.

"Yep, although it didn't smell like he marked her." Fangmeyer said, still stunned.

"Most definitely smelled it, and it didn't smell like rutting either, maybe just intense cuddling. But with the way they act around each other, you would almost think they were dating." Clawhauser said with glee.

"No way, that's insane and flies in the face of reason. I bet we're just smelling things that aren't there." Delgato said, butting in on the conversation.

"Oh, yeah? A bet? And how much are we talking about?" Wolford asked challengingly.

"I'd bet however much you're willing to lose." Delgato shot back, puffing out his chest confidently.

"How's 100 zollars sound then?"

"You're on, 100 zollars says they aren't dating,"

"100 says they are, my nose is never wrong," Wolford said, getting a little worked up.

"You're both such kits, they are not dating…" Fangmeyer scolded "…Yet, but there is something in the air between them, my female's intuition is never wrong."

"Put some money down on it then, or are you more chicken than tiger," Delgato mocked playfully.
Alright listen up, if you want to take bets on this, that's fine, but we need to keep it organized. We all remember how disastrous the last betting pool was, so unless anyone has any objections, this time I'll be keeping track of it. Come find me later with your bets and the cash behind them.

With that out of the way all the officer went back to discussing the new hot topic, and as Clawhauser listened to the various conversations he was surprised at the indifference or even possible acceptance many of the officers showed towards the potential couple. While not everyone is open to the possibility I'll remain hopeful. Those two do look really cute together.

Bogo's office, Wednesday Afternoon, 12:00 pm

"I wonder what he wants to talk about?" Nick asked as they approached the door to Bogo's office.

"He probably just wants to go over what we should and shouldn't say, I'm sure it's nothing serious," Judy said as she knocked on the door.

"Enter," came the booming voice of the burly buffalo.

Nick grabbed the handle and slowly swung the door open. The office hadn't changed much, still bland and tasteless, chairs still too large, and the same angry looking buffalo behind the desk. As they walked over to the chair Nick gave Judy a boost up, so she wouldn't strain her leg any further, and after climbing up into the chair with her Nick realized they weren't alone with Bogo.

Sitting in the chair next to them was an older looking aardwolf, resembled a very thin striped hyena, but with a slender muzzle. His fur was a yellowish color with black vertical stripes, and he had a long, distinct mane down the midline of the neck and back. He like Nick had a bushy tail, unlike Nick's it was a good few inches shorter, but it fit considering aardwolves were a few inches shorter than the average fox.

"Officer Hopps, Mr. Wilde, it is a pleasure to meet the two mammals who saved the city." The aardwolf said politely.

"Ugh thank you Mr..." Judy said, trailing off since she had never seen the mammal before.

"Christian, Christian Routmane, but you can call me Chris,"

"He's going to be the new Mayor of Zootopia," Bogo added.

"So they keep telling me, but my biggest job for now is just keeping the city intact, and fixing the mess my two predecessors made. Hopefully today's conference will go a long way in helping the city get back on track," Chris said humbly.

"Why's the new Mayor of Zootopia sitting in on this meeting?" Nick asked accusingly, cutting off Bogo who had been about to speak,

"I don't really see why he would need to sit in while you talk to us," Nick continued not quite trusting the "Down to earth and humble guy" act.

"Wilde!" Bogo shouted, but before he could continue Chris held up a paw to stop him.

"No need to get angry Chief he only asked a question. Now you're right I don't really have a reason to be here it's more because I wanted to meet and personally thank the heroes who saved the city and let you both know that if you need anything feel free to ask, I can't promise that I'll be able to do all
that much, but I'll certainly lend a paw if I can,"

"Thank you very much Mr. Routmane," Judy said politely, trying to keep the peace.

"Now if we could get back to business, I wanted both of you to come in early so we could go over some do's and don'ts, that way we can avoid any mishaps." Bogo said still angry about Nick's behavior but still making sure not to sound accusatory.

"If you think it'll help I'm all ears Chief." Judy said, giving Bogo her full attention.

"Actually Carrots, I'd say you're only about 25 percent ears," Nick said jokingly, getting a chuckle out of both Judy and the Mayor.

"But on topic." Bogo said, unfazed by the fox's humor. "I really just want to have you avoid mentioning any specific details of the case. I'll be covering everything relevant, including who our suspect is and who we're still looking for. You will be fielding any questions the press has for you, as well as making any statements you personally want to about the case."

"I understand Chief, I won't let you down."

"I'm sure you won't, Hopps. Just keep your head out there and remember you can end it at any time you want. After you're done the new Mayor will address the city and that will be the end of the conference. Any questions?" Bogo asked, having said all he needed to say.

"No? Alright then, dismissed!" Bogo said after a few moments of silence had passed.

With that Nick and Judy headed out of the office and back to the lobby where the press had gathered and were already setting up for the conference.

As Judy looked at the growing group of reporters she couldn't help the fear that began to grip her heart and turn her stomach in knots, and when Bogo took the stage and started telling the press the facts relating to the case Nick noticed the growing look of dread on Judy's face.

"Hey Fluff, you alright?" Nick asked, already knowing the answer.

"I know we prepared yesterday, and I know you're gonna be with me, but I still feel really scared," Judy said, not even looking in Nick's direction.

"Carrots look at me," Nick said as he crouched down and grabbed Judy by the shoulders and turned her to face him.

"It'll be fine. No matter what happens, I'll be right there with you, and unlike the last press conference you prepared for this one." Nick said reassuringly.

"You're right Nick, and it looks like it's our time to shine." Judy said, as Bogo seemed to be finishing up his speech.

"Now I'll turn the stage over to the two mammals who solved the case Officer Judy Hopps and the civilian who assisted her, Nick Wilde." Bogo said as he moved off to the side allowing Nick and Judy to get in front of the podium.

As they approached the stage Nick could feel the eyes of the reporters on them and having all those eyes on him made his fur crawl, Just ignore it, Just ignore it, Nick thought to himself repeatedly as he took his position next to Judy onstage, making sure he was close enough that she knew he was there but not so close as to look suspicious.
As Judy took her place in front of the podium heart hammering in her chest she swallowed hard, *I can do this*, she thought to herself as the chorus of "Officer Hopps, Officer Hopps," began as the reports jostled each other, trying to be the first to ask a question. The first few questions the reporters asked were typical questions about the case and as Judy answered a few she began feeling a bit more confident. It was only after the all the important facts of the case had been established that things began to go south.

"Yes, you in the blue," Judy said, pointing to a pig in a blue polo shirt who hadn't asked a question yet.

"Wilbur Troughrunner, Zootopian times, how do we know that this "Night howler," flower really is the cause of the savage mammal outbreak?" The pig asked before flipping a page in his notebook, ready to write Judy's response.

"Well you see I found out about the night howler when I went home for leave. I was told by my parents that a flower my family's farm uses for getting rid of bugs, once caused an uncle of mine to go crazy and bite my mom, and the colloquial term for these flowers was "Night Howlers," which was a term that had come up during my previous case involving the missing and savage mammals. Which lead me to eventually, with help from Mr. Wilde, finding a lab where these flowers were being refined, and then eventually to the alleged culprit who admitted to using the flower. So while I can't say scientifically that the flower is the reason, all the evidence points to it being the cause of the savagery." Judy said, being careful to stick to the facts.

"Alright, now how about you, zebra in green." Judy said, picking out another random member of the press.

"Stan Yipes, Channel Nine news, so how can we be sure we're safe? If all it takes for a predator to attack is a little flower how can we trust them?"

"Well Mr. Yipes like I said before, my uncle went crazy because he ate one. So we know prey are affected as well-"

"Did he recover?" The Zebra asked, cutting off Judy before she could finish.

"Well, yes he did, after a few hours he returned to normal-"

"But the preds that have gone savage are still savage, clearly that means they're more dangerous, like you said before their savage ways were how they survived, they probably slip back into it easier." An unknown voice shouted from the back causing an explosion of protest from the few predator reporters in the crowd.

"Listen, excuse me, LISTEN UP!" Judy shouted, getting the crowed to quiet down and all eyes to look at her again.

"Let me correct a few things. First the reason why the predators have stayed savage, is because the flower's properties were altered in a lab, and our scientist are already working on a cure. Secondly, when I said all that stuff about biology it was baseless and wrong. I got overwhelmed and started saying things without having any idea how they would affect others, and I apologize for that. I know it isn't worth much, but I want to set the record straight and admit my mistake. I never should have said those things and I'm sorry."

"So what?" a grey wolf reporter said, causing silence to once again fall over the reporters.

"Excuse me?" Judy asked, confused as to what the wolf was asking.
"I don't think I will, my name is Jenna Proudfoot from the Pack Broadcasting Channel and I want to know who you think you are? You just stroll in here and just try and apologize for helping to tear this city apart? Do you know how much predators suffered because of what you said that day? How do you think it felt having to fear for your life or the life of you kits, or having to hear about a friend being kicked out of his apartment because his neighbors were too scared to live near him? Or seeing the look of fear on the faces of prey mammals as you walk by them on the street. Do you think just because you solved the case and apologized, that all the wrong you did just goes away? Because I have some news for you it doesn't. So what do you have to say to all the people whose lives were made harder or who lived in fear because of the things you said."

Judy was stunned. She had nothing to say because deep in her heart she agreed with the wolf in front of her. As Judy stood there listening to a new chorus build from the crowd she found that she couldn't say a single word to defend herself.

"Yeah!"

"She's right!"

"What do you have to say for yourself?"

As the reporters began yelling, demanding an answer from Judy and the lightbulbs from the camera flashed Judy had no words to say and resigned herself to just taking the oncoming abuse she felt she deserved.

Nick had stayed quiet as the questions rolled in, the reporters had ignored him just like he knew they were going to and he was fine with that. As Judy answered question after question with ease Nick felt she was doing great without him, but as soon as Jenna started her rant Nick knew Judy was in trouble, and as Judy stood shell shocked, Nick decided, despite his better judgement, to step in.

"Alright have you all gotten it out of your system?" Nick asked, raising his voice slightly as he addressed the crowd.

"Nobody's talking to you Fox. We want Officer Hopps to answer for her mistakes." one beaver reporter said, viciously.

"What exactly do you think she's done wrong?" Nick asked calmly, ignoring the confrontational tone the beaver had taken.

"She's the reason tensions between predator and prey are so bad." Jenna said, taking her gaze off of Judy and turning to face Nick.

"Oh really, so you mean to tell me that this city has never had a problem between predator and prey and that Officer Hopps is the only reason the tension between the two groups is currently on the rise?"

"Well no… but because of her comments prey mammals started to fear and persecute us predators."

"Fair point. I'll give it to you that. What Officer Hopps said certainly didn't help the situation and probably even added some fuel to that fire. But she by no means started it. I think we are all smart enough to realize that even if she hadn't said anything, eventually one of our esteemed media outlets would have come to the same conclusion anyway. The outcome would have remained the same, But despite knowing that you all would still probably attack her for it, Officer Hopps knew that might happen, but came up here and tried to apologize for her actions anyway. How many of you could do the same? Come up on live TV, in front of hostile reporters, and admit you were wrong to hundreds
of thousands of mammals? Now I'm going to ask all of you here one more question, where would we be if Officer Hopps hadn't been here? You are all so quick to blame her for what she did wrong, but not once have I heard a thank you to the mammal who singlepawedly figured out the cause of the savage attacks and risked her life to put a stop to it."

Now it was the medias turn to be stunned silent, none of them knew what to say but after a few moments of eerie quiet Jenna finally spoke up again.

"Thank you, Officer Hopps, while you said some awful things that caused a lot of mammas a lot of grief, I do have to agree with the fox that you deserve some praise for fixing your mistake and for having the courage to come up and admit you were wrong. While I may still be angry at what you said, and the effects it had, I can't let that stop me from acknowledging what you did for the city."

As the crowd of reporters all mumbled they're thanks to Judy. Nick stepped back allowing her to take the stage once more.

"Mrs. Proudfoot, I feel like I need to respond to your comments about my mistakes, and what I need to say to you and everyone here is that I agree with you. And even though I don't know your pain, or what you went through, I do sincerely apologize for the things I said. While I appreciate your thanks, I was just doing my job and there is someone who deserves the thanks a lot more than I do," Judy said as she paused and gestured towards Nick.

"Mr. Nick Wilde. The mammal that was with me, throughout the entire process. Who saved the evidence, and even my life. Without any reason to do so, Mr. Wilde threw himself into an astounding amount of danger, to help this city even though it was not his job, so if anyone deserves thanks it's him."

As Judy finished she waited for someone, anyone to thank Nick for his actions and after a few moments of silence Judy had almost given up hope when Jenna Proudfoot spoke up again.

"Thank you too then, Mr. Wilde. Zootopia owes you and Officer Hopps more than we could imagine." Jenna then nudged her camera mammal to get a few shots of Nick as well.

The rest of the group stayed mostly silent, only a few half-hearted "Thank you's" were thrown out as Nick and Judy left the podium and Christian took the stage.

"Thank you again to Mr. Nick Wilde and Officer Judy Hopps, like Mrs. Proudfoot said the city owes you two a great debt which we will one day repay. Now as the acting Mayor of Zootopia, I have a few things I need to say and then I'll turn it over to you for questions…"

"Good job up their Carrots, even if it got a little hairy at the end, you still did well." Nick said consolingly as he they walked away from the stage.

"Thanks Nick, but if you hadn't been there it would have been a disaster. You're always getting me out of trouble."

"Nah, you would have figured it out yourself. I just stepped in and sped up the process a bit." Nick said, trying to play off Judy's gratitude.

"Nick." Judy said sternly as she stopped walking and grabbed Nick's tie, pulling him down to eye level, "You have a bad habit of trying to downplay your achievements and I'm not gonna let it slide anymore. If you hadn't been with me I would have stayed frozen on that stage. Because of you I was able to apologize and even start to make things better, so thank you for stepping in for me." Judy said sincerely
"Ahem, well I don't really think I did anything praise-worthy, but thanks for the appreciation I guess." Nick said, tugging at his collar a bit trying to loosen up the tightness in his throat, to no avail.

"Heeeeyyy guuuuuuyyyyyssss," Clawhauser said, calling out to Nick and Judy, cutting their conversation short.

"You aren't getting out of this that easy Nick." Judy muttered under her breath as Clawhauser approached.

"I know." Nick whispered back before turning to Clawhauser, "Hey Clawhauser how's it going?"

"Call me Ben, Nick. I told you last time, didn't I. I'm not doing bad, I was just watching you two up on stage, and let me just say you did great, both of you, despite the trouble at the end, I came over for a different reason though, I remembered that you never filled out your medical and payment forms. You need both of them filled out and filed before you go to the academy." Clawhauser said, handing Nick two packets of paper.

"Sorry Ben, I forgot, and thanks. I'll have those filled out as soon as possible but I think Carrots and I are going to head out before those reporters decide to swarm us again." Nick said

"Oh you better get out of here then. But we should all hang out before you leave." Clawhauser said happily waving the two off, but as Ben watched the two walk off together he couldn't stop himself from squealing slightly.

"Those two seem so good together, and whether or not they notice it or not they are definitely walking, talking, acting, and definitely smelling a lot closer than "Just Friends." After today's press conference, I know for a fact more people are going to get in on this betting pool."

As the two walked out the precinct doors into the light of the day Clawhauser happily went back to writing out the current bets about the two's relationship.

**The Wilde and Hopps Pool**

Delgato, Trunkably, Stripes, not dating ever – 100 Zollars each

Wolfard, Grizzoli, currently dating – 100 Zollars each

Fangmeyer, Higgins, Not YET dating, - 100 Zollars Each

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

Lastly go listen to
Everybody's Fool by Evanescence

It's a great song
Chapter 13 – Houses Hunted

Chapter Summary

The hunt for an apartment is on, will Nick and Judy find a place? will there be more then just that one plot line? Will I stop asking questions in the summery and just let you read the story?

Get reading and find out.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone I AM ALIVE, the story continues, and welcome to Chapter 13!

I know it's been a while and I'm sorry about that, I was having a hard time finding inspirations for this chapter and with my life getting in the way I just kinda stopped writing for a bit. I'm hoping to get one more chapter out soon before I move across the country for work and then depending on my work schedule I should be able to post a bit more regularly, once again I'm really sorry about the long wait and I hope you've all been well.

I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails

and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

Lastly as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: I've started my own group dedicated to stealing the rights to Zootopia so until LakesideMiners, Anteroinen, and I actually pull off the heist to get the rights to Zootopia I still own nothing except the plot lines that I've made up

Chapter 13 – Houses Hunted

Grove Park, downtown Savanna Central, Monday Morning 5:30am

The sun was up and already shining bright, casting its light through the leaves of the trees creating shadows that seemed to dance with only the prompting of a light breeze. As Nick ran down the pathway he thought to himself, looks like it's going to be a nice day. As he continued on his run Nick
noticed that while he was still struggling to finish his workouts, he was clearly doing better than his first day. *It's only been a week but I am improving, it's only a little bit but it's better than nothing.* Nick began to think about how much change last week had brought, not just for him personally, but for the city as well. Nick was not only getting in better shape, but he was also not on the streets anymore, and even had a job lined up. As for the city, since no more mammals had gone savage, and the public had been given an explanation, the tension that had been at its breaking point was slowly dissipating. *Things are definitely looking up. Now I better finish up this run now, because today's the day Judy and I go apartment hunting.* Feeling motivated, Nick pushed himself further and further and soon enough he was back at the clearing where Judy was waiting for him.

"Wow Slick, 27 minutes and 36 seconds, that a new record," Judy said impressed as she looked at her phones stopwatch.

"Thanks Carrots, I think I could have gone faster too, but I didn't want to burn myself out." Nick said in between breaths as he jogged over to Judy.

"Yeah, I feel that way sometimes too. But even if you could've done better you've still improved a lot since your first day." Judy said, as she tossed Nick his water bottle.

Nick grabbed the bottle out of the air and greedily downed half of it.

"You really don't appreciate water as much as you do after a workout." Nick said breathlessly, as he began his cooldown stretches.

"For sure." Judy agreed as she just sat and waited for Nick to finish so they could get going.

After Nick finished his stretches and grabbed his stuff and they headed back to the apartment. Once in the apartment Nick grabbed his shower stuff and headed straight for the door.

"Nick, make this shower a quick one will you. We have to be at the first apartment for the walkthrough by 7." Judy said over her shoulder as she hurriedly typed the apartments address in Zoogle Maps.

"Alright I will." Nick said, as he shut the door and began his walk to the showers.

Nick hurriedly made his way to the showers, managing to grab a free one as a grumpy looking oryx was leaving the stall.

As Nick jumped into the shower and started washing the sweat out of his fur his thoughts expectedly jumped to the apartment hunting. How would it go? Would they find a place within his fifteen attempts limit? While trying to think positively about the day ahead a negative nay-saying voice found its way into Nick's head like it always eventually did.

"You're gonna fail. You're gonna fail. Nobody's going to rent an apartment to a shady, untrustworthy fox like you. Especially not when you're trying to room with a sweet, innocent, young bunny like her." Cyn-Nick taunted as Nick began lathering up with his fur shampoo.

"That's not true. Everything will be fine. We'll find a great place at a decent price, and me being a fox won't be a problem." Nick said semi-confidently, trying his best to remain positive.

"You don't really think that." Cyn-Nick said bluntly.

"Yes I do," Nick said, trying to come across firmly but failing.

"Oh yeah, then why am I here? Why do I exist in your head? Whose thoughts do you think I
"am?" Cyn-Nick asked relentlessly.

"Ugh-"

"I exist because of you," Cyn-Nick explained cutting off Nick's attempted rebuttal.

"Everything I say is a thought you have, even if you try and deny it or change it. The fact remains that your negative world view and thoughts created me and keep me going. So, you can try and be positive all you want, but you're still as Cyn-Nical as ever and I'm the proof."

Nick just stood under the cascading water for a moment letting it wash the suds out of his fur as his inner voice's words sank in,

"I haven't changed at all?" Nick asked quietly his voice barely reaching his own ears.

"Don't listen to that guy. You're definitely changing for the better." Optimism said encouragingly

That cynical old fool might exist in your mind but so does Optimism, Logic and so much more, and while you may be more cynical than most, you've definitely began to change that. Hell, you have appointments to find an apartment with... ahh... A friend... the old you never would have done that. Optimism continued

"Yeah but is it enough? If things go wrong today will I be able to keep up a positive attitude?" Nick asked himself seriously.

For the first time in a long time the voices in Nick's head were quiet, and Nick finished up his shower in a contemplative silence. As he walked back to the apartment Nick's stomach was working itself into knots as he worried over what the coming day would have in store.

The Den Apartment Complex, Savannah Central, Monday Morning, 7am

A Seven story, recently built, luxurious and welcoming community, and all for a reasonable price. That was the advertisement for The Den apartment complex, and as Nick and Judy entered the lobby they were amazed at how nice it all looked. The reception desk was a rich polished mahogany and the carpet was so soft Nick almost wanted to lay down and sleep on it. The lobby had various sized couches and tables that were suitable for medium and large sized mammals scattered about. As Nick and Judy walked up to the receptionist who was a white-tailed deer that appeared to be in her early thirties, she was wearing a white button up shirt with a black blazer and a black pencil skirt, and her hair was put up in a neat bun, the deer's whole look screamed "I'm a stuck up Professional who takes my job too seriously." As they neared, Nick could see the look of confusion and distrust on the young deer's face, only for it to melt away and be replaced by a friendly smile as Judy approached.

"Hello, welcome to The Den, Zootopia's premier luxury apartments, my name is Sarah, how can I help you today?" Sarah asked, keeping her voice professional and enthusiastic.

"Hi Sarah, I'm Judy Hopps, I have an appointment to tour one of your apartments with my roommate today."

"Judy Hopps... Ah, I have you right here, you're looking at one of our medium mammal sized apartments correct? Do you want to get started now or wait until your roommate gets here?"

"Yes, I'm touring a medium sized apartment, and my roommate is already right here." Judy said grabbing Nick's arm and pulling him to her side without hesitation.

Sarah was shocked and a little uneasy, but she managed to maintain her smile and lead Nick and
Judy to the elevator.

As they rode the elevator up to the fourth floor Sarah went over some general information.

"The apartment's come fully furnished, with utilities included the price is 2,500 Zollars a month, internet and cable are separate and are up to you if you want to get them,"

After reaching the apartment Sarah wasted no time rushing Nick and Judy inside.

"I'll let you two check out the apartment yourselves, if you have any questions feel free to ask." Sarah said as she stepped to the side to allow Nick and Judy into the apartment.

As Nick took his time walking through the apartment he was checking for any signs of mold, mildew, rusty pipes, frayed wiring, or any other potential issues he could see, Judy was more interested at looking at the living spaces.

To the right of the entrance was the kitchen, a small space having only the essential fridge, oven, and a small pantry in the corner, with a connected breakfast bar and chairs. Further in was a spacious living room with balcony access. Seeing the balcony Judy quickly grabbed Nicks arm and lead him out to the balcony.

"Look at this view, Nick." Judy said giddily

The balcony had a great view of the neighborhood; sitting above most of the surrounding buildings gave the apartment a prefect view of the skyline and even allowing one to see the waterline.

"It certainly is something Fluff. I never thought of having a place with a view." Nick said as he stared out into the city seeming to be lost in thought.

"Are you alrig-" Judy started to ask before being cut off by a ringing phone.

Judy watched as the ringing snapped Nick back to reality. He then reached into his pocket he pulled out his phone and checked the number.

"Hmmmm, I don't recognize the number, and its area code it isn't from anywhere in Zootopia." Nick said seeing the curios look on Judy's face.

"You don't mind if I answer it do you? It maybe something important." Nick asked

"Go ahead Nick, I'm not going anywhere." Judy said casually.

"Yellow?" Nick said as he answered the phone, shooting a smirk at Judy.

…..

"This is him,"

…..…..…..…..

The smile on Nick's face vanished as his eyes went wide, causing his face to take on an expression that was an odd mix of shock, terror, and nervousness. Not saying another word Nick quickly hung up the phone and shoved it back in his pocket.

Worried by Nick's sudden and dramatic shift in expression Judy reached out to Nick and put a paw on his arm.
"Nick, is everything alright?" Judy asked quietly.

Nick, hearing the concern in Judy's voice quickly regained his composure.

"Everything's fine. Nothing to worry about." Nick said, deciding it was best to just keep the phone call's contents to himself.

"Are you sure Nick, because judging from your expression a minute ago I'd say that you're worried about something. You know you can tell me anything, right?" Judy said, giving Nick's arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Trust m-" Nick began before cutting himself off.

Do I really want to lie to her again? Do I even need to? If I want to be different and change for the better, then I need to actually do something differently. Nick thought to himself bitterly as his phone began buzzing again.

Turning to look at Judy Nick took a moment to wait for the phone to stop going off, and as the buzzing finally stopped Nick found himself looking deep into Judy's vibrant concern filled eyes.

"I know I can trust you, and I do want to tell you Judy, but not right now. I'm not really looking to have the discussion that will follow after I explain everything. And now probably isn't the best time or place for it." Nick said, holding Judy's gaze, trying to show her just how serious he was.

"Just tell me one thing Nick, are you safe? Because if someone's coming after you, I need to know so I can protect you"

Nick was taken aback. Not only was Judy completely fine with waiting for him to tell her on his terms, but her only concern was whether or not he was in danger. Not so that she could leave him and save herself, but so she could help keep him safe.

Nick couldn't hold in his laughter, he was just to relieved, impressed, and happy, to contain it, and as he wiped a stray tear from his eye all he could think was, that is just so like her, when will I learn?

"Nick?" Judy said cautiously, wondering why he had suddenly broke into laughter.

"It's nothing Fluff, I promise you I'm in no danger, the mammal on the other end of the phone probably wants to give me a good scolding, maybe some harsh words, and possibly a smack or two, all of which I might deserve, but that's it"

Judy let out a sigh of relief, "That's good. Now let's talk about the apartment. We've seen all the rooms; the price isn't bad, and it's only a short bus ride to the station. I don't have any complaints about it, but what do you think?"

"I like it Fluff, there doesn't seem to be any problems with mold or rusty piping, the apartment isn't huge, but we don't really need it to be, it comes furnished so we don't have to go looking for stuff which is nice, and I do like the view."

"Perfect! Let's get it then, found a place on the first try!" Judy said enthusiastically

Before Nick could say anything back his phone started ringing again, looking and seeing the same number Nick sighed.

"I'm just gonna shut off my phone for now, because the mammal who's calling won't be giving up anytime soon." Nick said as he hit the ignore call button, and then proceeded to do just that.
"If that's what you think is best." Judy said acceptingly.

"I do. Anyway, back to the apartment, I agree, we might as well, why should we bother spending time looking at a bunch of other places if we like this one." Nick said as he followed Judy back into the apartment.

"Hey Sarah, Nick and I really like the place, how long do you think it will take to get all the paperwork done so we can move in?" Judy asked she stepped back into the living room

"I'm happy to hear you like the apartment, follow me down to the lobby and we can fill out the paperwork." Sarah said pleasantly, but as Nick and Judy walked by both of them missed the quick flash of unease that came and went from Sarah's face.

Judy asked a few more questions on the way back to the lobby and Sarah answered diligently if not a bit unenthusiastically. Once back in the lobby Sarah produced two tenant application forms and handed one to Nick and one to Judy.

"Now before we can do anything else I'll need you both to fill these out."

So, Nick and Judy went to work on filling out the forms, after a few minutes Judy had easily finished her form.

"Pretty standard stuff. Right Nick?" Judy asked casually, but as Judy turned and looked at Nick she saw how baffled he was.

"What's wrong Nick?"

"I have no idea how to answer this" Nick replied honestly as he scratched his head.

"What do you mean? The questions are pretty straight forward, it's not like they're asking you to explain quantum physics or anything." Judy joked, trying to get a chuckle out of the seemingly stressed fox.

"Judy, I have no way to answer some of these questions, the last "former residence" I had, was with my parents, which I neither owned or payed rent for, and I don't have any proof of income or employment, since until I start the academy the ZPD doesn't technically employ me, and everything else I did before was off the books and cash only, and to top it off I have no credit history at all since I don't trust banks and they don't trust me." Nick said exasperated as he threw his paws up in the air.

"Nick, just answer what you can, and we'll deal with the rest as it comes up," Judy said reassuringly.

After taking a second to calm down Nick finished up his application and they both returned to the front desk.

"Here are the applications. So, when should we expect to hear back about the apartment?" Judy asked as she handed the papers to Sarah

"I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for a call," Sarah said, her tone shifting from her previously cheerful to something meaner and more hostile.

"Excuse me?" Judy asked, clearly confused by the sudden change.

"I said, you shouldn't hold your breath, while I can't refuse you if you want to take a tour or fill out an application I can deny your application after I have it, and for a shifty pair like you two, nobody would blame me." Sarah said, pushing the applications to the side without even looking at them.
"You can't deny us without even looking at the applications." Judy argued.

Sarah was quiet for a moment and as Judy stared her down Sarah decided she might as well prove a point to the naive bunny standing before her.

"All right Bunny, I'll take a look at your applications, but I promise you the result won't change." Sarah then grabbed the two applications she had set aside and quickly skimmed through them both.

"Denied,"

"What! Why?" Judy asked angrily.

"I'm not required to give you a reason, but I'll do you a favor and explain exactly why I, nor any other respectable landlord will accept your applications."

Sarah was now smiling madly; a few stray hairs had shifted from her previously perfect bun and found their way to the front her face, giving her the look of a madmammal as she pointed a hoof at Nick.

"That right, there is your problem. Even if his application was impeccable, a landlord will find a way to deny him if they look hard enough. But I didn't even need to find a reason when he gave me so many already. Nicolas Wilde, no former residence, no credit whatsoever, no proof of employment or income, and as far as I'm concerned no trustworthy recommendations since after over hearing your conversations on the balcony I can reasonably assume that he's into some shady business, so I'm definitely within my rights to deny you both." Sarah said, her tone haughty and malicious.

"How dare you!" Judy said angrily, but before she could tear into the disrespectful deer in front of her, she felt a paw set itself gently on her shoulder.

"Don't try and stop me Nick. She has no right to do this." Judy said, not even turning to look at Nick, content to continue staring down the receptionist.

"Judy," Nick said, his voice was calm, steady, and just a bit sad, which caused Judy to look back at him.

The resignation in Nick's eyes and the look of, "I knew this was gonna happen." almost broke Judy on the spot, and she had to hold back the urge to pull the sad fox in front of her into a hug so warm and comforting, that he'd never look that sad again.

"She has every right to not rent to us if she wants to, we can't force people like her to change. Let's just move on to the next place alright?" Nick said maintaining his calm exterior.

"It's not alright Nick. But if you want to go look at another place that's fine, I don't think this place is right for us anyway." Judy agreed, taking Nick's arm and leading him out the door.

"No matter where you go, as long as you're with that fox, nowhere will be right for you." Sarah said mockingly as the pair left the lobby.

"Let's move on to the next apartment building, I'm sure we'll have better luck there." Judy said optimistically as they exited the lobby and started walking down the street.

"Yeah, I'm sure we will." Nick agreed, trying to stay optimistic.

But, as if Sarah's words were a curse following them, Nick and Judy found that every place they tried denied them. Some were nicer about it explaining that renting to Nick was just too risky, while
some actively showed their contempt for Nick and to a lesser extent Judy and kicked them out right after showing them an apartment. One landlord even pulled Judy aside and asked if Nick was threatening her or forcing her in some way which Judy quickly denied. But the landlord wouldn't let up, insisting that Nick must be holding something over her. This eventually caused Judy to go off on a tirade so loud Nick could hear it from the other room. Needless to say they didn't get that apartment either. So as the daylight faded, and the cold night began Nick and Judy decided to take a break and get some dinner.

Random Pizza Joint, Savannah Central, Monday evening 7:30pm

Nick and Judy sat in silence, neither of them wanted to bring up how disastrous the day had been. Not only had they not found a place, but they had just reached the agreed upon number. Judy was in shock. *How could fifteen separate places reject us, does nobody have any decency?* She asked herself, and as she stared listlessly at her slice of veggie pizza she wondered how she could convince Nick to at least stay in her apartment instead of moving back under the bridge.

Nick on the other paw was scrolling through post on Craigslist hoping to find an apartment for Judy. *Even if I can't find a decent place to live, that doesn't mean Judy should be stuck in that shoebox,* Nick thought angrily as he continued checking the available listings.

"You know, she would have no trouble finding a place without you." Cyn-Nick said mockingly

"And that last failure makes fifteen so according to the bet you made with her, you're going back to the box under the bridge." Cyn-Nick continued, his tone mocking and oozing with "I told you so".

"I don't need reminding. I know full well that she's better off without me." Nick thought back.

"Don't give up now, you could still find a place," Optimism said, trying to keep Nick positive.

"You've already failed. Why torment yourself? Being positive doesn't suit you anyway." Cyn-Nick said

"I wanted to change. I wanted to be better. Was it really worthless? Was it really so wrong for me to want something more?" Nick asked himself sadly.

"You can still change." Optimism said weakly, trying desperately to keep Nick's spirits up

Nick paused for a moment as he remembered something his dad once said to him when he was only a kit.

"Anyone can change if they want to, and it starts by pushing forward. Take the limit you set for yourself and take a step past it. Only by going further than you thought you could, can you really begin to grow."

"Well I trust Judy, and I trust my dad’s advice, so I guess I'll give it a couple more tries." Nick thought to himself firmly, leaving no room for any other voices to chime in.

A few minutes later, Nick and Judy decided to head out, neither of them having been able to eat much. Walking down the side walk Nick could see Judy wanted to say something to him, the way she was nervously wringing her paws and glancing over at him sporadically, was a dead giveaway.

"Hey Carrots." Nick said finally breaking the silence.

"Yes Nick?"
"So, that last place we visited, what number was it?" Nick asked, already knowing the answer.

"It was number fifteen," Judy said, voice low and full of sadness.

"Well, we both know that was the number we agreed to stop at, right?"

"Nick can't we just," Judy started to say before Nick cut her off.

"Judy, you know we made a deal, and I'm sure you'd have a much easier time finding a place without me… But I was thinking that we could keep looking together a little longer… If you're ok with that… If not, I completely understand…" Nick said casually, as he tried to ignore the hammering of his heart.

Nick waited for a reply. He had been looking up at the night sky when he spoke, since he had decided not to look at Judy because he was afraid she'd see right through his carefree act, and he didn't want his feelings to get in the way of her choice. But as the silence ran longer and longer that Nick started to get worried. But just as he tilted his head back down to look at Judy, he was nearly toppled over again by a forceful bunny hug. This hug was no normal one though, Judy had been so overcome with happiness and other lesser known feelings that she had jumped up and latched her arms around Nick's neck and buried her face in his shoulder.

Nick was shocked at the intensity of the hug and the sudden weight he now carried, his arm's now suddenly full of bunny. Despite his usual feelings about hugs and his stance on keeping personal space, Nick decided to make an exception and brought his arms around and returned Judy's hug with one of his own.

After a few moments Nick felt Judy release her grip around his neck, so he slowly set her down on the sidewalk.

"So, can I take that as a yes then?" Nick asked jokingly

"Yes, yes you can." Judy said as a huge smile found its way onto her face.

"Alright then, if you feel like you have at least one more attempt in you today, I did find a couple places on Craigslist one of them we can even check out right now." Nick said, deciding to change the subject as he turned away to hide the emotion showing through his mask.

"Hey, Nick." Judy called out getting Nick to face her once more.

"Thank you, I know we had a deal, and I know it's hard to be positive especially after today, but I can't tell you how much it means to me that you're willing to keep trying."

"Your welcome, but it's not that big a deal Fluff. Now let's get going we got places to see and an apartment to rent," Nick said shrugging off the compliment as he continued walking down the street.

113 Bushwillow Road, Savannah Central, Monday Night 8:15pm

113 Bushwillow Road was a three-story complex made of red brick and had concrete stairs leading up to the front door. The neighborhood, and the building specifically seemed well taken care of with a few potted flowers growing here and there, very little trash on the sidewalk, no broken windows in sight, and best of all a bus stop right on the corner.

"Nick, are you sure it's ok to be checking out an apartment this late?" Judy asked as they walked over to the building they were looking for.
"Yeah it's fine, I texted the owner before we headed out. He works third shift so he's up and about around this time. Probably getting ready for work in around an hour or two, but he's definitely expecting us." Nick said, showing Judy the texts on his phone as proof.

"I see, then let's get this started." Judy said enthusiastically as she walked up and rang the doorbell.

"Give me a second," a voice called out from the other side of the door.

A minute later the door opened and a mid to late twenty-year-old Leopard in jeans and a simple black T-shirt stepped out.

"Good evening, what can I do for you two?" the Leopard asked politely as he got a good look at the pair in front of him.

"Good evening, we're here to check out the apartment for rent, we spoke through text briefly, I'm Nick Wilde, and this is my friend and future roommate Judy Hopps." Nick said, deciding to lay it all out in the open from the start.

"Ah yes, I remember. Welcome, I'm James Pardus the owner and also a resident of this building, the apartment I have for rent is actually the basement of the building so if you'll hold on for just a moment I'll go grab the keys and I can show you around."

James quickly ran inside and grabbed and the apartment keys before heading back outside.

"Now if you two will follow me your apartment has its own entrance to it over here," James explained as he lead Nick and Judy to a partially hidden staircase that lead down a few feet to a door with a welcome mat in front of it.

"Now this basement was recently redone, so all the walls, carpeting, hardwood, and tiles are new. The appliances in the kitchen are a little old but they work, feel free to test them out if you don't believe me." James said, as he opened the door and turned on the lights.

Nick and Judy were amazed as they stepped inside. The apartment was huge and had a lot of open space. The kitchen was tucked into the corner with a breakfast bar, pantry and even an actual dinner table that could seat six medium sized mammals easily. The living room had a coffee table, large couch that a lion could lay down on and be comfortable with and an empty T.V stand.

"It's not completely furnished and it's a little simple, I just threw in what I had in storage, so you can feel free to buy stuff and I'll put what I provided back in storage," James explained as Nick and Judy walked around

"No T.V either, I didn't have the money to buy one yet, but there is a cable and internet hookup for you guys if and when you decide to get a T.V and or Wi-Fi. Now over here is the bathroom, it comes complete with a shower and a fur dryer"

As James continued taking Judy along showing her the bedrooms and the in-suit washer and dryer Nick took the time to check the piping and other possible problem areas just like he had done at every apartment they had looked at. Without Nick noticing it however, James had crept up behind him and just watched as Nick ran through his inspection of the kitchen.

"Everything looks alright, at least." Nick said to himself as he stood up and turned around, bringing him face to stomach with James who had a warm smile on his face.

"Checking out the intricacies of the apartment before buying I see. Smart move there, Mr. Wilde."
"Ughh, yeah, I just want to make sure I'm not getting a place full of problems… Not that I don't trust you or anything." Nick said sheepishly

"Don't worry about it Mr. Wilde. I completely understand why you'd want to check everything out, but you should really stick with your friend there, because from the looks of it she doesn't know about what you're doing. Maybe you should show her what to look for too."

"You've got a point there, Mr. Pardus."

"Please, call me James." James said, trying to be friendly

"Alright James, feel free to call me Nick then,"

"Sounds like a plan Nick, now follow me and I'll show you the bedrooms." James said as he led Nick over to where Judy was.

The bedrooms were placed next to each other and were pretty plain as far as rooms went, both identical with wolf sized furniture they had beds with sheets, a blanket and a pillow, a dresser, a nightstand, and a closet.

"This place is pretty nice, and these bedrooms are just as big as my apartment! Isn't that crazy Nick?"

"Having seen your shoebox, yes I can believe it. But just because a place looks nice doesn't necessarily mean it is. Remember how at every apartment I would inspect things on my own?"

"Yeah I remember that, I figured you knew what you were doing so I just let you be,"

"Well, I do happen to know a thing or two. Do you wanna learn?" Nick asked hesitantly.

"Sure!" Judy replied instantly as another smile found its way onto her face.

"Alright, first things first, let's check for termites and carpenter ants. Now the trick here is to first visually inspect the baseboard. Look for any holes in the wood, even small ones could mean something. After checking visually, you can also knock on the walls and baseboards, if they sound too hollow or you hear something crawling behind the walls then you have a problem." Nick explained before showing Judy the proper way to inspect and listen to the walls.

"Doing something simple like this can prevent a world of trouble, if a place has termites and you don't find out until you move in, your stuff can get damaged and you'll have to relocate while the problem gets taken care of, and depending on how bad the infestation was, the building could have to be condemned for an extended period of time." Nick said as he watched Judy practice what he had just shown her.

"That's crazy. Good thing you've been looking out for us." Judy said, suddenly grateful her first apartment had been a decent place despite its lack of space.

"Yep, now I already checked the couch, but we can look for bedbugs on the beds themselves." Nick said as he lifted the blankets and sheets, so he could see the bare mattress.

"Nick, isn't that a little rude. I don't think Mr. Pardus would give us dirty beds." Judy said, not wanting to upset their potential landlord.

"Don't worry about it Miss Hopps. I think everything Nick's showing you is important for a renter to know, and any respectable landlord should be perfectly ok with a tenant checking out everything
they can. If they get angry it could mean that they're trying to hide something." James said, casually.

"I see, as long as it's alright. Ok then Nick, what should I be looking for?" Judy asked, prompting Nick to continue.

"Well for bed bugs there are a few things you can find to indicate their presence. First if there are any rusty looking spots, those occur when bedbugs get crushed by the beds occupant so keep an eye out for that. Second is eggs, they're hard to spot since they are white and kind of translucent, you also might be able to spot the shells, they are yellowish in color and are shed when the bugs out grow them, and lastly any black dots, they will be smaller than a ball point pin end, the marks can bleed into the fabric like a marker would, these dots are caused by bedbug excrement." As Nick finished explaining, Judy started looking all over the mattress for any of the signs Nick had mentioned.

"Make sure to check the seams, that's where they like to hide, also we should check the springboard as well," Nick added as he kneeled next to Judy to help her inspect the bed.

After checking both rooms thoroughly Nick then showed Judy how to look for water damage in hardwood floors by checking for gaps in between the wood. Having checked everything out and finding nothing of note to worry about Nick and Judy excused themselves from James so they could talk about the apartment.

"So Nick, what do you think?" Judy asked, hoping Nick liked the place as much as she did.

"Honestly Carrots I love it, it's spacious, clean, the landlord seems like a decent mammal, and something just feels right about living underground like this, but I'm worried that the price might be too high, the ad didn't specify and for a place this size with everything it comes with we might be biting off more than we can chew especially while we wait for me to join the academy," Nick said, keeping it as realistic as possible.

"I know." Judy said sadly, "But we should still ask anyway. Who knows what he'll say."

As Nick and Judy walked back over to James they could see he was eagerly awaiting their decision as he bounced up and down slightly on his paws.

"So, what do you guys think?"

"We like it a lot, but how much are you looking for a month?" Judy asked, getting straight to the heart of the issue.

"Hhmmm, well not including utilities I'd say around 4000, but if you wanted to add utilities I could just start off at 4500 and have you cover any excessive usage if and when that comes up, how does that sound?" James asked

Judy's face and ears fell, she knew there was no way they could cover the first and last month's rent along with a security deposit that was required when renting a place. Judy had gotten her back pay from when she went on "leave" so she could cover the first month's rent and possibly the deposit but another 4500 on top of that was just too much.

James, seeing the now crestfallen bunny before him realized he probably wasn't going to be renting to these two seemingly very nice mammals.

"Mr. Pardus, thanks for everything and I'm sorry to have wasted your time, but there's no way we could cover the cost of first and last month's rent and whatever the security deposit will be," Judy said sadly.
"Let's go Nick. Sorry again for wasting your time Mr. Pardus." Judy said as she grabbed Nicks arm and pulled him towards the door, only to run forehead first into James's leg.

"Hold on there, Miss Hopps." James said frantically.

"Who said anything about all that, I'm only asking you to pay month to month I've always hated that whole "first and last month's rent up front" thing, so don't worry about it, as for the security deposit I'm only asking for 500 Zollars and I'll also need about 50 Zollars from each of you to perform a simple background check if that's alright."

"James, are sure that's all you want? You're already drastically underselling the value of the apartment. I don't want you to regret it later, plus aren't you going to ask for credit scores or proof of employment? We could be taking advantage of you and you wouldn't even know it." Nick said suddenly, not caring how it might affect their chances of getting the apartment.

"Yeah Nick, I'm sure. The fact you just said that, confirms it for me. You both seem like really good mammals, I thought so from the start, and I'd really like to rent the place to you. So, aside from the background check, which I have to do for insurance purposes, I've decided to accommodate you both as much as possible. Plus I trust you two and that's far more important to me than money. So as long as you pay me on time and keep the place intact we should be able to work through anything else that comes up." James said, a big smile on his face.

"Well then it would be rude of us not to accept. We'll take it." Judy said before Nick could say another word in protest.

"Perfect, it'll take a day or two to get the background check done but after that we can sign the papers, exchange some money and you both can move in," James said happily.

After exchanging numbers and saying their goodbyes Nick and Judy headed back to Judy's apartment, and although Judy was exhausted from the day's events there was still a few things on her mind that she wanted answers to.

"Hey Nick." Judy called out as they started walking down the street to the bus stop.

"Yeah Fluff. What's up?" Nick asked, already knowing she had at least one question on her mind from the tone of her voice.

"How did you know all those tricks back when we were looking at apartments, I mean how could you know what to look for when…" Judy trailed off, realizing what she was about to say.

"When I've been homeless for so long?" Nick said, completing her sentence.

"Sorry," Judy said quietly.

"Don't be, it's a fair question. As for the answer I learned it going through life the way I did,"

"What do you mean?" Judy asked, not seeing what Nick was talking about.

"Well, I learned about checking for bedbugs from mattress hunting in the dump with Finnick, I learned about the problems bad wiring and rusty pipes can cause from couch surfing and calling in favors in the winter time, As for termites and water damage, well when I couldn't call in anymore favors I'd find some abandoned houses to sleep in and when you're trying to keep your body warm and your mind busy you tend to notice random things, like how water affects floors or what termites sound like."
"I see, well as sad as that is to hear, I guess at least you learned some things out on the streets, and from now on you won't be on the streets anymore. So all's well that ends well." Judy said, trying to keep from getting too emotional.

"Exactly, now let me tell you about the time a pipe burst over the bed of this wolf whose house I was staying in soaking him in icy cold water, boy did that ever wake him up!" Nick said, feeling the mood could stand to be a bit lighter.

So as the two waited for the bus and eventually made their way home Nick and Judy swapped funny stories and just enjoyed each other's company.

**Judy's Apartment, Monday Night, 10:00pm**

Nick sat on the floor staring at his phone, the good mood from the ride home gone now. The phone hadn't rung since he had turned it back on a few hours after leaving The Den, in total he had 23 missed calls and 1 voicemail. As Nick stared at the unplayed voicemail, unsure if he even wanted to listen to it he felt a paw on his shoulder, wanting to shrug it off but deciding against it Nick turned to face the mammal he knew was waiting for some answers.

"Are you ready to talk about it?" Judy asked, not a hint of condescension or coercion in her voice.

"No, but I doubt I ever really would be no matter how long you gave me. So now's as good a time as any." Nick said, trying but failing to lighten his own sour mood.

"You don't have to, Nick,"

"I know I don't, but I said I was gonna start trusting you and confiding in you more and this is a part of that. Now I should hurry up and start talking before I come to my senses." Nick said, managing to get a chuckle from both Judy and himself.

"The person who called me this morning, and many times after that was my sister, Hannah." Nick explained.

"Why did you look so scared then?" Judy asked, curious as to why a call from a loved one, even if you hadn't spoken to them in a while, would inspire such a terrified expression.

"Because… while I told you it's been a while since we spoke I neglected to mention that I haven't spoken to her in at least 10 years." Nick said, turning away from Judy in shame.

"I ran away after my Mom died. Hannah and my brother Mike went to live with my Dad but they couldn't find me. After a while I got in contact with my Dad and lied to him, said I was fine and living with a friend. Since they couldn't really do much to make me come with them they left. After that, I made sure to avoid contact with them. I'd sometimes drop a quick call to my Dad to let him know I was alive, but other than that, no contact at all."

"Why Nick?" Judy asked, confused as to how anyone could go that long without talking to their family.

"I'm not sure, at first I was so focused on survival I didn't have the time or energy to try and reach out. Then after a few years when everything stabilized I was too embarrassed to try and reach out, and too used to not talking to or about them to feel bad about it. I ended up pushing them out of my mind for the most part. I've always kept tabs on them though. I know a few people who are close to them, so I know when something happens. Hence, why I was able to send my sister money every month, but besides that I have no connection with them at all."
Judy stayed silent and motioned for Nick to continue.

"Anyway, apparently they played a clip of the press conference on the news in Foxborough, the town where my sister and father live. Hannah heard my name and managed to track down my number somehow and now I don't know what to do,"

Judy sat there for a moment trying to process it all. Not only had Nick been living on the streets but he cut himself off from his own family, and now that family was reaching out to him and he was scared and didn't know what to do.

"Nick." Judy said starting slowly, making sure to pick her words carefully.

"I know I don't really have any experience in this particular situation, but I think you should try and reach out to your sister. Not right away though, but when you're ready, you should call her, even meet with her eventually. I think it would be good for both of you."

"But what if she hates me Fluff, I wouldn't blame her, since in her view, I stepped out of their life without caring what happened to them."

"Nick, I don't think she'll hate you, and I'm sure once you listen to that voicemail you'll see she just wants to reconnect, but, even if she does, even if that message is just her cursing your name, I'll still be here for you, I told you once and I'll tell you again, you're stuck with me, cus I'm not gonna abandon you."

"Thanks Judy." Nick said softly as he lifted his head and gave Judy an honest smile.

Judy's heart promptly skipped a beat at the use of her name, then instantly melted because the look Nick was giving her. So with her throat now getting tighter, Judy quickly choked out a "Anytime Nick." and then excused herself to the bathroom.

Sitting alone in the apartment Nick contemplated what Judy had said, Judy's right, I'm sure Hanna's not gonna curse me out, and even if that's all the message is, it's not like I haven't called myself worse things for not calling them.

"Well then, here goes nothing," Nick said softly as he pressed the play button

"Nick...Nick, its Hannah, I know it's you now, so please just call me back. Alright? I won't say I'm not angry with you, but I still want to talk to you, so when you're ready, give me a call. We've got a lot to talk about."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

Lastly go listen to

Time of Dying by Three Days Grace

It's a great song
Chapter 14 Moving in and Heading out

Chapter Summary

Moving in to a new place, and moving forward in ones life, changes are happening even if our due is not really ready for them.

What are you doing still looking at the summary? Get Reading!!

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 14, the longest chapter so far and also the chapter that pushes me over 100k words so in recognition of the occasion I figured I’d post the story stat’s again.

User Subscriptions:10 Kudos:151 Comment Threads:56 Bookmarks:34
Subscriptions:89 Hits:4300

Never thought I'd get this far or this many people would wanna follow along with me so thanks to you all for that.

Also the cross country move was successful and I've jumped right into work once again.

I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails

and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

Also I'm sure people wanted to see the talk between Nick and his sister this chapter but I regret to inform you that it won't be in this chapter, I promise it will happen just need to wait for the proper time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: While crossing the country I found no signs of where the rights to Zootopia might be located so the search continues. Until the day I pull off my heist I'll have to keep saying "I don't own Zootopia or it's characters, that is owned by Disney," I think I can claim ownership over my O.C's but that's about it.
Chapter 14 – Moving in and Heading out

Judy's Apartment, Savannah Central, Thursday Morning, 10:30am

_I can't believe the day is finally here, the last few days moved so quickly I can't believe I'm already moving out_, Judy thought to herself as she packed the last of her stuff up in a box. Judy was still surprised at how quickly James had gotten everything together, not only had he obtained and looked over the background checks, which had both come back clean, but he had also had written up a contract and even set up the payment schedule for the apartment in only two days. Now with the contract signed and the first month's rent paid Nick and Judy were all set to move in and couldn't do so fast enough.

But as excited as Judy was about moving into the new apartment she suddenly felt a pang of sadness at the prospect of leaving this place, _even if this place was small and overpriced, it still holds a lot of memories for me_, Judy thought to herself as she remembered how much had happened here. Sad memories like her first few miserable nights before the Missing Mammals case, and the lonely nights after her fight with Nick, the secrets shared between her and Nick along with all the fights and fun they had had over the past few weeks. So many memories and important moments had happened here.

"Finn just texted me, he says he's parked in front of the building but won't be helping us load up the van because "The fact that I'm driving you and all your junk is favor enough!" or so he says." Nick said drawing Judy from her thoughts.

"Oh, ah, alright then." Judy said distractedly.

"You alright Carrots? It's not like you to space out, that's usually my job." Nick asked, noticing something wasn't right with Judy.

"It's nothing Nick, I'm fine." Judy said attempting to pass it off.

"Come on Fluff, if I gotta be more open, then so do you." Nick joked.

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

"I know I am, but all jokes aside if somethings on your mind Fluff then I'm here to listen. I might not look like it, but I sometimes have good advice to give." Nick said hoping that Judy would give in and talk to him.

"Thanks Nick, but it's nothing really. I'm just a little sad that we're moving out of this place. I know it seems silly, but despite how comically bad this place is, I still have a lot of fond memories here, especially from the last few weeks. I never thought I'd have a hard time leaving this place. You know?" Judy asked as she looked up at Nick.

"Don't you worry Fluff. I promise we'll make a ton of new and better memories at this new place, alright?" Nick said as he ruffled Judy's ears playfully.

Judy laughed and ducked away from Nick's paw, "I guess if you promise then I have nothing to worry about."

"That's right. Now I better move my tail and start bringing stuff down to the van before Finn gets angry." Nick said, wiggling his tale a little before grabbing a few boxes and making his way down the hallway.

"I better help out too then." Judy said to herself as she quickly picked up a box and headed out the
door, only to walk directly into another mammal.

"Oi watch it!" Pronk said reflexively as he felt a bump against his leg.

"Oh it's you." Pronk said as he looked over to see who had walked into him.

"What's with the boxes?" Bucky asked, as he walked up next to Pronk.

"Clearly she's moving out." Pronk said curtly.

"Are you really Bunny?" Bucky asked.

"Yep, Nick and I found a bigger place for a good price, so I decided to move out of the shoebox." Judy said proudly as she set down the box in her paws.

"Moving in with your boyfriend a little fast, aren't you Bunny?" Pronk asked flatly.

"W-w-what are you talking about? Nick's not my boyfriend." Judy said defensively as she felt a rush of heat hit her face.

"There's no need to be embarrassed. Pronk's just being insensitive. There's nothing wrong with moving in with your boyfriend." Bucky said sympathetically.

"Nick's not my boyfriend, you guys." Judy said, deciding to ignore the blood currently rushing to her cheeks.

"Whatever you say Rabbit. But back to the point of you leaving, it'll be sad to see you go, so make sure to keep in touch. Maybe we can grab dinner or something every once in a while, even your, "not boyfriend," Nick can come too." Pronk said as he looked at his phone feigning disinterest in the whole situation.

"Sure, let me give you my number!" Judy said enthusiastically.

"Hey Fluff, you gonna help me or what." Nick said as he came up the stairs.

All three mammals turned to look at the new mammal joining the conversation.

"I TOLD YOU," Pronk shouted as he punched Bucky's arm.

"Oww! THERES NO NEED TO HIT ME!" Bucky shouted back, rubbing the now sore spot on his arm.

"What are you talking about?" Judy asked, as she turned towards the pair.

"Well Bunny, this idiot thought I was lying to him when I told him I ran into a fox after taking a shower." Pronk said smugly.

"I didn't say you were lying. I just said I hadn't heard anything about a fox moving in." Bucky said before turning to Judy, "So this, is your friend and new roommate?"

"Yeah. Bucky, Pronk, this is Nick Wilde, he's been staying with me for the past few weeks and now we were moving into a new place together." Judy said as Nick walked up to the group.

Bucky and Pronk exchanged a raised eyebrow glance at each other which went unnoticed by Nick and Judy.
"Nice to meet you Nick, I'm Bucky"

"And I'm Pronk,"

"It's nice to meet a friend, of Judy's." Bucky finished as he extended a hoof out in greeting,

"Nice to meet you both." Nick said quickly shaking both of their hooves.

"Now if you'll pardon me I've gotta keep moving boxes before a short mammal with an even shorter temper loses what little is left of his patience." Nick said as he headed back into the apartment to grab a few more boxes.

"Sorry about that Nick. I'll help you out." Judy said as she bent over and picked her box back up.

"I'm fine getting the boxes Carrots? You can keep talking to your friends."

"Are you sure Nick?" Judy asked, not wanting to force Nick to do all the work.

"I'm sure, plus I could use the extra exercise. Just don't take too long or Finn will come up here and get you himself, and that's not something anyone wants," Nick joked as he headed down the hallway.

"Alright Nick, thanks." Judy said watching him go for a moment before turning back to Bucky and Pronk.

So for the next couple of minutes Judy talked with Bucky and Pronk, exchanging phone numbers, making plans, and generally enjoying each other's company as Nick packed up the van. Finally, as the last box was packed Judy said her goodbyes to Buck and Pronk, once again promising to keep in touch every once and a while.

As Judy turned to follow Nick down the hallway she felt a hoof on her shoulder and she turned around to see Pronk kneeling in front of her.

"It looks like you found yourself a good one Bunny. Don't wait too long though, I almost missed my chance with Bucky because I wasn't honest with my feelings. If he hadn't stepped up who knows what would have happened, just something to keep in mind alright?" Pronk said quietly before standing up and walking away not giving Judy any time to respond.

Judy just stood there for a moment taking in what Pronk had said, but before she could dwell on it for very long she heard Nick's voice call out.

"Come on Fluff we better hurry. Finn's getting a little cranky"

"Alright Nick I'm coming," Judy said as she ran down the hall after him.

Nick and Judy's Apartment, Savannah Central, Thursday Afternoon 12:15pm

It only took a few minutes to bring everything from the van to the living room and as Judy brought the last box in Nick found himself alone with Finnick for the first time in a while.

"Hey, Finn, you wanna come in and hang out for a bit? We don't have much in the way of food or drinks but I'm sure we can get something delivered." Nick asked as Finnick hopped back in his van.

"Nah Nick, as much as I would love playing third wheel to you and Officer Toot Toot, I gotta get ready for work soon. Helen's been running me ragged lately," Finn said as he started up the van.

"You wouldn't be a third wheel Finn because there's nothing but friendship between her and I. But
alright Finn, give Helen my best since I won't be around for the next few months while I'm at the academy."

"Whatever you say Wilde, whatever you say, and I'll make sure to pass on that message to Helen for you. Oh and one more thing Nick." Finn said, getting suddenly serious.

"Yeah?"

"I'm glad you're getting your tail off the streets. You always deserved better than living under that bridge like a troll."

"Thanks Finn, I'm still trying to convince myself it's not a dream." Nick said honestly.

Finnick quickly slugged Nick in the arm.

"Ahhh, what the hell is with mammals smaller than me wanting to punch my arm, and why do they all punch so damn hard?" Nick asked rhetorically.

"Well, since that hurt, I guess you not dreaming." Finnick said as he started to laugh.

"I guess not." Nick said as he rubbed his arm.

"Anyway Nick, good luck at the Pig Pen. You better show those fools that a street mammal knows best, chiao." Finnick said as he dropped his shades and started to drive away.

Nick just shook his head knowing there was no point in shouting after Finnick to tell him how rude that comment is to pigs.

"That's just how Finnick is." Nick said, shaking his head as the van drove away and after watched the van disappear from sight, Nick walked back inside.

"No Finnick?" Judy asked as Nick opened the door.

"Nah Fluff, he's got work, plus we'd cramp his style, I'm sure."

"His loss then, now Nick I have an important question for you," Shoot," Nick said as he walked over to Judy who was standing in front of the two bedrooms doors.

"Which room do you want?" Judy asked, stretching her paws out gesturing to the two identical doors.

"I don't know. Why don't you pick? I'm fine with whatever." Nick said as he shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"No Nick you need to pick."

"I really don't care Carrots. It's just a room after all." Nick said, unsure why Judy was being so insistent.

"Nick this is your room in your new home, I want you to have the choice, since, after all, this will be your first room in a long time, I want you to have whichever one you think is best." Judy said sincerely as she looked up at Nick eyes wide and ears down.

"That look won't keep working forever Fluff, but fine, I pick that room." Nick said pointing randomly at the door on the right.
Judy put her paws on her hips as her foot started to tap repeatedly in frustration.

"What's wrong, I picked just like you asked me to." Nick said defensively.

"You didn't even think about it!" Judy said aggravatedly as she threw her paws in the air.

"They are the same room Fluff, not much to decide between." Nick explained, trying his best to hold back his snarky tone.

"Come on Nick, at least take a minute and look at each room, there are some differences, and I want you to have a place you'll be the happiest in."

Knowing Judy wasn't about to give up anytime soon Nick relented and spent some time checking out each room.

"I'll take the room on the right," Nick said again.

"Are you sure?" Judy asked, "The room on the left has a window and more outlets in the walls?"

"I'm sure Fluff, I don't want the window cus the light will bother my eyes in the morning. As for the outlets I don't really have much to plug in, plus the room on the right has an outlet near the bed which is all I really need," Nick explained.

"Alright as long as it's really what you want." Judy said, still unconvinced.

"It really is, now let's get unpacking." Nick said as he headed over to the boxes.

"Yeah let's." Judy said esthetically.

So, Nick and Judy began the long arduous process of unpacking their belongings. The minutes turned to hours all in relative silence as both mammals focused on the task at paw, only breaking the silence to check on or to pass on some random, funny, interesting, or otherwise important piece of information to the other.

"I need to buy clothes hangers," Nick said to himself as he folded his last Pawaiian shirt and put it in the dresser.

As Nick sat on the bed and looked around the room it finally hit him.

"This is my room." as Nick said this, a flood of emotion hit him and his vision became suddenly blurry.

"What am I doing getting so emotional over a room?" Nick said, chastising himself as he wiped the stray tears from his eyes.

"It's fine, you're just happy that you've finally found a safe place to call your home." Optimism said reassuringly.

"Agreed, it's a perfectly natural reaction, especially considering you're also relieved because you never thought a day like this would come." Logic added.

"True enough, hell even though Finn punched me I'm still not entirely convinced this isn't a dream. But I'll keep that to myself lest I incur another punch from a freakishly strong bunny." Nick said as he laid back on his bed.

"It really is amazing." Nick said to himself as he realized once again how much Judy had changed
his life, how much he had now and how much more he was going to get.

"Yep you have sooooo much now, so much to lose that is." Cyn-Nick said, appearing as if summoned by the mere possibility of Nick being positive.

"One little mistake or slip up, one mention of your past life, or one toe out of line and you lose it all. Terrifying isn't it?" Cyn-Nick continued.

"You're wrong, even if something happened Judy would stick by me," Nick said optimistically.

"You tell him!" Optimism said happily.

"Oh sure she will... until she finds someone else," Cyn-Nick taunted.

Nick's heart lurched in his chest at the thought and his head went into a sudden tailspin.

She can't find someone else.

Why not? She's not gonna be with you forever.

Says you.

You've already decided you won't go after her, so what's the problem?

Have we decided on that?

She's gonna leave me? What do I do?

I don't wanna lose Judy,

Calm down, everything's going to be fine.

"ENOUGH." Nick roared inside his mind, quieting the cacophony of voices.

"Now listen here, forget all that other stuff because even if Judy found someone else she wouldn't abandon me. So it's all good, plus, if and when she finds someone who makes her happy, I'll support her because she deserves to be happy." Nick thought back at the voices, calming their frenzied discussion.

"Judy isn't the type to ever abandon her friends." Logic agreed as order was finally restored.

Cyn-Nick, seeing the chance to cause some more chaos in Nick's head decided to throw out one last comment.

"Unless she dies."

With those three words, all hell broke loose in Nick's mind. But he couldn't be bothered to calm it down as he was currently stunned in silence, clutching his chest because his heart seemed to have suddenly stopped.

"I can't lose her, too." Nick whispered quietly as his thoughts ran wild around him.

Before he could even find a semblance of order, Nick heard the sound of the doorbell which snapped him back to reality.

"I'll get it!" Judy said excitedly as she burst out of her room and made a beeline for the door.
A small smile found its way onto Nick's face as he watched Judy enthusiastically run to the door and throw it open.

Standing in the doorway, in a simple tee shirt and jeans was James. He had a big smile on his face and a wrapped box in his paws.

"James! What brings you here?" Judy asked, pleasantly surprised.

"Well, I wanted to make sure you guys got moved in all right and bring you a housewarming gift." James said, handing the box to Judy as he spoke.

"Thanks, but you didn't have to do that." Nick said as he walked over and stood beside Judy.

"You're right, but I wanted to. Having a good relationship with tenants and neighbors is very important."

"Thanks James. Do you wanna come in for a bit?" Judy asked, stepping to the side to allow James space to enter.

"I don't want to intrude." James said politely.

"You wouldn't be. Plus with Carrots here, it's less of a question than she's making it seem." Nick joked.

"Hey, I wouldn't force a mammal to do something they didn't want to." Judy said defensively as she crossed her arms.

Nick just raised an eyebrow, "Are you really going to say that to me with a straight face?"

"B- bu- but that was different, I needed help and you were the only one who could do it." As Judy said this however, she realized Nick was right and her ears fell against her back.

"I didn't mean to drag you into all that, especially everything that followed, I'm sorry Nick."

Nick, realizing his joke seemed to have cut a bit too deep brought his paw to Judy's face and lifted it so she could look at him.

"Judy, that was a joke. I do not regret getting mixed up with you for a minute and considering everything that happened afterwards, I'd say you dragging me along has been the best thing that's ever happened to me." Nick said forgetting for a moment that they weren't alone.

"Do you really mean that Nick? I haven't been a bother?" Judy asked as she looked up at Nick, feeling uncharacteristically timid.

"I do Fluff," Nick said a warm smile on his face.

James watched the interaction with interest, well, well, well, what exactly is going on here?

James waited for a moment, slightly amused that his tenants had forgotten him, before deciding to politely remind them of his presence.

"Eherrm, well if you're sure I won't be a bother then I'd be happy to come in. Especially since if you're willing to share, I'd love to hear the story of how you two became friends."

Nick and Judy both snapped back into reality and quickly looked away from each other.
"Oh, ugh, yeah. I don't mind, come right in." Judy said, a faint blush finding its way from her ears to her cheeks.

He didn't show anything on the outside, as he let James in and shut the door behind him, but Nick was just as embarrassed as Judy was, if not more so.

Making their way to the couch all three mammals sat down and made themselves comfortable with Nick on one end, James on the other and Judy in the middle.

"Go on and open the gift, I'm sure Nick especially will appreciate it." James said, looking over at Judy who still held the box.

"I can't wait to see what it is." Judy said as she began to tear off the wrapping paper.

Once the paper was removed Judy and Nick were able to see that the gift was a tool set, nothing fancy, just a hammer, various sized screw drivers, a set of Allen wrenches, a level, and a crescent wrench.

"I figured since Nick seems like quite the handy mammal you might want to add stuff around the place and if you did that you might need some tools," James explained.

"That's awesome James, thank you," Judy said happily.

"Yeah thanks James, now I can show Fluff a thing or two about fixing things around the home." Nick joked.

"It's nothing guys, hell it's more of a gift for me anyways, if you can fix a problem it saves me from having to do it.

"... N-n-not that I expect there to be any problems... or that I-I-I'd expect you to fix them or anything like that..." James said quickly as he realized how his gift could be perceived.

Nick and Judy just silently looked at each other for a moment before bursting out laughing uncontrollably. After a few minutes the two were able to calmed down enough to speak.

"What was so funny?" James asked.

"Well the look on your face for one." Nick said.

"Or the way you almost fell over yourself trying to assure us that there was no malicious or ulterior meaning behind your gift." Judy added between lingering giggles.

"Pffft, well if you two are done laughing at my sincerity, I believe you two had a story to share." James said pretending to be angry.

"We're sorry James, we couldn't resist. Now I'm sure you've heard of the missing mammals case from a few months ago, well Nick here helped me solve it." Judy said proudly.

"Missing Mammals case?" James said questioningly, a blank look on his face.

"You know that case that was in the news a few months back that ended in the mayor getting arrested and the savage mammals being found," Nick said trying to jog James's memory.

"Ah, now that you mention it. I do remember hearing that the mayor got arrested a few months back, but I never looked into why. I got my own problems to worry about, so I stay away from stuff like that. Plus the news is too biased these days so I just stopped watching." As James said this both Nick
and Judy's jaws dropped.

"So, you have no idea what's been happening in recently or who she is?" Nick asked astonished.

"Well I know basic details about recent savage mammals attacking and I do know that mayor Lionheart and now mayor Bellwether both got arrested but I didn't get into the details of it," James explained, suddenly a little embarrassed for his lack of knowledge.

"Alright then, I guess since you don't know anything about the case, we'll tell you everything we can." Judy said before breaking into her story.

Unlike with her parents Judy told the full story with all the heart pounding and dangerous adrenalin filled moments told in exquisite detail. The way she told it was almost bragging as Judy went over each detail with breathless excitement. Nick for the most part stayed silent, only throwing in a detail or two when necessary and trying to downplay his part in the whole ordeal, which earned him a reproachful scowl from Judy who would then go on to talk up his contributions even more. At the end of it all James was left speechless, in awe of his two tenants and what they had done for the city.

"Wow, just wow. Not only did I have the two kickass saviors of Zootopia as renters, but I didn't even know it! It's a little late but thanks for what you've done, I guess." James said awkwardly after taking a moment to absorb the whole story.

"There's no need to thank me. I was just doing my job." Judy said

"Fair enough, but it needs to be said anyways. Thanks even more so to you Nick, since you did so much without it being your job."

"Well it's not like I did it of my own free will, at least not yet anyways." Nick said dismissively.

"You did when Judy came back for your help Nick. Don't diminish your role in the events. Now would you care to elaborate on that, "yet" you added on to the end of that sentence." James said as he leaned forward curiously.

"Oh well I'm headed off to the ZPA in a week or so, I figure someone's gotta try and keep Carrots here out of trouble and I might even do some good in the process."

"That's great Nick! Well I wish you the best of luck, then again as resourceful as you are, I'm sure you'll do fine." James said encouragingly.

"He's gonna do great. I'm predicting top of his class, especially with all the time he and I have spent preparing." Judy said proudly.

"Well I wouldn't go that far with it Fluff but I'll try my best. Now James you know more about us but you're still a mystery. Mind sharing what you do for work?" Nick asked, expertly shifting the focus off himself.

"Yeah, tell us a bit about yourself James." Judy agreed.

"Quid pro quo. I guess it's only fair." James relented.

"There's not a whole lot to tell I was born and grew up just outside Zootopia, graduated Highschool and decided to go into medicine. I'm now a Trauma Nurse at Savannah Central General Hospital. I've been working there ever since I graduated from Zootopia Medical a few years back," James explained.
"That's awesome. What does a Trauma Nurse do exactly?" Judy asked, clearly genuinely interested.

"Well to put it simply Trauma Nurses treat patients in a state of emergency, and handle urgent situations where the cause of injury or disease isn't yet known. They normally work in hospital emergency rooms and other chaotic environments dealing with the critical cases and doing their best to stabilize the patient until the doctors can get to them."

"That's pretty cool James. It must be stressful work, though I don't know how you put up with it." Nick said casually.

"Everyone has their reasons, myself included, but yeah it can be rough. Especially when you try your hardest and are still unable to save someone, but every time someone thanks me for saving their lives, I know it's worth it." As James spoke a small smile sprung up on his face as he remembered all the mammals he'd helped while on the job.

"I understand that feeling." Judy agreed.

After that the conversation continued as James got to know Nick and Judy better. Everyone exchanged stories and laughter and as time wore on James continued to watch the pair, the shoulder punches from Judy, the way Nick's tail seemed to find its way to Judy's side, and not to mention the lingering looks they were unconsciously giving each other. After seeing all this James came to the not so surprising conclusion that there was definitely something between them and it didn't seem like they knew it.

Well it's an odd pair for sure. Never heard of a fox-bunny couple but then again, it's not like it matters to me at all, they're just two mammals in love. Who cares what they do as long as they're both consenting adults. James thought to himself before adding, that being said they do look good together so if they ever need some help I guess I can assist.

Eventually after many stories had been exchanged and laughs had been laughed James excused himself to get ready for work and realizing the time Nick and Judy decided it was time for bed and went off to their rooms and went to sleep.

The next week passed in a blur for Nick and Judy, their days filled with training, studying and just hanging out. During that time Nick, after giving it some thought decided to have his paycheck's put in Judy's bank account since he found out the ZPD only did direct deposit and he didn't have an account of his own so Nick felt this was the best option. Judy was against the idea at first and told Nick as much but was unable to argue when Nick explained how he was doing this because he trusted Judy not to abuse it or take his money, plus paying his half of the rent was way easier this way. Lastly Nick decided to put off the call to his sister, Nick couldn't find the words to say to her, let alone the courage to say them, so he just didn't call, letting the week pass and enjoying the time he had left before the academy. Then finally the fated day was upon them, the day Nick left for the academy for the next six months.

Savannah Central Station, Sunday Morning, 7:45am

The platform was crowded, no more than was to be expected on a Monday morning but crowded none the less. Mammals of all shapes and sized were boarding, exiting, or waiting, the movement of mammals flowed like a river, steady and unyielding. In the midst of that flow sat an unlikely pair that were oblivious to the eyes that glanced their way in curiosity. Judy and Nick sat on a bench talking, or at least Judy was talking, sending question after question Nick's way so fast he couldn't even respond.

"Do you have the flash cards? The training manuals? Snacks? Water? Phone? Headphones?"
"Charger? Toiletries?"

"Yeah Carrots I got everything." Nick said, finally able to get a word in as Judy stopped to take a breath.

"Alright good. Now when you get there, make sure to check in at the front desk, make your bed, go to sleep early, properly greet Major Friedkin and try and get on her good side." Judy said immediately launching into another tirade.

Nick, realizing Judy wasn't gonna stop anytime soon, decided to step in for his sanity and started ruffling Judy's ears.

Judy stopped in her tracks as Nick tousled her ears. She had never told Nick how sensitive a rabbit's ears were and in what way, or how unless you were very close to another bunny outside your family you wouldn't dare touch their ears. That being said Judy couldn't bring herself to stop Nick because the feeling of his paw pads was amazing, so much so that when he stopped Judy had to suppress a groan of displeasure.

"Have we calmed down a bit?" Nick asked as he put his paw back in his pocket.

"I guess, but I just wanna make sure you have the best chance at success"

"Do you doubt me?"

"No-Not at all Nick, I just want to help you as much as I can since there's only one mammal I want to partner up with." Judy said, suddenly feeling a little bashful.

"I know Fluff and there's no way I'm gonna let someone else watch your back out there, so trust me, you've helped me a ton and I'm grateful, so now you just need to sit back and believe in me, alright?"

"Alright Nick, I'll be waiting then," Judy said happily

"Train to Bunnyburrow with stops in Podunk and the ZPA, Departing in 5 minutes." A disembodied voice said over the station PA system.

"Well that's my train, I best get going, I'll give you a call once I get myself settled in." Nick said as he grabbed his bag and hopped off the bench.

Nick could feel something strange building in his chest, a feeling he could not explain, so in response to that feeling Nick decided to hurry up and get on the train but found his paw was trapped and he was unable to pull away.

"I really gotta go Fluff," Nick said still facing away from Judy.

A sharp tug turned Nick around and pulled him into Judy's arms, she was standing on the bench which made her almost as tall as Nick, so her forehead rested on his shoulder.

Nick could feel the looks from the mammals around them but was unable to deny Judy or the growing tightness in his chest any longer, so Nick just took a deep breath in through his nose and hugged back. There was something different in this hug and Nick could feel it, there was a sadness and intimacy that no other hug the two had shared previously had had, and as time stretched in that moment Nick knew something in himself had changed.

"Train to Bunnyburrow last call!" The voice said again as the unforgiving march of time continued.
"I gotta go Judy, I'll make sure to call when I can, and you can visit too if you want, but I need to go so I can become a cop and your partner." Nick said softly, speaking directly in Judy's ear.

"I know Nick I'm just gonna miss having my best and pretty much only friend around all the time, it's gonna be lonely." Judy whispered back.

"It'll be over before you know it, but promise me one thing." Nick said, getting serious.

"What?"

"Be safe, and before you say anything I know it's a dangerous job and you'll help anyone no matter the risk to yourself, but just promise me you'll be careful at least until I'm there to cover your tail and pull you out of whatever fires you jump headfirst into." Nick said as he subconsciously pulled Judy in a little tighter.

Judy sighed, "Alright I promise you dumb fox. But only because I don't want you to be worrying about me when you should be studying." Judy joked as she pulled back from the hug.

"Thanks Judy, now I better get on that train before it leaves me." Nick said as he stepped back.

"Alright Nick goodbye." Judy said as her throat started to tighten, and she fought to hold back her tears.

"Bye Fluff, I'll be sure to keep in touch." Nick said before walking away and getting on the train.

Nick quickly found a seat away from the few other passengers on the mostly empty train as the doors close and the train slowly began its journey.

15 Minutes Later

Nick tried to ignore the growing knot of worry in his stomach about what lay ahead but whenever he did that his mind would wonder to Judy, and the hug, and the shift that had made itself known in that moment. Throwing in his headphones Nick tried to drown out all thoughts with music but Nick's brain was being uncooperative as usual and even through the blaring music Nick's inner voices made themselves known.

"So what part of forgetting how you feel and just staying friends did you have trouble following exactly?" Cyn-Nick asked angrily.

"I can't help it" Nick thought defensively, "It just seems like everything she does makes me fall harder for her, and that hug felt a lot different than any hug I've ever had before." Nick couldn't stop himself as he remembered how heavy and close that hug had been.

"You're pathetic, she likes you as a friend and you're lucky you've even got that much now you want more, don't be a fool." Cyn-Nick criticized.

"Hey maybe she does like us more than just a friend," Optimism said jumping in to the conversation.

"No, no she doesn't, let's keep things realistic. I can't stop these growing feelings, but I don't want to get my hopes up, especially since it's not like I can't control how Judy feels." Nick thought, trying to gain a semblance of control.

"You could be wrong though, I mean she's the one who pulled you into such a tight hug, and she's the one who's always initiating physical contact, there is a possibility she likes us." Optimism argued stubbornly.
"No!" Nick said aloud drawing a few looks from the other mammals in the cabin.

"There's no way she would be interested in me and that's an unchangeable fact, just like how tourists are easy marks, Judy wouldn't waste her time dating someone like me" Nick thought stubbornly.

"But what about-"

"NOT A CHANCE!" Nick thought again cutting off optimism before he could go any further.

"Good, good, I'm glad you're thinking rationally, and there's even time to quit the academy and go back to our normal life." Cyn-Nick said gleefully.

"That's not gonna happen either." Nick thought, stopping the celebrating Cyn-Nick in his tracks.

"What do you mean not gonna happen? Why would you still go through all this even knowing she'll eventually move on and leave you?" Cyn-Nick asked confused as to why Nick was still being stubborn.

"I can't change how she feels about me and I can't change how I feel about her so I'll stay by her side and protect her, be her friend, and cheer her on no matter what she decides to do with her life, even when she finds someone special I'll still support her. Besides sticking with her is infinitely better than going back to my old life." Nick explained as Cyn-Nick stayed silent in shock.

"B-b-but it's gonna be dangerous being a cop." Cyn-Nick argued.

"So. was living on the streets and conning mammals any safer? At least now I'll get paid better, I get insurance to help patch me up, and I'll be able to sleep soundly at night, plus with Judy by my side I'm sure we can handle whatever the criminals of Zootopia throw our way." Nick countered, as he stood firm.

"But the academy is gonna be hard, what if you fail?"

"While I can't deny it's a possibility, I believe I can do it. Judy's trained and taught me as much as she could, that coupled with my street smarts should give me a huge advantage and I'm not about to give up easily."

"So, we're really going through with this," Cyn-Nick said in disbelief.

"Yep, no turning back now the only way out is forward." Nick thought happily as the voices died down and he sat back and was finally able to enjoy the music coming from his phone.

Nick and Judy's Apartment, Savannah Central, Sunday Afternoon 12:15pm

The whole way home Judy couldn't shake the sudden lonely and restless feeling that had started taking over as the fact she didn't have Nick by her side set in. It wasn't unbearable by any means, more of an annoying sensation that would come and go at random like an itch on her nose that just wouldn't quit. Judy would go to make a joke or point out something funny or strange only to remember Nick wasn't around and she didn't have another mammal to talk to.

As Judy lay on her bed she wondered why she felt so alone since it's not like she had been any better off when she first came to Zootopia. What's the difference? Why do I suddenly feel so much more alone now? Judy asked herself, but before Judy could give it much thought her phone started to ring. Pulling it out of her pocket Judy saw the picture of her parents displayed on the screen.

"Ugh, I really don't wanna talk to them right now, I think I'll just let it go to voicemail this time."
Judy said as she placed the phone screen down on the bed and as the phone stopped ringing and remained silent Judy thought that for once her parents might just leave a message and not call again, but as her ringtone started up again Judy knew she was having no such luck. Steeling herself for the conversation ahead Judy took a deep breath before answering the Muzzletime call. As Bonnie's face filled the screen Judy was surprised to see that her dad wasn't also on screen.

"Hey Mom, what's up?" Judy asked making sure to keep her tone even.

"Oh nothing much hunnie I just wanted to check in on yo-... what's wrong Judy?" Bonnie asked shifting from casual conversation to concerned caregiver instantly.

"What are you talking about? Nothing's wrong," Judy lied, not really wanting to explain to her Mom that she was missing Nick way more then she thought she would.

I don't want to explain what's wrong so please just take the hint mom. It's not important, so there's no need for you to bother with it. I just already miss Nick, more so than I thought I would. I miss that there's nobody to tell me corny jokes or to mammal watch with me. I miss hanging out with him, and there's not much that can really be done to fix that. I'll just have to visit him sometime, maybe I can bring him some blueberries too. Ooohhh, now that's a good idea, Judy thought to herself before realizing that while she was deep in thought she had missed something her mom had said to her.

"Ah what did you say Mom your voice cut out for a bit." Judy said recovering quickly from her side-tracked thoughts.

"I told you not to lie to your mother, because your ears are drooping and there's a distant look in your eyes that I, as your mother, wouldn't miss. Now wanna try telling me what's wrong again Judy," Bonnie said sternly pairing it with a look that let Judy know she really didn't have a choice.

Judy let out a sigh, "My Mom is just too good at reading me." She whispered to herself.

"Alright you caught me. Nick left this morning and I'm just feeling a little lonely because he and I have spent the past few weeks spending time together training, studying or just hanging out, now I'm back to being alone." Judy explained, deciding to omit just how much she was missing her fox.

"Oh Bun Bun, I'm sorry to hear that you're feeling down without your fox friend but I'm sure if you go out and meet some new people you'll feel better."

"Yeah I'm sure your right, I go back to work tomorrow, so I'll probably feel better then, but I just can't shake this feeling right now." As Judy said this she got a strange feeling her Mom had an ulterior motive behind the phone call, and Bonnie's next sentence proved Judy right.

"Well if you're looking for a friend to hang out with Dylan Daucus... you know one of Sheryl's sons, is moving to Zootopia for work and I happened to mention that you were in the city and he said he'd love to meet up, maybe get coffee or dinner some time," Bonnie said, trying to sound as innocent as possible.

Is she really trying to do this again? I thought she got the hint after I rejected the 9 bucks and the 1 doe she sent my way before I came back home, that I have no interest in the buck's she send's my way, they're shallow, self-centered and they all want me to give up my career, as for the doe, while she was sweet enough, I just don't swing that way, Judy thought to herself angrily.

"Mom I don't know if I'll have time for all that once work starts up again," Judy said trying to politely pass on the meet up.

"Please Judy it's going to be his first time in the city and he doesn't know anyone else, I'm sure it will
do you both good to see a familiar face, plus it'd be a big help for him to talk to someone who knows the city as well as you do." Bonnie said pleadingly.

Judy sighed, *she knows I can't resist helping mammals in need.*

"Alright Mom give me Dylan's number and I'll set up a time with him." Judy said as she hopped off her bed and walked into the living room to grab a piece of paper to write on.

"Oh, there's no need for that since I already gave him your number. That aside, where are you right now Sweetie?" Bonnie asked, as she realized that Judy wasn't in her old apartment.

Judy did not even bring up the fact that her mom had already arranged the "meet up" without asking her, decided to just skip the argument since Judy knew she was going to lose and instead just answer the question.

"I'm in my new apartment." Judy said casually.

"New apartment, when did this happen?" Bonnie asked, surprised at the sudden move.

"About a week and a half ago, Nick and I decided to find a two bedroom to split the rent for since we'll both be working at the same place and we enjoy each other's company." Judy explained.

"Oh, that's… a smart financial move." Bonnie said stiffly as her brain started going haywire with this new information.

"Yeah it just made more sense and that way I get to leave that shoebox that I used to live in." Judy said happily, oblivious to her mom's sudden short circuit.

"That place was really small I'm glad you got out of there at least but isn't sharing an apartment with Nick a bit much, even friends need time apart." Bonnie said, quickly recovering from her stupor.

"Neither of us mind, but only time will tell." Judy said, not wanting to discuss her relationship with Nick with her mom.

"I guess so… Anyway, you have to show me this new apartment of yours since it's not like either of us are doing anything right now," Bonnie said, suddenly getting excited.

Judy knew she wasn't getting out of this either, so she went around the apartment showing her mom everything from the new fur dryer to the used lion sized couch. Bonnie after seeing the apartment was happy that her daughter had gotten such a nice place for herself, and as Judy finished up the tour and said her goodbyes she realized while she still felt a little lonely it wasn't as bad as before. So, with a new sense of purpose Judy decided to get her uniform in order for tomorrow.

**Zootopia Police Academy (ZPA), Middle of Nowhere, Sunday Afternoon, 12:30**

Nick walked up to the entrance to the academy, as he looked around he was surprised at how normal it all looked. The stone pillars holding up the Zootopia Police Academy sign combined with the large patch of open grass and the surrounding brick buildings all grouped together made the academy look more like a collage campus than a police training facility.

"I was expecting a bit more to be honest." Nick said to himself as he noticed what seemed to be an obstacle course off in the distance.

As Nick walked across the grass to the big center building he wondered where exactly he was supposed to go, looking around Nick spotted a sign with an arrow indicating check ins for new
cadets.

"If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say I need to go this way." Nick said aloud before entering the building.

The lobby was pretty average as far as design went, black and white tiled floor with the walls painted a dull brown. Set off to the side sat a reception desk and behind that sat an old goat who was engrossed in something on his phone. Looking around a bit more Nick noticed that pictures and plaques lined the walls and sitting in glass display cases were pieces of historical police gear. Walking over to get a better look at the display Nick saw the first version of police handcuffs, along with the original wooden police baton and even the first type of muzzle used by the ZPD. Seeing the muzzle however, caused Nick to shudder unconsciously and quickly move on.

"Can I help you?" A voice called out to Nick, sounding tired and slightly irritated.

Nick turned to see the old goat at the front desk waving at him, so Nick headed over to the desk.

"Hey how's it going?" Nick asked deciding to try and be sociable.

"It's going alright, now what can I do for you young mammal?" The goat replied, ignoring Nick's attempt at small talk and instead getting straight to the point.

"I'm a new recruit, I followed some signs and here I am." Nick explained.

"Really?" The goat said doubtfully.

"Really, I promise."

"Name and a form of ID please." the goat said as he pulled out a sheet of paper.

Nick pulled out his wallet and grabbed his license.

"Nicolaus P. Wilde." Nick said as he slid his license across the table.

The goat picked up the license, looked at Nick, looked at the paper, looked at Nick and looked at the license again.

"Well I'll be a bison's uncle! You weren't kidding, never thought I'd see the day a fox joined the ZPD, but I guess times a' changing. I mean even a cute little bunny became an officer, so I shouldn't be too surprised." the goat said as he gave Nick back his I.D.

Nick just stayed silent, biting back the sudden urge to tell the goat not to call bunnies cute.

"Well I'll be a bison's uncle! You weren't kidding, never thought I'd see the day a fox joined the ZPD, but I guess times a' changing. I mean even a cute little bunny became an officer, so I shouldn't be too surprised." the goat said as he gave Nick back his I.D.

Nick just stayed silent, biting back the sudden urge to tell the goat not to call bunnies cute.

"Well anyway here's your ticket, a map of the grounds, the rules and regulations, and your schedule for the first week. Give the ticket to the quartermaster and he'll give you all the gear you'll need, you're in room 2b, follow the signs for the dorms and you can put your stuff away. Orientation is at 1600 on the grass in front of this building. Don't. Be. Late. I promise that you'll regret it if you do." The goat explained as he slid a folder over to Nick.

"Thanks, have a good day." Nick said politely as he grabbed the folder and started to walk away.

"You too Mr. Wilde, and good luck with your training." the goat replied before going back to his phone.

Nick then spent the next few minutes wondering around the campus looking for the quartermaster's office. As he walked around Nick noticed that there were statues and plaques that were scattered
across the campus, all of them were dedicated to either to the memory of an officer who died in the line of duty or in recognition of an officer who did something extraordinary, or both. Nick finally made it to the quartermaster's office, the building didn't look like much, just a simple brick building, it was windowless, plain, and didn't stand out in the slightest.

As Nick walked into the building he was met with a grumpy looking one-eyed tiger who had a three clawed slash going from his forehead, across his right eye and the side of his nose and hitting the corner of his mouth before ending at his jaw. The tiger was sitting at a desk typing on a computer seemingly oblivious to Nick's entrance but as Nick walked over to the desk he knew he was being watched, as if the tiger at the desk was Clawhauser and Nick was the last double-glazed donut with strawberry frosting and sprinkles, in the box.

"What da yah want?" the tiger asked gruffly.

Nick said nothing and just handed over the ticket the goat had given him.

"Ah, I see." The tiger said as he grabbed the ticket from Nick's paw. "Wait here a minute and I'll bring you your stuff." The tiger got up from his desk and walked over to a door labeled "Storage," and Nick was left alone. After a few minutes the tiger returned with an armful of various clothing items.

"I got you the smallest canine size we had, unfortunately since the academy won't order anything specific for smaller mammals until more start coming you'll have to make do with these, that being said they'll still probably going to be too big for you so for the time being you're authorized to wear your own shorts and you'll just have to tuck in the shirt, give me your size and I'll have some proper fitting clothes for you sometime next week." The tiger explained as he laid the clothes out on the desk.

"You get five pairs of shorts, and five shirts, one ZPA ball cap, two ZPA towels a ZPA sweat pant/shirt combo, and a ZPA backpack filled with supplies for class. If you need extras for whatever reason you'll have to pay for it out of pocket, also any other miscellaneous items you many need can probably be found here as well, again all out of pocket. Now sign here to show you received everything."

Nick went down the list making sure everything was there before signing. Then he quickly packed everything into the backpack.

"Thanks' for the stuff." Nick said after writing down his size for the tiger and making his way to the door.

"Don't mention it," the tiger said as he went back to typing on his computer.

Nick then found his way to the dorms and went straight to his assigned room. Opening the door Nick took a quick inventory of the room, two bunk beds each with sheet's, a blanket, and a pillow sitting at the foot of the mattress, four lockers, two desks complete with lamps and chairs, and surprisingly, a lack of other mammals.

"Well I guess I'm the first one." Nick said as he walked over to one of the bunk beds and put his stuff down.

"I guess I'll claim my spot now then." Nick thought to himself as he got to work making his bed and putting his stuff away.

After Nick had finished putting everything away he took a look at his phone and sighed.
"I still got two hours until I have to be on the green. What to do? What to do? Well I guess since I have a map I could have a look around to kill some time,"

So Nick spent the next hour and a half walking around the ZPA campus visiting various important buildings like the library, cafeteria, gym, rec lounge, computer lab and the classrooms, and getting a good sense of where everything was, before he knew it, it was time to meet up so Nick headed back to the dorm, changed clothes and walked over to the green.

As Nick walked over to the green he saw roughly 30 mammals of various species and sizes, however no one was smaller than Nick and there were only a few prey mammals, but still a diverse group none the less. As Nick approached he could see that most of the mammals were in groups of three or four chatting amongst themselves. Deciding it would be better to just stick to the sides Nick stood off by himself, and as he waited for the instructor Nick could feel the eyes of the other cadets on him and sighed.

"And so it begins." Nick thought to himself, luckily Nick was saved as a large female polar bear walked out to the front of the group.

"Alright Enough Chatter! Gather Round!" The polar bear shouted getting the attention of everyone.

"My name is Major Alexandra Friedkin, but you all will address me as Major or Ma'am for the next six months. Do you understand?"

"Yes Ma'am," everyone replied in unison.

"Good, now to give a little background on myself, I was also a cadet going through this academy just like you 20 years ago, I then went to work as a beat cop in tundra town for more years than I care to remember, eventually I worked my way to a detective in the Vice department where I hunted down drug dealers, pimps, bootleggers and illegal gambling rings, and after about 8 years of doing that I decided to come her and train the next generation of ZPD officers and I've been here ever since. Now enough about me and my past I'm going to explain to you exactly what I and every other instructor is going to expect from you." Major Friedkin explained suddenly getting serious.

"You WILL treat the instructors and other cadets with respect. There will be no speciest in my ZPD if I can help it. We here at the ZPD haven't always done the best job of this, but we are working on it and it starts with each and every one of you. You WILL study hard and learn everything we teach you because if you don't you will not graduate, I don't want a cop on the streets who doesn't know how to handle themselves, because not only are you endangering yourself and your partner, but also every citizen of Zootopia as well. Also you WILL NOT cheat in any way shape or form, if found out it will result in IMMEDIATE expulsion, if you're willing to cheat here how can you be trusted to do the right thing out in the field. Lastly, something that can't be taught or given to you, you WILL find your reason for being here. If this is just a paycheck or a way to make daddy proud, you won't last and I'll make sure of that, because at the end of the day pride and money aren't good enough reasons for most mammals to put their life on the line. That is what this job boils down to, risking it all, giving everything you have including possibly your life, all so that mammals you don't even know can sleep soundly at night. So if you don't have a reason yet, you better find one quick, because that reason will be what gets you through this training. Not too long ago I had a bunny come through here with nothing more than an iron will, solid determination, and good old fashion ingenuity. She not only graduated, but was top of her class! So if she can do it solely on willpower, then so can you."

As the Major spoke Nick looked around at the other cadets watching their reactions and was happy to see that nobody seemed to disbelieve the Major, at least they believe in how hard Judy worked.
"Now that we got all that out of the way, let's go for a walk so I can show you exactly what you're gonna be dealing with." Major Friedkin said as she led the group to the obstacle course.

"Zootopia has 12 unique ecosystems within its city limits." Friedkin explained as they got closer to the course.

"Tundra Town, Sahara Square, Rainforest District, to name a few. This course has been prepared to get you ready for what you might face in each one and you're gonna have to master all of them before you hit the streets, or guess what? You'll be dead!"

As they looked at the Sahara Square and Rainforest District courses Nick tried to analyze each environment and how he might go about overcoming each obstacle.

"Not much I can do about the ropes course, then again climbing drainpipes while carrying Jumbo Pops should have prepared me for that, as for the sand, I could try burying myself in and crawling through the sand, or maybe try hiding behind one of the bigger mammals and letting them take the brunt of the wind,"

As they got to the ice wall Nick gave a hard gulp, "How in the frozen hell am I supposed to climb that?" He asked himself rhetorically.

"I might, emphasis on MIGHT, be able to stick my claws in like ice picks, but I run the risk of them getting stuck, I doubt they'd leave the underside open to swim under, this ones gonna take some thought." Nick concluded as the tour finished.

"Now you all better go have yourselves a big dinner and get some sleep because the real fun starts tomorrow." Friedkin said before dismissing the group.

Nick quickly made his way to the dining hall alone, scarfed down his food, and rushed back to the room, not really wanting to interact with the other cadets much.

Once Nick got back to the room he realized that the others had also come in and set up their stuff, beds were made even a few posters had been put up on the walls, yet it seems the other mammals were still at dinner, so Nick hopped into his bed and started playing on his phone.

20 Minutes Later

Nick was still lying on his bed as his roommates arrived; there was a deer, a wolf and a lion, all chatting happily as they entered the room only to stop when they noticed Nick in bed.

"Oh, so this is our other roommate, it's nice to meet you I'm Tom Lunes" the wolf said welcomingly stretching out a paw to Nick.

"Nick Wilde," Nick said as he shook the offered paw.

"These two bozos are Harry and Sam," Tom said pointing to the lion and deer respectively.

"Now when you say Nick Wilde, you wouldn't happen to be the same Nick Wilde who helped Judy Hopps solve the Nighthowler case, would you?" Tom asked eagerly.

"Noooooooo, he's only the same species and had the same name as that Nick Wilde," Harry said sarcastically.

"Yeah how many other red foxes named Nick Wilde do you think there are?" Sam asked.
"You don't know that, it could just be a crazy coincidence, right?" Tom said defensively, looking to Nick for some back-up.

"While I guess it is possible, however unlikely, that I could also be a red fox name Nick Wilde, completely unrelated to the one who helped officer Hopps, that is, in fact, not the case. I am the one and only Nick Wilde." Nick explained.

All of a sudden, the other three mammals in the room started asking questions rapid fire asking Nick what Judy was like, what it was like facing a savage mammal, along with a host of other questions about the case itself, filling the room with more noise than Nick thought three mammals could make.

"Hold it! Hold it! I'll answer all the questions I'm allowed to answer, but you guy's need to quiet down." Nick said getting the three overexcited mammals to calm down a bit. So, for the next two hours Nick answered questions about the case and about savage mammals, while asking a few questions of his own in an attempt to get to know his roommates better.

"Alright I've told you everything I can, now we really should get to bed. I don't think Major Friedkin was kidding when she said tomorrows going to be rough." Nick said having answered every question he could about the case.

"Oh I'm sure we'll be fine, I wanna stay up sharing more stories." Tom said eagerly tail wagging freely behind him.

"Nah I think Nick might be right. Let's get some shut eye." Sam said as he walked over to his bed and climbed in.

"Works for me," Harry agreed before hopping up into the bunk over Sam.

"Fine, you guys are no fun," Tom said, disappointed nobody else wanted to stay up.

"Don't worry about it Tom I'm sure there will be plenty of time to chat in the coming months." Nick said consolingly.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, but still I'm just too excited to sleep." Tom said as he climbed up to the top bunk over Nick.

"Either close your eyes and count to 1000, or try counting ceiling tiles, or if all else fails just try thinking of nothing, those always worked for me." Nick said, trying to help the over-excited wolf get to sleep.

"I'll try, oh and by the way Nick,"

"Yeah?"

"That is one crazy adventure you went on with Officer Hopps, but I'm glad you guys figured it all out, otherwise who knows what might have happened." Tom said before letting the room go silent.

"I better get some sleep too, because if half of what Judy says is true I'm gonna need it." Nick thought to himself before pulling up some calming music, putting in his headphones and going to sleep.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

Lastly go listen to

Scar Tissue by Red Hot Chili Peppers

It's a great song
Chapter 15 – Finding Out

Uncle Bob's Rumba Coffee, Savannah Central, Saturday Afternoon 12:20pm

It had been a week since Nick left for the academy and Judy started working again. Even though the two of them had talked most nights, sharing what they had done that day and just chatting with each other until one of them decided it was time for bed, Judy couldn't help but feel it wasn't enough. As she walked to the coffee shop she found herself wishing Nick was with her.

*Ugghhh, I don't want to go on this date, I'd rather be sniffing a dumpster with Nick today then getting coffee with some buck,* Judy thought to herself as she went inside the coffee shop and found a table.
Judy had dressed in simple, casual clothes, plain blue jeans, a blue flannel button up, and no makeup to speak of, doing the bare minimum that she could to get ready for the date.

_Hopefully he'll just get the hint quickly and leave or say something stupid so I can leave_, Judy thought as she looked at her phone and realized she was ten minutes early.

Judy didn't have to wait too long however, as five minutes later Dylan walked in. Dylan was a mostly beige buck with black paws and ears, Judy knew it was him because his coloring was rare and made him stand out from other bunnies. Dylan was also scrawnier than most bucks in the Burrows, having been more into computers and electronics than tractors. Judy noticed as he walked in that Dylan was also dressed very casually, blue jeans and a red T-shirt with the logo of the Flash, a bunny super hero who fought crime while running at incredible speeds.

_Well that's not what I expected even just for coffee_, Judy said to herself as she remembered how her past coffee dates had all dressed up as if they were going to the club.

After looking around for a few minutes Dylan spotted Judy and gave a wave before walking over to the table.

"Hey Judy, thanks for agreeing to meet up with me." Dylan said politely, as he sat down.

"No problem Dylan. So how do you like Zootopia so far?" Judy asked, trying to make some conversation.

"I like it well enough, but I still don't know the city that well. It's huge and I don't even know where to start when trying to see it all." Dylan explained as he started to look over the menu.

"Oh it's not that difficult if you make friends with someone who's lived here for a while. I had Nick to show me some good spots, so I know more now than I did when I got here. Nick's lived here his whole life and he's actually the one who showed me this coffee shop,"

"I see, well then, until I get some knowledgeable friends of my own I'm at your mercy." Dylan joked.

"I'll tell you what I can," Judy said. So, for the next twenty minutes Judy just talked about the city, Dylan for the most part stayed quiet and attentively listened and asked the occasional question when he needed clarification. During this time both Dylan and Judy ordered coffee and a pastry, making sure to pay separately, both of them got plain coffee, wanting to add their own crème and sugar and for their pastries, Judy got a blueberry turnover while Dylan got a carrot muffin.

"And stay away from anywhere south of 29th street, the ZPD is constantly being called there for muggings, drug deals, and the occasional overdose," Judy said before stopping to take a bite of her pastry.

"Thanks for the warning Judy, I'll make sure to steer clear of that area for sure then. So, what have you been up to since coming to the city?" Dylan asked, deciding for a change in topic.

"I've been alright, I've been mostly working and hanging out at home since Nick, the guy who showed me around the city, left for the police academy last week. Other than that I haven't really done all that much since coming back." Judy explained

"I see, I see, so what do you do for work, I mean there isn't a bunny in the Burrows that doesn't know that you're a cop, but what is it like being a cop exactly? What's your day to day work consist of?" Dylan asked throwing Judy off guard.
That's different, usually the buck's Mom sends my way will only bring up my job to tell me that I should quit... suspicious, but I guess since he asked it'd be rude not to talk about it.

"Well Dylan it's not as exciting as TV and movies make it out to be. Most of the day is spent either driving around looking for crimes, driving to reported crimes, or filling out reports. I couldn't even begin to tell you how much paperwork we have to do. If the criminals had to file as much paperwork to commit a crime as we do after catching them, then I doubt anyone would even bother. Crime rates would plummet and I'd be out of a job." Judy joked.

Dylan laughed, "I never thought of it that way but I'm glad someone like you is willing to, do not only the dangerous stuff, but the boring paperwork that goes along with it."

"Nobody really does. Anyway my job has mostly been driving around more than anything else. I don't have a partner yet so I patrol with a different Officer every couple of days so I can get some experience, but once Nick graduates, he and I will be partners and go on patrol together." Judy said, smiling as she thought about how fun patrolling, catching criminals, and even paperwork would be once Nick graduated.

"Oh really, what kind of mammal is this Nick. You've brought him up a couple of times, but you've neglected to really talk about him in detail."

"Well Nick's a complicated guy. He's a Red Fox, he's lived in Zootopia his whole life, he's funny, smart, he can be kinda rude, but he's usually got a reason for it. He puts up a strong front when dealing with others but secretly he's a sensitive and kind mammal even if he denies it. He's constantly helping others no matter the cost to himself, he helped me solve two cases without getting anything in return, Nick even goes out of his way to support his family financially, despite not having all that much himself." Judy didn't notice it, but this had been the first time in the conversation she had actually shown some real emotion. Dylan however did but decided to say nothing about that fact and just let Judy continue talking.

"Sounds like he's an interesting guy. I'd love to meet him sometimes." Dylan said after Judy had finished up describing Nick.

"Yeah, he's great. We can meet up sometime after he graduates, if you want." Judy suggested.

"Sure!" Dylan said sounding genuinely enthusiastic.

"You know Dylan, we've talked a lot about the city and me, but what about you? What job did you get in Zootopia?" Judy asked, having warmed up to Dylan considerably.

"Well the job is nothing much. It's just an entry level computer programming position. I'll write code and work on projects that they ask me to do, I pretty much will be sitting at a computer typing stuff all day."

"Really, that's pretty cool, how did you learn how to do that? I don't remember Bunnyburrow High having any classes on programming." Judy asked, unsure if she had just missed that class.

"Bunnyburrow high had like five computers so I wasn't able to learn it there, but I was interested in learning about programming, so I taught myself instead." Dylan said with a small note of pride

"That's amazing, and yeah I should have known, that school was only interested in teaching basic required courses, sex ed, and farming." Judy joked as she remembered just how restrictive her high school had been.

Dylan laughed too and as the two continued their talk going from topic to topic at random. Judy
couldn't help but think that Dylan wasn't treating this like a date at all.

_I can't say I'm unhappy about the way this has been going, but I wonder if Dylan knows this was set up as a date, I mean my mom wouldn't stop pushing me to dress up and make a good impression so I know she thought it was a date, but he hasn't made any sort of move and he's not dressed like someone going on a date._ Judy pondered this as the conversation continued. Finally after some time, Judy worked up the nerve to ask Dylan outright.

"Hey Dylan, I'm not complaining or anything, but I was under the assumption our moms set us up to go on a date, and from my perspective you've been acting like we're friends hanging out rather than two mammals on a date. So I was just curious if you knew?"

As soon as Judy said this, Dylan's face started turning red under his fur as he tried and failed to hold back a blush. Eventually Dylan settled on sighing as he put his face down into his paws and took a moment to compose himself.

"It all makes sense now. Mom's giddiness and gushing about meeting the 'Bunnyburrow heroine'. I really should've realized what it all was about. I'm so sorry." Dylan said apologetically as lifted his face from his paws. "I am flattered and all that you agreed to a date, but I am really not looking for anything like that right now. I really did just wanted to hear about the city and all that. At most I was looking to make a friend in the city. Honest!"

Judy started to laugh as Dylan looked at her face still flushed with embarrassment and eyes now wide in shock.

"Are you alright Judy?" Dylan asked as Judy just continued to laugh and laugh, drawing a few sideways glances from the other mammals in the shop.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry." Judy said as she wiped a tear from the corner of her eye, "I'm just so relieved you feel that way. Because a friend and not a boyfriend is exactly what I need right now."

"Well I'm glad to hear that you feel the same as I do, I just have one question for you if you don't mind." Dylan said, feeling equally relieved.

"Sure I don't mind. What's your question?" Judy said as she took a sip of her drink.

"Did you agree to come on this "date" with me, because you're hiding your boyfriend from your family?"

Judy nearly spit out her mouthful of coffee but managed to hold it in, swallow hard, and then started coughing.

*"cough, cough, *"I'm sorry" *cough, cough* "What makes you think I have a boyfriend?" Judy asked as she tried to stop coughing.

Dylan looked at Judy reproachfully, "Judy are you really trying to lie to me right now? We've been talking for roughly an hour and you've mentioned this Nick guy in nearly every conversation."

"But that doesn't mean-"

"Not to mention the fact that every time you talked about him, you light up. You start smiling and you suddenly get very spirited and happy, and before you say he's "just a friend," let me just say I do know what a mammal in love acts like. Hell I have 45 sisters and I've seen how they act when talking about the mammal they love."
"W-w-what are you talking about? N-N-Nicks not my boyfriend!" Judy said defensively, "Nick's a Fox remember? There's no way a bunny and a fox would date, I mean what kind of bunny would even find a fox attractive, even if he's got those mesmerizing emerald eyes, lean muscular figure and that sinfully soft tail. Nope, no way a bunny could be attracted to a fox." Judy said a soft smile on her face as she pictured Nick and the amazing feeling of his tail. As she spoke however Judy's voice got quieter and quieter the more she went on, more attempting to convince herself rather than Dylan that she wasn't in love.

Dylan just smiled and said nothing, letting Judy continue.

"Plus, even if by some miracle I did find him physically attractive, Nick himself is not boyfriend material. He's snarky, sarcastic, and he tries too hard act so confident and self-assured, even though he's really not. I mean sure he's kind, funny, smart, and secretly really sweet, but he's also just so irritating. I mean the way he's always trying to help me even if he's the one who needs help, it's like he's trying to get me to fall for hi…m." Judy finished trailing off to the point where she couldn't even hear the "M."

"I'm not in love with Nick. Alright? He's my best friend sure, but a bunny being in love with a fox is crazy… Right?" Judy asked as she looked up at Dylan, her little rant finally finished.

Dylan just looked at Judy for a moment not saying a word.

"Say something." Judy insisted, irritated by Dylan's silent stare, "Come on."

"Judy I'm going to say this one more time. You ARE in love with Nick, at least from what I've seen and heard, and that's OK! If two mammals love each other then what does it matter? I mean maybe back in the burrows or say 50 years ago that would have caused a stir and maybe would have been forbidden, but in this day and age. Why not? I know I don't know much about this city yet, but I do believe in the motto people here seem to be so proud of, 'In Zootopia,"

"Anyone can be anything," Judy said, blushing as she subconsciously whispered the second part of the city's slogan,

"Exactly!" Dylan said excitedly, "And if it's true that anyone can be anything, then why can't a be a bunny in love with a fox." Dylan explained sincerely, making sure to keep eye contact so Judy knew he really meant it.

Is he right? How could someone who's been talking with me for only an hour know how I feel better than I do? Is it that obvious to everyone else except me? Judy was about to speak again when Dylan's phone went off with a ding.

Dylan quickly checked the message and looked back to Judy.

"I'm really sorry Judy, but I gotta run. My landlord just texted me. I gotta go pick up my key and sign my lease before he rents the place to someone else," Dylan explained apologetically.

"It's not a problem Dylan. I know how hard finding a place can be. If you wanna meet up again or even just chat you have my number." Judy said, suddenly very thankful that the conversation was over.

"Thanks for being so understanding Judy, and you should really come to terms with your own feelings soon, if not Nick might get taken by someone else." Dylan said as he grabbed his phone off the table and ran out the door.

Nick and Judy's Apartment, Savannah Central, Sunday Afternoon 2:15pm
Judy entered the apartment, her mind still stuck on what Dylan had said and trying to figure out her own feelings on the matter.

"This is ridiculous, I'm not in love with Nick… well maybe I have a small, teensy, tiny crush on him but nothing more." Judy said to the empty apartment.

"Says the one who totally didn't try taking a sneak peek at Nick's junk at first opportunity." A mischievous voice said tauntingly.

"That's different." Judy protested, "Bunnies have very high sex drives that's all."

"Yeah but if you felt the urge to look it mean you at least see him as a possible sexual partner." Another voice added.

"Yeah but it's not like being physically attracted to a mammal equals being in love."

"True enough but remember what Dylan said, 'I have 45 sisters and I've seen how they act when talking about the mammal they love.' If it's showing on your face then maybe you just haven't recognized it yet." Judy's voice of reason said plainly.

"I'm not in love, I of all mammals would know if I was in love… Right?" Judy asked, sounding a lot more unsure then she wanted too.

"I've never really been in love have I?" Judy said as she tried to think of what exactly it felt like to be in love.

Thinking about it for a few more minutes, Judy realized that despite having crushes and even going on a few dates she had never really been, "in love". Having focused on training to be a cop instead of talking about relationships and stuff with her friends like the rest of her sisters, Judy realized now that she wasn't even sure how she could tell if she was in love.

"Grirr, fine. Since I'm completely on my own, without a clue what to do, I'll just have to do what any adult does when faced with the unknown and Zoogle it." Judy said as she walked to her room and laid down on the bed.

"How, To, Know, If, You're, In, Love." Judy said to herself, as she typed each word in the Zoogle search bar.

As soon as she pressed enter the page was filled with links, things like "11 signs that you're falling in love, according to science," or "How Do You Know If You're in Love? | Psychology Today" and even "How to Know if You're in Love (with Pictures) – wikiHow"

"Wow there's so many links," Judy said as she scrolled down the screen glancing briefly at each link.

"I guess I should look at the scientific one first," Judy said to herself as she clicked "11 signs that you're falling in love, according to science,"

Going through the article Judy decided to see how each point matched up to how she felt about Nick.

"Alright the first one on the list is 'You can't stop staring at them.' Well I don't stare at Nick so that's one strike…" Judy said through pursed lips as she thought a bit longer about it.

"Except there have been a few times that I might have looked a bit longer than what would be considered normal, so maybe a half check." Judy negotiated with herself as she remembered some of
the sneak glances and prolonged eye contact over the past few weeks.

"Moving on, 'You feel like you're high. ' Well I've never been high so I wouldn't know how that feels, so that's out." Judy said plainly as she moved on to the next point.

"'You always think about them,' and 'You want them to be happy. ' I can't deny wanting Nick to be happy but that doesn't mean anything, and I don't think about him allll the time. Except Dylan did say that I had mentioned Nick repeatedly throughout our conversation, and I can't deny I often wonder how he's doing, but that's because I'm worried, not because I'm in love." Judy said as if trying to convince someone else of her feelings.

As Judy continued going down the list she found that in some way or another each point held true for her feelings towards Nick. Still uncertain however, Judy continued looking through lists, but list after list Judy found she would still feel unconvinced and move on to another one.

"Ugh this is not helping in the slightest. Maybe I might have better luck if I change the search up." Judy said after almost an hour of clicking through pages.

So Judy switched up how she searched, typing different variations to try and find whatever it was that she was looking for, desperate to find something that explained and summarized her feelings. But throughout the stories of people realizing their feelings and the lists explaining to her the ways to tell if she was truly in love, Judy slowly came to realize that it was pointless.

"I'm not getting anywhere!" Judy shouted as she finally threw down her phone in frustration.

After taking a moment to calm down Judy started laughing, and for a solid five minutes Judy just laughed.

"I can't believe I'm going this crazy just because Dylan thinks I'm in love with Nick." Judy said as she picked her phone back up.

As Judy was about to shut her phone off a link she hadn't seen before caught her eye, "When You Love Them Before You Realize You Love Them ... - PS I Love You,"

"Well one more isn't going to kill me," Judy said as she clicked the article.

The link lead to an article as expected, the site was called "PS I Love you," and seemed to be entirely dedicated to love, along the top of the page were buttons leading to poetry, stories, forums, and even a newsletter, all about love. Judy wasn't expecting much as she started reading the article, having already come to the decision that she wasn't in love, but as she read what the author was describing Judy realized the truth and she suddenly found that tears were spilling out from her eyes.

The article itself wasn't extremely profound or flowery, it was pretty average in all respects, but the points it made hit home hard. The author described the feeling of saying goodbye to that special person even when you don't realize how special they are, the long hug and whispered words between you and that person, the desire to spend just one more second with them no matter what. Judy didn't even try to hold back the tears as she remembered sending Nick off at the train station, and the more she thought about it the more everything was just starting to click.

Wiping her tears Judy continued reading as the author described the way you would casually drop whatever you were doing to take a call, or read a text from that special someone, and how you would just feel happy reading the text and how you'd reply as fast as possible in hopes of getting more texts from them, perfectly describing how Judy had been acting the past few days.

Judy was in shock. This article was short, not even 400 words long, but despite that it seemed to
speak to her, as if some other part of her had written the article to make Judy realize the truth.

"I'm always happy when I'm with him. I never wanted him to go even though he's going to make his life better. I look forward to seeing him and even plan on visiting just to spend time with him, and even though we talk almost everyday, it's still not enough."

"I fell in love with a stupid hustler fox." Judy whispered quietly, as if worried just by saying it somehow everyone else would know.

"I fell in love with a stupid hustler fox!" Judy exclaimed a little louder, a little happier, wiping away the last of the tears as she became more confident in and accepting of what she felt.

And after having accepted her feelings Judy couldn't stop the flood of warm fuzzy feelings that started bubbling up.

"I got my heart stolen by a conmammal and I didn't even know it." Judy said giddily as she hopped off her bed and walked to the fridge, suddenly thirsty after her emotional breakthrough.

"Wait! What if he doesn't feel the same?" Judy thought, suddenly freezing mid sip as she realized she had no idea how Nick felt about her.

"I mean I can be pretty sure he doesn't hate me, I mean he agreed to work with and move in with me, and he's always supporting me. So I know he cares a little, and he even defended me during the press conference despite not wanting to draw attention to himself." Judy reasoned, trying to get an idea for how Nick might feel about her.

"He also has started to trust and confide in me more. Plus, while he doesn't initiate physical contact, he doesn't pull away like he did that night he told me about the scouts. But is that him just trying to be a good friend? Am I just looking for something to validate my feelings or is there really something more?"

Before Judy could think more about how Nick might feel her phone started to ring.

"Ugh, it's probably Mom wondering how the date went." Judy said as she pulled her phone from her pocket only to be pleasantly surprised that it was Nick calling and not her mom.

"That's strange. I'm usually the one calling him." Judy said as she pressed the accept Muzzletime button.

As Nick's face filled the screen Judy took in every detail as if seeing him for the first time, everything was different, from the creamy color of his neck to the mixed shades of red and orange that made up his coat. Judy couldn't put her finger on it but looking at Nick now that she had realized her feelings was different than any time before and as the warm feelings welled up once again, Judy found she couldn't keep the smile off her face.

"Hey Nick! What's up?" Judy asked smile planted firmly on her face.

"Well Fluff, I figured you could tell me about your date, but seeing the look on your face, I think even a police cadet like myself could figure out how it went." Nick said, his cheer seeming a bit forced.

"Oh really? Well then, oh wise fox cadet, please tell me how my date went." Judy said deciding to play along.

"Well Fluff, from the lovestruck look in your eye and the big old smile on your face, I would say that
it was love at first sight. You two were lost in your own world as you chatted for hours about things big and small. Your parting at the end of the date was sad but with promises to see each other soon." Nick joked, as he forced his muzzle to come together into a smile.

*I could be wrong but that smile seems a bit forced to me,* Judy thought as Nick continued talking.

"No need to tell me I'm right, I just want an invite to the wedding. Hopefully you can hold off until after I graduate because I don't know if they'd give me the time off." Nick continued, finding himself unable to stop.

"Niiick," Judy said sweetly, trying to get the fox's attention.

"Oh and definitely name a -"

"Nick!" Judy said a little louder, snapping him out of it.

"Yes?"

"Am I going to be able to tell you what happened, or will I have to listen to you ramble till the end of time?"

"Well Carrots I guess I can let you fill me in on the specifics since I already know generally what happened."

Judy just smiled, "Oh Nick your powers of deduction really are amazing."

"I know, I know. It's a gift." Nick agreed, oblivious to the sarcastic tone Judy was using.

"You're right only someone as gifted as you could manage to be so absolutely one hundred percent… wrong!" Judy finished, smirk planted firmly on her face.

"Come again?" Nick said disbelievingly.

"I said you are wrong, Mr. Wilde. Dylan wasn't looking to date which was good because neither was I. Instead he wanted a friend and someone to help him learn the city, we talked about Zootopia, his job, and eventually about the burrows too." Judy explained.

As she spoke she watched the strained smile on Nicks face shift into a softer, less forced smile.

*Well that's encouraging, I can't say he's got a thing for me, but he does seem to be happy that the date didn't go well,* Judy thought to herself happily.

"Really? Well don't be disheartened, my dear Carrots. I'm sure some lucky buck will catch your eye and he'll sweep you off your feet." Nick said, trying to be supportive.

"Or, maybe, I meet someone, and sweep him off his feet." Judy teased.

"Yeah considering how you are, that actually sounds more likely," Nick responded, his smile getting more genuine by the second.

"For sure," Judy agreed, smiling as she imagined literally picking Nick up off his feet.

"So, how's your weekend going so far Nick, Hanging out with your classmates at all?" Judy asked, curious to see how Nick was getting along with his fellow cadets.

"Eh not really, I've been hitting either the gym, the books or my bed, I realized even with all your
training I still have a lot to work on if I want to graduate." Nick explained.

"Hey Nick," A voice off camera said, causing Nick to look off screen.

"Yeah what's up, Tom." Nick replied.

"Me and some of the other guys are going to shoot some pool in the rec room if you wanna join us." Tom said casually.

"I'm on the phone right now, but maybe later." Nick said, still looking off screen.

"Oh, pardon me. I wouldn't want to interrupt your call with your girlfriend, maybe some other time."

"Tom, you and I both know I'm single, and unless you want me to spread your girlfriend's nickname for you to the rest of the class, you'll keep your mouth shut." Nick said, trying to suppress the blush that was heating up his face.

Is it just me or is his face a little redder than usual, I can't be sure though. Curse his red fur, Judy thought annoyedly.

"Let's not do anything hasty Nick, I promise to keep my speculations to myself from now on, but if you talk to the same girl almost every day mammals will start suspecting things, I mean mammals talk" Tom said defensively.

"Well my dear Schmoopsie-poo, if you don't want every other guy in the class calling you that too, you'll help keep the chatter down." Nick said teasingly.

"How did you even hear that? And you wouldn't really… would you?"

"I have really good hearing Tom, and Would I really tell everyone your girlfriend's pet name for you? No, probably not, but just know I have it in my back pocket if I need it." Nick said reassuringly.

Judy was listening to the exchange smile still firmly planted on her face.

It seems like he's getting along well with at least one of his classmates. Judy thought to herself as she waited for Nick to finish.

"I'll try and make sure you don't need it then, and feel free to come down when you're done if you want." The voice said as it faded away and Nick turned his attention back to the screen.

"Threatening your classmates already, Slick? And here I thought you were a changed mammal." Judy said in mock disapproval.

Nick just smiled and said, "You can take the fox out of the streets, but you can't take the streets out of the fox."

"Well I'll just have to see about that." Judy said coyly.

"You're welcome to try, but nobody thus far has succeeded. But if anyone could, it'd probably be you Fluff." Nick said, voice soft with a hint of sadness.

"Now tell me more about Mr. Daucus, seeing as he didn't want to date, you probably were able to have an actual conversation with him." Nick said, quickly perking back up.

"Well he's about the same age as me, we graduated at the same time…. And so Judy spent the next
few minutes describing Dylan before changing the subject to something else, until before either of them had notice an hour had passed.

"Well Nick as much as I'd love to keep talking to you all night I should probably make dinner and if I remember correctly the Dining Hall closes soon too, so you should go as well," Judy said as she noticed the time.

"You've got a point there, Carrots. I can't survive off of good conversation alone, not that I haven't tried in the past." Nick joked.

"Please don't joke like that Nick." Judy said her ears drooping slightly as she pictured a starving Nick.

"Alright, alright, I'm sorry. I just like to joke about it because if you can't laugh about something then you've already lost to it. But if it bothers you I'll try not to mention it as much." Nick said trying to placate Judy.

"Thanks Nick, I know you use humor to cope it just makes me sad thinking about how you used to live. I'll try and not be such a stick in the mud about it. Now I really do need to get going, bye Nick." Judy said before adding a quiet, "I miss you." figuring Nick wouldn't catch it.

"Thanks Judy, I miss you too," and before she could react, Nick quickly ended the call, leaving Judy with an empty screen and a heart full of hope.

Clutching the phone to her chest for a moment Judy couldn't help but smile, *Yep there's definitely something here.*

*What a relief that this Dylan character just wanted to be friends,* Nick thought as he let out a sigh of relief and he placed his phone down on the bed.

*Wait, I shouldn't be relieved? Judy deserves to find happiness and I shouldn't get upset if she's trying to date.* Nick thought, chastising himself for feeling relieved that date went bad.

"She's better off with someone else. She's better off with someone else, I'm just her friend. I'm just her friend. She wouldn't want a fox like me, anyway." Nick whispered this mantra a few times to remind himself where he stood before picking his phone back up and checking the time.

The screen lit up and informed Nick that it was only 6:30. After seeing the time Nick contemplated going to the Dining Hall or even the rec room but decided to go to bed instead, feeling more tired than anything else. So, after hitting the lights and plugging in his phone, Nick went to bed, still repeating those words in his head until he finally fell asleep.

_Zootopia Police Academy (ZPA), Middle of Nowhere, Monday Morning, 10:30am_

"Sliding into icy water, You're DEAD Foxsicle,"

Nick suppressed a growl as he pulled himself out of the freezing water at the base of the ice wall.

"I fucking HATE ice, I can't stop myself from sliding when I pick up speed," Nick said as he quickly dried himself off with a warm towel before heading back to the front of the obstacle muttering to himself all the while about how he'd personally speed up global warming after he was done in the academy.

As Nick approached the obstacles start he noticed a group of his classmates huddled together trying
to figure out how to go about conquering the wall. Nick just ignored the group and instead just jumped right back onto the course, determined to figure out how to beat the wall. Instead of going full speed like last time Nick decided to slow it down and jog up to the wall. Nick then took a few minutes to inspect the ice, looking for any natural cracks or ridges he could find, and after locating a possible path Nick began his attempt at climbing the wall, using his claws to find purchase on the smaller ledges and crevices Nick slowly pulled himself up inch by inch.

"I'm actually gonna make it!" Nick said as he reached up to grab the top of the wall only to have the ice beneath his hind paws break, leaving him dangling by just one arm.

"Or not." Nick said through clenched teeth as he tried desperately to hold on and reach the top, only to fall a few minutes later.

"Alright Cadets go hit the showers and eat lunch. I expect you all in the classroom at 12 o'clock and not a minute later," Major Friedkin said as Nick pulled himself once again from the icy water.

As all the other cadets wandered away, Nick took some time to dry off and warm up. As Nick was toweling off his wet fur he could feel a pair of eyes on him and had to fight the urge to keep drying himself and not turn around.

"Can I help you in some way pal, or do you just wanna keep silently staring at me?" Nick asked casually, as he continued to dry off.

"Well Cadet, as much as I enjoy staring at soggy foxes I figured I could give you some advice." Major Friedkin said flatly as she walked over from where she had been standing.

Hearing who it was Nick quickly straightened up a bit.

"Sorry Major, I knew someone was watching me I just didn't know who." Nick said, hoping the Major wouldn't chew him out for talking to her informally.

"At ease Wilde, I won't punish you for not knowing that it was me, that being said good job recognizing you were being watched."

"Thank you Major," Nick said as he finished drying himself.

"Now, I wanted to talk to you about what you were doing at the ice wall, you're not exactly wrong by looking for cracks in the ice but it's not going to work in reality." Major Friedkin said as she looked over at the ice wall.

"You see, in the field when every second wasted could mean the difference between life and death, can you really afford to spend time staring at the ice hoping to find a way up that might not exist?"

Nick remained silent, thinking to himself, she's right, but what other way is there?

"It might seem impossible Wilde, but what you can't do on your own isn't impossible with others. Hell, officer Hopps jumped on the heads of her classmates since she couldn't do it on her own." Major Friedkin said, chuckling at the memory.

"It's just some food for thought, take it or not, as long as you can get over the wall you'll pass. And speaking of food you should go get some before it's too late." Major Friedkin said before walking off.

"That was strange." Nick said to himself as he headed to the dorm to change.
Nick entered the dining hall and joined the line of mammals waiting in line for food. After waiting for what seemed like an eternity Nick finally got his food and found a table for himself in the corner of the dining area. Eating alone was not a new thing for Nick, and in some cases, he preferred it, especially now since making forced conversation with mammals he didn't really know wasn't exactly something he wanted to do. So, sitting alone Nick ate quickly as he pulled up the news on his phone, partly in an attempt to keep up to date with what was happening in Zootopia and the country as a whole, and partly to keep himself occupied, so by the end of the news segment Nick had finished his food and made his way to the classroom.

Nick found himself a desk exactly in the middle of the classroom, giving him a good view since most of the other cadets sat towards the back of the room. A few minutes later the rest of the cadets had found their way into the classroom and sat waiting for the instructor. As they waited a few conversations sprung up between cadets until the room was filled with murmurs from all the conversations, but everything went silent as the classroom door burst open and slammed loudly into the wall.

The instructor who walked in was a large brown bear, his fur was long and unkempt, and he walked with a slight limp and as he turned to face the class. Nick had to fight to keep up a straight face and not stare as he noticed just how scared and messed up this instructor's features were. The bear, now standing in front of the class, was missing the left half of his nose. Nick couldn't tell what caused the wound, but all that remained of one half of the instructor's nose was a collection of mangled and scarred tissue. Adding on to that no less than seven scars, that Nick could count, all going in different directions across his face. This mammal had seen some things, that much Nick could be certain. Not only by the scars on his face, but by the weary look in his eyes as he scanned the classroom, as if searching for some hidden danger.

"Morning class, I'm Sargent Alastor Crowtheri and today I'm going to be teaching you the proper technique for searching and handcuffing a perp." Sargent Crowtheri explained as he walked over to the computer and tried to pull up a power point.

After a few minutes of struggling and cursing, Sargent Crowtheri was finally about to get the power point displayed on the wall behind him.

"Now that I've set the damn thing up, today I'm only gonna to be explaining the steps and describing what you should do, tomorrow you will go to the gym and actually practice the techniques, so pay attention and make sure take diligent notes."

Sargent Crowtheri then went point by point explaining how to take control of a perp, the proper commands to yell, where to search, and what kinds of tricks and resistance they might experience. Throughout the lesson Crowtheri made sure to say on multiple occasions that they should never lower their guard on the street, saying that, they weren't safe until they were home in their beds and sometimes not even then. Nick paid attention to the lesson and took notes like usual and by the end of the lecture he had a pretty good idea of the step by step procedure that should be followed.

"Alright any questions?" Sargent Crowtheri asked as he clicked through the last slide.

Everyone stayed silent, they either didn't want to sound stupid, wanted to get out of class as soon as possible, or they actually understood everything, but no matter the reason the end result was the same, silence.

"Alright good, and one word of advice to you all, DON'T underestimate the smaller mammals, I'm sure you big tigers, bears and other large mammals think that you can relax when dealing with a small mammal like an Otter a Raccoon or even a pig, but I promise you that thinking like that will lead to your death." Sargent Crowtheri explained seriously.
One of the tigers in the back of the class let out a snort as he tried to hold in a laugh.

"Something funny, Cadet?" Sargent Crowtheri asked, his voice suddenly taking on a dangerous tone.

"I'm sorry Sargent, it's just what could a pig do to hurt me? I'm significantly bigger, stronger and faster than a pig is, plus they don't have claws or fangs so it's not like they can do all that much damage especially if I've already caught and disarmed them," The tiger explained confidently.

"Oh really? So, you think a wee little piggy couldn't hurt a big bad tiger like yourself, well I got something to show you since your next class doesn't start for another 15 minutes," Sargent Crowtheri said morbidly.

Walking angrily over to the computer Sargent Crowtheri pulled up another slide show, and as the first slide came into view everyone in the room gasped. The only thing on the slide was the picture of a dead wolf officer who had seemingly been mauled to death, the wolf's face was a mess of blood and gore, slashed beyond recognition, and the cuts on his face were paired with deep gashes in his throat as he lay in a pool of his own blood.

"This officer was killed in action, but I'm sure you figured that out already." Crowtheri joked darkly

"He had cornered a perp after a long foot chase, the perp was a minx if my memory serves me correctly, so without backup the officer decided to handcuff the minx and wait for his partner, the camera footage from the site shows how instead of using proper holding techniques the officer was sloppy, he probably thought he could compensate with strength, this lead to an opening, the perp seeing an opportunity attacked with everything he had and after a one sided struggle the minx fled the scene and the officer bled out before help could arrive." Crowtheri said solemnly as the room stayed silent.

"This was a tragic loss! His wife and kids no longer had their husband and father and the ZPD lost a brother in arms. Now I'm not blaming the dead here, but I think had he used proper technique, this officer might have gone home that night." Crowtheri said as he switched to the next slide.

This picture was less gory but no less gruesome, this time the officer was a tiger and he was laying in an alley surrounded by dirt and trash with a bullet hole in the head, eyes wide, showing the shock of his last moments.

"This big strong tiger was killed by a little piggy," Sargent Crowtheri said, looking right at the cadet that had laughed earlier.

"The perp was unarmed and running from the officer, eventually the chase lead to this alley and the officer found the perp digging through the trash, not thinking he had anything to worry about the officer approached with his weapon holstered since, 'It's just a pig, and what could a pig do to hurt me since he doesn't have any weapons, claws or fangs?'" Sargent Crowtheri paused for a moment and sighed showing just a hint of sadness.

"Little did the officer know that the pig had hidden a gun in this alley, and as the officer approached the pig quickly turned and shot him, and that was the end of it. Another good officer lost and another funeral with children crying for a father to come back, who never would!"

Nick couldn't be sure but he thought he could see a tear forming in Sargent Crowtheri's eye.

_This is some brutal stuff._ Nick thought to himself as Crowtheri continued on to the next slide.

"Yeah, and that's how you're gonna end up. Are you sure that this is what you want?" Cyn-Nick
said as he pulled up an image of Nick lying dead in an alley like the tiger had been.

"It's possible, but I know how to handle criminals, plus if I use both procedure and my own wits, I'm sure I'll be OK." Nick thought confidently as Sargent Crowtheri changed slides again.

Cyn-Nick, realizing that using his own life wouldn't work decided to change tactics.

"You're right, you'll be fine. But what about Judy?" Cyn-Nick asked, letting the question settle in Nick's mind, throwing a picture of Judy lying dead in an alley, mauled by some unknown mammal.

Nick shuddered at the thought and had to fight to keep himself calm.

"That won't happen because I'll be there! Why do you think I'm here?" Nick thought back trying to get rid of the image plaguing his mind.

"If you're there." Cyn-Nick said tauntingly, "But remember what happened in that other chase, and she's clearly faster than you so she'd pull a head, and instead of waiting for backup, she'll charge in headfirst, and by the time you get there she'll already be dead." Cyn-Nick explained, painting a very explicit picture that Nick couldn't exactly refute.

Seeing he had the advantage Cyn-Nick pushed the issue further.

"Or what happens if you have to choose between saving her or some citizen? We both know that you're obligated to save the citizen first and that's what Judy would want, but could you do it? Could you let the mammal you care so deeply for die so that some random mammal could live?"

That was a blow Nick wasn't ready for, his mind was sent spiraling as he tried to figure out if he could let Judy die to save someone else.

"Could I do it?" Nick asked himself, suddenly very conflicted about what he was doing here.

"This is all for Judy, but would I sacrifice Judy like I'm supposed to, just to save another mammal I don't care about?" And just like that a seed of doubt had planted itself in Nick's mind and even as Nick refocused on the slideshow Cyn-Nick laughed as he watched the seed take root.

"I'm a red fox with a green thumb!" Cyn-Nick said proudly as he faded into the background not wanting to press his luck.

"Now I didn't show you these images for my own amusement, it kills me to have these pictures at all, since these mammals were my brothers and sisters in arms. But I show you this so you will remember one important thing." Sargent Crowtheri said before going silent.

Letting the silence hang there for a moment Crowtheri just stared out at the cadets as the tension in the room got heavier and heavier as everyone waited for him to speak.

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" Crowtheri suddenly roared, causing the whole class to jump in their seats.

"Constant vigilance, following procedure and technique, and finally, following your gut. If you stick to those three things, then hopefully you'll all live long happy lives and I won't have to attend any more funerals of my family in blue." Sargent Crowtheri said, suddenly sounding very tired as he walked slowly out of the room without another word leaving both Nick and the rest of the class with a lot to think about.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn’t, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all.

Also If you enjoyed the fact that Dylan turned out to be a nice guy just looking for friendship and nothing more you can thank AeonFeral over at FanFiction.net it was his idea that he let me use. In fact I was just gonna throw Dylan in the story to just be a jerk and then never get mentioned again but thanks to Aeon Dylan will live on.

Lastly go listen to

How Could You Leave Us by NF - It's a great song.

Now that I think about it does anyone even listen to my suggestions? ... eh I'll keep suggesting anyway
Chapter 16 – Things Left Alone

Chapter Summary

the past comes back to bite,

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 16, it's a longer one so enjoy that, and keep those comments coming.

So nobody found all three references which is fine, The first one was the cafe's name, Uncle Bob's Rumba Coffee is from the anime Soul Eater, The bear instructor is Mad Eye Moody from Harry Potter and lastly Schmoopsie-poo is from Monsters Inc.

This chapter also has some references so point them out if you see them.

As Always I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails
and
LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: Still don't own Zootopia or it's characters, but that's fine, who needs money, fame, prestige, and my name in the credits that nobody actually reads, I'll stick with what I got right here, complete control of the story, good readers, and the ability to make my own schedule.

Chapter 16 – Things Left Alone

Zootopia Police Academy (ZPA), Middle of Nowhere, Tuesday Morning, 5:30am

Nick ran alone through the lightly wooded path behind the ZPA, his breath slightly labored as he pushed himself to go faster.

"Dang, no matter how many times I do it, running the morning 5 miles is rough," Nick thought to himself as he ran.

"Lucky for me I had Judy, if not I'd probably be lagging behind," Nick thought as he looked behind
him at some of his other, less fit classmates.

As he thought about it more Nick realized he had a lot to thank Judy for, not only had she conditioned him physically, but she also drilled as much information into his head as she could, spending long night's studying flash cards and textbooks until Nick could answer the questions in his sleep.

"I really gotta thank her properly sometime, there's no telling just how far behind I would have been without her," Nick thought to himself as he reflected on how hard the academy really was.

"Running in the morning, followed by the obstacle course, then classes with only short breaks and an hour for lunch, and at least one test a day, it's a surprise I'm still standing let alone standing at the top," Nick said to himself as he considered his position in the class. Nick had been crushing the academic portion of the academy, with perfect scores on almost every test, Nick held the number one spot in class by a wide margin. As for the physical side of it Nick held to the middle of the pack, he was by no means the fastest or strongest but was able to hold his own.

"As it stands now I should be a shoo in the top 10%, but I gotta keep working to make sure that it stays that way,"

"You still haven't made any friends though," Cyn-Nick said mockingly.

"Sure I have, Tom and the rest of the guys in the room are my friends," Nick thought back defensively.

"You're delusional, do you ever hang out with them outside of class or the room? Do you ever talk to them about anything other than class? Do you know anything about them other than their names and ages? I wouldn't call that friendship, at best your acquaintances and even that's a stretch," Cyn-Nick said maliciously

Nick couldn't say anything in response as Cyn-Nicks words sank in and Nick realized there was some truth to them.

"Pfft, so what? I'm not here to make friends, hell I'm already best friends with my future partner so any other friendship is pointless, and I don't need it," Nick thought defensively, and before any other voices could rear their ugly heads Nick pushed everything to the side and focused entirely on the run.

After finishing the run with a new personal best, Nick quickly jogged back to the dorm to change out for breakfast.

A Few Hours Later...

Nick sat alone, his breathing ragged, his body cold, his fingers sore, and a big smile on his face as he enjoyed the view from the top of the ice wall.

"Even though Major Friedkin said I should think of another way getting to the top this still feels nice," Nick said as he enjoyed his victory.

Nick took it all in for a moment, the warm shining sun on his fur, the feeling of the cool ice on his paw pads, and the gentle breeze that ruffled his shirt, but as he reveled in his success Nick noticed the few cadets that had come to the wall weren't faring so well.

Pretty much everyone had been struggling with the wall, some cadets lacked the fingers needed to properly grasp the wall while some lacked the upper body strength to pull themselves up, and for some cadets, they just weren't built for climbing.
Nick sighed, "Well I guess that's enough of a break for now, I should probably switch to a different obstacle since I've got this one down."

Nick then gracefully slid down the back of the wall on his hind paws and began walking towards the Rainforest District course.

"Wilde, Hey Wilde wait up," A voice called out, causing Nick to stop and turn around and see three mammals walking towards him.

The motley crew consisted of a hippo and a tiger whose names Nick couldn't quite recall, and Sam one of his roommates, and as they walked over Nick wondered what they wanted with him.

"What can I do for you gentelmammals," Nick said as the trio gathered around him.

"Wilde, I think we need to have a talk," the tiger said darkly.

Nick just raised an eyebrow silently and prepared himself for the coming confrontation.

"Yeah, you go some explaining to do," the hippo agreed.

Not liking his odds Nick did a quick scan of the surrounding area, seeing if anyone was around to help, but much to his displeasure there were no instructors or even any other cadets around.

"And what pray tell do I have to explain," Nick said sourly, throwing out his meanest scowl in hopes that the three might leave him alone.

"Oh, don't be like that Nick, we just want to know how you got up the wall," Sam said playfully.

Nick let out a small sigh of relief.

"What's so bad about helping out fellow cadets? I mean it doesn't hurt your score if we also make it," Sam said taking Nick's sigh as a sign of irritation.

Nick quickly recomposed himself, switching gears from "I'm gonna fight these guys," to "normal conversation," and throwing up the appropriate mask.

"You're right Sam, sorry about the attitude I'm just a little tired, didn't sleep well last night," Nick lied, trying to brush off his attitude.

"It's fine we've all been there," The tiger said understandingly.

"For sure, so would you mind explaining how you got up the wall?" The hippo asked eagerly.

"Sure, I guess I can tell you, but I don't know how helpful it will be," Nick said casually.

"Thanks Nick, any bit of information helps," Sam said gratefully.

So, Nick explained his trick for getting up the wall, but as he did Nick noticed only the tiger looked happy with the information, Sam and the hippo were both noticeably disappointed as they heard how Nick had conquered the wall.

"Well thanks for the advice Nick but I think John and I are going to have to find another way to get to the top, some of us just aren't born to climb" Sam said, wiggling his hooves to emphasize his point.

"Sorry I couldn't be of more help guys, but I'm sure you'll think of something I mean there are hippos
and dear in the ZPD already, so you know it's possible," Nick said encouragingly before walking off to the Rainforest course.

So, Nick spent the rest of his time working through the Rainforest course, climbing ropes, swinging across monkey bars and falling face first into mud pits until finally Major Friedkin gave the order to get cleaned up and reconvene in the gym after lunch.

*A Short Lunch Break Later…*

With lunch finished, Nick and the rest of the cadets gathered in the gym, Today was the practical training of what they had talked about in class yesterday, and as the instructor went step by step through the motions of how to properly restrain and handcuff a suspect, pulling a cadet from the class to demonstrate on, Nick made sure to pay close attention.

"Now there are sometimes when a suspect needs extra restraints put on them, this is mainly used for predators who have resorted to attempting to bite either themselves or others, now since sharp teeth and strong jaw can do just as much damage as claws the ZPD also employs the use of muzzles," The instructor explained as he pulled a muzzle out of a box to show the class.

Nick's eyes were immediately drawn to the muzzle, for a moment all he could do was stare at it as it swung from the instructor's paw and shimmered in the light.

Nick gulped before giving his head a quick shake, "I figured I would have to see one of those again, it's no big deal, I'm fine," Nick thought to himself reassuringly, but even as he tried to ignore it Nick found he could no longer focus on the instructor, as his focus would always find its way back to the muzzle.

"Alright enough talking and watching it's time you all tried it out for yourselves, grab yourselves handcuffs, a muzzle and a training partner, make sure to keep switching who gets cuffed and muzzled, and until I say otherwise don't stop practicing, I'll walk around and check your form and assist if need be," The instructor said as he finished up his demonstration, breaking Nick from his daze.

Nick approached the box of muzzles cautiously, each step slower than the last until after an eternity seemed to pass, Nick was finally face to face with the instrument of his kithood trauma.

"I'm fine, I'm fine, it's just a lifeless piece of metal and fabric," Nick thought to himself as he pulled a muzzle from the box.

Holding it in his paw for a moment Nick just stared at it lost in thought as he kept telling himself that he was fine over and over again, surprisingly during this time Cyn-Nick stayed silent, as if even he was too scared of the muzzle to come out and take advantage of the situation.

"This is stupid," Nick said to himself after a few minutes of just staring at the muzzle in his paw, "I need to find a partner and start practicing," but even as he said those words Nick still couldn't move from where he was standing.

"Hey Nick, you still without a partner?"

Nick jumped slightly at the voice that had suddenly appeared behind him, turning around Nick saw it was Tom.

"Oh hey Tom, you nearly scared me out of my fur, don't sneak up on me like that," Nick said as casually as possible while he quickly threw up a mask to hid how shook up he was.
"I just walked up to you normally Nick, I wouldn't even bother trying to scare you since you always seem to know when someone's trying to sneak up on you," Tom said as he eyed Nick suspiciously.

"Well what can I say I've got good instincts I guess, but I must have just spaced out, so what were you saying?" Nick asked, hoping Tom would buy his excuse and move on.

"It happens to the best of us I guess," Tom said, still sounding unconvinced,

"Anyway, I saw you standing alone and wanted to know if you needed a partner since it seems everyone else has found someone," Tom said motioning with his paw to the rest of the class which had already started practicing.

Nick followed Tom's paw and saw that he was right, while Nick had been spacing out everyone else was already hard at work.

"Yeah I guess I could use a partner if you're alright with that," Nick said as he tossed the muzzle to Tom.

"Damn this thing is creepy," Tom said as he looked the muzzle over, "You wanna practice putting this on first so we can get a better idea of how it works?" Tom asked as he held up the muzzle to Nick.

"S-sure Tom, if you're into that sorta thing, but just so you know, my safe word is blueberries," Nick joked as he tried to calm his nerves.

"You would make it weird, but never the less let's get started," Tom said as he began to walk over to Nick, muzzle in paw.

"It's only weird if you make it weird," Nick tried to say, but it only came out as a strangled whisper as Nick stepped back unconsciously, suddenly Nick started to flash back to the last time he was this close to a muzzle.

"I Nicholas Wilde promise to be brave. Loyal. Helpful. And trustworthy,"

"Even though you're a fox,"

Nick heard these words clear as day as the gym faded out replaced by the darkness that had surrounded him that night, and just like that Nick found himself back in that memory, the one that had haunted him for years and years until he had buried it and pretended he had conquered it.

"what?" Young Nick said, the confusion and worry evident in his voice.

The bright light in his face suddenly switched off leaving Young Nick temporarily blinded as his eyes tried to adjust to the lack of light. All of a sudden, a swift punch to his gut sent Young Nick sprawling to the floor.

Nick remembered that moment as if it was yesterday, the pain as his arms were held down, the look of disgust and malice on the faces of the scouts as the woodchuck leaned over him, muzzle at the ready. Nick remembered the jeering and laughter, as he plead with them to tell him what he had done.

"No, no! What did I do wrong, you guys? No, please! Tell me what did I do wrong?" Young Nick cried out.

Then came the pressure and cool touch of metal as the muzzle was held firmly in place and strapped
onto his head while all the scouts just laughed at him.

Tom noticed pretty quickly that something was off as he approached, Nick’s eyes just suddenly went wide as his ears went flat against his skull, and a faint whine escaped his lips.

"Nick, Nick you alright?" Tom asked, suddenly very worried for Nick.

Nick didn't seem to hear him so Tom, wanting to figure out what had caused the sudden shift in behavior decided to see if he could figure out what Nick was looking at, and found that while Nick's eyes were wide and out of focuses they were undoubtedly locked on to the muzzle he was holding.

Quickly tossing the muzzle to the side Tom lightly grabbed Nick's arm and gently shook him.

"Nick, Nick snap out of it," Tom said quietly so as not to draw any attention to what was going on.

"If you ever thought we'd trust a fox without a muzzle you're even dumber than you look," The woodchuck said maliciously, the words ringing in Nick's ears as the woodchuck's face faded out of existence and were replaced suddenly by a very concerned looking Tom.

"What's got you all spooked Tom?" Nick asked, trying to pretend the flash back hadn't happened at all.

"You Nick," Tom said, still holding onto Nick's arm.

"What are you talking about," Nick said nervously as he stepped back and shook Tom's paw off of his arm.

"Nick you just zoned out big time, you wouldn't respond when I called your name, your eyes were wide as saucers, and you're face went blank and your ears were glued to your head, all while you were staring at the muzzle in my paw," Tom said, clearly concerned by what just happened.

"Oh really, I must be more tired than I thought, I was watching EweTube till late last night, so I must’ve dozed off while standing, sorry about that," Nick lied, it was a stretch, but he hoped Tom would buy it.

"Nick I'm not an idiot, and I'm kind of insulted you think I'd believe that lie, there was clearly something more going on than falling asleep on your feet, now would you care to try again?" Tom asked, his tone suddenly harsh.

"That's the truth, believe it or don't, your choice," Nick said defiantly as he finally regained his composure.

"Fine." Tom said curtly before turning to pick up the discarded muzzle.

"Should we get back to this then," Tom said as he held out the muzzle challengingly.

Nick gulped, "Uhhh, maybe we don't practice putting on the muzzle today," Nick said sheepishly as he shifted his gaze as far away from the muzzle as he could.

"Thought so. Well then let's practice handcuffing then." Tom said bitterly as he threw the muzzle back in the box.

So, Nick and Tom began practicing take downs in silence, every time Nick tried to make conversation Tom would shut him down with a one word reply or silence. So, by the end of class they both had gotten a lot of practice handcuffing since they hadn't spoken more than twenty words
to each other. Nick could tell Tom was upset with him, and while he felt a twang of guilt over the whole incident Nick couldn't even think about how to fix it as his mind was completely overtaken with memories of that night. So, with a heavy heart and a head full of unpleasant thoughts Nick headed to the showers.

-ZPA Dining Facility 60 Minutes Later…-

Nick sat alone again, but this time there was no videos to accompany his meal, Nick was lost in thought over what had happened during the afternoon.

"So not only is that muzzle issue bigger than I thought, but now Tom will barely talk to me, what a mess," Nick thought to himself as he moved the food on his plate around listlessly.

"Y-yeah, I ah, told you, y-you can't do this, you should just give up," Cyn-Nick said, sounding strangely shook up.

"Don't listen to him you can get through it," Optimism said, sounding a lot less cheerful than usual.

"I don't see how, maybe If Judy were here I could trust her enough to… to put that thing on me," Nick thought back, even shuddering at the thought of Judy putting the muzzle on him.

"But she's not here so what can I do?" As Nick mulled it over in his mind three mammals joined his table.

"What a surprise, Nick's sitting alone again," Harry said teasingly as he sat down across from Nick.

"What's even more surprising is that he's not watching the news on his phone and putting out that 'don't bother me' vibe he normally has either," Sam said as he sat next to Nick.

Tom just glanced at Nick but said nothing, instead he sat down next to Harry and just started eating.

"Hey guys, how's it going?" Nick asked politely.

"Well Sam, Tom, and I just came back from the gym, it was leg day today. Lots of fun," Harry said in between bites of food.

"Yeah it was great! You should join us sometime Nick, working out with people is always better then working out alone," Sam said enthusiastically.

"Thank for the offer guys but I'll pass, I prefer to work out alone, since I like to just put my headphones in and go I doubt I'd be a good person to go to the gym with," Nick explained.

"Pfft, sounds about right," Nick heard Tom say under his breath.

"What was that Tom?" Sam asked, having faintly heard something from the wolf.

"I said, what do you guys wanna do tonight?" Tom lied.

As the three began to discuss evening plans Nick suddenly felt a vibration in his pocket. Checking his phone Nick saw it was a text from Judy and found himself suddenly much happier than he was a minute ago, so without delay Nick unlocked his phone and looked at the message.

Judy: Hey Nick a letter arrived for you today and I wanted to know if you want me to mail it to you or not, if so let me know soon so I can make a quick run to the post office. Hope everything's going alright, call you later!
A letter? That's strange. Nick thought to himself, *eh it's probably not important, I am interested as to what it's about though... I guess I could let Judy open it since none of my former contacts want to keep in touch and if they did they definitely wouldn't send a letter since it's too easy to steal or keep as evidence.*

Nick: A letter? Even I'm too young for letters Carrots, go ahead and open it if you want, you can tell me about it later,

"and send," Nick said as he sent the text to Judy and put his phone away, looking at his plate Nick realized he wasn't going to eat anymore and decided to go back to the room and relax. So, after excusing himself from the table and cleaning up after himself Nick slowly walked back to the dorm, his thoughts, once again occupied by the muzzle.

"What to do, what to do," Nick said to himself as he walked the length of the dorm room for the 20th time since he'd arrived. The dilemma of what to do about the muzzle problem was big and seemed to be without a solution so when Nick's phone began to ring it was a welcome distraction and Nick jumped on it, desperate for a break. Walking over to his bed Nick picked up the phone and immediately smiled, it was Judy requesting a Muzzletime.

"Just what I need to get my mind off of this," Nick said as he threw on a nonchalant expression and answered the phone.

"Hey Carrots, I see texting me just wasn't enough for you, you just had to see this perfect face, well I don't blame you, so I guess can spare some time to talk if you really-" Nick said playfully but stopped when he saw the expression on Judy's face.

Nick could tell right away that she was angry, and not the playful type of anger, or the fun kind of anger, no this was a new type of anger for Nick, not even when she confronted him about tricking her was she as angry as she seemed right now.

"H-hey what's got your tail in a knot fluff?" Nick said nervously.

"Nicholas Wilde," Judy said her tone slow and tempered.

"This is not going to end well," Nick thought as he heard his full first name.

"We. Need. To talk,'"

Nick sighed, he didn't know what she was mad about, but he knew his plan of catching a break and having a fun and relaxing conversation with Judy just went up in smoke.

"What did I do?" Nick said suddenly sounding very, very tired.

A Few Hours Earlier at the Apartment....

"Thanks for dropping me off Wolford, I'll see you tomorrow," Judy said with a cheerful wave as she walked down the stairs to the apartment with a spring in her step.

As Judy entered the apartment and shut the door behind her however, all the energy she had left her almost instantly and as Judy made her way to her room she had to fight the urge to just collapse on the floor and fall asleep right there in the middle of the apartment. The day had not been kind to Judy, the main reason being she hadn't been able to sleep much the night before as her mind was abuzz with the realization that she was in love with Nick, so Judy spent the entire day with a cup of
coffee in paw and bags under her eyes fighting desperately to stay awake. To make matters worse Wolford seemed to want to play 200 questions Nick Wilde edition all day, and while Judy had no problem talking about Nick there were more appropriate times then when she was taking a statement from a citizen.

Judy sighed in relief as she removed her belt and vest, letting them fall to the floor with a satisfying thud. After a quick shower and a change into a comfy pair of grey sweatpants and a pink tank top, Judy headed to the kitchen to figure out what she was going to do for dinner. As she got to the fridge Judy was stopped by a buzz from her pocket. Thinking it might be Nick Judy quickly pulled her phone from her pocket and unlocked it without even checking who the message was from.

*Dylan*: Hey Judy I just got off of work not too long ago and was bored, so since you're the only person I know in the city right now I wanted to know if you're free to hang out? If not no worries.

Judy smiled, "Having someone over isn't exactly what I wanted but I could at least talk to him about my feelings for Nick since he basically already knows, plus maybe if I talk about it I won't be awake all-night thinking about it again."

*Judy*: Sure Dylan I'm free for a bit, if you wanna come over we can order pizza and watch a movie or something.

After sending the message Judy waited for a reply and a few minutes later it came.

*Dylan*: Sounds good to me, I'll be over with a pizza in 30 minutes or less or your money back.

"That sounds like something Nick would say," Judy chuckled.

*Judy*: The address is 113 Bushwillow Road, Savannah Central. I live in the basement apartment, just take the stairs off of the sidewalk.

*Dylan*: Alright, I'll be over in a jiff.

So thirty minutes later there was a knock on the door and when Judy opened the it Dylan was there, wearing blue jeans and a green t-shirt with a strange logo on the right corner, the logo had white and blue wings on top of what looked like a small square shield with a point at the bottom. More important than his shirt however was the pizza in his paw that Judy looked at with ravenous hunger.

"Hey Dylan welcome to my apartment," Judy said as she stepped to the side and let Dylan in.

"Wow, nice place you got here, how much you paying for it?" Dylan asked as he had a look around.

"4,500 a month including utilities, but Nick and I split it, so it's not too bad, plus it's huge compared to my old place, and it came with almost all the furniture you see here," Judy said proudly as she walked over to the fridge.

"Wow that's impressive, I'm paying about 2,000 a month and I don't even have half the amount of space," Dylan said, clearly impressed with the apartment.

"Yeah it's a great place for a great price," Judy said as she rummaged through the fridge.

"You want anything to drink?" Judy asked as she pulled out a bottle of carrot juice from the fridge.

"I'll take some water if you don't mind," Dylan said as he set the pizza down on the coffee table.

"Not a problem," Judy said as she poured a glass of water and walked over to Dylan, handing him
the glass.

"Now I just got this T.V not too long ago and Nick also has a Furflix account that we can use, so we have a wide selection of T.V shows and movies that we can watch so take your pick," Judy said as she hopped onto one side of the couch and started scrolling through movies.

As Judy scrolled through movies Dylan took the other side of the couch for himself, commenting here and there on the odd movie that popped up.

"Ugh, how can there be so many movies but almost no good ones," Judy said annoyedly after 15 minutes of searching.

"I know right! It makes no sense," Dylan agreed, "but we don't have to watch a movie if you can't find something you like we can just chat or play a card game or something."

Judy sighed, "that's probably for the best since I doubt I'd be able to focus on a movie right now anyway,"

"What do you mean?" Dylan asked curiously.

"Well I actually had ulterior motives when I agreed to hang out tonight," Judy said as she sheepishly looked down at her feet.

"Ah Judy, not that I'm not tempted, but I meant what I said when we agreed to be friends, I'm flattered and all, but I think I'm going to leave now," Dylan said nervously as he jumped off the couch and headed towards the door.

"Wait Dylan I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner but what I had in mind is something friends do though," Judy said as she jumped off the couch and blocked Dylan's path.

"Judy this is not something friends do, maybe special friends do stuff like that, but I don't want to be that kind of friend with you," Dylan said as he stood face to face with Judy.

"What are you talking about Dylan, Friends talk about their problems with each other all the time, I know I should have told you I wanted to talk about stuff instead of just relaxing and I'm sorry about that, but you don't have to leave, we can just go back and find a movie, we don't need to talk about my problems,"

Dylan just looked at Judy in a stunned silence that lasted for about five minutes before he burst out laughing.

"What?" Judy asked confused as Dylan continued to laugh and laugh.

"What the fluff is so funny? Dylan" Judy asked again, confusion turning to anger.

"haha, it just, haha, it's just that, hahaha, the way you said, hahahahahah, owww my sides are killing me, ah hahahahaha," Dylan couldn't even explain himself as his laughter continued, harder than ever.

Judy just stood there watching, foot thumping in anger as Dylan seemed to lose his mind in the middle of her living room.

"I'm sorry Judy but that was just too much for me," Dylan said, still chuckling but managing to finally get himself under control.

"What are you talking about? What was too much for you?" Judy asked indignantly.
"Think about for a minute Judy, what you said to me, while bashfully looking away, in nothing but sweatpants and a tank top, how might that be taken?"

Judy thought about it and as the realization slowly dawned on her Judy could feel the blood rushing up to her face and all the way to the tips of her ears. She then slowly walked over to Dylan and swiftly punched him in the arm.

"OWWWW, damn Judy that hurt," Dylan said as he vigorously rubbed his arm.

"You deserved that Dylan, how could you think I'd want to do That with you when I'm in love with Nick," as that last word came out Judy realized what she had said and covered her mouth quickly. Dylan looked at her with a raised eyebrow, "Oh really now?"

"Think long and hard about what you say next Dylan, the second punch can be even harder if it needs to be," Judy said threateningly.

"Point made and received," Dylan said as he rubbed his sore arm.

"So you've come to terms with your feelings then, how'd that happen?" Dylan asked, curious as to what pushed Judy over the edge.

"Well after I left the coffee shop what you said stuck with me, but I had no idea if you were right or not since in all honesty I've never been in love before, not really anyway, so after Zoogling what love felt like and wasting a lot of time finding nothing that made any sense I finally found an article that put it all in perspective and it all clicked. I am in love with a wonderfully, annoying and sweet fox named Nick Wilde." Judy said proudly,

Dylan chuckled again but stopped immediately after receiving another death glare from Judy.

"Well I'm happy for you Judy, but is that really what you wanted to talk about? I mean I'm perfectly happy to talk about it with you don't get me wrong, but aren't there people you'd rather talk about this with, sisters? Girl friends? Your mom? Or even just someone you've known been friends with for longer than a day, out of everyone you know, Why me?" Dylan asked, his little rant finished.

"Well, you see I don't know who I can trust with this," Judy said quietly.

"I have no idea how others will react to the fact that I'm in love with a fox, I know you said the world has changed and I'd like to believe that but at the same time I'm worried about what happens next, especially since I don't even know how Nick feels, or what I should do next, so while I try and figure that out I don't really want to deal with all the nay saying and people telling me it'll never work out. That's why I figured you'd be the best person to talk to since you basically knew already and not only were you perfectly ok with the idea, but you seemed supportive of it,"

Dylan was blown away at Judy's display, thinking to himself I always thought of Judy Hopps as this larger than life superdoe, but looking at her now, I can see that she wants reassurance and advice as much as any other bunny. What sort of a friend would I be, if I said no?

"Learn," Dylan said after thinking it over for a moment or two.

"What?" Judy asked, unsure if she had misheard Dylan.

"You said you don't know what to do next, you should learn, learn more about Nick, what his favorite food is, what music he likes, what his favorite color is, learn everything you can about him and also try learning about fox culture in general, there are things that foxes hold in high regard,
things foxes hate, and things that offend foxes. Being a bunny who grew up around bunnies you obviously know bunny culture well, but if you really want to make it work with Nick you'll need to lean about his culture too." Dylan said as he walked back to the couch and grabbed a slice of pizza.

"But I don't even know if he feels the same way yet," Judy said dejectedly.

"That doesn't matter, you won't know for sure until he's ready and tells you himself, but if you want to give your relationship the best chance possible taking the time to learn more about the nuances of both Nick and fox culture is the best way to do that,"

"Yeah that's true, but shouldn't I try and figure that how he feels first first, I mean what do guys in love act like? What should I be looking for?" Judy asked as she too walked back to the couch and picked up a slice of pizza.

"Judy focus, guys don't have a universal tell, just like girls don't, you should deal with what you can, learn first and let the rest come to you in time," Dylan said, trying to reason with Judy.

"Ugh I know you're right Dylan it's just aggravating not knowing how he feels," Judy said as she pulled her ears down in frustration.

"Plus, where would I even begin to learn about fox culture, it's not like I know any other foxes," Judy said as she let go of her ears and took a bite of her pizza.

"Well there's always the internet, but that's not always the most reliable, the library should have some books on fox culture, and of course you can just ask him yourself, I mean the guy you're in love with is a fox" Dylan said playfully.

"I know he's a fox, but a very closed off one at that, I'm not sure how much he would really be willing to share, but I guess there's no harm in asking or trying to find out on my own," Judy agreed.

"Yep, plus in learning all this stuff about fox culture and his personal likes and dislikes you can make him happy by surprising him with his favorite meal after he gets back from the academy, or spending alone time with him celebrating some obscure fox holiday," Dylan explained, getting Judy to imagine an overjoyed Nick eating a homecooked meal, or the two of them hanging decorations together for some fox holiday.

"Yeah that would be nice, I bet since Nick's been away from his family for so long he'd really appreciate something like that," Judy said.

As if by merely saying the word family summoned them in some fashion Judy heard her phone notification sound go off.

"I wonder if that's Nick," Judy said happily as she went to go retrieve her phone from the kitchen.

Dylan smiled, seeing Judy accept her feelings and embrace them was great but knowing he was a part of making that happen made it feel even better.

"Ugh it's just my mom asking about how our date went," Judy said as she walked back, phone in paw.

"Well what are you going to tell her?" Dylan asked suddenly.

"What do you mean, I planned on telling her how the meet up went and that we decided to just be friends and nothing more," Judy said as she began typing up her message.
"Wait Judy, umm... I was thinking... maybe, if you want, we could just tell our parents that we are dating?" Dylan suggested hesitantly.

"Why would we do that?" Judy asked, not sure where Dylan was going with this.

"Well you see I ended up ignoring my mom's phone call last night because I knew she was going to put me through the wringer about how the date went, and I know as soon as I tell her that we aren't going to date she's going to try and set me up again even though I've told her I'm trying to focus on work," Dylan explained, as Judy nodded in agreement.

"Yeah it's going to be the same for me, so you're saying if we tell our parents that the date went well then we can stop the forced blind dates and constant questions on if we've found someone yet," Judy said, catching on to what Dylan was getting at.

"Exactly and when you eventually start dating Nick or I end up finding someone then we can just say we broke up and they'll be none the wiser," Dylan said proudly as if he'd just presented the solution to world hunger and not a plan to get out of blind dates.

"It could work, but do we really want to lie to our parents like that?" Judy asked as she felt the potential guilt bubble up inside of her.

"Judy, I don't want to lie either but they've push us to this point, I don't know about you but I've told my mom at least fifty times that I'm not ready to find someone to settle down with, and yet I still unknowingly ended up in a coffee shop, on a date, that neither me or the other bunny wanted," Dylan said, sounding very frustrated.

"I guess you're right, I've told my mom the same thing more times than I can count, plus now that I know how I feel about Nick I can't afford to waste any more time on dates with random bucks," Judy agreed finally caving to Dylan's logic.

"So it's settled then, we pretend to date until we actually get real significant others." Dylan said, sticking out his arm for a pawshake to seal the deal.

"Agreed," Judy said as she shook Dylan's paw.

So Judy quickly tweaked a few details about the date and sent it off with hopes that her mom would be done with the conversation for now.

But like always life seemed to like to mess with Judy and not even a minute later Dylan's phone started ringing.

"It's my mom, I'm gonna let it go to voicemail," Dylan said after checking his phone, but the second it stopped ringing it started up again.

"Ugh, I'm sorry but I better talk to her or else she'll never stop, just give me a minute," Dylan said apologetically before picking up the phone.

"Hey Mom, what's up?"

"....."

"No I was going to tell you, but I just had to move into my apartment and forgot,"

"....."
"Yes Mom, I promise to keep you updated on everything, yes I am glad you convinced me to go, yep you were right I was bound to find someone eventually."

Judy listened to the conversation with interest until her phone went off again.

Mom: Oh, that's wonderful news hunnie, I already told your dad and even called up Dylan's mom too, both you father and I and Dylan's parents are thrilled that our little late bloomers ended up liking each other, make sure to tell me everything.

Judy was mortified, somehow in under a minute her mom had managed to not only tell her family but, contact Dylan's family and tell them everything too. Before Judy could say anything to either her mom or Dylan she got another text.

Mom: You should bring Dylan by the house sometime when you get the chance, we'd all love to meet him, and I know your nieces and nephews would love to see you too.

Judy sighed, I was just there like a month ago, plus I was going to visit Nick next weekend, Judy thought to herself, then again, maybe I could bring Nick to the Burrows with me, that way we can spend more time together and I can show Nick my favorite places back home.

Judy: I'd love to come back Mom, but Dylan's busy next weekend and it's one of the few weekends off I'm going to have completely off for the next months or two, so I can visit but Dylan wouldn't be able to come with me.

Mom: Of course, we'd love to have you come for the weekend even without Dylan, and I understand you city mammals are busy, we can just meet Dylan another time.

"Perfect, now I should probably make sure it's ok if Nick comes too," Judy said to herself.

Judy: Hey Mom, I was wondering if it'd be ok if Nick comes with me, he's bound to need a break from the academy and since they have the weekends off too, I'm sure he'd love to see the Burrows considering he's never left the city before.

After Judy sent the message she waited patiently for a reply expecting it to come right away like every other time she texted with her mom. So Judy waited, and waited, and waited, until after ten minutes had passed and the reply finally came.

Mom: Sure your friend can come too, we'll make up a guest room but are you sure he's going to want to hang out with our family, he's probably going to want peace and quiet, which as you know is in short supply in our house.

Judy: He'll be fine, plus if I tell him about the blueberry fields I'm sure he'd fight through even the kerfluffle with one paw tied behind his back just to eat some.

Mom: If you say so, anways I can't wait to see you dear.

"Perfect, now I can go home while also spending some quality time with Nick," Judy said as she texted her mom goodbye.

I wonder where I should take Nick? I could probably show him the town square in less than an hour but what else? Maybe my old running trail, the lake, or we could just walk around the fields, touring the house is a must, but that will take almost a whole day by itself and I want to make sure he can relax too, As Judy started to plan out where she was going to take Nick Dylan had just about finished up his phone call.
"Alright, alright I promise Mom, but I gotta go, I love you too, bye," Dylan said as he wrapped up his conversation with his mom.

Judy chuckled, happy that she wasn't the only bunny in the Burrows whose parents were a little over the top. As she waited for Dylan's mom to say goodbye Judy noticed the mail had been delivered and was now sitting on the floor by the door. Walking over Judy quickly scooped up the mail and browsed through it, most of it was junk mail but as Judy reached the end of the pile she found a letter which address was handwritten and addressed to Nick.

"Now that's strange," Judy said as she looked at the letter.

"What's strange?" Dylan asked, appearing out of nowhere and scaring Judy causing her to jump a bit.

"Don't sneak up on me Dylan," Judy said as she brought her arm up to hit him.

Dylan flinched away from Judy, "I'm sorry, please don't hit me again, you're too strong and my arm can't take another punch,"

"Fine I won't hit you again, anyway what's weird is Nick got a letter and it doesn't have a return address or the senders name on it," Judy explained, handing Dylan the letter so he could see.

"That is strange," Dylan said as he looked over the letter, "only one way to find out,"

"Dylan," Judy said scoldingly as she swiped the letter from his paws right as he was about to tear into it, "we are not going to open Nick's mail, that's a total breach of privacy, not to mention a federal offense,"

"I was just kidding, why don't you ask Nick about it, maybe he'd let you look at it," Dylan said, backing away from Judy slightly, fearing another punch.

"I doubt he'd let me look at it, but I guess I might as well let him know that the letter's here," Judy said as she pulled her phone out again and quickly texted Nick, only to get her reply a second later.

"He said I could open it," Judy said hesitantly.

"Go for it then, what's the problem?" Dylan asked sensing Judy's uncertainty.

"Well it could be personal, or something I shouldn't read, Nick thinks it's nothing, but he could be wrong," Judy said as she fiddled with the letter in her paws.

"Your right it could be personal, but what if it's nothing like Nick thinks, or if it's something important that Nick needs to deal with right away, it's up to you but I'd open it," Dylan reasoned.

"Fine I'll do it," Judy said before quickly tearing open the envelope and pulling out the letter.

The letter was written on lined notebook paper, the handwriting was neat, legible and was printed instead of being written in cursive, and Judy could tell exactly who it was from just after reading the first few lines.

Nick,

I've given it some time but decided to try and see if a letter would reach you and get you to reply. I don't know what else to do or how I can get you to contact me in some way, I'd even be alright with exchanging letters like this if that makes you more comfortable, I just want you to come back into my
life. You wouldn't know this, but you have a nephew now, his name is Jackson and he's 6, he's my little ball of joy even when he's got me tearing my fur out, and it kills me that he's never met you before. You must have had your reasons for leaving and staying away but I think too much time has passed, our family broke apart the day Mom died, and I want to find a way to bring it back together again, because it's so lonely when every holiday is spent by yourself. I get together with Dad sometimes and that's better than nothing, but I can tell it's not enough for either of us, Mike stays in contact but rarely visits because much like you he seems to be happier to run away from not only the memories of the past but the family he has in the present. Nick I know Moms death hit you the hardest, I know you have your reasons for staying away, but we need you back in our lives, I need my brother back, Jackson needs his Uncle, and Dad needs his son, please at least write a letter, just something small, a starting point so we can begin being a family again.

Love, your very frustrated but still caring sister, Hannah

P.S enclosed is a picture of Jackson if you don't want it please send it back. My address is 136, Fieldstone Drive, Foxborough, 95480

As Judy read the letter her ears started drooping slowly as her heart began climbing her throat only for it to completely catch as she noticed the state of the paper. She hadn't noticed at first but as she looked over the paper again Judy could clearly see it was stained with tears and had been erased and re-written multiple times.

I can't believe Nick hasn't spoken to her yet, he's hurting his family so much when all they want to do is reconnect, Judy thought angrily as she started tapping her foot.

Family is the most important thing, how can he not take the hand that's reaching out for him, even if he's scared, to do that to his own family when they're not only willing to talk it out but even forgive him without question. The more Judy thought about it the angrier she got and the faster her foot tapped, coming from a big, close nit family like hers Judy couldn't accept that Nick was willing to hurt his family like this with no reason other than his own fear.

"Uhhhh, Judy are you alright? Because if your foot taps any faster than I'm pretty sure it'll catch on fire" Dylan said nervously.

"I'm fine I just need to have a talk with that fox," Judy said menacingly.

"Oh, ok, well then I'm gonna get going then, so enjoy the rest of your night and good luck with learning about Nick and foxes in general, feel free to text me anytime," Dylan said before quickly stepping around the irate Judy and walking out the door.

"Thanks for the help Dylan, I'll talk to you later," Judy said quickly as Dylan left, before opening her phone and clicking the Muzzletime button under Nick's contact name.

Nick answered the phone in his typical playful manner, but Judy was having none of it, shooting Nick a glare that stopped him dead in his tracks and let him know that this was not going to be a fun or playful discussion, and as Nick shifted from playful to nervous Judy felt a tiny bit of satisfaction.

"Nicholas Wilde, We. Need. To talk," Judy said slowly, after letting Nick sweat it out for a moment.

Nick sighed, he didn't know what she was mad about, but he knew his plan of catching a break and having a fun relaxing conversation with Judy just went up in smoke.

"What did I do?" Nick said tiredly as his tone once again shifted, going from nervous to tired, and his faced dropped causing Judy to get suddenly concerned.
'Nick are you alright?' Judy asked softly, deciding to let go of her anger for a moment.

'I wouldn't exactly say yes to that, it's been…. It's been a long and rough day, but I'll be alright so what do we need to talk about?' Nick asked, keeping his voice as steady as possible and looking down so Judy couldn't see how upset he really was.

'Nick what happened?' Judy asked, worried since despite Nick's best effort she could tell something was really bothering him.

'Come on Nick, I can't help you if you don't tell me,' Judy said, as Nick stayed quiet.

'Alright I give in if anyone could understand it'd be you,' Nick said defeatedly, causing Judy to smile.

So, Nick explained what had happened, telling Judy everything from the flashbacks to how Tom reacted to his current feelings of hopelessness and worry. Judy listened intently, offering comfort as Nick talked but found herself at a loss as to what she could do to help him and as Nick finished up Judy had to figure out what to say to him.

'Nick I'm so sorry I didn't warn you about the muzzles, I completely forgot that we worked with them since it was such a small portion of the training, the ZPD uses them as a last resort so I haven't used one since my days at the academy,' Judy said apologetically.

'It's fine, I just don't know where to go from here,' Nick said sounding lost.

'I know, I know, If you want I could visit you on the weekends and we can practice using the muzzle, maybe if you and I work on it together it'd be easier for you,' Judy suggested.

Nick shook his head, "I appreciate the offer Carrots but I couldn't ask you to constantly buy tickets out here and spend what little time off you get trying to help me get over a kithood incident."

'Nick if you needed me to I would come right now without a second thought," Judy said intently, staring at Nick as she did.

Nick felt his heart skip a beat, she really cares he thought as he noticed the intense sincerity in her eyes.

"Thanks Judy," Nick said softly, "If it comes to that I'll let you know but I'm going see if I can handle this on my own first."

'Alright Nick but remember you aren't alone, you have a class full of fellow cadets and while you might not get along with everyone you should lean on them if you need a hand, and of course you know you'll always have me," Judy said with a smile.

'Do I know that?' Nick asked, deciding to shift the heavy mood a bit, "yes, yes I do."

'You better," Judy said sweetly, causing Nick's heart to jump again.

'So, what'd you want to talk about?" Nick asked, deciding to ignore his erratic heart.

Nick regretted it a second later however as Judy's face hardened once again although not as bad as it was before it still made Nick shiver.

'You STILL haven't called your sister," Judy said, barely managing not to shout, her tone and demeanor doing a complete 180.
"What brought this up, also how do you know I haven't called yet?"

Judy looked sternly at Nick, "That letter you told me I could open was from her, so care to explain why?"

"Well it's been a busy month, you know with the move and getting adjusted to the academy I just haven't had the time," Nick said defensively.

"So, you're going to call her soon right?" Judy said, making the question sound a lot more like an order.

"Well I got a lot on my plate right now, it's probably be best if I waited until after I graduated," Nick said apprehensively.

"Nick you NEED to call her, I can show you the tear stained letter and read her pleading attempt to bring you back into her life if you want, but I think you already know that you need to talk with her and do it soon, family is really important Nick and I don't want to see you give up before you've even tried to reconnect,"

"I don't know how good of an idea that is right now," Nick said, still trying to make up an excuse, however Judy quickly cut him off and just read the letter to him.

After Judy was done Nick sat in silence for a moment,

"I'll think about it, I can't promise anything since I really do have a lot on my plate right now but both you and that letter have given me a lot to think about," Nick said, his voice distant and quiet.

"That's all I can ask, but Nick let me just say one more thing, you may be keeping tabs on them but that's no substitute for being in their lives, missing out on all the important moments in their lives isn't worth it, don't let fear stop you, especially since it seems like they want you back in their lives."

"You're probably right Carrots, well if that's all you got for me I think I'm gonna go to bed, today has been one of the most draining days in recent memory," Nick said, yawning for effect.

"I do actually have one more thing… but I'll let you go to bed, talk to you tomorrow," Judy said, suddenly sounding nervous.

"Nah let's hear it, I don't mind spending some more time talking with you," Nick said, curious as to why Judy was getting nervous.

"No, no, no, it's nothing big, just get some sleep," Judy said, not wanting to keep Nick up.

"Out with it Officer Hopps, take your own advice and don't let fear stop you" Nick said, turning Judy's words back on her.

"Fine, you got me there," Judy said pretending to be annoyed, "I was wondering if you wanted to join me next weekend on a trip to Bunny Burrows, my family wanted me to come back and I figured you might appreciate a break from the academy, plus we can hang out all weekend, there's blueberries and fresh air and I can show you my home and-"

As Judy started listing off reasons why Nick should go Nick found himself unable to focus on what she was saying since she had for all intents and purposes set a bomb off in his head as his internal dialogue exploded.

"So you're bringing the boyfriend home to meet the family," Nick joked, trying to buy himself some
time to process and figure out what he should do.

"W-what are you even, t-that's ridiculous, I'm not... don't tease me Nick," Judy stammered out as she fought to hide her sudden and intense blush and hoped Nick wouldn't notice.

Nick was still too preoccupied with his own problems to notice Judy's slip up however and as the silence grew Judy started to feel like maybe asking Nick to visit her family might have been a bit too much.

"You know what, don't worry about it Nick, I'm sure you want to focus on your studies and not spend the weekend with my crazy family, just forget I asked," Judy said, trying her best to keep her ears up and not to sound disappointed.

Nick who had finally started to settle down noticed the tone and expression on Judy's face and before he even had time to think he found himself speaking, his mouth seeming to act on its own.

"Don't say that Judy, I'd love to visit your home and meet the rest of your family if you're want me to, I'm just worried I might be too much for your family to handle, I mean I don't want to cause a problem,"

"Are you sure? Because you don't have to force yourself Nick," Judy said, perking up slightly

"I wouldn't miss it for all the blueberries on your family farm," Nick said with a smile on his face.

"Alright! You're going to love it Nick I can't wait," Judy said, her mood improving instantly.

"I'm sure I will, and I promise not to eat all your families blueberry crop," Nick joked.

"I'd be impressed if you did but be careful you might end up turning blue and becoming a giant blueberry yourself." Judy said, giggling at the picture.

"Goodnight Judy," Nick said softly.

"Goodnight Nick," Judy replied, her heart rate picking up at the tender way Nick said her name.

Nick smiled as he hung up the phone but the moment he hung up his smile fell.

"What the hell did I just agree too?" Nick asked himself.

"You agreed to visit Judy's home and meet her family, what part didn't you get," Logic explained.

"Yeah and they're going to hate you and it's going to be an awful time," Cyn-Nick said flatly.

"You'll be fine, it needed to be done," The strange new voice Nick had dubbed Instinct said.

"You did this didn't you," Cyn-Nick said accusingly.

"I Have no idea what you're talking about," Instinct said innocently.

"What's done is done, the question is what do I do now?" Nick asked himself, cutting off any further discussion.

All of the voices went silent, none of them seeming to have an answer to the current predicament that was until a strange voice, one that sounded like it belonged to a powerful old goat whose deep and gruff voice gave the impression of wisdom and age far beyond mortal mammals.
"Fly, you fool!" The voice cried, and then was gone, leaving Nick to lay awake in bed trying to sort out the mess that had suddenly become his life.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all. Also If for some reason you don't want to comment but still want to suggest something or talk to me personally don't hesitate to PM me, I'll respond when I have time but be warned I'm going to be unable to connect to the internet for the next few days so If I don't respond it's because of that.

Lastly go listen to

I Will Not Bow By Breaking Benjamin- It's a great song.

I'll keep suggesting Music forever, feel free to ignore it or tell me what you thought of the song, also if you have a favorite song suggest it to me, music is a great thing that you can never have too much of.
Chapter 17 – Meeting the Hopps's Round Two

Chapter Summary

Nick and Judy in the burrows... it's a cluster rut... enough said

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 17, it's the longest one thus far, funny because I expected it to be shorter than average so enjoy that, and keep those comments coming.

So last chapters references for those that missed them, Dylan's shirt is from Attack On Titan, "Fly You Fool" is from Lord of the Rings and Nick turning into a giant blueberry is from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

This chapter also has some references so point them out if you see them.

11/12/2018 - The editor caught me so here's the chapter without as many grammatical errors

So this is probably going to be the last chapter for a while unfortunately, I'll be leaving the states soon for a work trip, so for the next 4ish months I'll be gone, and during this trip my life will consist of work, eating and sleeping for the most part. I will try and write a bit in my spare moments bUt if thereS not a Chapter for four months that's why, hopefully you all can forGive me and will stick around and stay, always ready, for when I come back.

As Always I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails

and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: I'm running out of ways to say I don't own Zootopia or it's characters, but just in case lawyers from Disney are watching I'll keep saying it.
A Train Station, Middle of Nowhere, Friday evening, 6:15pm

The train station was isolated and not much to look at, that much was sure. A small parking lot, two platforms with benches, a tiny ticket booth, and a portable bathroom all surrounded by open fields. The station, while small and remote was well maintained for its age with no sign of trash or graffiti that plagued the train stations in the city. Standing on one side of the tracks, equally isolated was one agitated fox in a Pawaiian button up shirt and cargo shorts and wearing a ZPA backpack.

Well today's the day, Nick thought as he sat himself down on the bench and watched for the train.

As he waited Nick noticed some of his classmates were gathered on the other side of the tracks. Some were dressed up for a night on the town, and others were just in plain clothes ready for some time at home, but despite their different appearances all of them were going back into the city, only Nick was heading further away from it.

So as Nick waited alone, his eyes kept finding their way back over to his classmates and his mind wondering as a small pang of loneliness worked its way into his heart. The past two weeks had been hard on Nick, Tom still wasn’t talking to him and while Nick hadn’t thought it would matter, he soon realized how wrong he had been. Tom had always tried to lighten Nick’s mood and include him in discussions whenever Nick was around, and while at times Nick found it irritating he now found himself missing it. Without Tom trying to bring him into conversations Nick realized just how far outside of the social order he really was, and despite how Nick claimed not to care he found the lack of genuine mammalian interaction was getting to him.

“You could try and make up with him,” Optimism said cautiously as the aforementioned Tom came into view, headed back to Zootopia to see his girlfriend.

“Why would I? I haven’t done anything wrong, he has no right to be this angry with me,” Nick said stubbornly.

“You got that right, you don’t need him or anyone,” Cyn-Nick agreed.

“Don’t try and fool yourself, he’s clearly hurt by the way you constantly distance yourself, you saw how concerned he looked when you freaked out, but instead of letting him in you pushed him away,” Logic said as Nick sighed.

“Your right, but why does he care so much? What’s his angle?” Nick asked himself as the train going to Zootopia pulled into the station, blocking the platform from view.

“There doesn’t always have to be an angle, this isn’t your old life, people can be nice just to be nice, they may just want to be friends with you without wanting anything in return,” Optimism explained.

Nick slammed his fist down on the bench in frustration, “I hate not knowing things. Everything was so much simpler before, you may not be able to trust what people said in the underbelly of Zootopia, but you could trust that they’d only do something that benefitted them, but now, I just don’t know…”

As the train pulled away from the station and Nick was left completely alone again he tried shifting his thoughts towards this weekend and seeing Judy again, and surprisingly it worked. So, by the time the train pulled into the station, Nick could feel the excitement building as his tail moved slowly side
The train slowly pulled in with a light screech of grinding brakes, and as the doors opened Nick stood to the side letting the few mammals exiting the train do so, before walking onto the train himself. Nick quickly scanned the cart and noticed there were more mammals than he had expected, a small family of bunnies who looked at him with caution, some wolves and a tiger who took no notice of him, a sheep couple, and a horse, but no Judy, so ignoring the stares and looks of distain from the mammals who had noticed him, Nick moved on.

The further back Nick headed, the emptier the cart’s got, until Nick found himself at one of the last carts on the train which was completely empty except for a lone grey bunny, sitting one leg crossed over the other, in a red sundress decorated with simple white flowers, and as Nick entered the cart her ears perked up and her head immediately turned to face him and the two locked eyes.

Nick couldn’t tell what it was, but there was something different in Judy’s eyes, something softer, gentle and yet at the same time fierce and unyielding, and as her face lit up in a blinding smile, Nick’s heart couldn’t help but skip a beat before it started hammering in his chest, as time seemingly slowed to a near stop. Judy simply hopped off her seat her little tail moving erratically side to side beneath her dress as Nick walked over and silently stood in front of her. Both mammals said nothing, seemingly lost for words.

“Hey Fluff, long time no see, gotta say I didn’t think you owned a dress, but it looks good on you.” Nick said after a few moments of silence.

Judy blushed slightly at the compliment, “Thanks Slick.”

“What are you doing? Say something else. Judy thought to herself angrily as an awkward silence settled in, but as the seconds ticked away Judy knew there was a lot she wanted to say, but found she couldn’t say anything at all.

“You feeling alright?” Nick asked, concerned at Judy’s strange behavior.

“Yeah. Why wouldn’t I be?” Judy said, unable to break out of her suddenly timid demeanor.

“No idea. It’s just strange, I figured you would have dived headfirst into a hug, or started filling me in on what the plan is for the weekend, but as soon as you saw me you seemed to have shut down.” Nick explained self-consciously, his tail no longer wagging as a feeling of disappointment washed over him.

“Oh. Ah… well I just didn’t know if that’d be the best idea, since you might be sore from training.” Judy lied.

“Fair point, but if you really want to, I can make an exception for you.” Nick said casually as he opened his arms invitingly.

Snap out of it Judy, he’s trying to bring things back to normal, he doesn’t know how you feel so, for the love of carrots just act like you usually do. Judy chastised herself.

“If you’re sure about that Slick, then here I come.” Judy said as she too opened her arms for a hug, but as she stepped forward the train lurched to a start and she found herself falling into Nick’s arms.

“I got ya.” Nick said as he caught Judy and pulled her into a deep hug, “I knew you’d fall for me eventually, but this is a little sooner than expected.” Nick joked, not noticing how Judy’s heart stopped momentarily.
“Don’t get ahead of yourself Slick, if I fell for any old smooth talker I would be a mother in the burrows like pretty much every other sister I have.” Judy said, managing to keep her composure as she broke the hug and sat back down.

“Well, as funny as it would be seeing you as a mother, trying to reign in a bunch of little Judys, I have to say I’m glad you’re so resistant to sweet words or else we wouldn’t have met.” Nick said as he sat himself down next to Judy.

“Plus, I don’t know if the world could handle a bunch of little Judy Hoppases, all running around trying to catch criminals and defend the innocent, despite being under a foot tall,”

“Yeah, I’m definitely not ready to be a mother, so let’s just drop that conversation now, alright.” Judy said, not wanting to get into this conversation since she knew her family would bring it up at least ten times during this trip.

“Fine by me, so what do you want to talk about then, we’ve got what I assume is a long ride ahead of us and some conversation would be nice.” Nick said, not wanting to fall back into the previous silence.

“How about you tell me some things about foxes.” Judy said, deciding to act on the advice Dylan had given her.

“Well foxes are a species known for being devilishly handsome and charming. They have two arms, two legs, as well as two eyes and ears. Their fur color varies depending on the subspecies of fox.” Nick started.

“That’s not what I meant.” Judy said unamused.

“Well Fluff you gotta be more specific then. What do you want to know about foxes?” Nick asked, with a smile on his face.

“Well I don’t need you to tell me things I can find out by having two working eyes.” Judy said sarcastically, “Well you could tell me things like what holidays do foxes celebrate.”

“Why would you want to know about stuff like that?”

“No reason really.” Judy said bashfully, “I was just interested in what holidays or traditions you might want to celebrate, since were roommates and all.”

“I don’t really celebrate any fox specific holidays.” Nick said dismissively, “Not since I started living alone anyway,”

“Well let’s fix that, tell me some of your favorite holidays and we can celebrate them together,” Judy said insistently.

“You aren’t going to stop asking until I tell you, are you?” Nick said as he noticed the look in Judy’s eye.

Judy just looked at Nick, a smirk on her face and a gleam in her eye as she slowly shook her head from side to side.

Nick sighed, “Fine.”

“Good boy.” Judy said happily.
Nick just shook his head as he tried to keep the smile off his face.

“Well there’s Saint Robin’s day for starters. It’s a celebration of one of the few fox folk heroes Robin Hood, who lead a band of merry mammals, taking money from the corrupt wealthy mammals of the kingdom and giving it to the poor and downtrodden.” Nick explained.

“Interesting, what do you do on Saint Robin’s day?” Judy asked, deciding to ignore the less than legal aspects of Saint Robin’s story.

“Well not much really, people usually have a special dinner, tell stories of Robin Hood’s deeds, and if you’re really dedicated to the ideas of Saint Robin then you’d go out and help the less fortunate, but that part of the tradition isn’t really followed much anymore.” Nick said as he tried to think of more holidays.

“There’s also Kit’s day, now that one was always a favorite.” Nick said suddenly getting very excited as he remembered one of the best fox holidays for a young Tod.

“Kits day?” Judy said questioningly.

“Yeah, it’s also called Den Leaving Day. The tradition goes back to long before civilization as we know it, but basically foxes used to only have kits in the winter due to biological reasons, because of that spring was the first time parents would take their kits out into the world, so the first day of spring became a celebration of fox kits. Now a-days it’s not as meaningful since fox kits are born at any time of year but it’s still celebrated by the fox community, usually parents will buy their kits a small present and spend the whole day outside with them, playing tag, hide and seek, or some other game."

“Sounds like you really liked that holiday.” Judy said as she watched Nick’s tail begin to wag as he talked about Kit’s day.

“Yeah it was the best. A day off of school, getting to sleep in and play around, couldn’t ask for a better holiday for a kit. Do bunnies not have anything like that?” Nick asked, realizing he knew nothing about the holidays Judy celebrated.

“No, bunnies usually have way too many kits for something like that, we have plenty of other holidays, most revolving around the harvest or farm life. But stop trying to distract me, I’m the one asking the questions here.” Judy said, cutting herself off before she went on a tangent.

“Now that’s not fair Judy. If I’m sharing then so are you, it’s only right.” Nick said before crossing his arms in a huff, his small smile the only indication that he was joking.

“I guess you’ve got me there, but tell me a few more fox holidays first, and then I’ll go.” Judy said relentingly.

“Will do,” Nick said as he uncrossed his arm and brought his paw to his chin as he tried to think of other fox holidays.

“Ummm, well I know there are more, there’s uuggghhhhh…” Nick said, trailing off as he found himself unable to remember more holidays.

Judy, seeing Nick was struggling and getting a bit annoyed, decided to see if she could help out.

“What about Christmas, are there any fox specific traditions for that?” Judy asked, figuring that learning how Nick liked to celebrate Christmas would be useful information.

“Oh yeah, winter,” Nick said enthusiastically.
Foxes have quite a few winter traditions like Ma…, the Winter Solstice,” Nick said quickly as he tried to cover his slip up.

Please take the bait Judy, I do NOT want to talk about mating season or its related holidays with you right now, or ever if I can help it. Nick thought to himself as a bead of sweat rolled down his neck.

“I know what the Winter Solstice is, but why is it significant to foxes?” Judy asked, not noticing Nick’s slip of the tongue.

“Well there are two big myths around that specific day. Do you know about the Aouras?” Nick asked as he let out a silent sigh of relief.

“That’s those lights that can be seen near the poles, right?”

“Yes, and while we know what causes the lights now, back before science figured it out foxes believed that those lights were from the Sky Fox hitting its tail upon the mountaintops. Now the Sky Fox was considered to be the spirit of the first ever fox, who after he died became the guardian of the underworld,”

“Wow, that amazing!” Judy said as she imagined a giant fox spirit running across the sky, its tail leaving luminescent streaks of green and blue across the night sky.

“It is a pretty cool story, and it goes along with the other part of the Winter Solstice tradition. Since the Solstice is the longest night of the year and according to fox legends the night time is when the spirit world is the closest to ours the Winter Solstice is a sort of time of remembrance of those who’ve passed on from this world.”

As Nick started explaining the holiday his expression changed slightly, he seemed to be looking beyond Judy rather than at her, as if he was getting lost thought.

“So, on the night of the Winter Solstice while the Sky Fox runs along the sky he temporarily opens the path to the otherworld allowing spirits to come to earth. In recognition of the spirits returning some foxes will light candles and leave branches of evergreen and heather around pictures of deceased loved ones, some go as far as to put food and other trinkets out for the spirits, Families will also get together and have a party of sorts telling stories from the deceased’s life.”

As Nick explained the holiday and everything it entailed Judy listened intently, and while she didn’t really believe it she still found it beautiful in a morbid sort of way.

“That’s quite the tradition, and when you say heather are you talking about Calluna vulgaris?”

“If that’s the scientific name of the purple flower that kind of looks like a shrub, then yes.”

“Yep that’s the flower. Now I knew a few foxes growing up, why didn’t they ever mention or celebrate it?” Judy asked as she failed to remember any of the foxes in Bunnyburrow mentioning the holiday.

Nick shrugged, “Not every fox celebrates it, and for those that do it’s a more of a private family holiday.”

“I see, did your family celebrate the Winter Solstice?” Judy asked

“They did. My mother was especially enthusiastic about it, and as a kit I was too, but these days… I think it’s ridiculous, I mean candles and flowers are a fire hazard, and putting out food for those who
can’t eat it is a waste.” Nick said, a hint of mockery in his voice.

“I still think it’s kinda nice.” Judy said, not liking the tone in Nick’s voice.

“‘To each their own, I guess.” Nick said dismissively.

“Now I believe you owe me some bunny holidays and traditions,” Nick said, his distant expression changing into a smirk.

“Fair is fair, so what should I tell you about… Carrot day? The harvest festival? Or the three separate ceremonies that are done to ensure a good harvest.” Judy said sarcastically as she tapped her finger to her chin.

“Be as sarcastic as you want, but I really do want to know,”

“I know you do Nick. It’s just I don’t really follow those holidays anymore. As a kit I loved them, don’t get me wrong, but now I find them kind of tedious. I mean I don’t run a farm so traditions like that hold no meaning for me anymore.” Judy explained with a sigh.

“I can understand that, but I still want to know about it, silly traditions and all. Especially if you do anything in celebration of blueberries.”

So Judy gave in and described some of the bunny holidays, unable to resist the fox next to her, especially since Nick seemed genuinely interested in the strange and illogical traditions of her species. Judy described writing letters to the “Great Carrot,” and how the female bunny who picks the last vegetable becomes “Holo the Brainy Bunny,” and is then chased until she is caught in put in a barn for the night in honor of the god who watches over the land. Nick, Judy noticed was a really good listener, even as she tried to downplay and simplify the traditions Nick still seemed interested. He always seemed to have an insightful question or a funny remark to liven up the discussion. So by the end of her explanations even Judy felt a bit fonder of the old bunny traditions.

“And that’s when we burn the effigy of the locust in an attempt to ward off not only locusts but any other pests as well,”

“Wow, a 20ft burning locust, that’s something I gotta see!” Nick said excitedly.

“I guess it is pretty cool, if you want we could come back for the festival.” Judy said as she stifled a yawn.

“That sounds like fun, but you sound tired Carrots.”

“I am a little bit, work was exhausting. I never thought paperwork could take so much out of a mammal.” Judy said as she held back another yawn.

“Well take a nap then. We’ve got at least another hour until the train reaches the station. I’ll make sure to wake you up.”

“It’s fine Nick, I’m not some kit that needs a nap.”

“Even if you don’t fall asleep, you should rest your eyes at least. It’ll make you feel better. Come on, I’ll even let you rest your head on my lap.” Nick said as he patted his lap invitingly.

“And we can keep chatting while you rest your eyes.”

Judy was going to argue some more but as another yawn escaped her lips she decided to just give in.
“Alright, I’ll do it.” Judy said as she gently placed her head on Nick’s lap.

Wow, this is surprisingly comfy, Judy thought as she closed her eyes and let her body relax.

“So Nick, what’s your favorite type of music?”

“Well I can find songs I like in pretty much any genre, I definitely have a preference for Rock music though, specifically Alternative, Punk, and Classic rock. How about you?”

“I like Gazelle’s type of music if that makes any sense, but I also like country and other types of music as well.”

“Well I can’t say I’m too surprised to hear you like Pop music Carrots, but I can’t deny that Gazelle’s had a few good songs, and I have been known to enjoy some country on occasions, but I will definitely be introducing you to some new bands later.”

“I look forward to it, but you best be ready to listen to a lot of Gazelle during stakeouts and patrols.”

Nick laughed, “If that’s the price I have to pay for working with the best cop in the ZPD, then I guess I can pay it.”

“I’m not nearly the best, but I appreciate the compliment.”

“Think what you want Carrots, but I personally don’t think the rest of the ZPD really has a leg to stand on when you solved two cases that had them stumped for months.” Nick pointed out.

“That’s true, but I had some help; without a certain fox I never would have figured either case out, so I guess you could say we are the best team in the ZPD.”

“If you say so. I still think you did most of the work,”

“I do.” Judy said with conviction.

“Now, what’s your favorite food Nick?”

“Spaghetti and bugballs.”

“Really? That’s interesting, not what I would have expected, but alright. Do you like it made a certain way? I mean you can go to five different restaurants, order spaghetti and have it taste different each time.” Judy asked, hoping Nick knew the specific spices he liked.

“I liked the way my mom prepared it. She would get some “original” spaghetti sauce from the store then she’d add garlic powder, black pepper, butter, and “Italian seasoning”. My mom would also buy ground bug and make the bugballs herself, making sure to put the same seasoning into them as well, without the butter of course, oh and she put breadcrumbs in the bugballs too.” Nick said as he recalled the time he’d asked his mom to show him how she made his favorite meal.

“Of course I’ll show you my little Kit, that way even when I’m gone you can eat your favorite meal and think of me.” Nick’s Mom’s voice said as it echoed in his mind.

“Nick…Nick!”

“Wh-what?” Nick said snapping out of his dazed as he looked down at the bunny whose head was in his lap.

“I asked what “Italian seasoning” is? I know the names of over 500 spices, but I haven’t heard of
“Oh, well you wouldn’t have because it’s a blend of spices. My Mom would buy it pre-made at the grocery store, let me look it up real quick.” Nick said as he quickly took out his phone and brought up Zoogle

“Alright, it says here that the “Italian seasoning” blend, is a mix of oregano, marjoram, thyme, basil, rosemary, and sage. Either way you can buy it pre-mixed like my mom did, so I guess the specifics don’t matter,”

“How much of each seasoning did she use for the sauce?”

“No idea, she never measured it out, she just said she could just tell.” Nick said a sad smile on his face as he remembered asking his Mom the same question.

“That’s an interesting method.” Judy said as she closed her eyes again.

“Yep she was an interesting mammal. What about you? What’s your favorite food?”

As the train sped on Nick and Judy continued their pleasant chat asking each other more about their likes and dislikes until after about 45 minutes Nick noticed a change in Judy’s breathing. Looking down Nick couldn’t stop a smile, Judy was sleeping and looked so peaceful, her features relaxed, while her ears lay limp against Nick’s thigh.

“Sleep tight Judy. You deserve it.” Nick said softly as he gently took his phone out of his pocket and started surfing the web.

30 Minutes Later…

The train will be arriving at Bunnyburrow station in five minutes, all passengers desiring to disembark prepare for arrival, the train’s intercom said, rousing Judy from her sleep.

“Well good afternoon Carrots. Did you enjoy your nap?” Nick asked, a big smug smile on his face.

“Actually, I did. You’re a pretty comfy pillow.” Judy said as she sat up, not wanting to give Nick the satisfaction she knew he was looking for.

“Oh Nick look, it’s the welcome to Bunnyburrow Sign.” Judy said as she pointed to the sign with its rapidly increasing numbers.

Nick looked at the sign on the side of the tracks, it was a pretty simple welcome sign, made up with bright colors and a carrot painted in the middle, beneath it was a population sign that almost caused Nick’s eyes to pop out of his head for a second, the numbers were already reaching the end of the sign 250 million and still rising.

“That’s a nice joke sign.” Nick said calmly.

“It’s not a joke Nick, that’s the current population.” Judy said seriously.

“I’m not that gullible, Carrots.”

“Awww, come on, what gave it away.” Judy said dropping the serious expression and tone she had been using.

“Well first off there’s no way you could keep an accurate number of births in real time, especially if you bunnies had a birthrate like that. The next issue is the actual number, there’s no way you’d be
able to sustain a population of that size, the amount of food needed would be more than you could produce, especially during winter, but the thing that gave it away the most was you telling me. Since I had no way of being sure you could have convinced me if you’d stuck to it for long enough.”

“You’re no fun Nick. I wanted to see the look of shock and horror on your face.” Judy said, sounding disappointed.

“I’m sure you’ll have other opportunities to trick me.” Nick said consolingly as he ruffled Judy’s ears.

“Alright enough of that. Let’s head over to the door,” Judy said as she swatted Nicks paws away.

So, Nick and Judy gathered their stuff and walked towards the door for their cart, but as the train pulled into the station and Judy saw her family, and more specifically her sisters she realized she had forgotten to warn Nick.

"Fertilizer!” Judy said suddenly, drawing Nick’s attention.

“You alright there Fluff?”

“Nick, I need you to listen quickly to what I’m about to say and not ask any questions at least until we have some time alone alright,” Judy said as the train started screeching to a halt.

“Sure Carrots, but what’s got you so worked up?”

“Listen my family thinks I’m dating Dylan, you’re probably going to hear about it, or even get questioned about it yourself, so if anyone asks you only know that the coffee date went well and you don’t know anything else since you’ve been focused on training. OK?”

“Bu- but” Nick started, but before he could go any further Judy had grabbed his tie, pulled his face down, and put her finger against his lips.

“Shhhhh, there’s no time for questions remember, I’ll explain it to you later just trust me alright.”

Nick just nodded, too shocked to really ask anything anyway.

“Good, now get ready for my family,” Judy said as she let go of Nick’s tie and pulled her finger away from his lips.

As the train jolted to a stop and the doors opened and Nick stepped onto the platform he was interested by the design. The station was nice and rustic, the simple design of the station was charming, and it was even adorned with bunny ears and carrots.

“Cute, but I’m definitely going to stick out like a red tod in the arctic,” Nick said under his breath as he stepped onto the platform and off to the side.

The moment Judy stepped onto the platform she was pulled into a pile of at least fifteen bunnies all jostling for her attention with a chorus of, “Welcome home Judy,” and “Auntie Judy, Auntie Judy,” so loud that Nick reflexively dropped his ears.

So Nick stood off to the side as Judy was absorbed by the blob of bunnies until he wasn’t even able to make out her ears.

“I’ll just wait for them to calm down a bit. Shouldn’t take too long.” Nick said cheerfully, but as the seconds turned to minutes and the train left while the station cleared out Nick couldn’t help but feel a
It's fine, they don't know me and they're pretty excited to see Judy, Nick thought as he looked around and realized that he and the Hoppses were now the only ones left in the station.

Judy was already used to the mobbing of her overexcited family and took it in stride, answering every hello and question about how she was doing. Judy soon realized however, that Nick was standing off by himself, looking around awkwardly as nobody seemed to notice him.

“Hey guys I’m really happy to see you all too but I want to introduce my friend,” Judy said loudly, getting everyone attention.

“Oh yeah Mom did say you were bringing a friend, where is he?” one of Judy’s younger sisters said as she looked around the platform for another bunny.

“Ohhh, did you bring Dylan back to meet the family already?” Another sister asked.

“I didn’t bring Dylan, he’s working this weekend, but I did bring my future partner in crime stopping, Nick Wilde,” Judy said proudly as she broke out of the crowded and walked over to Nick.

As the Hoppses eyes followed Judy and landed on Nick, they couldn’t stop their expressions of disdain as they huddled a little closer together.

Nick saw this and couldn’t help but feel disappointed, well I kinda expected this, but it still stings a bit. Nick thought to himself as he kept up his relaxed smile.

“Hello everyone,” Nick said as he waved awkwardly at the group of bunnies, getting a few offhanded “hello’s” back as they continued to stare at him.

“Well, let’s get home then,” Judy said trying to ease the tension a little.

The group of bunnies turned into a huddle and as hushed whispers of “Who’s driving with the fox,” and, “well I’m not driving him, you do it!” started overflowing from the circle, Judy’s foot started tapping angrily, until after a minute or two a tan and white doe walked out of the huddle, she was wearing a green t-shirt and a brown plaid skirt that fell just below her knees.

“S-sure Judy, let’s get going, we took a few of the trucks because a bunch of us wanted to come get you, b-but with the size of your friend there I’ll drive you and him in one truck,” the doe said hesitantly, looking down at her feet as the rest of the bunnies had already started to walk away.

“Sounds good, Sarah. Come on, Nick.” Judy said as she grabbed her bag and Nick’s paw and walked out to the parking lot, too annoyed by her family’s reaction to Nick to care how it looked.

As they walked to the parking lot Nick noticed a line of trucks, they were almost carbon copies of the truck Nick and Judy had driven in the city, the only noticeable difference being that these trucks looked slightly less run down.

Judy said nothing as she opened the passenger door and slid over to the middle seat, clearly not in the mood to talk, so Nick followed suit and wordlessly got in and shut the door behind him. A minute later Sarah opened up the driver’s side door and got too, not saying anything either as she swiftly started the truck and drove off.

Nick could feel the slight tension in the air as Judy was silently steaming, arms crossed with an annoyed expression glued to her face, while next to her Sarah was nervously casting glances in Judy’s direction, while looking like she wanted to speak. After about ten minutes of this Nick
decided enough was enough but before he could open his muzzle Sarah spoke up first.

“Please don’t be like this Judy,” She said quietly, as if she were scared Judy would blow up.

“Be like what Sarah? Annoyed that my family is treating my friend like he’s either not there or he’s Frankenstein’s monster?” Judy said, as she turned to look at her sister.

“Come on Judy, you know they didn’t mean it like that. He’s just a new face and you know how people out here are. You don’t need to get so angry.” Sarah explained, as she looked at the road, unable to make eye contact with Judy.

“Look Sarah, I’m not really that angry. I’m just annoyed. Saying that the family’s reaction has nothing to do with Nick’s species, is a load of manure Sarah. If I had brought some city buck with me they would have been bombarding him with handshakes and greetings as soon as he stepped off the train, the only reason Nick got that reaction was because he’s a fox and you know it.”

“Y-your right Judy. But I just don't want this to spoil your time home, just give them some time. I’m sure once they get to know him everyone will come around.” Sarah said unable to counter Judy’s argument.

“I’m sure they will. If they ever get to know him, but if everyone treats him like you have and not say a word even after ten minutes in a car together, I doubt they’ll get to know Nick at all.”

“You know I’m right here.” Nick said, deciding to remind the two doe’s of his presence.

“I’m sorry Nick.” Judy said apologetically before turning back to her sister, “But Sarah this is exactly what I’m talking about. We just had a conversation about Nick while not acknowledging that he was here with us!”

“I’m sorry Judy, how about you introduce me. That way we can get a conversation going.”

“You’re old enough to introduce yourself Sarah,” Judy said harshly.

“Judy, I understand you’re angry, and I’m flattered it’s on my behalf. But it’s fine. Let’s just start over.” Nick said, also not wanting the situation to get worse.

“Alright Nick, I’ll let it go for now.”

“Thank you. Now Sarah it’s nice to meet you, I’m Nick Wilde, yes I’m a fox, and a handsome one at that, but I’m also a cadet at the police academy, and a good friend of your sister’s, if you want more info I’ll have to start charging you.” Nick joked, trying to bring the mood back up.

“It’s nice to meet you as well Mr. Wilde. I’m Sarah Hopps, I’m a senior at Tri-Burrows High, I like reading, movies, and swimming, and I hate confrontation and because of that I usually get saddled with the work nobody wants to do. I hope we can get along,”

“Well Sarah you can just call me Nick. Mr. Wilde sounds way too respectable for a guy like me. So, you’re a senior in high school... What do you plan to do after you graduate?” Nick asked, trying to keep up the conversation.

So as they continued the drive to the house Sarah, Nick, and Judy managed to keep up a decent conversation, filling most of the drive with discussions on various topics. Sarah was hesitant at first but seemed to at least warm up to Nick a little bit, and as the conversation continued and the houses got less and less frequent Judy was happy to see at least one other member of the Hopps family was able to get along with Nick.
“Wow, it’s been nothing but farmland for the past few miles. I wonder who own’s all this?” Nick said as he stared out the open window.

Nick was expecting some answer from one of the two bunnies in the car with him, but after a few seconds of silence Nick looked over at the sisters who were sharing a grin and quietly laughing at something.

“What’s so funny?” Nick asked, unable to see the joke.

“Nick, WE, own all this land.” Judy said as she stretched out her arms, indicating the fields on both sides of the road.

“Wait, what?”

“Yep, everything you see before you is part of the Hopps family farm, we supply more than half of the carrots, blueberries, and other vegetables for the entire Tri-Burrow’s area,” Judy said with pride.

“How do you manage all this?” Nick asked, shocked by the as he saw more and more of the seemingly endless Hopps family farm.

“W-Well we’ve got a big family. Only a few bunnies go of on their own like Judy did. Most of us stick around, get married, have kits, and work on the farm. As long as we contribute to the farm in some way we get to work with what interests us. Some of the doe’s run the daycare, some work in the kitchens, or in the fields with the bucks. For those bunnies who don’t like field work there is plenty of house work to be done, cleaning and general upkeep, and if none of those options suit someone, then they can help run one of the farm stands, or fix the equipment that breaks down. We even have a group of tech savvy bunnies that work on the internet and TV stuff.” Sarah explained as Nick looked on in shock.

“So, you guys are basically your own country.” Nick said flatly.

“Don’t exaggerate Nick.” Judy said as she rolled her eyes.

“I’m not. You grow most of your own food. You grow up and then work on a single piece of land for your entire life, and you have your own infrastructure. Your family farm is a small country,”

“Nick don’t be so…” Judy started to say but stopped as she realized Nick had a point.

“Wow, I never thought about it like that.” Sarah said in awe.

“Yeah.” Judy agreed, unable to really say more.

The truck was then silent as they continued on their drive until they eventually reached a turn which had a big arching sign that read,

“Welcome to the Hopps Family Farm”

Nick couldn’t help but be surprised at how small the house seemed as they approached the two-story house. The house was a simple light blue color, its shape was rectangular, and there was a large wrap around porch, with tables and chairs set out for people to enjoy the weather. There was also a playground and sports field where kits of various ages were playing, supervised by only a few adult bunnies.

To the left of the house was farmland as expected, but surprisingly in the back-right corner of the property sat a forest, trees going as far back as could see. Nick wondered why the Hoppses had left
the forest standing, but didn’t ask as he continued checking out the area surrounding the house.

Eventually the long dirt driveway ended and opened up into a large parking area with rows of similar trucks and vans all lined up neatly.

“Nice place you got here.” Nick said as Sarah parked the truck in an open spot.

“It really is. I can’t wait to show it to you.” Judy said enthusiastically.

As Nick, Sarah, and Judy got out of the truck Nick heard what sounded like the low rumble of a hungry polar bear. Looking around Nick saw no sign of a hungry Ursus of any kind, let alone of the polar variety.

“Uuuuhhh, Judy what’s that sound?” Nick said as the rumbling started to get louder.

“If I had to bet, I’d put money on that being the Kerfluffle.” Judy said with a smile.

“The Ker-what now?”

“The Kerfluffle, it’s the unstoppable horde of Hopps Kits, they mostly consist of my nieces and nephews now, and they have been known to put fear into the hearts of even the mightiest lion.”

“They’re not going to attack me, are they?” Nick asked looking around nervously as he did.

“I mean you are a new face, and a species they don’t see often. Plus you have a long fluffy tail which is bound to fascinate them, so you’d better start running because even I can’t save you from them.” Judy said, her tone low and ominous.

Nick said nothing but just prepared himself for the doom that was coming his way, and as the sound got closer and closer Nick closed his eyes not wanting to look death in the face.

Nothing happened, Nick thought as the rumbling got closer and closer before retreating into the distance.

“I’m alive! Hey Judy, they didn’t go after me!” Nick said as he finally opened his eyes only to see he was alone.

“What happened? Where did Judy go?” Nick said to the empty air where Judy had been standing.

“W-well, that wasn’t the Kerfluffle.” Sarah said quietly as she walked to the other side of the truck where Nick was.

“What was it then?”

“It was something much scarier.” Sarah said, her voice taking on a much darker tone, “It was the Relationship Inquisition Squad,”

“Relationship Inquisition Squad?” Nick said still in a daze.

“Yes, the Inquisition Squad is an unofficial group in the Hopps family, it consists of a gaggle of the most gratuitously, gossipy girls in the family. Whenever a Hopps girl gets into a relationship they capture her and ask all sorts of questions about their partner. They do this to judge the worthiness of the mammal and also because they feel the need to stick their nose into everyone else’s business.” Sarah said angrily, her meekness falling to the wayside for a moment.

“Seems like you don’t approve of the group.” Nick said, hoping Sarah would talk to him a bit more.
“I can respect that they want to look out for the girls in the family. They’ve even prevented or stopped some pretty bad relationships in the past, but they go after you if there’s even the slightest hint that you’re in a relationship. Whether or not you’re in one, and pretty much drive away any mammal they don’t approve of.”

“That sounds rough. I take it you’ve had some run-ins with them.” Nick said sympathetically.

“Me and pretty much every other doe of dating age. Judy was a rare exception since even if she went on dates she was never really interested in anyone, but now that she’s with Dylan it’s open season.”

“Wow. Well, I hope Dylan passes this first test with flying colors, it would suck to be kicked out of the race without even having a chance to start.” Nick said as he tried to keep his tone neutral.

“S-speaking of tests, I have to go study for one, I-I guess I’ll see you later... maybe.” Sarah said before jogging over to the house, leaving Nick all alone once again.

As she jogged away however, Sarah thought back to what Nick had said about failing without even getting a chance.

*It’s strange,* Sara thought to herself as she opened the front door and went inside, *Nick seemed kinda sad as he said that I wonder why.*

“Well this sucks. If I wanted to be alone, I could have just stayed at the academy.” Nick said as he kicked a rock by his foot.

*Just settle down, everything’s fine. I’m sure once Judy gets questioned by her female family members, she’ll be back for you and then you two can hang out all weekend. In the mean time you should just get the bags like a gentlemammal and go wait inside.* Optimism said, attempting to keep Nick’s spirits up.

“Yeah everything’s fine, Judy will be right back and this trip will be great.” Nick said as he grabbed his and Judy’s bag and headed to the house.

Walking into the house Nick was greeted with well-kept hardwood floors, and a very clean entrance with bunnies of all shapes and sizes, coming and going as they pleased. Looking around Nick hoped he would be able to see where Judy had gone but today was clearly not Nick’s day, because instead of finding Judy as Nick walked further inside the house he instead found more glares directed at him. Putting the bags down by his side, Nick decided to do his best to ignore the looks he was receiving and just look at his phone in silence.

Even though Nick tried to look at his phone and ignore the gazes of the bunnies around him, he was unable to focus on the screen, since the combination of being stared at along with all the hostility he was sensing, had Nick’s street instincts setting off alarm bells left and right. So, Nick decided instead of fighting a losing battle with his instincts he’d be better off pretending to look at his phone and try listening in on the conversations around him.

Most of them were actually innocent as Nick soon found out, it seemed that while some of the Hopps bunnies were unwelcoming to Nick’s presence, most of them either didn’t care or didn’t even notice, too busy with their own lives to pay attention to a red furred stranger in the hallway.

“Look he’s red!” a young voice whispered from behind Nick.

“He’s so tall, too.” another voice chimed in.

“Look at his tail. It’s so floofy and it keeps wiggling back and forth.” a third voice observed.
All of a sudden Nick heard the sound of a small scramble, looking out of the corner of his eye Nick saw a group of bunny kits hiding behind a wall and trying to sneak a peek at him.

*Hopefully they don’t try and grab my tail,* Nick thought as he watched the kits stare at his tail, deciding to have a little fun Nick started to make his tail move erratically, causing the kits to stare at it even more.

“Let’s get the floofy wiggler,” a young buck said quietly, eyes still glued to Nick’s tail.

“Yeah, let’s get it,” the group agreed as they slowly moved out from behind the wall.

“Wait,” a small voice whispered, Nick was unable to see the kit that said it since they were still behind the wall, but Nick could tell by the sound that it was a little doe who had spoken.

“Why?” the lead boy asked, as he stopped his approach.

“Mom said not to go near the red furred stranger, remember?” the voice behind the wall said.

“She said the stranger with red fur is not a good mammal and we shouldn’t go near him or talk to him, and if we do we’d get in trouble.”

Nick couldn’t stop the hurt that came from hearing those words. He had expected some apprehension and distrust from the adults. That was par for the course and Nick had dealt with it all his life. But hearing that even the Hopps kits were being told to stay away because he was a bad mammal was just too much. So, as the kits backed away and headed deeper into the house Nick just stared blankly at his phone screen, his face a mask of indifference while he tried to focus on anything else other than the hurt he was currently feeling as his throat tightened up and his tail fell limp to the floor.

Ten Minutes Later

Judy had finally escaped the Inquisition’s grasps and began making her way back to Nick. The questioning had been relentless, the Inquisitors had asked about everything, innocent things like Dylan’s favorite foods and musical interests, to more spicy details like the size of his “carrot” and how far they had gotten. Judy could feel the heat rising to her face as she remembered some of the more explicit questions and advice they had given her before she had been let go.

“I came home to see my family and show Nick around. I didn't expect a kind of Relationship Inquisition.” Judy said, annoyed she had been ripped away from Nick so suddenly.

“NOBODY expects the Relationship Inquisition!” A voice called out from behind a door.

“Our chief weapon is surprise!... Surprise and fear... fear and surprise...” The voice continued.

Judy sped up her walking pace as she continued down the hallway, not wanting to get caught up in anymore questions from the Inquisition.

As Judy reached the foyer she could tell something was off. Nick stood alone, leaning against a wall and looking at his phone, an aloof expression on his face as he flicked his finger across his phone screen. While that by itself wasn’t too strange, Judy could just feel something was wrong. Maybe it was the distant look in his eyes or the way his tail fell limply to the floor behind him, or maybe it was the way Nick seemed to be too engrossed in his phone. Normally he’d look around every once and a while, it was a habit Judy had noticed after spending more time with him. No matter where they were, or what they were doing, Nick always would check his surroundings periodically, as if he thought someone was after him, but not right now, his eyes were glued to his screen despite not really looking at it.
“Hey Nick. Are you alright?” Judy asked as she walked over to where Nick was standing.

As soon as the words were out of her lips she saw an instant change in Nick, suddenly, he perked up, his tail lifting from the floor while his eyes lost their glossy and distant look as they left the phone and turned towards her.

“Hey Judy. Took you long enough. I was pretty surprised when you disappeared on me.” Nick said, a smile that seemed fragile to Judy, plastered on his face.

“Yeah, sorry about that. My family gets a little crazy sometimes. Did they give you any trouble while I was away?”

“I can see that, but lucky for me they seem to have focused entirely on you so it’s like I’m not even here.” Nick said keeping up his smile, but Judy could see the wavering in his eyes as he spoke.

“Nick is something wro-”

“So where will I be sleeping tonight? Not the barn I hope, because this house seems far too small for all the bunnies I’ve heard live here.” Nick said, quickly cutting off Judy’s question.

Judy sighed, something was wrong, and Nick was shutting her out again, and while she wanted to force him to tell her, Judy realized this probably wasn’t the best place for it.

“Follow me Slick, and prepare yourself, because your mind is about to be blown.” Judy said as she grabbed her bag and started off down the hall.

As they walked down the hallway Judy described the layout of the house, explaining that the house on top was mostly for show since the actual living areas were underground. The Hopps Burrow, Judy explained, was almost twenty floors deep with each floor being roughly 150ft by 100ft, by 6ft, with many floors being dedicated to living spaces and the rest being split between entertainment, food storage, hobby rooms and other miscellaneous needs.

Nick didn’t believe a word of it. Figuring Judy was just trying to pull his leg, he dismissed the idea of a vast underground complex as soon as Judy had said it. It wasn’t until they got into the elevator and Nick saw all the buttons that he realized that Judy was telling the truth.

“This is insane!” Nick said as they rode the elevator down to the guest quarters.

Judy just shrugged, “It’s one of the bigger burrows in the town but it’s not that crazy. We’d need at least five more floors if every member of the family were living here,”

“You do understand that your family home is bigger than most apartment complexes right? I mean you have elevators. What normal house has elevators?”

“Yeah it’s pretty big, but like I said before this is more than just living spaces. We store a lot of food and farm equipment, the first few floors are basically warehouses.” Judy explained.

“I’m still blown away.” Nick said as the elevator finally stopped with a ding.

“Well I never really thought much of it before, but I can see what you’re getting at.” Judy said as she led Nick down the hallway.

“Here we are, this will be your room for the weekend, and I’ll be in 526,” Judy said, as she stopped in front of a plain wood door with the number 525 painted on it.
“You’re sleeping in a guest room? What about your old room?”

“Nick, rooms don’t stay unused in this burrow. With the exception of guest rooms, if a bedroom is empty it will get claimed by a younger bunny looking to move out of the shared kit rooms. So the room that used to be mine has long since been taken over.” Judy explained.

“Now hurry up and unpack, dinner should be just about ready.” Judy said as she walked over to her room and went inside.

With his bag on his shoulder Nick followed Judy’s lead and headed into his own room. The room was nice, carpeted floor with a dresser, a bed sized for a wolf, a night stand with accompanying alarm clock, lamp, and phone, the walls were painted a soothing grassy green and there was even a small attached bathroom complete with shower.

“Wow.” Nick said with a whistle, “This is more like a hotel room than a guest bedroom.”

Nick then went about unpacking the few items he had brought with him, all the while running the day’s events through his head. Try as he might to stay positive, Nick found himself looking less and less forward to the next few days. Because if the reception he’d received thus far was anything to go by, he was in for a rough time even with Judy by his side. Before he could contemplate it more however, his thoughts were interrupted by a voice from outside his door.

"Dinner will be served in ten minutes, today’s meal is eggplant parmesan with steamed vegetables, optional side salad, soup of the day, or timothy hay,"

A minute later Nick heard a knock on his door, “Hey Slick are you ready? If we don’t hurry up the line will be unbelievable.” Judy called out from the hallway.

“Just a sec.” Nick said as he threw his phone in his pocket and walked over to the door.

“So what was that voice I heard? Do you bunnies have telepathy or something.” Nick asked as he walked with Judy towards the elevator.

“It’s an intercom system Nick. We use it for general announcements, calling family meetings, or for passing information in an emergency. It’s a huge time saver, since before we had it installed the runners would have to be sent to each floor to let everyone know.”

“That sounds like a lot of mammals would end up missing dinner.” Nick commented as they made their way to the dining hall.

“You’re not wrong.” Judy said as she opened the door to the dining hall

As they entered the dining hall Nick got flashbacks of high school. The hall was massive, taking up at least half of the space for the entire floor, spread out around the room was a mixed collection of long tables and round tables with rabbits already finding places to sit, forming groups based mostly on age. At the front of the room was a cafeteria style serving line with a bustling kitchen behind it.

Grabbing a tray and getting in line, Nick and Judy quickly made their way through the line. The generous portions of noodles and eggplant making Nick’s mouth water in anticipation. As they navigated the maze of tables, Nick could feel almost every eye in the hall on him. The kits looked at him with curiosity, while most of the adults looked at him with either fear, or distain. Nick tried his best not to let it get to him.

Eventually Judy found them a spot at a table of similarly aged bunnies. As Nick sat in a seat slightly too small for him, the conversation around him all but ceased.
“Hey Ian, Izzy, Kevin, Jake, how have you guys been?” Judy asked the bunnies at the table as she sat beside Nick.

“I’ve been good Judy, just working the fields like normal. How are you?” A well-built brown buck replied plainly.

“I see, I’ve been alright, working hard to enforce the law. So, how’s the field prep going? Are all the fields ready?” Judy asked, happy to be having a normal conversation with a sibling.

“Pretty much, just got a few more fields to do before we start planting. We’d be done already if someone *cough, cough* Kevin, *cough, cough* wasn’t taking so many breaks.” the brown buck said, nudging the cream-colored buck next to him in the ribs.

“Knock it off Ian, you’d work yourself to death if I didn’t make you take a break every once in a while.” Kevin protested, playfully shoving Ian back, however Ian wasn’t expecting the shove and ended up slamming into Nick.

Nick who hadn’t been paying attention to the situation let out a small yelp of shock as the surprisingly solid buck slammed into his arm, but quickly recovered and helped Ian sit back up in his seat.

“Sorry about that Ian,” Kevin said apologetically.

“Its fine Kev, I didn’t think you had that much strength in you.” Ian said with a laugh.

“So Judy, tell us, what’s it like saving an entire city and becoming a minor celebrity?” The doe to Judy’s left asked.

“Hold on a minute Izzy. Ian, Kevin, don’t you two have something to say to Nick?” Judy asked impatiently

“Judy, its fine,” Nick said quietly, not wanting to attract any more attention to the incident.

“No Nick it’s not fine, they should apologize to you for that,”

“Judy if the Fox says its fine then just let it go,” Ian said dismissively.

Judy looked at Nick, “Are you sure?” She asked.

“Yeah it’s no big deal, just an accident.” Nick replied.

“If you say so.” Judy said uncertainly before turning back to the doe next to her, “anyway Izzy saving the city was a thrill to be sure. But having random mammals come up to me on the street and thank me has taken some getting used to.” Judy explained before being prompted to tell the story of what happened.

So as Judy talked about the case she made sure to bring Nick in as much as possible, letting him describe some of the events, hoping to get some of her siblings to converse with him as well but to no avail, every time Nick spoke he was met with silence. While when it was Judy’s turn she would be asked at least two questions or elicit a “ooh,” or “wow,” from the bunnies at the table.

Giving up on conversation Nick decided to just focus on his meal, taking slow, measured bites and taking great pains to open his mouth as little as possible lest he show his teeth too much. Nick also made sure he was always chewing on something so he wouldn’t have to talk. In doing this Nick started to notice the subtle shift in conversations at the table. Judy’s siblings seemed to be only
reluctantly talking to her, Nick was pretty sure it was because Judy was constantly trying to bring him into conversations and the Hopps bunnies had made their positions clear on that. So as the meal went on Nick could feel the underlying tension growing at the table and see the changes happening around him, like how unless Judy was bringing up things to talk about nobody would say anything to her, comfortable to whisper to the bunny next to them instead.

Seeing this bothered Nick, he knew it was hurting Judy from the droop in her ears and the look on her face, he also knew that Judy’s siblings were only pulling back from her because of him. So as Judy fell silent and looked down at her tray, unwilling to try and talk anymore Nick decided enough was enough.

“I’m gonna go get some air Judy.” Nick said abruptly, as he got up from the table, unable to take the atmosphere or the hurt in Judy’s eyes anymore.

With that Nick quickly navigated his way through the tables, eventually making his way to the elevators and finally finding himself outside. Unsure of where to go but realizing he needed to be alone for a while, Nick walked towards a big oak tree that sat alone atop a small hill. As Nick sat back against the tree and looked up at the stars his mind a whirlwind of conflicting thoughts and emotions Nick couldn’t help but admire the dazzling night sky, thinking to himself, *now this isn’t something I’d ever see in the city.*

**Back in the Dining Hall**

Judy felt her heart break and her throat tighten as she watched Nick all but run from the hall, and as his tail disappeared from view Judy felt the urge to chase after him.

“Well, Judy tell us more about the city, I was thinking about going to visit and I figured you’d be the best person to ask about fun things to do there.” Kevin asked, completely oblivious to Judy’s inner turmoil.

“Yeah Judy tell us, tell us.” Izzy said as the rest of the table joined in, thier demeanor changing instantly.

“You want to know about Zootopia?” Judy said, her tone taking on a dangerous edge as her sadness slowly changed into rage.

Unaware of the shift in Judy’s demeanor her siblings started throwing out questions about the city left and right.

“Alright, I’ll be right back then.” Judy said as she stood up.

“Well Ian, since you and the rest of the table seem so interested in Zootopia, I figured I would go get Nick, since as a native Zootopian he’d know best,”

“O-o-oh, you don’t have to do that Judy, I’m sure he wouldn’t be much help, you’d know the best places for bunnies like us.” Kevin said, clearly not wanting to bring Nick back into the conversation.

“No, no I insist, Nick knows the best places in the city. Every cool place I’ve been to was on his recommendation.”

“Well we want your recommendation, that fox doesn’t know us like you do.” Ian said bluntly.

“His name is Nick,” Judy said quietly.
“What?” Ian said, not quite hearing Judy over the murmur of the other conversations filling the Hall.

“I said HIS NAME IS NICK!” Judy shouted, unable to keep herself calm anymore.

“Judy calm do-” Izzy tried to say but the last word died in her throat as she caught Judy’s glare.

“I will NOT calm down, I bring a friend and future partner on the force home to meet my family and let him relax from training and this is how you treat him?” Judy said indignantly.

“‘That Fox’ saved my life on multiple occasions, he saved my job, got me an apartment, and helped save the city. All with no benefit to himself, and not only that but he’s joining the ZPD and is going to be covering my back while we protect the city.” Judy continued, her voice getting louder, reverberating through the halls as everyone else went quiet.

“How DARE you treat him like that! You ignore him, look down on him, or are just downright rude and he’s done nothing to you. Not only that but he tried to talk with you, tried to be nice, even going so far as to excuse or ignore your behavior.” Judy then turned to the rest of the dining hall,

“This goes for the rest of you as well, since Nick hasn’t been treated well by anyone in the Burrow so far.” Judy said, disappointment clear in her voice,

“The way you’ve all been acting is NOT an acceptable way to treat any mammal, let alone someone important to me. I expected a lot better from all of you, because at the very least Nick is a guest in this house. Now if you’ll excuse me I have a Fox to find.” Judy said before storming out of the dining hall, leaving the entire table, along with the rest of the family stunned in silence.

Outside Under the Oak Tree

Nick had been sitting under the tree for at least a half hour and still didn’t feel any better. His thoughts were still in turmoil, and while Cyn-Nick was practically throwing a victory party in his head, Nick tried to plan out his next move.

“Maybe I should just go back, I mean Judy’s better off spending time with her family without me.” Nick said quietly as he weighed his options.

“If that’s what you want, I understand. But if you want my opinion on the matter, I would like for you to stay.” Judy said softly as she came out from behind the tree.

“Oh hey, didn’t see you there. Why aren’t you eating dinner with your family?” Nick asked nervously.

“Nick, the way they treated you was unacceptable. I left to go find you right after you left. Well almost right after, I made sure to give them a rather stern talking to before I left.” Judy said as she sat down next to Nick.

“You didn’t have to do that, Carrots.”

“Yes, I did. They shouldn’t treat you that way Nick.” Judy said with conviction,

"Also,” Judy said, her tone softening. “This is the first time you’ve called me Carrots since the train ride. Why? I thought you loved using nicknames?”

“Well, I didn’t want your family getting a bad impression of me so I stopped using your nicknames, because they could be considered condescending. But I guess that was pointless since they already seem dead set against me.” Nick said sadly, not bothering to hide his feelings from Judy anymore.
“Oh Nick, I’m so sorry... If you want to go back to the academy... I—I’ll understand.” Judy said, trying but failing to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

“Stay,” Instinct said, not really leaving room for discussion.

“I didn’t need you to tell me that, if Judy wants me to stay and it’s not going to cause her too much trouble then of course I’m going to stay.” Nick thought back at Instinct.

“Judy, if you want me to stick around, and it won’t cause you too much trouble then I’d be happy to.” Nick said sincerely.

Hearing that Nick would stay despite the way her family had acted, combined with the way he had said her name caused a swell of emotions to bubble up and all Judy could do was immediately wrap her arms around him and bury her face in his side.

Nick said nothing and just returned the hug, letting himself enjoy the bunny’s embrace, and after a few minutes both Nick and Judy had let go but Judy had decided to remain nestled against Nick’s side. Seeing that Judy wasn’t going to move Nick decided to just let his arm fall around her shoulders and bring her in a little closer.

For the next thirty minutes Nick and Judy just sat there under the dazzling night sky, talking and enjoying each other’s company. It was like this that Bonnie Hopps found the two mammals she had been searching for.

Bonnie hadn’t been searching for Judy and Nick long when she stumbled upon the two lying together under the old oak tree. As Bonnie got halfway up the hill and she was close enough to see and hear the two mammals, she decided to pause for a moment and take in the scene before her, the way Judy way laying against Nick, and how Nick’s arm was draped around her shoulders pulling her closer.

*They seem a bit close for friends, especially since Judy has a boyfriend.* Bonnie thought to herself as she watched her daughter and Nick together,

“Is it possible they’re actually....” Bonnie whispered to herself but decided to let that thought drift away. Judy had a boyfriend, and while Judy was many things, stubborn, ambitious, and definitely not your average bunny, one thing she wasn’t, was a cheater and Bonnie was sure of that. So that combined with the sheer absurdity of the idea that a fox and bunny would date was too much to even entertain the notion.

“Judy? Nick? Are you out here?” Bonnie called out, as she started walking up the hill again.

Bonnie chucked as she watched Judy shoot up straight and slide over slightly, as she tried to pretend that nothing had been happening.

“O-oh hey Mom. What are you doing out here?” Judy asked, quickly regaining her composure.

“I came to talk to you two about what happened at dinner.” Bonnie said as she reached the top of the hill and stood next to Judy.

“I’m not apologizing.” Judy said stubbornly.
“I’m not asking you to. After your little outburst during dinner, I talked to Izzy, Ian, and Kevin and they told me about what happened and you were completely right. That is no way to treat a guest, especially someone who has been taking care of you while you’ve been alone in the city.” Bonnie said before hesitantly turning to Nick.

“And Mr. Wilde, while it may not mean much, I do apologize for the behavior of my family. It was unacceptable and if you’re willing to stay you’ll be welcome here and if anyone in the burrow gives you any problems, let me know and it’ll be taken care of.”

Nick smiled, he could see by the formal, almost stiff way Bonnie was talking to him that she still wasn’t entirely comfortable with his presence, but she was at least making an effort and Nick appreciated it.

“You can call me Nick, Mrs. Hopps. Don’t worry about this evening, it’s not the worst welcome I’ve ever had, but I appreciate the apology. So for me at least it’s water under the bridge.”

“That’s very mature of you Nick. Feel free to call me Bonnie, but like I said, if anyone gives you trouble, please let me know. Alright?” Bonnie said, her tone getting a little less stiff.

“Alright Bonnie, I’ll be sure to let you know if something comes up.”

“That’s a promise then, and I expect you to keep it young mammal.” Bonnie said, suddenly reminding Nick a lot of Judy.

Judy who had been watching the exchange suddenly let out a loud yawn that got the attention of both Nick and Bonnie.

“Well I can see you’re both tired and I’m sure you have a busy day planned tomorrow, so you both should get some sleep.” Bonnie said with a smile.

“You might be right Mom.” Judy said as she let out another yawn, “Come on Nick let’s hit the hay.”

“I don’t know about you Fluff, but I’d rather sleep on a mattress than a pile of hay, but maybe that’s just me.” Nick joked as he stood up.

“You know what I meant Slick,” Judy said, smiling as she lightly punched his arm.

“Wow, that was a pretty light punch, you must be tired.” Nick said with a chuckle.

Nick, Judy and Bonnie all made their way back towards the house together, but as Nick and Judy walked together Bonnie trailed behind the two, watching them even closer than she had before. Eventually Bonnie split off and made her way back to her own room as Nick and Judy headed to theirs.

So as all three mammals reached their rooms and found themselves lying in bed each had their own thoughts that kept them awake a little while longer. Judy’s mind was occupied with thoughts of the coming day, what they were going to do, who they were going to see, and how to best keep Nick happy. Nick was preparing himself for tomorrow, steeling his resolve for another day of being stared down and disrespected. While Bonnie was unable to get the idea of Nick and Judy being a couple out of her head. Despite how ridiculous it was, despite that she didn’t believe that Judy would cheat, and despite the absurdity of it, Bonnie still couldn’t deny the closeness between the two. Plus, Judy punching Nick on the arm was also a clear sign that there was something more going on. As the saying went, “When a doe boxes a buck, then he’s surely in luck”

“There’s just no way, is there?” Bonnie whispered quietly, trying to convince herself that she was
wrong, “

I must have misread the interactions, I mean they were really close when we went to visit a few weeks ago, but Judy’s with Dylan so there can’t be anything like that between Nick and Judy, it’s just not possible,” Bonnie concluded before turning over in her bed.

I know and trust Judy, Bonnie thought to herself, but the image of Judy leaning into Nick under the starlight night sky keep popping back in Bonnies mind. I’ll just have to keep a close eye on those two just in case, and as she let sleep overtake her Bonnie still felt uneasy about the whole situation.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn’t, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all. Also If for some reason you don't want to comment but still want to suggest something or talk to me personally don't hesitate to PM me, I'll respond when I have time.

Paperthin Hymn By Anberlin - It's a great song.

I'll keep suggesting Music forever, feel free to ignore it or tell me what you thought of the song, also if you have a favorite song suggest it to me, music is a great thing that you can never have too much of.
Friends In Low Places

Chapter Summary

Day 2 at the Hopps Family Farm, what awaits our poor fox? read and find out....

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 18... I bet you didn't expect to see me so soon but I worked through a lot of lunch breaks to bring you this chapter and I don't regret a minute of it since I enjoy creating this story for you all and I like to read the comments you post.

So last chapters references for those that missed them were all pointed out by Sasuke149, But if you missed them they were 1. Disney's Robin Hood 2. Day of the Dead. 3. Spice And Wolf and 4. Monty Python.

Work has started in full swing and I will be out of internet range for the next 2 months so there definite wont be a chapter 19 for a while. So while you wait for me to come back I recommend you check out Camoss's story "A Ray of Hope"

https://www.fanfiction.net/s/12774460/1/A-Ray-of-Hope

The story is great and Camoss posts regularly too so that's a big plus, definitely check it out.

Also, Damn this story's getting long and not really moving forward much, I have no idea when I'll finally get what I want and bring those two together, But thank you all for sticking with me.

As Always I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails,

and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

Last Thing I promise, this chapter lacks the normal Time, location and Day thing's I normally do since it didn't really need them but in case you forgot...

Hopps Family Farm, Bunnyburrow, Saturday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 18 – Friends In Low Places

"And here is the Hopps Family game room." Judy said as she and Nick walked into a darkened room filled with nothing but TV's and gaming consoles along with quite a few bunnies sitting on couches playing a wide assortment of games.

"Wow Carrots, you have quite the collection." Nick said as they walked around, looking at all the gaming stations.

"Well why don't you sit down and play a bit." Judy offered, patting the couch invitingly.

"Are you sure? I thought you had more you wanted to show me around the farm?"

"Its fine Nick. I have to run to the bathroom real quick, so just play." Judy said as she walked towards the exit.

"I guess playing a little won't kill me." Nick said as he put a random game in and turned on the TV. Nick couldn't have been playing for more than ten minutes before he heard the sound of someone coming up from behind him.

"Hey Fluff, are you ready to get going," Nick said, still facing the screen.

After a few seconds of silence, Nick decided to pause the game and turn around. What he found was not Judy but a little doe, her fur color was brown, and she wore a blue shirt with clouds on it and brown cargo shorts. Nick was curious, the kit couldn't be more than five years old and she was just standing there staring at Nick with wide eyes.

"Hey sweetheart, I'm Nick. What's your name?" Nick said as he smiled, making sure not to show his teeth, making his expression look more like a grimace than a smile.

The doe said nothing and just continued to stare, making Nick more uncomfortable by the second. Getting off the couch Nick decided he might as well try and show the kit he wasn't a threat.

"Hey kiddo." Nick said awkwardly as he began to approach the little doe. As he got closer, Nick could see the kit was hiding something behind her back.

"What-cha got behind your back?" Nick asked, thinking it might be a doll or a security blanket.

The little doe continued to say nothing but brought her hands from behind her back and revealed she was holding a muzzle. Seeing the muzzle gave Nick pause, the way it seemed to glow even in the low light of the game room drew Nick's attention to it.

"Oh, that's a, a, ah, a muzzle. Why are you carrying around such a silly thing like that." Nick said as he tried to get himself under control.

"Mommy said the red furred stranger is bad. Bad mammals need a muzzle. Mommy said the red
furred stranger is bad. Bad mammals need a muzzle. The doe said as she began approaching Nick slowly.

"I think Mommy might be mistaken kiddo, I'm a good mammal. I work with your auntie Judy, no need to muzzle me." Nick said, as he slowly took a step back from the kit. But as he took his step back Nick found himself walking into another bunny.

"I'm sorry I didn't see-," Nick said apologetically as he turned around, but the rest of his sentence died in his throat as he saw not just one bunny but a group of them, all carrying muzzles with twisted grins on their faces.

Looking around Nick suddenly realized he was surrounded by at least fifty rabbits, all carrying muzzled and slowly closing in on him.

"Wha- what's g-g-going on here?" Nick stammered out as the circle around him got tighter and tighter.

"If you ever thought we'd trust a fox without a muzzle you're even dumber than you look." a voice called out from the back.

"What are you talking about? Who said that?" Nick asked, as he held his arms out in an attempt to keep the bunnies back.

"Bad mammals need muzzles." another voice said.

The bunnies were on top of him now and Nick found himself being pulled to the ground, the twisted smiles on the faces of all the bunnies filling Nick's sight as his arms and legs were pinned to the ground.

"No, no no no, HELP!" Nick cried out as the last traces of light were suddenly blotted out and a muzzle was secured firmly on his face.

Suddenly chants of, "No good fox," "maybe if you keep that muzzle on you can stay." and, "Nobody wants you here you disgusting pred." filled the room.

"What is going on here," A familiar voice called out, stopping the chanting in its tracks and causing the bunnies piled on Nick to slowly climb off of him and open a path.

Nick was relieved as he recognized the voice, Judy would get him out of this mess, and probably give the bunnies who did it a thrashing too, but as Judy's face came into view Nick's stomach dropped. Instead of a furious look or a look of concern Judy's face only held a sneer and it was directed solely at Nick.

"You're so pathetic, Nick." Judy said, disgust and displeasure oozing from her voice.

Nick tried to say something to Judy but all that came out of his mouth was garbled nonsense, as even his voice betrayed him.

"Yep, pathetic. You always need me to pull your tail out of the fire. Why would I want a worthless mammal like that as a partner? You know what, if you can't even manage a few bunnies then I'm better off alone." Judy said spitting in Nick's direction before turning away.

All of the fight went out of Nick in that moment, and as he watched Judy walk away he just laid on the ground, unable to even move a finger.
"Get him outta here." Judy said coldly as she walked out the door not turning to look back even once, and the next thing Nick knew he felt the rough fabric of a bag being pulled over his head turning the world around him into darkness before being dragged away.

After a few minutes of being dragged by the bunnies Nick then felt a larger mammal pick him up and throw him on their shoulders and carrying him away, before eventually being unceremoniously dumped in a chair. The chair was made for a much larger mammal Nick could tell, it was comfy but cold, very, very cold.

As the bag was taken off the first thing Nick saw was a very disappointed looking old shrew being held by an enormous polar bear. The second thing Nick saw was that he was surrounded by the cadets from his ZPA class, all of them looked down on him judgmentally but said nothing.

"Nicky my boy, you've failed." Mr. Big said as he tapped his tiny claw on the wood of his miniature chair each click echoing ominously.

"Judy doesn't want you as her partner and now there is no reason to keep you alive. However I'm not an unfair mammal, so if one of your fellow cadets is willing to work with you I'll let you go." Big said, before turning to the mammals that now surrounded Nick.

"So, would any of you upstanding ZPA cadets be willing to work with ?"

Not a single mammal lifted their paw or showed any emotion, but disgust.

"Think carefully now, I'm not asking if Nick is a good mammal, or someone you'd be ok hanging out with. I'm just asking if you'd allow him to walk the halls of the ZPD at all, even if you'd never have to lay eyes on his pathetic pelt?"

Big’s words were once again met with silence, however some grinned maliciously at his words.

Nick’s eyes went wide as he frantically looked at the mammals around him, none of them would meet his stare however. There has to be someone, anyone, willing to raise a paw to save me. Nick thought pleadingly as his eyes finally fell on Tom. Unlike the others Tom stared back at Nick with a hardness in his eyes that caused Nick to recoil in his seat.

"This is what you get Nick. We all tried to extend a hand out in friendship to you, but you pushed us away. No one here cares about you anymore and you're to blame. So, your only option is to face the consequences." Tom said, staring Nick down as he spoke, and after he had finished speaking, Tom turned his back.

One by one everyone in Nick's class did the same until the only one Nick could look at was Mr. Big who had a sad smile on his face.

"Well Nicky, there you have it. Nobody wants you around, so now it's time to say goodbye, don't worry I'll find another Mammal to protect Judy in your place. Maybe I'll get that young buck Dylan. I mean he's already dating Judy so I'm sure he'd be ok with protecting her." Big said, as Nick was picked up by the scruff of his neck and dropped into the icy cold water below him, the world fading to black.

"NNOOOOO," Nick screamed as he shot up in his bed, his heart nearly forcing its way out if his chest.

Looking around frantically Nick realized he was still in the guest room at the Hoppses.

"It was just a dream." Nick whispered to himself as he took in a deep breath and attempted to calm
down a bit.

It took several minutes before Nick had calmed down and his heartbeat returned to a normal level. Looking over at the clock on his nightstand Nick saw it was already 7:30.

"I might as well get dressed." Nick said, as he got out of bed. He was unwilling to try and fall back asleep lest the nightmare come back. As Nick went about putting on his shorts, he heard a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Nick asked already knowing the answer.

"It's Judy, can I come in?"

"Sure, I'm half decent," Nick said, as he put his Pawaiian shirt on, not bothering to button the buttons just yet.

Judy was dressed in a simple pair of blue jeans and a red long-sleeved shirt, and while her outfit wasn't anything flashy Nick still found himself discreetly checking her out anyway.

"So what brings you into the fox's den so early in the morning." Nick joked, as he flashed Judy a winning smile.

Judy blushed, a nearly shirtless Nick was not something she had expected, but she wasn't complaining as she too admired the view in front of her.

"Well I was going to let you sleep more but I heard you yelling and I was a little concerned and came to check on you,"

"Oh, sorry about that, it was nothing, just had a little nightmare, but thanks for coming to check on me." Nick said coolly, but as the memory of the dream flashed through his mind Nick quickly looked away not wanting Judy to see how shaken he still was.

"Wanna talk about it?" Judy asked as she walked over to Nick and gently put her paw on his arm.

"Not particularly, I've already forgotten most of it." Nick lied.

"Alright Nick. I won't push you, but remember I'm here for you whenever." Judy said as she wrapped her arms around Nick reassuringly.

"Thanks Fluff," Nick said as he returned the hug.

Judy stayed in the warm embrace, just enjoying the surprisingly fluffy and soft feeling of Nick's fur for a moment before eventually breaking it off.

"Well Nick you should probably finish getting dressed, breakfast is almost over so if you wanna eat we best get a move on," Judy said.

"Alright, just let me button up and we can be on our way." Nick said as he swiftly buttoned up his signature shirt.

The two then quickly made their way to the nearly empty dining hall, grabbed some of what food was left and sat down at an empty table. Nick and Judy chatted while they ate, finding themselves perfectly content to keep to themselves and after they had finished and dropped their dishes off Judy led Nick to the front floor.
"So Nick what would you like to do today? We could tour the house, take a truck into town and I can show you around there, or I can take you to the blueberry fields."

As soon as Judy said the words "blueberry fields" Nick's ears perked up and his tail immediately started to sway.

"Well I think your tail has answered for you." Judy said with a smile, "Follow me to, what is likely to be your favorite place in the Tri-Burrows."

Judy then turned and walked towards one of the barns behind the house. Nick, who was unable to deny the swaying of his tail decided to just stay quiet and follow along.

"Unfortunately, the blueberry fields are a few miles out so instead of walking I thought you might enjoy taking the ATVs for a spin." Judy said as she opened the barn doors revealing a wide assortment of off-road vehicles.

"Wow, I've never ridden an ATV before." Nick said as he hopped onto one of the four wheelers, admiring the sturdy frame and large treaded tires.

If Nick's never ridden one before he might hurt himself. Maybe we should just walk it. Judy thought as she watched Nick play around with the ATV.

Or we could take only one ATV, I'll drive and make sure we don't crash, that way we don't have to walk all that way, Judy rationalized,

"You just want Nick to wrap his arms around you, don't you?" a sultry voice asked teasingly.

It's just for safety and that's all, having Nick give me an extended hug is just ahhhh... a perk. Yeah that's it, a perk. Judy thought back defensively.

"Whatever you say." The voice chuckled before fading off leaving Judy with the image of Nick clinging onto her as they rode through the fields, and into the sunset for some reason.

"Hey Nick, if you haven't driven one before I think it'd be best if you rode with me instead." Judy said as she walked over to Nick.

"Aw come on Fluff, I'll be fine, I doubt it's that hard to control."

"Nick if you were to accidentally get hurt, I'd never forgive myself. You'd probably have to drop out of the academy," Judy explained, missing the look on Nick's face.

"I guess that makes sense. Well, I guess I can ride with you. Better safe than sorry." Nick said stiffly.

Judy, mistaking Nick's tone for disappointment decided to give in a little, "Fine... I'll let you drive on the way back, as long as you promise to take it slow. Now let's hurry up and get those berries." Judy said enthusiastically as she started up one of the ATV's

"I can't wait," Nick said with equal enthusiasm, shaking the dream from his mind.

"Hop on and make sure to hold on tight," Judy said as Nick got on behind her.
As soon as she felt Nick's arms wrap around her midsection, Judy hit the gas and they shot forward. A sly smile found its way onto Judy's face as she felt Nick hold on a little tighter, followed by a gasp of surprise as she felt Nick's wet nose against the crook of her neck.

"Sorry Carrots," Nick said, his voice low and his breath hot against her face, "I wouldn't normally invade your space like this, but I kinda have to, so I don't get slapped in the face by your ears."

"O-oh, sorry I didn't even think of that, just stay where you are then." Judy said, heat spreading across her face as she got over the shock and just enjoyed the closeness.

As they drove along the fields, Judy told Nick what the field was growing, and what the plant would be used for, either selling, feeding the family or storing for later use. Judy then went on to describe the crop rotation system employed by the family. Explaining how rotating the crops ensured the soil would be rich in nutrients and less prone to pests.

"Sorry, I must be boring you." Judy said, realizing she had talked about nothing but farm work since they started the ride fifteen minutes ago.

"Don't worry about it Fluff. It's actually kind of cool to hear how food is grown. Most people in the city don't have the faintest idea of where their food comes from, besides the fact that it shows up in the grocery store for them to buy. While I'm probably not going to be an expert anytime soon, it's still interesting to learn." Nick said quietly, not wanting to shout in Judy's ear.

"We'll make a farmer out of you yet, Slick." Judy said playfully as she brought the ATV to a stop.

"I wouldn't say that. Switching professions one time is already enough for me, thanks." Nick said as he let go of Judy and got off of the four-wheeler.

Nick approached the field in wonder, "Wow, look at them all." Nick said excitedly as he looked upon the rows of blueberry bushes.

"I've never seen them on the plant like this. Some of them are so small and green, and look at those, they're white!" Nick continued as Judy made her way over to his side.

As she watched Nick, Judy couldn't help but smile. Nick just looked so happy, his tail wagging was always a good sign but since tail control is notoriously hard seeing Nick's tail wag was not entirely out of the ordinary. What really had Judy smiling was the look on Nick's face, his calm, cool, "I don't care about this," hustler mask which for the most part was firmly welded on, was nowhere to be seen. Instead Nick's emotions were firmly displayed on his face and his almost childlike look of wonderment and joy was in its place.

*Look at this, Nick is so unguarded right now, and he seems to not have a care in the world, he looks so happy. This is how he should look more often.* Judy thought to herself as she walked alongside Nick as he made his way down the rows of bushes, excitedly talking about his favorite fruit.

*But he won't,* a somber voice pointed out, *Nick's far too guarded to the outside world and for good reason, too. So even when he is happy, he never shows it.*

Judy couldn't argue, from the stories Nick had shared with her and what she had seen firsthand she could understand why Nick acted the way he did.

*But that's going to change. I vow to make Nick smile like this more often. He deserves that much at least.* Judy thought to herself, resolving to make Nick as happy as possible.

"You know, we grew these fields from wild bushes." Judy said as she plucked a berry off the bush.
and tossed it to Nick

"How?" Nick asked as he caught the berry and ate it.

"Well this was before I was born but apparently while walking in the woods, Alex, one of the kits from my parents first litter, got lost in the woods and stumbled upon a wild blueberry bush. After eating a few and realizing how good they were, he picked a bunch and took them with him while he searched for a way out of the forest. Alex eventually found his way home and gave the last few berries to my dad, who after trying them decided that since the berries tasted better than any he'd ever had, that they should take the seeds and plant them. They tried to find the bush again to get more berries but were unsuccessful, so they only had three berries to take seeds from, but after planting the seeds the bushes grew and the fruit they bared were just as good as the bush from the forest. It took some time to get the fields to this size, but all these bushes are descendants of that one bush."

"That's a nice story, but blueberries don't have seeds" Nick said as he picked a few berries from a nearby bush.

"What are you talking about. Of course they do, how else would they grow," Judy said as she took a blueberry out of Nick's paw and ripped it in half.

"I may not know much about farming Fluff, but I have eaten at least a million blueberries and I have never encountered a seed. You just bury the whole berry and the bush will grow" Nick said definitively.

"Nick every berry has seeds. Heck, so do the majority of plants, since that's how they reproduce." Judy said as she took a blueberry out of Nick's paw and ripped it in half.

"Judy what are you doing?" Nick asked as she started rooting through the halves of the berry.

"Look, see these little brown things," Judy said as she finally managed to pull a few seeds.

"Kinda?" Nick said as he squinted, trying to get a better look at the tiny brown specks.

"These are blueberry seeds, since they're so small you don't notice them when you eat them but they're always there." Judy explained, smiling once more at the look of surprise on Nick's face.

"You don't say. I thought I knew my favorite fruit better than that, but now I see how little I really knew." Nick said dramatically.

"Stick with me Slick and I'll teach you things about blueberries you'd never learn in the city." Judy said playfully.

"Like what?"

"Well like the proper way to pick them so you get the best ones," Judy said waving Nick over to her side.

"Show me, oh wise bunny sage, how to pick the best berries." Nick said as he crouched next to Judy.

"Well, you see how all these berries look ripe?" Judy asked motioning to the bush.

"Yeah, they look delicious," Nick said, mouth watering at the sight of all the ripe berries.

"Well, sometimes the berries look ripe but still need some time to be perfect. The way to check is to very gently try and roll the berry off the stem with your fingers." Judy said as she demonstrated the
motion getting a few blueberries to fall into her paws. "If the berry isn't ready yet it won't come off the stem."

"That's amazing!" Nick said as he followed Judy's instruction, and watched in disbelief as the berries fell effortlessly into his paws.

"Yep, little tricks like this are the reason the Hopps berries are the best in the burrows." Judy said proudly.

"Now if you encounter a clump of good-looking berries instead of testing them one at a time there's a trick you can use to get all the ripe ones at once and save yourself some time," Judy explained as she saw Nick trying to pick a bunch of berries individually.

"You sure have a lot of little tricks, don't you?" Nick said lightheartedly.

"You gotta learn the ways to save time when you're harvesting as much as we do."

"I'm sure you do, now show me this mystical berry picking method." Nick said, as he realized Judy had missed the point, that's probably for the best telling her she tricked her way into your heart might not be the best idea considering there's no way she feels the same, Nick thought himself wistfully.

Without another word Judy took both of Nick's paws in hers and gently moved Nick into position, getting him to cup his paws around a clump of ripe looking berries.

"Now we slowly and softly rub our paws back and forth," Judy said as she guided Nick's paws gently back and forth.

*Yep, she tricked her way right into my heart.* Nick thought as he enjoyed the softness of Judy's paws on his own, not even paying attention to the new berries that were falling into his palms.

"And there you go. A paw full of perfectly ripe blueberries." Judy said as she slowly took her paws away from Nick's.

"Quite the trick there Fluff. Now I can clear this field in half the time." Nick said as he tossed a blueberry into the air and caught it in his mouth with a resounding snap.

"Nice catch, and while I can't let you eat the entire field, my parents did say you could pick a basket's worth and take it back to the academy." Judy said as she pulled a basket seemingly out of thin air.

"Really?!" Nick said excitedly, like a kit who just found out he could pick out a toy from the store.

"Really, now get to picking." Judy said happily as she handed him a basket and watched him go.

*That's more like it,* Judy thought as she watched Nick happily picking berries, throwing them either in his mouth or into the basket.

**Around an hour later...**

Having picked and eaten more blueberries than Judy had thought possible in such a short time, Nick and Judy decided to head back. As they approached the four-wheeler Judy's warning popped back into Nick's head once more, *If you got hurt you'd probably have to drop out of the academy*, followed by the image of being iced, the thought of the icing had Nick a little worried about driving the ATV back.
"Don't be such a kit, Wilde. It was just a dream." Nick chastised as they reached the vehicle.

Placing the basket full of blueberries in the ATV's storage compartment, and giving Nick a short course on how to operate the vehicle, the two slowly made their way back to the house. Their speed never going above 5 mph, Judy hanging on tightly as she barely managed to get her arms completely wrapped around Nick.

"I'm impressed Nick. I figured you would have gunned it at the first opportunity, possibly trying a wheelie and putting both of us in a hospital, but you're really are being careful." Judy said, speaking more into Nick's back than to him.

"Well as much as I would love to show you how a real mammal drives one of these things, I don't want you to somehow fall off and hurt yourself." Nick replied, chuckling nervously to himself as he tried to bury the terror that still lingered from his dream, but every time Nick even approached a reasonable speed the scene of his icing would pop back up in his mind.

"There's no shame in being scared, Wilde." Judy teased.

Nick, not one to back away from a challenge simply replied with, "Challenge accepted." as he hit the gas and sped up considerably, causing Judy to hold on even tighter.

"You're fine, you're fine, think of something else. Nick thought to himself as he tried to ignore the booming of his heart in his ears.

"Like how nice it feels to have Judy holding on to you so tightly," Emotion said, suddenly calling Nick's attention to that fact.

"It feels really, really, nice. Doesn't it," Emotion continued as he realized he had the spotlight all to himself.

"That it does," Nick agreed, the heat building in his face.

"No Way. You're finally admitting your feelings to… well yourself, but still this is huge." Emotion said excitedly as he reveled in his first victory in years.

Pretty sure I've already accepted that fact. I'd have to be really out of touch with myself if I wasn't able to figure it out by now. Nick thought back dismissively.

And before you even say anything else, no, I still won't be pursuing a relationship. This is for the best and it's what she wants. Nick continued, cutting off emotion before he could push the issue.

"But she's trying to learn more about you. She brought you home to meet her family, and she's also holding onto you so tightly. You know that has to mean something more." Emotion said, deciding to try a different angle.

You are just looking too deeply into it, or I guess I should say I'm, looking too deeply into it. Judy's a good mammal and a great friend, that's why she's trying to learn about me and inviting me to meet her family, and as for the holding onto me she's doing it for safety and nothing more. Nick rationalized, deciding it was best to squash every argument his more emotional side was putting up Emotion, seeing that Nick wasn't going to budge just shook his head and said, "You're still blind," before fading away.

That being said, I'll still enjoy all the closeness I can get, even if it'll never go further. Nick thought happily as he made his way back to the Hoppses house.
After safely making it back to the barn, Judy and Nick made their way back into the house, stopping by the massive kitchens to put the berries away before continuing to the tour of the house. Judy was eager to show Nick all the things the Hopps house had to offer like the Gym, the movie theater, and the game room which Nick seemed very eager to leave, for some reason Judy couldn't grasp. As the day wore on and the noon meal was announced the two made their way to the lunchroom to eat.

**After Lunch…**

Lunch had been a semi-tense affair. Judy had decided to pick a smaller table that was off to the corner and relatively empty in an attempt to avoid what happened yesterday. So as the two sat by themselves, Judy tried her best to fill the meal with conversation to distract Nick so he wouldn't notice and feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. However, much to her and Nick's surprise a few of the braver Hopps bunnies joined them. The bunnies introduced themselves and even tried making conversation with Nick, so by the end of the meal Nick was more or less pleasantly chatting with them and while Judy knew there was a long way to go until Nick was accepted by the family, at least it was a start.

"So what's next on the schedule Miss Tour Guide?" Nick asked as he put his dishes on the conveyor belt and watched them disappear.

"Well I was thinking we could either finish touring the house, go visit the town, or if you wanted you could take an afternoon nap." Judy said as she led Nick out into the hallway.

"An afternoon nap definitely sounds nice, but why? Not that I'm complaining necessarily, but it seems a little out of character for you to suggest it, since I figured you'd want to show me as much as possible."

"You're not wrong, but I realize that I won't be able to show you everything, so I think it's better to instead focus on what you want to do, and I know you're always saying you miss taking afternoon naps." Judy said as she pressed the elevator's call button.

"That's sweet Fluff, and I think I'll take you up on that kind offer, but let's make it a short nap that way we can get back to searching your house for at least one normal room." Nick joked as the two entered the elevator.

"Oh, come on. My house isn't that weird." Judy said as the elevator descended.

"You say this while riding an elevator with twenty floors to choose from, after eating lunch in a cafeteria, staffed exclusively by your family." Nick deadpanned.

"It's not that strange." Judy defended, her voice falling flat.

So the rest of the elevator ride and the walk to their rooms was spent discussing just how not normal the Hopps household was and by the time they reached the guest rooms, Judy couldn't deny it any longer.

"Fine, my kithood home is strange. Are you happy now?" Judy said, pretending to pout.

"Acceptance is the first step, but then again your current house isn't that much more normal, I mean a Fox and Bunny living together is bound to turn a few heads even if it's just as roommates and friends," Nick said consolingly.

"Yeah… friends," Judy said under her breath.

"So, wanna come get me at, let's say 2. That gives me time to nap and shower, then you can show
me around some more." Nick said as he opened the door to his room.

"Sounds like a plan Slick, I'll be knocking at your door promptly at 2. So you best be dressed and ready." and with that both Nick and Judy entered their rooms.

Nick quickly went about getting ready for his nap, discarding his shirt and shorts and diving into the fantastically soft bed, not even bothering to pull the covers over himself. Eyes heavy and falling fast Nick was more than ready for bed. But, as Nick's head hit the pillow and his consciousness began to fade a voice cut through the encroaching darkness, cruelly pulling Nick back to reality.

"Hey Sweetie," It was Bonnie, or at least sounded like Bonnie and since Nick didn't know any other mammal, bunny or otherwise that could get away with calling Judy sweetie besides her parents, Nick figured it was a safe bet.

"Hey Mom, what's up," Judy's voice came from behind the wall.

Called it, Nick thought to himself as he slowly started to fall back asleep.

"Well I just figured I'd check in on you and Nick, I know you were giving him a tour of the house and I wanted to make sure everyone was at the very least being respectful to Nick,"

Well isn't that nice of her, but how am I hearing this conversation? I doubt a house full of bunnies would have walls that thin, Nick thought to himself as he got out of bed and decided to investigate.

As Nick walked around the room he tried to pinpoint where the voices were coming from, listening as the volume of the conversation changed with his location

"Well today was better than yesterday, some bunnies even sat with us at lunch…." Judy's voice faded to an inaudible murmur as Nick got closer to the corner of the room opposite of his bed.

"Interesting," Nick said to himself as he slowly started walking the perimeter of the room ears perked, ready for when he could hear the conversation again.

"But the funniest thing was the look on Nicks face when I showed him blueberry seeds, he had this look, it's hard to describe, something like a mix of shock, embarrassment, and awe." Judy said, as her voice became clearer again.

"Sounds like you two had a lot of fun. I'm glad you found such a good friend in the city, I was worried you'd just work and work,"

"I probably would have, if I hadn't stumbled across Nick that first day. I mean who knows where I'd be without him." Judy said thoughtfully.

"Oh Judy, you would have been fine on your own. I'm the one who's thankful you found me." Nick said quietly as he continued trying to pinpoint where the voices were coming from, getting closer and closer to his bed.

"I'm sure you would have done fine BunBun, but having a close friend is always nice, and you two seem, really close." Bonnie said, her voice getting much clearer as Nick crawled under the bed.

"Ah, it's the vent," Nick said, before covering his muzzle.

"That must have been how Judy had heard me this morning," Nick whispered hoping he hadn't been overheard.
"I guess you could say that, but since we're going to be partners on the force that's probably for the best since we'll be spending some long hours together." Judy said dismissively

"For sure," Bonnie said, her tone shifting, "but how does Dylan feel about your friendship with Nick?"

"Dylan? I mean he knows about Nick. He also knows we're good friends and he said he doesn't care. But why do you ask?"

"Well I'm just worried Judy. Having a close friendship with another male regardless of species can be *misinterpreted*, and I wouldn't want it to put strain on your relationship with Dylan." Bonnie said, her tone holding nothing but motherly concern.

"Mom that's ridiculous, I mean…" Judy started but Bonnie cut in before she could finish.

"Dear I'm just saying, Dylan could be pretending he's ok with it because he doesn't want to tell you what to do. But jealousy is an insatiable monster, and even if Dylan really is ok with your relationship with Nick, what if, heavens forbid, you two break up? Most bucks won't go near a doe who's that close with another guy since nobody wants to fight an uphill battle. I'm just worried if you and Dylan don't work out then you might end up alone…” Bonnie said sadly, her voice trailing off.

Nick's ears, tail and heart all dropped simultaneously at the comment, this was something Nick hadn't considered and as Nick thought about the point Bonnie was trying to make, he also realized the position he was currently in and how it might look if someone else walked in and saw him, under the bed, ear to a vent and listening in on a private conversation.

*I shouldn't be listening to this, even if it's unintentional, I'm still eavesdropping.* Nick thought to himself as he sighed and started crawling out from under the bed.

"I think I'll go for a walk. It's not like I could sleep after hearing that anyway." Nick whispered to himself as he threw on his clothes and headed out

So Nick made his way to the elevator, making sure to close his door quietly as to avoid alerting Judy to his presence. As Nick made his way outside all he could think about was what Bonnie had said and as the internal debate started, he knew he needed a quiet place to be alone. Stepping outside Nick immediately made a beeline for the forest.

"Maybe I'll find the magic blueberry bush." Nick said as he headed off into the woods.

For the next twenty minutes Nick wandered the woods. No real directions in mind as all his thoughts were occupied by the raging debate within his head. Cyn-Nick and Logic were teaming up against Optimism while Instinct merely watched, his only real demand being Judy's safety.

"You're just being selfish, you're probably hoping that if you hang all over Judy, like you have been, she'll never find a mate and be stuck with you." Cyn-Nick taunted, knowing his punches were hitting home.

"Am I really that bad for her? I'm perfectly content with just being her friend but is that even too much to ask for?" Nick asked himself sadly, not even trying to hide it since he was alone.

"You don't deserve her, you never did. And now you see that sticking by her will make her miserable, what are you going to do?" Cyn-Nick asked gleefully.

"Don't listen to him, you know Judy is happy with you. What's so wrong with that? Plus there's no proof that you would be driving away potential relationships." Optimism argued, desperately trying
to regain control.

"Except you know for a fact that most guys won't approach a girl they suspect has feelings for someone else and with how close you are I bet mammals are getting that impression." Logic said impartially.

"You're not helping." Optimism shot back angrily.

"That's not my job, and facts don't have sides." Logic replied, his voice as steady as always.

"I don't want to cause her any trouble." Nick said as he continued walking.

"Then just leave her, it's for the best." Cyn-Nick said firmly, "You know how to disappear, it would be child's play for you to drop out of the academy and hide. She would move on and be better off for it, and you'd go back to life as usual, probably in a new city. But hey Zootopia's getting old anyway."

That got Nick to stop in his tracks, "I can't just do that… can I?" Nick said as he tried to imagine leaving the city and Judy behind. As Nick thought about it he couldn't deny that it would be easy to do since he really didn't have anything attaching him to the city, but the thought of leaving Judy to fend for herself was like a knife twisting in his gut.

"No, I can't do that." Nick said resolutely.

"Yes!" Optimism cheered.

"That being said I'm going to give Judy some space because Bonnie is right, no buck is going to want to date her if a clingy fox is in the picture." Nick said sadly as the voices faded out once more.

Now alone and a little lost Nick wandered on, still not composed enough to head back. So instead Nick headed deeper into the forest no real intention, other than to just keep walking. As Nick walked he thought about the best way he could keep his distance from Judy as well as proper boundaries he should set for himself.

"This is going to be hard. I've gotten kind of used to all the hugs and the closeness." Nick sighed, "I'm gonna miss it."

Suddenly the sound of a lone guitar started up, seemingly out of nowhere. As his ears perked up so he could hear it better, Nick realized he knew the song and began to walk towards the sound, singing quietly to himself.

(Mr. Jones - Counting Crows) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I_ioXVa3TA)

\[
\text{Shalalalalala.... Oooh, uh, huh}
\]

\[
\text{I was down at the New Amsterdam,}
\]

\[
\text{Staring at this yellow-furred girl}
\]

\[
\text{Mr. Jones strikes up a conversation,}
\]

\[
\text{With a black-furred, flamenco dancer}
\]

\[
\text{She dances while his father plays guitar,}
\]

\[
\text{She's suddenly beautiful.}
\]
Well we all want something beautiful.

Man I wish I was beautiful…

Nick continued to sing quietly to himself as he approached the clearing where the guitar mammal was.

Sitting alone on a fallen tree sat a young rabbit buck playing on an old wooden acoustic guitar that was slightly too big for him. The buck's build wasn't as stocky as Stu's but not as lean as Judy's, if Nick had to guess he'd say the Buck's build was about average, maybe a bit on the smaller side. He was wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans, his fur was a rich chestnut brown, with traces of white at his throat and on his right paw.

Deciding not to approach further Nick just stood behind a tree at the edge of the clearing, content to quietly sing along.

Believe in me,

Help me believe in anything.

Cus I, wanna be someone who believes,

Yeah…

As Nick continued to sing along, he unknowingly got a little louder as he let the music over take him, so by the end Nick was completely into it, putting all the emotion he had behind his voice forgetting the need for silence.

Mr. Jones and me stumbling through the barrio…

Yeah we stare at the beautiful women,

she's perfect for you.

Man there's got to be somebody for me!

Suddenly the guitar stopped, but Nick being so caught up in the moment continued on for one more verse.

I wanna be Bob Dylan,

Mr. Jones wishes he was someone a just little more funky…

When everybody loves you,

oh son; that's just about as funky as you can be

"You might as well come out," The buck called out.

Nick, seeing no reason to hide himself since he had been so clearly caught, stepped out from behind the tree. Making sure to keep his paws up so the buck wouldn't get scared and run Nick slowly began to approach the center of the clearing.

"Sorry about that, I just recognized the song and felt like singing along. You played it well."

The buck looked Nick up and down for a moment, a conflicted look on his face, like he wasn't sure
if he should run to or away from the fox in front of him.

"Thanks." the buck mumbled as he sat back down, "Your singing was pretty good too."

"Eh, I'm nothing special. But you've got some talent. I tried learning guitar once, but I was never able to quite pick it up." Nick said as he put his paws down and took a few more cautious steps toward the young buck.

"You have a nice voice. It's smooth, and it carries a lot of emotion behind it. Plus you know how to carry a tune. So don't sell yourself short." the buck said as he turned to his guitar and started tuning it.

"Well thanks, I guess. I'm Nick Wilde, by the way." Nick said as he stuck out his paw.

"Aaron Hopps, my dad is Judy's older brother, Brandon." The buck said as he returned the pawshake.

"Nice to meet you, Aaron. So why are you practicing all the way out here?" Nick asked as he sat on the tree next to Aaron.

"What does it matter. Why are you out here?" Aaron shot back.

"Easy there buddy. I didn't mean anything by it. As for why I'm out here, I had some thinking to do and since I seem to make every bunny in your house uncomfortable, I figured the woods would be a nice place to be alone and think." Nick explained, choosing to be open with Aaron instead of his normal act.

"I guess that makes sense." Aaron agreed, his tone returning to normal, "I'm out here so I can practice in peace, since I don't really like to play in front of others and there's nowhere to be alone in the house."

"I can understand that, I don't really sing in front of people either, at least not intentionally. So do you know any other songs?" Nick asked, not wanting to lose the first substantial conversation he'd had with a rabbit other than Judy since he got here.

"What do you wanna hear?" Aaron asked, figuring since Nick had already heard him play it couldn't hurt to play another song or two.

"Do you know, "Whisky Lullaby" by Brad Paisley" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gV3g9LCvPc] Nick asked, in the mood for a more somber song.

"Sure thing, but that song has got a male and female part. How are you going to manage that?" Aaron asked as he started to play.

"You'll see." Nick said as he closed his eyes and waited for his cue.

Aaron started to play, slowly at first as he tried to remember exactly how the song went. Aaron started solo until the vocals started up and Nick joined in, singing the words while infusing an extra emotional level to it while still staying in tune with the original. Instead of trying to change up his voice for the female portion of the song, Nick just kept the same low somber tone content to make his voice just a touch softer, and Aaron had to admit it still sounded amazing.

As the vocals ended and Aaron finished out the last few chords Nick just stood there, a far-off look in his eyes until the last note faded out.

"You're really good, Aaron. I wish I could play like that." Nick said enthusiastically, as he broke out
of his temporary melancholy.

"That'd be unfair to the rest of us." Aaron said, chuckling a little to himself.

"What do you mean?" Nick asked, not understanding the joke.

"Well if you could sing like that and play guitar, that'd be too much talent for one mammal." Aaron said seriously.

"I told you I'm not that good of a singer, Aaron. Stop trying to pull my tail." Nick said dismissively.

"Nick, I have no reason to pull your tail here. You have some real talent. The way you brought so much emotion into that song was amazing. I could really feel the pain and sorrow in your voice."

Nick was shocked. Nobody had ever really liked his singing before, so hearing such intense praise was a little jarring.

"Well, thanks I guess." Nick said awkwardly as he thought to himself, what is it with Hopps rabbits and being so straightforward and sincere.

"You're welcome. Sooooo… do you wanna keep singing?" Aaron asked cautiously.

"If you'll put up with me, I don't see why not." Nick said happily.

"What song do you want me to play next then?" Aaron asked, curious as to what Nick would pick.

"How about, "Better Male," by Pearl Jam?"  (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWzLgWWu5wU)

"Interesting choice, another sad one but lucky for you I know it." Aaron said as he got himself ready.

Nick waited as Aaron played the intro and started to sing along in time, slowly at first as if he was pulling the words from his soul, every word was soft and reflective and as the tempo picked up Nick went right along with it.

Aaron was surprised once again, he had complimented Nick on his singing and he hadn't been lying when he said it, but as Nick sang Aaron could tell there was much more behind the words. That somehow Nick was channeling something raw inside himself. The subtle cracks in Nick's voice, coupled with the intensity Aaron could feel in the air, had the buck speechless and on the verge of tears.

Unbeknownst to Nick, Aaron had taken out his phone before he had started playing and was recording the entire performance. There was nothing malicious behind it, Aaron just could not let such an amazing singer go unrecorded, especially while he was playing with him.

And as the song reached its end, and Nick's voice faded out Aaron was so glad he'd recorded since Nick was even better with this song then he had been with the first one.

"Seriously Nick, how do you sing like that?" Aaron asked as he stopped the recording.

"No idea, you said I have a lot of emotion behind my voice and I'd say that's because those songs resonate with me and the many regrets I've had… or something like that anyway." Nick explained, not really sure if he was making any sense.

"So, it's something that comes with age then?" Aaron asked as he put his guitar down and leaned it against the fallen tree.
"Not necessarily, but it can. Then again, no matter how old you are, regret ages you either way. It takes but a second for the mind to age and after that life takes on a different color." Nick said his voice sounding very tired and worn down.

"So how long have you been playing?" Nick asked, quickly changing topics.

"I started a few years ago. It's all pretty much self-taught since nobody seemed to have the time to show me." Aaron said bitterly.

"Why not?" Nick asked, "Surely there's at least one other Hopps that plays guitar,"

"You're not wrong. Almost every Hopps plays an instrument of some kind, but when I told them I wanted to learn guitar so my friends and I could start a band and try to make a career out of it. Everyone told me that there was no way I could make a living off of music and they decided not to teach me until I decided on a, "real" job." Aaron explained, anger and sadness clear in his voice.

Nick was silent, as he watched Aaron drop his head and sigh, "Maybe they're right. Maybe I'll never make it big, but I just wish they'd let me try."

As a lone tear dropped to the ground, staining the dirt Nick knew he had to say something, even if it wasn't his place, even if it would cause the Hopps family to hate him even more, he had to do something.

"How old are you Aaron?" Nick asked as he slid over, bringing himself closer to the downtrodden rabbit.

"I'm 16," Aaron said, keeping his eyes to the ground.

"You're pretty good for a 16-year-old. So let's make a deal."

"Mom says not to make deals with weasels or foxes, cus they'll cheat you every time."

"Well I've been cheated by and cheated pretty much every mammal that's out there… well, except a sloth," Nick said with a smile.

"Sloths?" Arron said questioningly as he lifted his head to look at Nick.

"Yeah they're the only mammal that can't pull a fast one on you."

Aaron chucked despite himself, the joke was corny and awful, but it was just what he needed.

"Alright, well now that I have you laughing a bit, are you ready to hear my deal? And I promise no funny business or Judy would take my tail and hang it over the door." Nick said, trying as hard as possible to look trustworthy.

"Alright I'll listen, there's no harm in that at least."

"Be careful. I've seen a lot of mammals get tricked and it all started with those words." Nick said with a wink.

"But in all seriousness, here's my offer, If you and your friends can stay together as a band and practice hard then in a year or two I'll listen to a few of your songs."

"But what good will that do?" Aaron said, interrupting Nick, who just patiently held up a finger.

"I was getting to that. If by that time you manage to impress me, then I will introduce you to a friend"
I have in the music business. From there, how far you go will depend on you and your friends. But it will give you a chance."

"You know people in the music industry?" Aaron asked, clearly not buying Nick's offer.

"Aaron, my dear little rabbit, I know everyone." Nick said with a smirk.

"And in the meantime, if you need anything to help you along, send me a letter or something and I'll see what I can do to help you out."

"What's in it for you?" Aaron asked cautiously.

"Well besides getting another member of your family to talk to, and eventually like me. You'll have to promise to send me any CD's you make, as well as concert tickets whenever I ask for them. Sound like a deal?" Nick asked, sticking his paw out once more.

"I'll accept on one condition." Aaron said pausing for suspense.

"And what might this condition be?" Nick asked, one eyebrow raised.

"You gotta sing with us, one song. You can write it if you want or you can leave it to us, but you will be the lead singer and we will record it. Those are my terms, take it or leave it." Aaron said, trying his best to sound confident.

Nick pondered the proposal, on one paw he had no real reason to help the young buck since one extra rabbit on his side wasn't really likely to help that much, but he also really did want Aaron to at least try and pursue his dream. *I doubt the song is going to top the charts, especially not with a fox singing it, so it's probably safe to agree,* Nick reasoned.

"Alright, but you'll also have to help me get in better with your family."

"Fair enough," Aaron agreed, grabbing Nick's paw and giving it as firm a shake as he could.

"Oh by the way… I've been saving up to buy an electric guitar and an amp, but I still don't have enough… you wouldn't happen to know somewhere I could get those things cheap?" Aaron asked, a nervous smile on his face.

"Already cashing in on our deal, you're one tough customer… but I like it, get everything you can out of any deal you make. I may know a guy, who runs a store that might have exactly what you're looking for. I'll give him a call and let you know." Nick said, not at all angry about Aaron's request.

"Yes! Thanks Nick, you're the best!" Aaron said happily as he jumped a few feet in the air.

"I don't know about all that, but I try," Nick said shyly.

"Oh can I get your number? That way I can text you updates and we can talk about music and stuff… I mean if you want, that is."

"Sure Aaron, text me anytime." Nick said as pulled out his phone to get Aaron's number.

With phone numbers exchanged and the deal struck Nick and Aaron continued to play and sing, Aaron secretly recording and Nick just enjoying the time, especially since it helped cleared his mind of what he had overheard. Inevitably the session came to an end as Nick checked the time and realized he had to meet up with Judy in 20 minutes.

"Aaron I gotta get going, Judy's expecting to meet me so we can continue the tour, you wouldn't
happen to know the way back would you?” Nick asked sheepishly.

"Yeah I know the way back, follow me.” Aaron said as he shook his head.

"So I was thinking…” Aaron said as he led the way out of the forest, guitar slung across his back.

"A dangerous pass time." Nick quipped, getting a chuckle out of Aaron.

"That it is. But anyway the best chance you have is to get the rest of the family to warm up to you is to get the kits to like you. That way you show you're a good guy and can be trusted,"

Nick's expression soured, "That's easier said than done." Nick said bitterly as he remembered the warning the kits had gotten.

"Yeah, the fact that my parents and their siblings told us kits to stay away from you definitely is an issue." Aaron said, trailing off as he considered the options.

"Buuuuut, if some older kit told them that the new fox was actually friendly and a good mammal, I'm willing to bet at least half of them would approach you to find out for themselves, and as long as you manage to make a good impression with them, then the rest of the kits should follow suit."

"Wouldn't that older kit get in trouble?” Nick asked, not wanting Aaron to get punished just for his sake.

"It's possible, but since you seem to have gotten grandma Bonnie on your side, I'll probably be spared. Especially if she finds out that the kits were being told to keep away from you." Aaron reasoned as the two finally exited the woods.

"Let's scratch that idea. I appreciate the thought, but I'll think of another way to get everyone to come around. I don't want you to put yourself in the crosshairs just for my sake. Now I think we should split up, don't want you getting seen with the big bad fox.” Nick joked halfheartedly.

"If you say so, but I'll make sure to text you later. Maybe I can hang out with you and Aunt Judy.” Aaron said as he ran off towards the house, intent on putting his plan into action.

"He's a good kit." Nick said to himself as he watched Aaron disappear into the house, "Well I guess I should get back to my room, before Judy notices I'm missing."

Nick quickly made his way back to the house, once inside he was able to find his way to the elevator and back to his room with relative ease. While he made his way through the burrow every bunny Nick passed gave him a sideways glance and made sure to give him plenty of space.

Nick sighed as he reached the safety of his room, So much for things getting better, Nick thought as he collapsed onto the bed.

Right as Nick was about to close his eyes and pass into blissful sleep three sharp knocks caused his eyes to shoot open.

"Well it was fun while it lasted.” Nick said as he dragged himself out of the comforting embrace of the mattress and slowly stumbled over to the door.

A Few Minutes Earlier…..

"Well that was a disaster,” Judy said as her mother finally left.

"Not only did I get lectured to about relationships and compromising, she also went into how close a
doe should get with her male friends and the dangers of getting too close. I'm an adult, for carrots sake, not some hormonal teenager." Judy ranted as she started pacing across the room.

"And I am NOT getting too close to Nick," *if anything I'm not getting close enough*. Judy's thoughts finished for her.

"Ugh, she's only getting this way because of the lie Dylan and I made up. Maybe it'd be better if I just came clean… then again, I'd just keep getting set up on dates. So, what I really need is to hurry up and figure out how Nick feels so I can make my move." Judy said, realizing the current problem would disappear as soon as she started dating Nick.

"Speaking of Nick, it's about time we head out again." Judy said as she realized what time it was.

So, after taking a minute to compose herself, Judy headed over to Nick's door, giving it three sharp, clear knocks. After a moment Judy heard the doorknob start to turn and then the door creaked open revealing a very disheveled looking fox.

"I'm guessing you didn't sleep well?" Judy said, as she took in Nick's appearance.

"I have no idea what you're talking about Carrots. I had a perfectly restful sleep."

"Don't bother trying to pull one over on me Slick, I can see the dirt and grass stuck to your feet, plus while my nose might not be as good as a wolf's I can clearly smell the forest on you. Now do you want to try again?" Judy asked, paw on her hip, and a victorious smile on her face.

"Fine, you got me." Nick sighed, putting his paws up in mock surrender, "I decided to skip the nap and try to find the magical blueberry bush."

"And did you have any luck?" Judy asked as she tried to suppress her giggle.

"You tell me officer. Since you're so observant, I'm sure you can figure it out." Nick said playfully.

"Well the fact that there's no blueberry juice staining your fur, combined with the fact that you came back instead of staying to eat all the magic berries would lead me to believe that no, no you did not find the bush." Judy said, a warm smile on her face.

"Right as always. Now, let's get going I'm sure you have a lot more to you want to show me." Nick said as he stepped out into the hallway.

"You've got that right, Slick. Now follow me, we've got a house tour to finish." Judy said enthusiastically as she grabbed Nicks paw and pulled him along to the elevators.

*Balto help me! This is going to be a lot harder than I thought.* Nick thought to himself as he let Judy drag him along, her paw soft and warm against his.

Chapter End Notes

The opening nightmare sequence can be blamed partially on Anteroinen since he suggested it and the majority falls to me since that's what I ended up imagining, poor Nick he can't catch a break.
Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, etc. I love hearing from you all. Also If for some reason you don't want to comment but still want to suggest something or talk to me personally don't hesitate to PM me, I'll respond when I have time.

Yesterday By Atmosphere - It's a great song.

I'll keep suggesting Music forever, feel free to ignore it or tell me what you thought of the song, also if you have a favorite song suggest it to me, music is a great thing that you can never have too much of.

Also, HAPPY NEW YEAR, and I hope you all have good fortune in 2019.
Chapter 19 – Righting a Few Wrongs

Chapter Summary

Nick and Judy talk, and a few wrongs get righted, hell is raised.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 19... I'm baaacccckkkkk, that's right I've crossed the oceans, fought the harsh Antarctic winds, and finally returned better than ever(though I did lose half a tooth, lol). This is by far the longest chapter I've written so far coming in at just shy of 17k words. Also this story has now been written in some unusual places like, "The X" (where the international date line and the equator meet), also Antarctica, and Australia and New Zealand. but despite all that I still retain my style of writing.

Also Just so you know there is one speech in this chapter that I take from "How I Met Your Mother," It's a great show with some great lines that I have wanted to put into my story for a long time so forgive my unoriginality in that regard. Also there are references, catch them if you can.

ALSO ALSO : Special thanks to Story Writer .2015 for giving some of his ideas to this chapter

As Always I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails,

and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my editor SaberGatomon.

One last thing before you Jump into the chapter. I just want to say thanks to you, yes you the person reading this. Thanks for sticking with me while I was gone, thanks for picking this story up and reading it to this point, Thanks for the comments and the subscriptions and for the support, It means more than I could ever express.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Disclaimer: Since this story has been written internationally do I still need to add this, I mean laws vary country to country... I'm sure I'm safe from the wrath of Disney lawyers now right? Na, I still don't own Zootopia or it's characters, other than the ones I've created that is.
Chapter 19 – Righting a Few Wrongs

The Lake, Hopps Family Farm, Bunnyburrow, Saturday Evening, 6:50pm

"So, this lake here is our final stop on the Hopps house tour, and you're in luck since the view of the sunset is to die for," Judy said as she threw her arms out directing Nick to look at the currently setting sun.

Judy was right, the setting sun's reflection against the surface of the water was sublime, the vibrant reds and oranges mixed together on the surface of the water and moved with the breeze, making the entire lake look like a high-class painting.

"It's beautiful," Nick agreed as he stared out at the horizon.

"I thought you might like it," Judy said, pleased Nick was enjoying one of her favorite sights, "We can stay and watch the sunset if you want,"

"I wouldn't be opposed to staying a little bit longer and taking in the sights," Nick said as he sat down on the grassy hill.

Judy wordlessly sat down next to him, but as the two sat in comfortable silence Judy could feel Nick scoot away from her slightly, he had been doing that since the second half of the tour and Judy couldn't stop thinking about it.

The two had left Nick's room and continues wondering around the house as Judy showed Nick the reading rooms, entertainment rooms, and even the small doctor's office, and while most of the Hoppses they had encountered kept their distance, a few managed to politely greet Nick and Judy and even attempted casual conversation, which was a step in the right direction for sure. What was bothering Judy however wasn't the unwillingness of her family to interact with Nick, although that was still an issue, the bigger problem was how Nick was constantly pulling away from her.

Why? Was the constant question on Judy's mind as she replayed the evening's events in her head. Why was it that every time she would bump up against him or grab his arm to lead him somewhere new, he would jerk away like he was being burned by her touch.

I don't get it, he's never had a problem before, Judy thought as she remembered all the hugs, paw grabs and other little contacts they'd shared, but now all of a sudden he's pulling away, is it possible he knows how I feel and is trying to subtly let me down? Judy asked herself, fearing the worst.

I mean I wasn't being too forward, was I? Judy questioned as she turned to look at Nick who was still watching the setting sun, a relaxed expression sitting nicely on his face.

Or maybe I did something to upset him and now he's so angry that he doesn't even want to be near me anymore, Judy thought worriedly as she tried to think about what she might have done to upset Nick.

Well, I could keep sitting here stewing in my thoughts…. Or, I could just ask him, maybe I'm just overthinking it, Judy thought, hoping with all her heart that she was just overthinking it.

"Nick," Judy said quietly, not wanting to disturb the moment.

"Yeah Fluff," Nick replied, not taking his eyes off of the setting sun.

"I wanted to ask you something," Judy continued, keeping her voice low.
"Ask away." Nick said as he turned to face her.

"Well I was wondering why you've been acting differently this afternoon?" Judy asked, as she stared at Nick, a determined look in her eye.

"I have no idea what you're talking about Carrots. I'm just being my usual foxy self," Nick said as he wiggled his eyebrows for effect.

Judy wasn't buying it however, and instead she pressed further, "Nick ever since we came back from our break you've been acting a little off, whenever we accidentally bump into each other you jerk away from me like something's burning you, or when I grab your arm to lead you somewhere else you yank your arm away almost immediately. I don't know what's wrong or what I might have done, but I'm sorry," Judy said sadly, her ears getting lower as her voice got softer and softer.

"Nononononononono, it's nothing you've done Judy," Nick said frantically.

"It's not?"

"No, I promise you that you've done nothing wrong so there's no need to apologize." Nick said reassuringly.

"Then what is it?" Judy asked, as a feeling of relief washed over her.

"It's nothing. Just something stupid, so don't worry about it." Nick said dismissively.

"Nick you can tell me. I promise I won't laugh, and I'll help however I can." Judy said sincerely, hoping Nick would open up to her.

"It's not something you can really help with Fluff." Nick said with a sigh, "But alright I'll tell you."

"I'm just trying to keep a respectable distance from you, I don't want to come between you and Dylan if you two decide to date. I mean nobody wants a clingy fox around their girlfriend." Nick explained as he started playing with the grass by his side.

"Oh." Judy said under her breath.

This Dylan thing's really weighing on Nick, Judy realized as she heard the weariness in Nick's voice, I told him we weren't dating so I thought that'd be enough, but it seems Nick might have gotten the wrong idea. Well, I guess it's time to set the record straight.

"Nick?"

…

"Nnniiiiicccck."

…

"Yes," Nick finally answered, still keeping his eyes on the grass.

"Why do you think I lied to my parents about Dylan?" Judy asked as she scooted closer to Nick.

"Well, if I had to take a guess it's because you and Dylan like each other but want to take it slow and see what's there, and because of that you don't want your parents to set you up on anymore dates while you take the time to figure it out,"
So close yet so far you dumb fox, Judy thought as she tried to figure out just how much she was going to tell him.

"That could make sense," Judy said softly, "except I already told you that he just wanted to be friends, so why would I lie to you?"

"Because you don't want an annoying fox sticking his nose in your love life either." Nick said sadly.

"Nick, I don't think you're annoying." Judy said as she grabbed Nick's paw causing him to look at her. "And I didn't lie to you, the only reason Dylan and I decided to lie to our parents was because neither of us wanted to keep getting set up on dates, and since our parents didn't listen to us the last hundred times we told them, this lie was the best solution.

"But-"

"No buts Nick. I wouldn't ever lie to you, period. I only lied to my parents to avoid more dates, end of story. So, are we good?" Judy asked, feeling much better now that she had cleared up that misconception.

"I guess," Nick said, still sounding down, "but I think I'll still keep some distance, it's better this way."

"But wwhyy," Judy said, unable to keep a slight whine out of her voice.

"Because Judy, even if you're not interested in Dylan, having me hanging all over you isn't gonna help your chances of finding a nice buck to settle down with," Nick said bitterly.

"I don't care!" Judy said, her voice raised just below a shout.

"I don't care about that," Judy said again, lowering her voice to a more reasonable level.

"I'm not looking for some nice buck Nick. I'm not looking to settle down and have a family. I'm not looking to give up my job, which is what all the bucks I've ever been set up with want. I've dated before, multiple times in fact, and no matter how many times they say they'll support me, and they won't get in the way of my dream, they always try. I don't need another mammal telling me I can't." Judy ranted. All the while Nick just stared wide eyed at her.

"What I want... Or rather what I need, is someone who is there for me. Someone who's supportive of me and has my back no matter what, and that Nicolas Wilde, is what you are. YOU stood up for my dream. YOU helped me get the recognition I was due, and after I hurt you, you still took me back and faced numerous dangers to help me save the city. You cared enough to get me my apartment back and even help me find a better one. You're always cheering me up and showing me new things. You're important to me Nick, more than you'll ever know, and I don't need any bucks if you're by my side. So there is absolutely no reason to pull away from me, unless that's what you want."

Eeep, I think that might be considered a confession of sorts, Judy realized as she saw the look of utter shock on Nick's face.

Well you can't take it back now, so what's next? A voice asked.

I could run away... no, Nick and I would have to meet up eventually, especially since we have a train to catch tomorrow, Judy reasoned as the silence between her and Nick continued.

We could show him just how much we care, the sultry voice added suggestively, accompanied with
an image of a passionate kiss again the still setting sun.

*I still don't know how he feels though, I think it's best to just wait it out,* Judy thought back, face suddenly very warm as the thought of kissing Nick played out in her mind.

*Pppfftt, booororrning,* the sultry voice added before fading away, Judy's mind made up.

As for Nick, he was in shock to be sure, and while Emotion and Optimism fought to convince Nick that this was proof Judy wanted more Nick fought back with everything he could. Nick had logic point out how Judy never said she cared for him in *that* way, and that having someone be important to you and being in love with someone are two separate things. Despite that Optimism and Emotion continued to push the issue so Nick brought out Cyn-Nick to point out how someone as great as Judy wouldn't want someone as worthless as him, and how a country bunny like her would never be ok with interspecies dating, let alone participate in it, so he shouldn't even bother entertaining such foolish ideas. Eventually, Optimism and Emotion gave up, having been bested by sheer pessimism and willful ignorance, and Nick was finally able to collect himself.

*She may feel this way now but feelings change, they always change.* Nick thought somberly.

"Judy, you may not care right now but feelings change. I'm sure one day you'll want to settle down and find a nice buck, and while that might still be far in the future, I don't want to get in the way of that," Nick tried to say, however the end of his spiel was drowned out by Judy's laughter.

"Care to share the joke Carrots?" Nick asked as Judy got herself under control.

"It's just funny how underneath your cool, calm, and collected exterior, you Nick Wilde, are nothing but a big worrywart," Judy explained as she started giggling again.

"I am no such thing," Nick said as he pulled his paw out of Judy's in mock offense.

"You definitely are, I don't know how I never saw it before, but you worry. A lot. And all that worry amounts to is extra trouble for you and those around you,"

"Give me one example of when I've done that…. Except this one," Nick added after seeing the smirk on Judy's face.

"But this is the perfect example!" Judy said, smile still firmly on her face as she broke out in laughter again, "Nick, I've already told you that I'm not looking for some buck and that you don't need to change the way you act around me, and yet I'm willing to bet you're still planning on pulling back, thinking it's for the best," Judy explained as she grabbed Nick's paw once more.

"If you really need another example though, I could think of one more that probably tops this one, and it's what you're doing to your sister and father," Judy said softly, hoping she wasn't going to upset Nick too much.

"Explain," Nick said darkly, his tone devoid of any playfulness as his eyes took on a hard gleam.

"Well I just think that you're afraid to face your family, worried about what they'll say and how they'll react and because of that fear you've convinced yourself that it's better to stay away, and that decision is causing both you and your family a lot of heartache, all of which could be fixed with a simple phone call," Judy said, trailing off slightly at the end as she felt Nick's gaze tearing into her.

"And I'm sorry if I'm overstepping my bounds as your friend but I think it needs to be said," Judy finished, mustering up the nerve to stare back at Nick.
And as she watched Nick, waiting for his reaction, Judy prepared herself for the coming argument. *This needed to be said, come what may, I know I did the right thing,* Judy thought to herself as she watched Nick cautiously.

But as Judy steeled herself for the oncoming storm, Nick, who looked ready to blow just deflated. His defensive posture crumbling as his head once again dropped and his chin rested against his chest.

"I know," Nick whispered, voice so low even he could barely hear it.

"What?"

"I said I know," Nick repeated a little louder, his voice heavy and full of regret.

"I know staying away for so long has hurt them, Hannah especially, but I just can't bring myself to face them Judy."

"But why Nick?" Judy asked as she held onto his paw a little tighter.

"Because I don't deserve to. I stayed away for so long just because I couldn't face the past, and eventually I convinced myself that it was better this way, and now I don't know if I even have a right to stand in front of them again. Even if they want me back. Do I deserve to? Considering all I've done, all the pain, worry, and sleepless nights I've caused them. Can I really just go back?"

Nick was trembling now, it was slight, almost unnoticeable, the only reason Judy could tell was because she was still holding his paw.

"Nick, I can't pretend to know how you feel, I've never been in anything close to this type of situation before, and it may be wrong of me to give you my advice but I'm still going to," Judy said softly as she gently traced circles on the back of Nick's paw soothingly.

Nick didn't reply so Judy continued, "I think whether or not you deserve to come back into their lives isn't really up to you, as bad as that sounds, it's up to your family to decide if they want you back. And from the state of the letter your sister wrote, and the numerous ways she's tried to contact you I'd say it's pretty clear what she wants."

"But."

"No buts. Hannah wants you in her life, end of story. And if you want to be back in hers then you need to pluck up your courage and call her."

Nick said nothing for a moment as he considered Judy's words, the silence between them stretching on until after a minute Nick spoke.

"You might be right Judy. Hell, you probably are, but even knowing all that, I still don't know if I have the strength to do it... I'm just too weak." Nick said with a heavy sigh.

"Nick you are so much stronger than you know. You may not see it, but I do, and I know you'll be fine. But if you want, I can be with you when you make the call, and be by your side the entire time if that will help you." Judy said as she squeeze Nick's paw reassuringly.

"You really mean that?" Nick asked as he turned to look at Judy, his eyes a little misty.

"Yes Nick, if that's what you want, then I'll be there." Judy said as she stared back at Nick.

"You're the greatest mammal I know Judy, and if you're by my side then I think I'll be able to do it."
Nick said, his voice full of gratitude. "It's nothing Nick," Judy said as she felt her throat tighten a little, "now let's give Hannah a call."

Nick chuckled, "I think she's probably asleep right now Fluff, but I'll call her tomorrow, and that's a promise."

"I'm going to hold you to that Slick, now then we should get some sleep, I wanna show you the town tomorrow and we'll be leaving early." Judy said as she stood up and dusted herself off before offering a helping paw to Nick.

"Sounds good." Nick said as he took Judy's offered paw and pulled himself up off the ground.

Nick and Judy then made their way back to the house and down to their rooms, and while both mammals lay in their beds, trying to fall asleep, their minds were still wide awake, neither of them able to find sleep for some time.

**Hopps Family Farm, Bunnyburrow, Sunday morning, 6:30am**

"Get a move on Slick, we still have to sign out a car before we head into town" Judy said as she led the bleary-eyed, half asleep fox by the paw towards the garage.

Nick and Judy had woken up early like they had agreed to, eating breakfast with the Hoppses that were up early to work in the fields that day. The food was tasty and the coffee fresh, but not even that could shake Nick out of his sleepy state. Even though Nick had been waking up early every day for the academy he was still not a morning mammal despite Major Friedkin's best efforts to turn him into one.

"You have to sign out your own cars?" Nick asked as he tried to wipe the sleep out of his eyes.

"Well yeah, if we didn't have the sheet there'd be no way to keep track of who was driving what and where they're going, plus the list also helps keep track of the miles on each car so we don't run one or two vehicles into the ground." Judy explained as she opened the door to the Hopps Auto Shop

As soon as the door was opened the pair was greeted by the sound of mechanics hard at work. A drill being used here, the sound of hammer hitting metal there, along with the occasional blast of air and car alarm as well. Accompanying the sounds of mammals working Nick was also greeted with the smell of oil and metal, its tangy, pungent aroma permeated the shop and reminded Nick of his dad who would often come home after a long day's work smelling the same way.

Nick took in a deep breath, he had always liked that smell, even as a kit. But as Nick reminisced about the familiar smell, he was also reminded about the phone call he had to make later, and his expression turned sour.

"Don't dwell on it right now, let's just enjoy the day with Judy first," Nick said quietly to himself as he hurried to catch up to Judy who was already busy signing out the keys.

"So what truck are we taking this time Judy, is it the blue one? Or maybe the stick shift, or my personal favorite the one that says "Hopps Family Farm," on it," Nick joked.

"Very funny Slick, but today we're taking one of the sedan's since they're better on gas and a lot less likely to break down," Judy explained as she took a key off the hook and started swinging it around her finger.

Nick looked at Judy skeptically, "Are you sure I'll fit into a bunny sized sedan? I mean I'm sure
you've notice by now but I'm a bit bigger than your average buck,"

Judy chuckled as she made her way outside, "You don't say."

"Well lucky for you we go a size up on pretty much every vehicle we get, just in case we need to accommodate slightly larger mammals," Judy explained as she led Nick down the rows of cars and trucks looking for the sedan.

Nick opened his mouth, snarky comment at the ready but stopped as he heard a voice calling out from the distance.

"Auuuuunnntt Juuuuuuuuddyyyyyy.

...

"Auuuuuuuuuunnntt Juuuuuuuuuuddyyyyyy."

"I think someone's calling for you Fluff."

"Your power of observation is impeccable." Judy deadpanned before taking in a deep breath.

"I'mmmmmmmmmmm heeeeeerreeeeeee." Judy shouted, cupping her paws around her mouth for added volume.

A minute later a familiar brown buck came jogging out from behind some cars, "Aunt Judy I thought that was you." Aaron said as he got closer.

"Hey Aaron, it's great to see you!" Judy said happily as she pulled Aaron in for a hug.

"It's great to see you too Aunt Judy, I heard you were back for the weekend, but I haven't seen you at all." Aaron said as Judy let him out of the hug.

"Sorry Aaron I was busy showing this sluggish fox around." Judy said with a smile as she jerked her thumb back to point at Nick.

"I'll have you know I'm very fast… As long as it's after 1pm." Nick said, feigning offense as he slowly walked to Judy's side.

"I don't believe we've met, I'm Nick Wilde, but you can just call me Nick." Nick said as he stuck out his paw.

"It's nice to meet you Nick, I'm Judy's nephew Aaron Hopps." Aaron said as he took Nick's paw, figuring it was best to follow Nick's lead and pretend they hadn't already met.

"So Aunt Judy, are you and Nick going into town?" Aaron asked after he and Nick finished shaking paws.

"Yeah, I thought seeing the town would be a nice change of pace since all I've shown him so far is the house and the fields." Judy explained.

"Do you mind if I come along? I don't really have anything better to do." Aaron asked, not wanting to explain his real reason lest Nick try to stop him.

"I don't have a problem with you coming along, that is if you really want to spend the next few hours hanging out with me and Nick." Judy said with a smile, happy another Hopps didn't seem to be afraid of Nick.
"Cool! Let's get going then." Aaron said as he started walking down the row of cars.

"Wrong way," Judy called out as she unlocked the car they were standing next to.

"Oh… I knew that." Aaron said, heat rushing to his face.

So the three mammals piled into the beige sedan, Judy was the driver while Nick rode shotgun and Aaron took the backseat. The three chatted pleasantly while they drove into town, Aaron sharing stories about school while Nick and Judy shared stories about their recent escapades. The conversation flowed so effortlessly that before anyone had realized they had already reached the outskirts of the town.

"I gotta say I was expecting a few small buildings in between some carrot fields, not all this," Nick said as he took in the nice paved roads, wide sidewalks, and the colorful and bustling businesses of the Bunnyburrow shopping district.

"It just got redone a few years ago, but the town always tries to keep the shopping district nice since we hold a lot of regional events here." Judy explained as she drove around looking for a place to park.

"You don't say." Nick said as he spotted a large grassy knoll with oak trees lining the edges and a great big stage at one end.

"That stage is where the bands play, thousands of mammals come and fill the park, all to listen to their music," Aaron explained excitedly.

"Must be nice, as long as you have a good band that is, if not… well that's a lot of mammals to throw tomatoes at you,"

"Nick nobody throws tomatoes, that'd be a waste of valuable produce," Judy joked, "If anything that park has plenty of trash cans to supply throwing material,"

"Well I'll just avoid it altogether then since I don't have any musical talent to speak of anyways," Nick replied with a smile.

"Don't sell yourself short Nick, I bet your really a fantastic singer and you just hide it," Aaron said knowingly.

Nick quickly turned around to look at Aaron, giving the young buck a glare so serious it could've silenced a comedy club full of hyenas.

"Nope, I'm horribly tone deaf. I've even been kicked out of a karaoke bar before, but that's a story for another time." Nick said, still maintaining eye contact with Aaron while keeping his tone light.

Aaron gulped, only managing to squeak out a measly, "Understood."

After hearing that Nick's expression immediately changed back to a charming smile, and after he'd winked at Aaron to let him know there were no hard feelings Nick turned back around.

Judy, who had been focused on finding a parking spot had only heard the conversation and completely missed the look Nick had shot her nephew.

_Nick singing, I'd love to get a recording of that, especially if he's as bad as he claims he is_, Judy thought to herself as she finally found a parking spot.
Having reached their destination, the three mammals got out of the car and started walking around with no real direction in mind. Judy was leading the group for the most part, pointing out buildings and adding some interesting facts about each one with Aaron adding the additional comment here and there as well.

As they walked around from place to place Nick noticed while Bunnyburrow was aptly named considering the sidewalk was a river of bunnies, but there were a few other species around, Nick had spotted a few deer, a wolf or two and, even a hippo walking the streets, like small islands in a sea of bunnies.

Continuing their tour, Judy showed Nick the police station where she'd interned as a teenager, the bar where her class graduation party was held, and the arcade where countless young bunnies lost their allowances every day. After a few hours however, Nick's stomach started rumbling so Judy lead them to the "Bouncing Bunny" diner for lunch.

Sliding into a booth, Nick and Judy on one side, Aaron on the other, they quickly ordered before continuing to chat while they waited for their food, Nick asking about the name of the diner which he found out was because quote, "the food is so good the first bunny who ate it was jumping around town for days raving about it."

Eventually their food and drinks were brought out to them and Nick being nothing more than a big kit couldn't resist trying to shoot his straw wrapper in between Aaron's ears, or shouting "and the field goal is gooood!!" when the wrapper successfully made it past.

His antics earned him a laugh from Aaron and a reproachful look from Judy as she tried to hide her own smile. Aaron then decided to follow Nick's lead and try his own luck at making a field goal, and while his aim was true, he unfortunately lacked the necessary power and the wrapper landed gracefully between Judy's ears causing both Nick and Aaron to burst out in laughter.

"Nice try there Aaron, but not good enough." Nick taunted as he got his laughter under control, not seeing that Judy was preparing her own wrapper shot.

"Maybe one day you'll be as good as me," Nick continued, only to be stopped in his tracks as Judy's wrapper found its way into his ear and stayed there.

"Bullseye!" Judy shouted victoriously as Nick turned towards her, his face a mask of indignation.

"Firstly. How in the hell did you make that shot. I may be sitting right next to you, but my inner ear is far too small a target," Nick said in disbelief, "secondly. How could you, my own partner shoot me in the back… or in this case, the ear!"

Judy just smiled, "I'm a crack shot I'll have you know. I even got top scores on the range at the academy, and you started this game Slick, but like usual I finished it." Judy said triumphantly.

"Oh you think this is over, but you've got another thing coming bunny." Nick said as he playfully flicked one of his French fries into Judy's soda.

"You're in for it now Nick." Judy said as she sent a flurry of soft blows at him as he cowered in the corner of the booth.

"I yield! I yield!" Nick cried out as Judy's relentless attack continued.

"I hope you've learned your lesson." Judy said after a few more seconds, a big smile on her face as she finally stopped and let Nick sit up.
"Yeah, I learned my partner and roommate has violent tendencies and I can't go to the police for help since she's one of them." Nick said, his smile matching Judy's

"Violent tendencies, I only save for you when you step out of line Slick. So, just do what I say and there'll be no problems."

As the two bantered back and forth they had completely forgotten that Aaron was there, and as the young buck watched the fox and bunny across from him he couldn't suppress his own little smile, *Those two look good together,* Aaron thought as he snapped a few photos to send to Nick later.

"I'd argue some more but I'd like to keep feeling in my arm and not eat a cold lunch." Nick said before quickly picking up his black bean burger and taking a bite.

Judy and Aaron both just shook their heads before digging into their own meals, and as the three ate Nick kept them entertained with stories of Zootopia and some of the crazier things he'd seen and done.

"After that the brown wolf in the trench coat and his companion both thanked me for my help and walked into a blue phone booth, the next thing I know I'm hearing this ungodly grinding sound and the box disappears right in front of my eyes." Nick said, finishing his strange story just as their waitress walked over to the table.

"Can I interest you folks in any desserts today?" the waitress asked as she started clearing their empty plates.

"Actually I'd-"

"Nope, we're all set thanks." Judy said, swiftly cutting Nick off.

"Alright I'll just leave your check here then." The waitress said as she walked away leaving the receipt on the table.

"What the heck Carrots, I wanted some of that blueberry pie that's on display over there." Nick wined.

"Don't worry Nick. I know how much you wanted blueberry pie, especially since you were drooling over that one since we walked in, but I know where to get the best pie in the whole Tri-Burrows." Judy said with a smile.

"I wasn't drooling," Nick said defensively.

"Oh yeah, then what's that on your chin?" Aaron chimed in.

Nick quickly grabbed a napkin and wiped his chin before realizing Aaron had played him.

"Cleaver move there Aaron, but be warned, revenge will be mine." Nick said, smiling as he put the napkin down.

"So where are these pies that are apparently a cut above the rest?" Nick asked as he grabbed the check and pulled out his wallet to pay.

"The place is actually close by, the mammals who makes them uses our family's produce, so he's already got a head start, but he's also one of the best bakers in the Tri-Burrows," Judy explained as she watched Nick pull out four 20 Zollar bills and throw them on the table.
"What are we waiting for then, those fantastic pies aren't going to eat themselves," Nick said excitedly.

"We're getting pie from Gid's, I knew coming out with you guys was a good idea," Aaron said as he hopped out of the booth.

The three then made their way out of the diner and down the street until they came to a small little bakery that sat nestled between two other buildings. Nick could tell which one was the bakery right away however, since it was painted a dark shade of pink and had a large sign that read, "Gideon Gray's Real Good Baked Stuff," with a picture of a smiling pie.

_Gideon Gray… where have I heard that name before_, Nick was racking his brain trying to remember who exactly Gideon Gray was as they walked up to the door. As they entered the shop the bell above the door jingled and a second later a voice called out from the back.

"I-I-I'll be with yew in a minute, just pullin' some of these here pies outta this here oven." the country fox called out, his accent in full swing.

"Take your time Gid, we're not in a rush." Judy called back

"I'm gonna go use the bathroom real quick." Aaron said as he walked over to a door marked "Males (Small – Medium only)"

_Gideon Gray, Gideon Gray, I know that name I swear I do_, Nick thought to himself, and as Gideon finally appeared behind the counter it all suddenly clicked.

_The bully's name was Gideon Gray and he was a fox," Nick had finally remembered. Judy told me about … A fox … Named Gideon Gray… Who clawed her when she was a kit…_

Nick froze, both his mind and his body stopping in their tracks, and as the realization of exactly who was in front of him fully sank in only one voice could be heard.

_"DESTROY HIM, HURT HIM, TEAR HIM APART!"_ Instinct raged, causing Nick's entire body to tense up as his hackles raised.

_"nononononononono, let's not do that!"_ Logic and Optimism cried out as they jumped into action and began trying to reign Instinct in.

_**HE HURT JUDY, HE GET'S NO MERCY**"_ Instinct roared, pushing back against the two trying to stop him.

As Instinct pushed Logic and Optimism to the side Nick's claws slowly began crawling out from his paws as a low, almost inaudible growl began forming behind Nick's clenched teeth.

_"I get that you're upset and that's understandable, but this won't be good for Judy and it's not what she would want. Plus do you really want Aaron to come back from the bathroom and see you attacking someone, think about it." _Emotion argued, trying to use to Nick's growing friendship with the young buck to calm him down, and for a second it worked, the growl died down as Nick's claws began retracting and his hackles started to fall.

_"HE ATTACKED JUDY ONCE AND HE'LL DO IT AGAIN! HE MIGHT EVEN HURT AARON, NO SECOND CHANCES!"_ Instinct cried out as he let loose his own thundering growl while he completely overpowered the voices trying to hold him down. All the while Nick's claws had come out once more and the growling in his throat returned.
A second later Nick's claws were completely out, and unlike the average clawed mammal Nick's claws had been sharpened to fine points, an old habit from his former life that Nick had been unable to part with.

"So this is what it comes to," The familiar voice of Cyn-Nick said harshly, his voice cold and firm, cutting through the fray like a knife, "you're just going to attack a mammal for what he did years ago when he was just an angry and confused kit?"

As Cyn-Nick spoke every other voice fell still, stunned not just by what Cyn-Nick was saying, but also by the fact that he was helping calm the situation down instead of egging Instinct on.

"You of all mammals know how hard it is to try and change, to make yourself better than the mammal you were before. You also know how much it hurts when nobody is willing to accept that you're trying to change your ways. Cyn-Nick's words were like a sucker punch to the gut, and as Nick listened to the well-deserved lecture, he took in a deep calming breath.

"It's not an easy thing to change and as you struggle with yourself there's always more to face, there are mammals that are willing to kick you down, over and over and over, until you're back in the dirt unable to get up again. Yet here you are doing the exact same thing to Gideon, a mammal who has actually managed to change, and unlike you his mistakes are long behind him, so if you can't give him a chance then how can you expect anyone to give you one."

As Cyn-Nick finished delivering his speech all the other voices fell back in awe, even Instinct who was still enraged by the sight of Gideon was unable to speak.

"You're right," Nick thought, ashamed he had fallen into the same trap as every mammal who had put him down.

"I know," Cyn-Nick said solemnly as Nick's claws retracted and he faded away with all the other voices, leaving Nick alone with the shame of what had almost just happened.

Judy was excited as they entered Gideon's bakery, she knew how much Nick loved the taste of blueberries, and she also knew how good of a baker Gideon was, having seen pictures of the trophies he's won at some of the Tri-Burrow competitions, so this was sure to be something Nick would never forget.

So when Gideon appeared behind the counter, fresh pies in each oven mitt covered paw Judy walked right over to say hello, wanting to make sure Gideon knew that there were no hard feelings.

"Hey Gideon, how've you been?"

"Awe hello Judy, I've been doin' just as good as I can be, and yourself?" Gideon replied as he set the pies down on the counter.

"I'm doing great, I got my job back and even found a nicer place to live too,"

"That's wonderful news, I-I was kinda worried bout yew when ya sped off in such a hurry, I asked yer pa, but all he said was yew were back in the city because of some case and … he…. couldn't… say anything…. Else." Gideon said, trailing off as he noticed Nick's glare.

"Yeah that was really rude of me to run off like that, but when we were taking you actually gave me the final clue I needed, so I rushed back and finished the case." Judy explained happily.

"I guess you could say I owe you for getting me my job back." Judy continued before noticing that Gideon was no longer paying attention to her, his eyes were wide and focused entirely on something behind her.
Judy quickly turned around, ready for a fight, figuring whatever had Gideon looking so scared must be trouble. But as she scanned the area all she saw was Nick, and as she was about to turn around and ask Gideon what exactly had him so scared she heard it, the sound was a faint, but guttural growl, so low and quiet that it was almost inaudible, but as Judy listened harder she realized that this almost savage sound was coming from Nick.

"Nick… Are you alright?" Judy asked softly as she slowly walked over to the clearly agitated fox.

As Judy got closer she noticed that every muscle in Nick's body was tensed up, like he was ready to pounce at a moment's notice, and much to Judy's shock his claws, which normally stayed retracted, were out, for all the world to see.

_Those are some really sharp claws_, Judy thought to herself as she tried to think of a way to calm Nick down.

_I've never seen Nick like this before, I mean the closest thing I can think of is when he was pretending to be savage for Bellwether. Also, those claws are way to sharp, I don't think I've seen any mammal with claws as sharp as that_, Judy's thoughts continued as she got closer to Nick, far too worried about him to even consider being afraid.

Just as Judy was reaching out to grab Nick's arm the growling suddenly stopped, and as Judy took Nick's paw she noticed his claws were already retracted back.

"Nick…" Judy said again as she looked up at the now considerably less tense fox.

"Yeah Fluff." Nick said his voice completely normal as he let out a long breath, the rest of the tension leaving his body as he exhaled.

"What was that just now? I mean you looked about ready to attack there, you even had your claws out." Judy asked as Nick turned to face her.

"Did I? Well that's concerning. I guess I was a bit agitated meeting the fox who clawed your face as a kit." Nick explained, deciding to omit just how close he'd been to assaulting the portly baker.

"Nick I told you that was a long time ago, and he's changed quite a bit since then, so there's nothing to get upset about. Alright?"

"I know Carrots, I know. That's why I calmed myself down, I mean how hypocritical would it be to ask for a second chance and not give someone else one?" Nick asked rhetorically.

"Now, I believe introductions are in order." Nick said as he casually strode over to the counter.

"I apologize for my unacceptable display of aggression Mr. Gray. I'm Nick Wilde, ZPA cadet and Zootopia's foremost expert on all things blueberry. I am told your pies are the best around and I'm here to verify." Nick said, hoping to lighten the mood a little.

"Shoot you don't gotta call me Mr. Gray, Gideon or just Gid is fine by me, and as for the aggression I-I know a thing or two bout that, and how hard it can be to get it under control. So, water under the bridge." Gideon said as the final bit of tension left the room.

"Now Mr. Wilde I ain't never heard of an expert on blueberries, not here nor from Zootopia, but if yer lookin' for some of the best darn blueberry pie in the county, I've been told mine holds up." Gideon continued as he cut into one of the pies he had just set down.

"I appreciate you being so understanding Gid, and feel free to call me Nick. Now just the smell of
this pie is making my mouth start to water, so unless you want this place to be flooded with fox saliva you best pass me a slice," Nick joked, getting a hardy laugh from Gideon and a face palm and a smile from Judy.

"What did I miss?" Aaron asked as he walked over to the still laughing group.

"Nothing much Aaron, just cracking a few jokes in an attempt to get free pie." Nick said with a smile.

"Yer a funny guy Nick, that's fur sure. I hope you enjoy the pie since it'll be 4 Zollars and 50 cents each," Gideon said as he wiped a stray tear from his eye and slide a plate with a piece of pie and a fork to Nick, Judy, and Aaron.

"Too bad I'm not funny enough for free pie," Nick said, feigning disappointment as he brought a bite of pie up to his mouth.

As Nick took the first bite he wasn't rally expecting anything special, he'd had many different blueberry pies in his life and while some were clearly better than others, none of them had ever been really noteworthy.

But as Nick took the first bite into his mouth, he knew no other blueberry pie would ever be good enough. The crust was the perfect ratio of flaky and firm, while the tangy blueberry filling was indescribable, it danced across his taste buds and flashes of flavor exploded across his tongue like fireworks, and as Nick slowly chewed, savoring every last bit of flavor the pie had to offer he had to hold back a tear.

"This is by far the best blueberry pie in existence." Nick said as he hurriedly took another bite, his tail wagging faster and faster as he chewed.

"Awe shucks Nick, yur just saying that." Gideon said bashfully as he scratched the back of his neck.

"Not in the slightest Gid my male. The dream of every blueberry must be to be put into one of these pies, because otherwise their life was wasted." Nick said, mouth still full of pie.

"No talking with your mouth full Nick," Judy said playfully as she lightly punched his arm.

"And Gideon as much as Nick likes to exaggerate, I have to agree, your pies are leagues above any others I know of." Judy said as she took another bite of her pie.

"Yeah Gid, everyone in the entire town knows you make the best pies." Aaron agreed enthusiastically.

"Well thank yall for yer kind words. Knowing mammals enjoy my food warms my heart." Gideon said as he watched the three continue to devour their pie while cutting a slice for himself.

After that the group continue to eat, chatting pleasantly while enjoying the divine goodness that was Gideon's blueberry pie. Inevitable however the pie was finished, and after checking the time Judy realized it was already 2:30 and decided it was time to head back. So after saying their goodbyes Nick Judy and Aaron made their way out the door, but before Nick could leave he felt a strong paw grab his arm and turn him around.

"Hey Nick before you go would yah mind if I gave you a word of advice?" Gideon asked, his normally cheerful tone turned suddenly serious.

"Sure Gid, what about?"
"W-well it's about when you first showed up, yah know that f-frightful growl and glare you were sending my way." Gideon explained going from serious to nervous in an instant.

"I'm sorry again about that, it wasn't my proudest moment and I don't think it'll happen again. So, I'd like to put it behind me, if you're ok with that." Nick said as he started turning towards the door again, not want anything to do with this conversation.

"Wait Nick," Gideon said, stopping Nick once again, "that's not what I'm tryin to say."

"I-I'm just trying to say, I know what it's like to have unprocessed emotions like I'm sure Judy told you, I was a major jerk as a kit and I won't go into my whole life's story, but basically I was holding in a lot of self-doubt and self-loathing, along with a whole host of other things and because of that I-I lashed out, I hurt others and did a lot of things I'm not proud of." Gideon explained, his nervousness disappearing the further along he got.

"Now I'm not gonna say I know yew or anythin you've been through, but I do see a lot of that same pent-up emotion behind yur eyes too, and as someone who's been there before all I can say is you should talk to someone, anyone. I know that therapy and just talking about my feelings did a whole world of good for me and you might want to consider trying it too, before your pent-up emotions make you do something you regret for the rest of your life." as Gideon finished his voice took on a tone of deep remorse and sadness.

"I…. I'll think on it, thanks for the advice Gideon." Nick said awkwardly.

"Anytime Nick, now you best git goin', or else Judy and Aaron are going to leave you behind."
Gideon said, a warm smile on his face as his cheerful tone returned.

As the door closed with a jingle and Gideon watched Nick catch up with Judy and Aaron, Gideon couldn't stop himself from saying a silent prayer that Nick would heed his advice and get some help.

"I hope he figures it out before it's too late, I held it all in for nine years before the pressure got to me and it finally exploded outta me, I don't wanna be anywhere near Nick if he explodes cus I can just tell he's under a helluva lot more weight than I ever was,"

It didn't take long for Nick, Judy and Aaron to reach the car and while Nick joked along with his companions his heart wasn't in it, too caught up in both what he'd almost done and what Gideon had said.

*I mean he's probably right but what good would it do to go to therapy, I'd just pay a mammal too much money to just listen to me complain, and it's not like they'll even be able to help. Nope, not gonna waste my precious time or money. But as Nick started getting lost in thought a voice called out.

"Nnniiicccckkk." Aaron said as he got into the sedan.

"Huh, uhhh, what's up Aaron." Nick said, as he was pulled from his thoughts.

"You weren't even listening, were you?" Judy asked accusingly as she buckled herself in.

"Was I listening… No, no I was not." Nick said with a smile, "I apologize I got lost in thought."

"I see, I see. It's probably pretty easy to get lost when you're doing something unfamiliar." Aaron said teasingly.
"Ouch, that was savage Aaron, but I did deserve it. So, what were you saying?" Nick asked, taking the jab in stride.

"I was saying you're a pretty cool mammal, and I really have had fun getting to know you."

"Oh." Nick said, taken aback slightly at the compliment.

"You're pretty cool yourself Aaron, and I've enjoyed hanging out with you too. Also, as far as bunnies I know named Aaron, you're definitely number one,"

I'm so happy Nick's made a friend in the family especially since it's one of the more unsociable Hopps kits, this should show everyone else he's a good guy. Judy thought happily as she listened to the two talk.

"Thanks Nick. I've enjoyed hanging out with you and Aunt Judy too. I have no idea why my parents told me to stay away from you." Aaron said, delivering the line he'd waited all day for.

Judy, who was putting the key in the ignition froze immediately, and as what Aaron said sank in all Judy could hear was the sound of her heart, pounding in her ears like a war drum.

Slowly, as her body shook with rage, Judy turned around to look at Aaron.

"What, did you just say?" Judy asked, her tone measured and calm yet somehow dangerous and hinting at an impending explosion like the slow ticking of a time bomb.

"Oh, I was just saying how Nick is a really cool guy and I don't know why my parents warned me to stay away from him." Aaron said innocently as he fought back a shiver.

"I see. When exactly did they tell you this?" Judy asked, still maintaining her calm for the moment while Nick looked on, a horrified expression on his face.

"Well it was the day before you got here, a bunch of adults got all the kits under 17 together and told us that you were coming back for a visit and you were bringing along a red fox from the city." Aaron started to explain, knowing there was no going back now.

"They said the fox you were bringing along was a bad mammal and that we all needed to stay away from him, and if we did have to get close to him that we shouldn't talk to him and leave as quickly as possible."

Judy said nothing as her anger exploded, her mind a flurry of furious voices all clamoring for metaphorical blood. Every fiber of Judy's being screamed out for vengeance, HOW DARE THEY, Judy's mind screamed as she continued to silently sit there fuming.

I say we beat them all senseless, Judy's sultry voice said sternly, before adding, and then to make it up to our fox we can kiss him senseless.

As much as Judy hated to agree with that side of herself, and as much as Judy loathed the prospect of hurting anyone, let alone her family, she knew something had to be done about this.

"Aunt Judy…" Aaron called out, his voice was quieter and more timid than usual and it snapped Judy back to reality.

There's definitely going to be hell to pay, but this is the wrong audience, Aaron didn't do anything wrong and he doesn't need to see me blow up. Judy realized as she calmed herself down.
"Aaron?" Judy said, her voice returning to something resembling a normal tone, despite her best efforts though Judy couldn't keep the anger entirely out of her voice.

"Yes Aunt Judy?"

"Did my Mom and Dad know about this?" Judy asked, deciding to find out who exactly would be receiving her fury when she got back.

"Grandma and Grandpa? I don't think so…" Aaron said uncertainly, "I didn't see them there, it was just a bunch of Aunts and Uncles along with my parents."

"I see." Judy said coolly as she turned the key and started the car up.

"Now let's just take it easy Carrots. There's no need to get upset." Nick said as he broke out of his stupor.

"I mean it's not like I wanted to be swamped by kits anyways, so it's fine."

....

"Judy talk to me. I'm fine and we've had a great trip, so there's nothing to get upset about." Nick said, desperately trying to run damage control.

"I'm happy to hear that you've enjoyed the trip Nick, and while I appreciate that your willing to overlook my family's actions, I am not! I'll be taking care of it when we get home." Judy said calmly as she started speeding back to the farm.

Hopps Family Farm, Bunnyburrow, Sunday Afternoon, 3:00pm

The ride back to the farm was short, as Judy sped home faster than the speed limit, rushing to deliver justice upon the unsuspecting members of her family. It was also a silent car ride as each mammal in the car was lost in thought, Judy focusing on the hell she was about to reign down, Nick contemplating his almost severe loss of control, and Aaron, whose only thought was, I might have gone too far this time, hopefully the rest of the plan goes as expected.

As soon as they parked Aaron, claiming he had some homework to finish, quickly hopped out of the car and headed into the house.

"He's a nice kit." Nick said to Judy as he watched Aaron go.

"Yeah he is," Judy agreed before turning towards the fields, "Now I have some business of my own to deal with, so you should find an entertainment room and relax, just text me which room you end up in and I'll come find you when I finish,"

"Seriously Fluff there's no need to get upset on my behalf. So let's just both go inside and hang out until we have to leave." Nick suggested as he saw the fire in Judy's eyes.

"That's a very tempting offer Nick and I'll be sure to take you up on it, after I have a chat with some of my siblings," Judy said as she started walking to where she suspected they were.

"Judy please don't." Nick said sadly, causing Judy to stop in her tracks.

"It's fine, really. I'm not worth you getting into a fight with your family over, so please just let it go, alright?"

As Judy listened to Nick, and the sad pleading tone in his voice she almost gave in, she almost turned
around and went inside with Nick to have some fun, almost let go of her anger and given her family a pass, not because they deserved it, but to respect Nick's wishes, almost. However, just as her anger started to fizzle and the last ember of her rage started to die out, she heard something that both broke her heart and poured a gallon of gasoline on the almost dead fire, turning it back into a raging forest fire.

"It's not like I expected anything different," Nick said, his voice low and full of sad acceptance.

"You SHOULD expect something different, Nick." Judy shouted causing Nick to jump slightly, "You should expect to be treated better than this, because you deserve it Nick. Everyone should be treated with courtesy and kindness until they give you a reason not to, and you've done nothing to warrant this. So, I will NOT let this slide, and if this turns into a fight then so be it, I don't care. So, just go inside and wait till I come back, I promise it won't take too long." Judy ranted before running off, not wanting Nick to have a chance to talk her out of what she knew she needed to do.

Nick sighed as he watched Judy go, "I guess I'll head inside but I think I'll find a quiet place to relax instead."

Nick then slowly headed to the house and began searching for a quiet place to sit and think. Little did Nick know he was being followed and closely watched by 25 pairs of little bunny eyes.

"What do we do Charlie?" a little doe in a pink dress asked nervously.

"We keep following him," the older kit replied as he checked around the corner.

"But why?" Another buck asked as he too looked around the corner to watch the fox turn another corner.

"Sssshhhhh, we need to be quiet, and like I told you before, we need to see if what my big brother Aaron said was true or not," Charlie said as he stepped out into the hallway.

As Charlie started walking the rest of the kits followed, their questions continuing.

"What did Aaron tell you again... I forgot," One of the kits asked sheepishly.

"You don't remember, I musta told you a billion times already," Charlie said indignantly. "My big brother told me that the fox that's been in the house all weekend is a friend of Aunt Judy and actually a nice guy who loves music and is a really good singer, so we should get to know him."

"Yeah but how do we know that's true," the doe in the pink dress asked as they reached another corner.

Charlie took a quick peek to see where Nick was before turning to the group, "Well we saw him talking to Aunt Judy so we know he's her friend, but to be extra sure we should see if he really is good at singing that way we know if Aaron was tellin the truth." The other kits thought about it for a moment before nodding in agreement.

"But how do we get him to sing?" another doe wearing a yellow tee and white shorts asked quietly.

"Well Ashely, Aaron told me that if the fox hears a song he knows, he'll sing along, but only if he thinks he's alone," Charlie explained as he stepped out into the hallway Nick had just left.

"So, all we need to do is play a song and listen, Aaron even told me a few songs we could try,"
"What song are you gonna play? Since your mom only lets you have Disney songs on your iCarrot," Ashely asked.

"I have other songs" Charlie said defensively, "but none of the ones Aaron told me about, luckily he told me the fox guy likes Disney songs too,"

The fact that Nick liked Disney songs caught the kits interest and a small discussion broke out amongst them about whether or not that could be true.

"Guy's quiet down or he'll hear us," Charlie said quietly causing the discussion to die down.

"My mamma told me I can't watch Floatzen or Wrangled if I'm bad, so If Mr. Fox likes Disney he must be good," the little doe in the pink dress said to the agreement of the group of kits.

"So, it's agreed then. We'll follow him and once he's alone we play a song and listen, if he's a good singer then we can play with him," Charlie said putting an end to the discussion.

"Aaron told me the perfect song too, it's from a really old movie but lucky for us I still have it, Operation Fox Friend is a go." So, without another word Charlie continued to lead the group as they carefully followed Nick.

What the hell do I do? Was the question on Nick's mind as he wondered around the Hopps house so caught up in his own torrent of thoughts that he wasn't even aware of the gaggle of kits following less than stealthily behind him.

Judy's going to get into a huge fight with her family all because of me and there's nothing I can do but wait. Nick thought to himself as his inner voices remained silent, Well I did try and talk her out of it, she's a grown mammal and I guess I'll just wait until she comes back..."

While Nick struggled with worrying over what Judy was going to do his inner voices were having a discussion of their own over the day's events.

"You went too far this time Instinct," Optimism scolded.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Instinct said obstinately.

"How about the fact that you almost got us to attack another mammal today, and we both know that even if that pudgy fox had put up a fight Nick could have torn him apart easily," Emotion cut in passionately

"So,"

"So, SO... so if that had happened do you know what would have happened next?" Optimism asked angrily

"Assault charges, prison, kicked out of the ZPD, losing Judy and Aaron's friendship as well as being hated by the entire population of Bunnyburrow." Logic added flatly.

"Exactly, if we hadn't stopped you Nick would be in JAIL right now." Optimism ranted.

"Fine, I won't try and attack the pudgy fox anymore." Instinct begrudgingly agreed.

"Also, if I might add it was actually Cyn-Nick who stopped him, you all were failing miserably." Logic corrected.
"Yeah, what was up with that Cyn-Nick? Not that I'm complaining or anything, but why were you being helpful. I thought you'd be egging Instinct on since it would have put us right back where we were before we met Judy." Emotion asked the unusually silent cynical voice.

"I have no idea where you guys got this opinion that I'm only trying to drag Nick down. I guess none of you understand or have ever understood, what I'm really here for," Cyn-Nick said sadly before going quiet once more.

Back in the physical world, Nick had finally decided to stop wandering and find a place to sit and relax.

"Reading room 815, huh. Well I am certainly lost, but I guess here is a good of a place as any to sit and wait in, plus it seems like nobody else is in here so that's an added bonus," Nick said as he shot a quick text to Judy informing her of his location and heading inside.

Walking into the room Nick was once again in awe of the Hopps household, the room was a miniature library, complete with bookshelves, desks, beanbag chairs, and even a large brown couch which Nick quickly claimed for himself.

"I guess I'll just nap here until Judy comes back," Nick said to himself as he stretched out across the couch and closed his eyes.

But as Nick's eye closed and his body began to relax a faint, but familiar melody caused his ears to perk up. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EA68KUb4e7Q)

"Is this what I think it is? I guess they play songs over the speaker system sometimes," Nick questioned as he sat up and looked around to make sure he was alone, and after confirming that fact Nick began to sing.

I am a question to the world,
Not an answer to be heard
or a moment that's held in your hands
and what do you think you'd ever say
I won't listen anyway
You don't know me
and I'll never be what you want me to be

And what do you think you'd understand
I'm a boy, no I'm a male
You can't take me and throw me away
And how can you learn what's never shown
Yeah you stand here on your own,
they don't know me, cus I'm not here
And I want a moment to be real, wanna touch things I don't feel

Wanna hold on and feel I belong

And how can the world want me to change

They're the ones that stay the same

They don't know me, cus I'm not here

As Nick continued to sing, letting himself get pulled deeper and deeper into the song the kits who were listening in were stunned silent.

Aaron had said he was good, but this is amazing, Charlie thought as he listened intently to the singing fox.

And how can yah say I never change,

They're the ones that stay the same

I'm the one now, Cus I'm still here

I'm the one, cus I'm still here

I'm still here

I'm still here

I'm still here

"Too bad I can't just sing a song to the Hoppses to get them to like me… no it'll take a miracle for that to happen," Nick said to himself as the melody faded away.

And as Nick sat back, sinking into the extremely comfy couch his moment of quiet reflection was shattered by the cheers of the group of bunny kits that had been listening. Nick's eyes shot open as he struggled to take in the fact that not only was he not alone like he'd previously thought but he was now being overrun with kits as they all crowded around him.

"Wow that was so good,"

"Are you a professional singer Mr. Fox?"

"Do you like Wrangled too?"

"Can I touch your tail?"

That last question was met with the feeling of small bunny paws on his tail which caused Nick to let out a small yip which caused a chorus of giggles from the kits having never heard such a strange noise before.

"It's sooooo soft."

"Do you like carrots?"

"Can you sing us another song?"
"Kits, kits, I can't answer every question at once, let's start with introductions, I'm Nick, Nick Wilde, and I'm a friend of Judy's, and I love blueberries." Nick said trying to regain some semblance of control as he found himself completely surrounded by kits.

One by one the kits all said their names and told Nick one thing about themselves giving Nick time to assess the situation.

"Now to answer your questions, I am not a professional singer, I do like Wrangled, if you're going to touch my tail please do it gently," as Nick said this a few more paws found his tail but all of them careful not to grab to tightly. "I do indeed like carrots, and I can sing some more if that's what you want, but first I've got some questions of my own,"

"What kinda questions?" Charlie asked as the rest of his siblings began studying Nick in detail, commenting to each other about how big his paws were, how strange his paw pads felt, and how extremely soft his tail was.

"Nothing too difficult," Nick said reassuringly, "I just wanted to know why you decided to come over and talk to me?"

"Oh, that's easy, it's cus my big brother Aaron told me how you were super nice and a really good singer, so after talking with the others we wanted to find out for sure," Charlie said confidently.

"I see, I see, and is Aaron the one who told you to play that song?" Nick asked as a few kits began climbing up his shirt.

"Yeah he said you liked it a lot and that if we played it when you were alone, you'd sing,"

"Well I guess he was right about that, so wh- " before Nick could continue he was cut off as one of the kits who had climbed up to the top of his head stood proud and proclaimed himself king of fox mountain.

This caused any conversation Nick wanted to have to be quickly shut down as he was suddenly covered in kits all trying to become king or queen of fox mountain themselves. As the kits clambered over him Nick couldn't help but laugh causing a few of the kits to fall.

"Earthquake," the kits shouted, giggling as they clung tighter, desperately trying to stay on.

"Actually, fox mountain is a magical moving mountain," Nick said in a deep voice as he started swaying gently side to side, causing the current king to fall off onto the couch.

As the little bunnies continued to climb over him, inspect him, feel his tail, and ask him question after question Nick took it all in stride and found a smile creeping its way onto his face.

Well hallelujah miracles do happen, and I guess being swarmed by kits isn't so bad…

While Nick was wondering around the house without direction Judy was making a beeline for the back of the house where she knew a good portion of her siblings would be.

"Targets acquired," Judy said to herself as she turned the corner seeing the crowd of siblings gathered at the picnic tables.

The tables and accompanying water coolers had been an idea Stu had come up with years ago as a place for the rabbits who had been working out in the fields to sit and rest up for a bit before getting back to work. The idea had been extremely well received and sometimes the spouses would even
personally bring out refreshments, and as luck would have it today was one of those days.

It actually looked like everyone was having a really good time, the spouses who weren't busy with other tasks had brought out lemonade and even cucumber sandwiches, and as they all ate and drank the air was full of pleasant conversation, they had no idea the hellfire that was about to rain down upon them.

"Brandon!" Judy said dangerously, her tone however went right over the head of the brown buck in front of her.

"Hey Jude the Dude. What's up?" Brandon asked cheerfully as he took a big sip of his lemonade.

"You, my dear brother, have some explaining to do, YOU ALL HAVE SOMETHING'S TO EXPLAIN." Judy said, raising her voice to a shout so that everyone could hear her.

"And what, might I ask, do we have to explain to you?" Brandon asked confidently as everyone around quieted down to hear what was going on.

"How about you explain why you're teaching your children to be bigots! So afraid of other species they won't even talk to them." Judy said, eyebrow raised, her tone cold and oozing with a barely contained anger.

"I-I-I have no idea what you're talking about." Brandon lied, taking a small step back from the irate rabbit in front of him.

"Do you think lying to me is a good idea?" Judy asked angrily, "You know damn well what I'm talking about."

Judy's siblings were in shock, that was the closest thing to a curse Judy had ever said. Unlike the rest of them Judy had always held herself to a higher standard with the language she used, despite being told time and time again that cursing was no big deal.

"Judy there's no need to get that upset, I'm sure this is just some big misunderstanding." Brandon said, deciding to try and calm the situation down.

"A misunderstanding?! Ah I see, how silly of me." Judy said calmly.

"Yeaaahhh, exactly. It's all just a big misunderstanding. So, why are you so upset?" Brandon asked as the everyone else relaxed.

"Oh it's nothing big really. I'm just upset that you and the rest of my siblings got the kits together and told them to stay away from Nick. But like you said, I'm sure it's some big misunderstanding, so if you could just explain it to me I'll let you go back to your lemonade and I'll be on my way." Judy's voice was sweet, sickly so, and as her siblings registered what she had just said a feeling of dread came down upon them.

"I'm waiting." Judy said after a few moments of tense silence, "Well since you've all decided to find the grass so fascinating, I take it I haven't misunderstood anything. Have I?" Judy asked rhetorically.

"How did you find out about that?" A voice from the back asked quietly.

"Oh never mind how I found out Kevin. I want to know what gives you the right to tell your kits to be afraid of Nick."

"It's our right as parents." Brandon said, attempting to sound firm but unable to keep his voice from
wavering slightly.
"Your right as a parent?!" Judy said, her disbelief and anger clear.
"Yes, we as parents have a duty to protect our kits and I'll do whatever it takes to do just that, and as
a non-parent you have no right to judge." Brandon continued, gaining a bit of confidence.
Before Judy could say another word a chorus of, "Yeah." "They're our kits not yours." and "What
give YOU the right." erupted from the crowed as Judy's siblings fought back, emboldened by
Brandon's words.
"Now listen here," Judy started, but found she could no longer be heard, and as her family started to
shout her down Judy felt her anger start to bubble up, and then it burst.
Deciding she needed to be seen as well as heard, Judy jumped up onto a table, then she took in a
deep breath and cupped her paws around her mouth, "SHUT! THE! FUCK! UP!" Judy shouted,
getting everyone to gasp and then fall silent.
"Judy did you just curse?" one of Judy's sisters asked incredulously.
"Damn right I did Lilly, and you better prepare yourself because I have a lot more to say and I can
promise you none of it is pleasant. I will preface it however by saying that what I'm about to say isn't
meant for everyone here, but if it is for you then I'm sure you already know it." Judy said, as she
glared at the rabbits around her.
"I am disgusted, hurt, pissed off, and disappointed in every single one of you that decided to lie to
your kits and slander my friend. I expected so much more from you all. I tolerated the fear you had. I
tolerated the mistrust. I tolerated the cold shoulder you turned not only towards Nick but towards me
as well. I was disappointed but I was patient because I know nobody is perfect, but I figured once a
few of you got to know Nick, everyone would come around and see he really is a great mammal."
Judy said passionately as her family stared on in silence.
"What I did not expect was that you would pull some shit like this!" Judy continued, her tone turning
harsh, causing those closed to her to recoil as if her anger would burn them.
"You say it's your right as parents to lie and spread ignorance well I say fuck that and fuck you!
Your job as a parent is to be an example and to teach your kits to be good mammals that will make
the world a better place, but you failed. This was an opportunity to let your kits meet someone new
and to let them grow as mammals but instead you robbed them of that, and as parents you should be
ashamed of yourselves."
"J-Judy we did what we had to, just because you trust this fox doesn't mean we should," One of
Judy's brothers called out from the back.
"Mike's right Judy," Brandon said, finding his voice once again, "These are our kits, we did nothing
wrong, protecting them from potential danger is nothing to be ashamed of."
Judy just smiled and laughed, and that was the most unsettling thing to the group, and after a few
moments Judy stopped her laughing, wiped a tear from the corner of her eye and stared Brandon
down.
"If you aren't ashamed of your actions, and if you've "done nothing wrong," Judy said mockingly,
"Then why didn't you tell mom about your plan?"
…


"Ah silence! What a surprise!" Judy said angrily as the bunnies around her once again suddenly found their feet very interesting.

"Now let me make this VERY CLEAR to you all, and feel free to tell everyone else who thought what you did was a good idea. You all have royally fucked up, and I have no idea what has to happen or how long it will take but until you all understand what you've done, but until that day comes and until you apologize to Nick PROPERLY and tell your kits that you were wrong about him I won't be speaking to any of you, and if you EVER pull a stunt like that again I promise that everyone involved will be spending a few nights in the Hopps infirmary. Guaranteed."

With everything she needed to say said Judy jumped down off the table and still facing the crowd she could clearly see they had more to say.

"Let me stop you right there because I can see you have more to say, but just know that I'm still very angry with all of you and I know one angry rant isn't going to change your minds, so I don't want to hear another word out of any of you." Judy then turned around completely ready to go find Nick and spend the rest of the time she had with him just enjoying herself.

"Listen here Judy you don't just get to walk away after that." Brandon said, grabbing Judy's arm to stop her.

Judy turned to face her brother slowly, and while he was a good head taller than Judy and was even broader than Stu, he still let go and jumped back in fear at the look Judy shot him. "What part of, NOT ANOTHER FUCKING WORD DIDN'T YOU UNDERSTAND!" Judy yelled angrily as she slammed her fist on the table.

Unfortunately for Judy she had put too much strength into it, the board she had slammed down on broke free and launched a half full pitcher of lemonade into the air. The pitcher's arc was flawless, as if guided by fate, God, subpar writing, or… Cosmic coincidence? Whatever the reason for it, the pitcher landed perfectly on Judy's head, its contents spilling out everywhere and soaking Judy's fur and clothes.

Nobody moved as Judy calmly lifted the now empty pitcher from her head, as she did this however, she heard someone from the crowd let out a snort. As Judy slowly scanned the crowd looking for the offender, she noticed her siblings shrinking away from one of her pudgier brothers, and as she stared him down and his expression went from nervous anticipation to utter horror Judy knew she'd found the culprit.

"Is there something you want to add Anthony?" Judy asked, as she firmly set the pitcher down on the part of the table that was still intact, her voice cold, harsh, and stinging like the whipping wind of a blizzard.

"I-erh, I… No."

"That's what I thought," Judy said as she turned to leave.

"I think you pissed her off Ant," another brother whispered to the still shaking Anthony not expecting Judy to hear him.

But when Anthony didn't answer the rabbit looked up to find he was now on the receiving end of a death glare from his terrifying sister.

"It seems my brothers lack a certain instinct for self-preservation," Judy said under her breath, but making it just loud enough for the group to hear, before continuing her walk towards the house.
After waiting a few minutes in complete silence Judy's siblings finally found the courage to speak again since they were sure their very angry sister was far enough away. Now that they were safe once more the group began discussing exactly what had just happened, most expressed outrage at Judy's behavior, and explained how they were definitely not in the wrong no matter what Judy might say. Some however, were less sure if themselves, a few even going as far as to admit they should have thought things through a bit more, and while the two sides argued over what they should or shouldn't have done they did agree on one thing, seeing Judy that angry was the scariest thing they'd ever experienced and they had no desire to cross her again.

30 minutes later…

It hadn't taken long for Judy to get to her room, and the second she did she immediately jumped into the shower. Taking a long shower was exactly what Judy needed, and after drying off and getting into a new change of clothes Judy felt much better, and while her family wasn't off the hook by a long shot Judy no longer felt like beating them into the ground and becoming a literal bunny farmer.

But as Judy sat on the bed getting the last bit of moisture out of her ear fur she heard a familiar rumbling followed by a pounding on her door that had Judy worried the frame would give way.

"It's unlocked." Judy said dismissively as she sat on her bed, ready for whoever was about to barge in.

Although Judy had thought she was ready for whatever was about to come through the door she couldn't have imagined the Relationship Inquisition's sudden interest in Nick and her feelings toward him. Unlike the first time she'd been interrogated Judy found herself at a loss for words.

"Wh-Wait. What's going on?" Judy stammered as the crowed of her sisters called out question after question, overwhelming Judy.

"How long have you known this fox?" a voice from the back asked.

"You've been spending a lot of time with him away from the family." another sister noted.

"Yeah, and you never brought any friends home before. Why him?"

As the questions continued relentlessly Judy decided to stay quiet, realizing she wasn't going to be able to get a word in anyways. So for the next few minutes Judy just listened as they hurled question after question at her, the few Judy was able to comprehend had her on edge, they're really focusing in on Nick, this might be bad, but at least they're too unorganized to get anything done, hopefully it'll stay that way, Judy thought to herself, but it seemed luck was not on Judy's side today as a new voice cut through the rest.

"Alright, Alright, stop trying to shout over each other. We need to actually get some answers here." A voice from the crowed commanded as she pushed her way to the front.

Judy knew this voice she was sure of it, and as the older doe pushed her way through to the front of the crowed Judy's suspicions were confirmed. It was one of the senior members of the inquisition Judy's older sister, Brittney. Brittney was one of the few unmarried doe's left from the first five of Bonnies litters and although she pretended it didn't bother her Judy could tell deep down Brittney was growing more and more insecure by the year.

"Well, well, well if it isn't "Jude the Dude," causing trouble as usual." Brittney said mockingly as she sauntered over, making sure to get in Judy's personal space.

"What is it with the "B-Bunch" and getting on my bad side today?" Judy sighed and whispered
"So why have you all decided to corner me again, I thought I answered all your questions last time." Judy asked, unable to keep the irritation out of her voice.

"So hostile, Judy. We just wanted to know more about your little… lets call him your foxy friend." Brittney said as she sat on Judy's bed and started kicking her feet.

"What do you want to know?... and Why? You weren't interested in him when we first talked." Judy said as she eyed her sister suspiciously.

"Well Judy, you are correct, at first we weren't interested. I mean why would we, be he's just a fox," Brittney said flippantly causing Judy to ball her fist and grit her teeth.

"But after watching your outburst in the cafeteria, seeing you almost never leave his side and now hearing about what just happened outside, we've come to the conclusion that there may be more going on here."

They're really perceptive. I've been underestimating them... or I'm being way too obvious about how I feel about Nick. Judy thought to herself as she tried to figure out her next move.

"I was just defending my friend from the unacceptable behavior of my family, nothing more." Judy said, deciding to stick to denial.

"And what about all that time you two spent alone this weekend?" Another one of Judy's sisters asked.

"Yeah Judy, what was that all about?" Brittney asked, having taken complete control of the situation.

"Well we wouldn't have been alone if you all had just tried to get to know him. I wanted Nick to get to know the family but since you all decided to ignore him, we just hung out without you." Judy explained, her irritation growing with each question.

"How about the fact that you've been all over him, I mean whenever anyone saw you two together you were always holding his paw, grabbing his arm, or bumping into him,"

"I was showing him around this massive burrow, I had to keep a hold on him so he wouldn't get lost." Judy said, rolling her eyes for good measure.

"I mean it's not like any of you would have helped him if he had gotten lost." Judy continued her frustration starting to show, "And I'm done answering questions so could you please leave,"

"Sure we'll leave." Brittney said, to the shock of every bunny in the room.

"Really? Well thank you, I honestly expected more of a fight." Judy said, stunned it was so easy.

"Oh Judy, my dear sweet sister, if you don't want to answer any more questions, we won't force you… but since you're not up to it maybe we'll go ask that fox." Brittney said, a nasty smile on her face.

"Come on girls let's go have a chat with Judy's friend." and with that Brittney and the rest of the Inquisition turned to leave only to be stopped in their tracks by a predatory growl.

"Don't. You. Dare." Judy said through teeth clenched so tight they might break.

Brittney was terrified, Judy was faster than her, stronger than her, and very, very angry, all her
survival instincts were telling her not to go any further, not to push anymore, but another part of her knew this anger was the best chance to get Judy to slip up. So, defying all rational thought Brittney decided to push a little further and see what happened.

"Don't get so worked up Judy. It's just some questions I'm sure he won't mind. Plus it's not like you could stop us anyway." Brittney said, making sure to keep her voice steady and in control.

"You will not bother Nick. It's his last day before going back to the academy where he'll be under unimaginable stress. The last thing he needs is to be bombarded with unnecessary questions like the ones I'm sure you're going to ask. This is your one warning." Judy said firmly, putting out a vibe that would make even a lion pause.

"What are you gonna do if we ignore this little warning," Brittney said mockingly as she tried not to shake in fear.

"Well Brittney I know I don't have a lot of power here. I mean I could threaten you physically, but it would put me in the wrong when all's said and done, so that plan's out. Instead, maybe I'll tell Mom and Dad that I won't be coming home anymore, and maybe I'll tell them it's your fault. Now correct me if I'm wrong but since you still don't have a husband you're still living at home, so there's lots of things Mom and Dad can do to make life miserable for you." Judy explained as she slowly got closer and closer to Brittney, so by the end she was just barely whispering in Brittney's ear.

Brittney was horrified, she knew Judy was one of her parents' favorites despite what they might say, and since Judy was such an upstanding bunny, they'd believe her over Brittney every time. So, Judy's threat was not only realistic but terrifying since there was no end to what Bonnie and Stu could use for punishment.

"Y-Y-you would lie to Mom and Dad and refuse to come home, a-all for some fox?" Brittney asked, shocked Judy would go so far.

"If you push me to it, I will." Judy said fiercely.

"So you're willing to lie to your parents, threaten your siblings, and potentially turn your back on your family… all for some fox you've known less than a year! That's crazy. That's more than crazy, I don't think there's a word for that at all." Brittney shouted, her composure long gone.

Crazy, that one little word rang in Judy's head the moment she heard it because as much as Judy didn't want to admit it she did feel like she might be going crazy. Why am I willing to go so far? I know I said I love Nick but I don't even know how he feels yet here I am ready to burn bridges with my family for him… maybe I am crazy, Judy thought to herself as Brittney's words hit home.

When faced with a problem or a foe all animals big and small have two possible choices, two paths they can walk down, fight or flight. This was what Judy faced as she looked at her sisters who were waiting for a response. Judy could run, she could backtrack and pretend it was all a joke, Nick would never know, and she could come back to this particular foe another day.

Maybe it's for the best, I mean I am acting a little crazy, Judy reasoned, but as she opened her mouth to reply she realized something important, that if she did back down something would change, she would lose something, something she didn't want to let go of, I can't back down, I won't back down! Judy shouted to herself. If I want to be with Nick I need to be ready to fight, if I backed down here there's no way I could look him in the eyes and tell him I love him when the time comes, and just like that Judy was no longer looking to back down, instead she was angry, she chose to fight.

"Actually there is a word for that, it's love." Judy shouted, no longer able to hold back.
"I'm in love with him, okay? If you're looking for the word that means caring about someone beyond all rationality and wanting them to have everything they want no matter how much it destroys you, it's love! And when you love someone, you just, you don't stop, ever. Even when people roll their eyes or call you crazy Even then, especially then! You just, you don't give up because if I could give up, if I could just, you know, take the whole world's advice and.. and move on and find someone else that wouldn't be love! That would be, that would be some other disposable thing that is not worth fighting for!"

With her rant finished Judy, breathing heavily, walked through the crowded of her stunned sisters, and as she reached the door Judy turned to face the crowd one more time.

"One more thing before I go my dear sisters," Judy said, mimicking Brittney's voice, "I don't think it needs to be said but I'll say it anyway, if a word of what I just said reaches the rest of the family you all will pay dearly, I didn't want to say this before but I have enough dirt on your little group and its members to bury you all ten times over, and if you don't believe me that's fine, tell whoever you want, but it'll be your funeral," Judy warned, giving her sisters one last menacing look before slamming the door closed.

The silence in the room after Judy left was deafening, and as the Inquisition gradually dispersed, the members slowly wandering off in different directions, but while everyone left the room one rabbit stayed behind. It was Sarah Hopps, who had followed the Inquisition to provide support to whichever poor soul they were going to interrogate. But as soon as Sarah had seen who it was and how angry they were she decided she would record the conversation, if only to watch Judy tear into the inquisition over and over again later. What was supposed to be a video to watch to raise her spirits had turned into an enormous weight on Sarah's shoulders as she struggled whether or not to delete probably the only recording of Judy's shocking confession.

It hadn't taken Judy long to find the room Nick was in, after reading his text she headed straight there, determined to squeeze a bit more time with Nick out of the trip. But as Judy stood in front of the door paw on the door knob ready to throw open the door, she heard something that stopped her in her tracks. At first it was just the sound of kits playing that threw her off since they had been warned to stay away from Nick, but as Judy pressed her ear closer to the door, she heard something even more stunning, Nick, laughing. If that wasn't strange enough this laugh was different somehow than any other she'd heard from the fox, this laugh sounded so carefree and pure, it was the sound of real unguarded happiness.

So Judy slowly opened the door to the reading room, making sure not to make a sound and what she saw made her heart melt. It was Nick not only was he surrounded by little bunnies but he was also covered nearly head to toe by the adoring kits, some of them were atop his head playing with his ears, while some were investigating his paws, two of the kits had wrapped themselves in his tail and fallen asleep. Most impressive of all was Nick, he was somehow able to not only keep a careful eye on the kits on his head and stopping them from falling when they started slipping, but he was also playing cards and holding multiple conversations with the kits, answering every question they sent his way while asking some of his own.

*Nick would be a great father,* Judy thought wistfully as she watched Nick and the kits play together, a gentle smile on his face. *I should probably stop watching and just go inside,* Judy thought to herself as she opened the door further.

"Hey guys, I see you're all having fun," Judy said, announcing her presence as she took a step into the room.

"Aunt Judy!" the kits shouted as some of them ran over to give her a hug, but to Judy's surprise not
that many kits came running over only around ten, the rest stayed put, preferring to keep playing with Nick then get up.

"I see you've become quite popular with the kits Slick," Judy said as she walked over to the couch.

"Mr. Nick is awesome," one of the kits shouted, while the rest nodded in agreement,

"He's really fun, he likes games and Disney movies," Another kit added as she began climbing up Nick's shoulders.

"I see, well I'm glad you all made a new friend but it's getting close to dinner time so you all should go wash up," Judy said, eliciting a collective groan from the kits.

"No grumbling, you need to wash up or you'll get sick and sick kits can't play outside, they have to lay in bed all day," Judy explained as she started trying to usher the kits out of the room.

It took a few minutes but after promising Nick would come back and play with them again the kits finally agreed to go, making sure to wake up the kits sleeping in Nick's tail and take them too, and so after a chorus of goodbye's and see you later's from the kits Nick and Judy were finally alone.

That was actually pretty nice, I guess playing with kits is a better time than I believed, Nick thought to himself as he and Judy watched the last of the kits file out of the room, and as Nick reflected on how much he'd enjoyed interacting with the Hopps kits a realization hit. I should be playing with my nephew too. This family time has been great, but, if I'm going to be a part of a family again, then I should be with my family.

"Judy…." Nick said, his voice wavering and full of uncertainty, causing Judy to look up at him with worry, "I think it's time I gave my sister a call," Judy's eyes widened with shock as she gasped, "Are you sure your ready Nick?"

"As ready as I'll ever be" Nick said firmly as his gaze fell on Judy and he found his resolve within her sparkling lavender eyes.

"Alright Nick, I'll give you some time then, come find me when you're done," Judy said as she held Nick's stare, finding Nick's look of determination startlingly attractive.

"Well actually… if you wouldn't mind…." Nick started, getting suddenly nervous as he broke eye contact, "I was hoping you would come with me, you know… for support, but if you don't want to, I completely understand."

Judy smiled as she felt her heart swell, "Of course I'll come with you Nick, I'll stay by your side as long as you need."

Nick, feeling his throat tighten decided to not say another word, instead he simply took Judy by the paw and slowly lead her outside, a solemn and comfortable silence falling over the pair.

As Nick and Judy walked the halls of the burrow their pace unhurried as they made their way outside both mammals were consumed with their own thoughts, Nick's thoughts were completely consumed with the impending conversation, which exactly what you'd expect. As for Judy one would think her mind would be consumed with either her recent encounters with her family or worry for Nick, and while both those things were on her mind her current train of thought was entirely focused on how much progress this was.

I can't believe he wants me to be there while he talks to his sister for the first time in years. THIS IS
FANTASTIC! He's starting to let me in, plus he grab my paw for once and he still hasn't let go. Judy looked up at Nick, a big smile on her face only for it to be replaced with a worried expression. Nick was tense, his expression was anxious and his grip on Judy's paw was shaky.

I shouldn't be thinking about this right now. Judy scolded herself, Nick needs me and I'm going to help him however I can. Judy thought as she squeezed Nick's paw reassuringly.

Eventually the two made their way outside and over to the old oak tree they had found themselves under the first night they'd arrived at the burrow. So under that towering oak Nick took his phone from his pocket and pulled up the number he'd saved weeks ago.

"You've got this Nick." Judy said encouragingly as Nick hit the call button and squeezed her paw and brought the phone up to his ear.

BBBRRRRIIIIINNNNGGGGG…

The sound of the ringing was deafening in Nick's ears as his heart started pounding and his agonizing wait began.

BBBRRRRIIIIINNNNGGGGG…

Maybe this isn't such a good idea. Nick thought as time seemed to slow.

BBBRRRRIIIIINNNNGGGGG…

I'll just call another time, this can wait another few hours… or days, maybe even a few weeks wouldn't hurt.

BBBRRRRIIIIINNNNGGGGG…

His mind made up to call again another time Nick started to pull the phone away from his ear only to be stopped as he heard Hannah's voice come from the other end.

"Hello Brother…"

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all. Also If for some reason you don't want to comment but still want to suggest something or talk to me personally don't hesitate to PM me, I'll respond when I have time.

Song Suggestion for this chapter is: Ain't No Rest for the Wicked By Cage The Elephant - It's a great song. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBgp5aDH23g

I'll keep suggesting Music forever, feel free to ignore it or tell me what you thought of the song, also if you have a favorite song suggest it to me, music is a great thing that you can never have too much of.

Lastly my Editor had some words for you all.
(Editor's Note)

I'm so happy to help bring this story to you. I, like many of you, have been hooked by this story from the beginning and have enjoyed the journey of our fox and bunny heroes, told from another prospective. Hang in there, cause this story is about to get a lot better!

So, welcome one of our favorite authors back from abroad and tell him how great this chapter is. Because comments are the life's blood of authors and gives us the courage to keep writing.
Chapter 20 - Sorry

Chapter Summary

The Final Chapter in bunnyburrow, Nick talks to his sister and a few other unexpected people, read on to find out more.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 20, I know it's been a month and I apologize for that, after posting the last chapter I was beat, working for almost 4 months going almost 24/7 with very few breaks do a real number on you and because of that I spent a week or two doing nothing but laying in bed and resting. That said I pulled myself together to bring you this chapter, it's on the shorter side but I hope you enjoy it.

As Always I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails,

and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

and welcoming a new guy to the crew, another editor (I'm moving up in the world)
- Toren6000

AN: Thanks as always to my other editor SaberGatomon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
"Hello Brother...."

As Nick opened his mouth to speak, he found that his ability to form words had suddenly abandoned him in face of the sister he hadn't spoken to in years.

After a few seconds of silence Nick managed to choke out a measly, "Hey Hannah," before falling back into silence.

"Hey Hannah... really, that's all you have to say to me after twelve years?!" Hannah asked angrily, causing Nick to recoil at the scorn in her voice.

"H-how are you doing?" Nick asked weakly, not knowing what to say.

"No,"

"I-I'm sorry," Nick said, still unsure exactly what his sister wanted from him.

"Damn right you are, do you have any idea how much of our lives you've missed out on, I wouldn't even know where to start! You're basically a stranger with the same last name, Nick!"

Nick's stomach dropped. Hannah was, of course, justifiably angry, and while what she said hurt immensely, Nick found he couldn't refute her in the slightest. As Nick listened to his sister scold him and his shoulders slumped in defeat, he felt a comforting pressure grip his paw.

"You've got this, Nick." Judy whispered encouragingly as she gave his paw another squeeze.

"Thanks Fluff," Nick mouthed with a small smile.

"I know Hannah, and I'm sorry it ended up like this," Nick said as he turned his focus back to the conversation at hand.

"You just left Nick. You walked right out of our lives and disappeared; we didn't even know if you were dead or alive! I just don't know if sorry is going to cut it," Hannah shot back.

"I mean who does that!? Just run away from a loving family, especially when we had already lost Mom! We searched for you for months, every back alley and abandoned building in the neighborhood until eventually Dad said it was time to move on. So we left Zootopia and I thought I'd never see you again, and every time I talked to Dad about it, he would just keep insisting you were fine and you'd just come back when you were ready, but I really thought you had died." Hannah was almost crying at this point, her barely contained sobbing heard clearly through the phone. Nick could hear it all and it broke his heart.

"Hannah... I don't know what to say. I really am sorry, and I know it's not nearly good enough, but I promise you I do genuinely regret what happened." Nick said, the pit in his stomach growing with every passing second.

"Do you Nick? If I hadn't seen you on the news and started looking for you, would you have called me? Would you have even tried to find out where I was?" Hannah asked accusingly as she started collecting herself again.

"No; No, I don't think I would have, at least not for a few more years anyway," Nick said honestly,
"But it wasn't because I didn't want to be a part of your lives again! I just didn't think I had a right to be; not after all I did."

"I see," Hannah said coldly, "Well I'm not going to lie and say I'm not angry or upset, Nick, because I definitely am, but I would never turn you away if you came back into my life and I know Dad would say the same thing."

Nick let out a sigh of relief. Well, that's one weight off my shoulder, but this pit in my stomach isn't going away just yet.

"But Nick, this isn't something that can be forgiven overnight,"

*There it is,* Nick thought as he continued to listen to his sister.

"Both you and Mike just left me alone! You disappeared and never came back, and Mike moved away and never answers when I try and call him! He might as well have disappeared too, since I only know he's ok because he's always posting pictures of what he's doing on Muzzlebook."

Hearing this caused Nick to roll his eyes. That sounds just like him. Irresponsible and caring only for himself, just like he was when we were younger… but then again, who am I to judge.

"It always felt like I was being punished somehow; I mean, not only did I lose Mom, but both my brothers as well! No matter how hard I try I just keep losing people and it's not fair," Hannah said as her voice broke, causing Nick's heart to break with it.

Nick could hear his sister start to cry on the other side of the phone and it only broke his heart more since he knew he was at least partially at fault for her pain.

Nick had no idea what to say to his now crying sister having never been good with dealing with emotional situations. Nick's normal reaction to other people's emotions was to stay far away from them, but now he knew he had no choice.

"It's alright Hannah…. I-I'm here now and I'm not disappearing again," Nick promised awkwardly.

"Please… there's, uhh… there's no need to cry. I can't begin to try and make up for the years I've missed out on, but if you ever need anything, I promise I'll be here to help."

"We'll see about that," Hannah said after taking a minute to get a hold of herself.

"Maybe we should talk about something else," Nick suggested, hoping to move on and prevent anymore crying.

"That might be for the best. So tell me, what you have been up to for the last twelve years? And why did you finally decide to call me back?"

"Well, the reason I finally called back to you was because a good friend of mine found out about the situation and set me straight," Nick said as he looked down at Judy, sending her a soft smile that sent her heart aflutter.

"If she hadn't stepped in, I probably wouldn't have mustered up the courage for another few weeks at least. As for what I've been up to… Oh, you know… wake up, work, sleep, repeat, that sort of thing. I never have time for anything else," Nick answered awkwardly, deciding it would be best if Hannah didn't know about his past dealings.

"I see. Well, I'll have to give your friend my thanks if I ever get the chance."
"I'm sure you two will meet at some point. Now enough about me, tell me about how you, Dad, and my Nephew have been," Nick said quickly, hoping Hannah would take the bait and talk about her life and not focus on the fact he hadn't told her anything about his.

"Well, Jackson is six and an only kit, he's super cute and so kind, I love him to pieces," Hannah said, her tone noticeably lighter as she spoke of her child.

"He's super smart too; he likes to read and build and play, he's started kindergarten not too long ago, and while he didn't like it at first, he's made friends so fast. Now, he can't wait to go!" As Hannah continued to gush over her baby boy Nick made sure to listen attentively, asking questions and making sure to remember everything important, and as the conversation topics switched Nick made sure to keep his sister talking, getting as much information as possible about her job, her friends, her life and anything else of interest until he finally decided to ask the question he'd been dying to know the answer to.

"So, how's Dad been? Is he still working too hard?" Nick asked, curious to get some firsthand information about his dad.

"Yes he is, but that's just the type of mammal he's always been, he actually works for a real business though, unlike the odd jobs he worked when we were kits."

"That's great," Nick said enthusiastically, "I'm surprised they hired a fox though."

"Well Foxborough has a large fox population, hence the name. Because of that it's an easier place for a fox to find a job than Zootopia," Hannah explained, her tone shifting and becoming slightly nervous. "I'm sure if you moved here you'd be able to find work too, and you could live with me and Jackson till you found your own place,"

"I'm fine where I am Hannah. But I appreciate the offer," Nick said firmly, not wanting to even entertain the thought.

Hannah sighed, "I thought you might say that Nick. Well, that's your decision, but you better come visit, at least!"

"I will Hannah. I can't say when since I'm pretty busy, but I will make time to come and meet my nephew."

"Good! And you better call Dad, too," Hannah added sternly.

Nick froze, he'd rather face a hundred savage jaguars than have a conversation with his dad after so long. Nick could just picture the disappointment and sadness in his father's voice, and it caused his heart to start pounding uncontrollably.

"I-I, ah, I might have to take a rain check on that one Hannah, and before you say anything let me explain," Nick said quickly cutting off Hannah's protest, "I think that when I talk to Dad it'll need to be face to face; a phone call like this won't cut it."

"I guess that makes sense. Just don't take too long, ok? I think we've all waited long enough," Hannah said as a voice in the background called out.

"Mamma, I'm hung'yi!"

"Alright sweetie, Mommy will get started on dinner right now," Hannah said, her tone becoming soft and motherly.
"Nick I have to go, Jack needs to eat and get ready for bed but I'll call you again so you better pick up," Hannah said lightheartedly.

Nick smiled, "I can't guarantee I'll pick up, but I promise I'll call you back when I can."

So after saying a quick goodbye, Hannah hung up, leaving Nick to collect his thoughts. After a few minutes of silence, Nick heard someone clear their throat and he remembered he was not alone. Looking over at the beautiful bunny still holding his paw, Nick smiled at the anxious expression on her face.

"So… how did it go?" Judy asked cautiously.

"Well, it could have gone worse. She did forgive me, but we have a long way to go before we're back to being regular siblings again," Nick explained, his tone hopeful.

"Don't you worry, Nick; everything will work out fine because this is something you both want, and no matter how many times you might mess up and stray from the path, I'll be by your side and set you straight again," Judy said, punching Nick's arm lightly with a smile on her face.

*I know she wouldn't want me to say it, but she is so incredibly cute! It's almost too much to handle,* Nick thought to himself, as Judy's words sank in.

"Well, thanks Fluff, I can rest easy knowing Officer Toot-Toot is on the case," Nick joked, earning himself another punch from Judy.

"You better believe it Slick; you'll be on the straight and narrow before you know it! Speaking of which, why didn't you tell your sister you're gonna be a cop?"

"Oh… that." Nick sad as he scratched the back of his neck nervously, "Well, for one, I don't know how well she'd take the news considering foxes don't typically like the police. I also don't want to jinx it since nothing is set in stone until I graduate the academy."

"Nick, you big dummy; worrying about nothing, as usual" Judy said playfully.

"Hey, that is a perfectly valid concern," Nick said defensively.

"Is your concern perfectly valid?" Judy asked rhetorically. "No. No, it is not, because your sister would definitely be amazed that you're going to be the first fox cop in ZPD history," Judy explained proudly.

"Besides, you failing isn't even a possibility," Judy said matter of factly.

"Yeah, and why is that, o wise bunny?" Nick asked teasingly.

"Because Nick," Judy said, pausing a moment to look Nick directly in the eye, "I need a partner, and there's no other mammal I'd want by my side. And since you're my best friend, I know you wouldn't let some substandard mammal watch my back. Thus, you have no choice but to pass and join me in the never ending fight to make the world a better place."

"Way to pile on the pressure, Fluff," Nick said as he looked away trying to hide his embarrassment.

"I only do it because I know you can handle it. Now, if you want to have dinner, we better hurry inside," Judy said as she turned to lead Nick back to the house, only to find he wouldn't budge.

"Hold on, Judy."
"What's wrong, Nick?" Judy asked, concerned by the somber tone in Nick's voice.

"I was just wondering if you could give me some time alone," Nick asked as he looked up at the sky, his tone soft and distant.

Instead of getting a reply he just felt Judy squeeze his paw tighter as if she was scared he would run away.

"Nick, what's wrong?" Judy asked again sternly.

Looking up at Judy, Nick saw the concern and determination in her eyes and just smiled, I don't deserve her in the slightest.

"It's nothing, Judy. I just need some time to process everything, and to do that, I'll be spending a lot of time inside my own head, so I wanted to be alone for a bit," Nick clarified, taking care to properly explain so Judy wouldn't misunderstand.

"I promise you it's nothing more than that. Plus, I'm sure you want to say goodbye to your family. So, while you do that, I can hang out here and sort through my thoughts. Just don't forget to come get me before you leave," Nick joked, trying to lighten the mood a little.

Judy just stared at him for a moment pinning him with her piercing gaze until, like the flip of a switch, her demeanor changed.

"Sure Nick, I understand. Take all the time you need and I'll come get you when I've found someone to drive us to the station," Judy said, returning to her normal chipper self.

"Thanks Fluff," Nick said as Judy turned to walk back to the house.

As Nick watched her go, all he could think about was how utterly amazing Judy was. How, in the few short months he'd known her, she had turned his life on its head. And I couldn't be more thankful to have her in my life, Nick thought to himself as he sat down against the big oak tree.

Ten Minutes Later...

True to his word Nick had been sorting out and going over everything that had happened, not only in the past hour, but also the weekend as a whole. But, as he continued to work through it all, a sound from behind him snapped him back into reality.

I doubt that's Judy already, plus the steps are too heavy to be hers, Nick thought to himself as he prepared for whomever was approaching.

After a few tense seconds the mammal finally came into view, and to Nick's surprise it was Stu, who had been missing all weekend that appeared before him.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Hopps," Nick said as he scrambled to stand and extend a paw in greeting.

But as Nick waited, paw outstretched for some form of greeting Stu just stood there, silent as he stared at Nick.

"I guess not then," Nick mumbled as he brought his paw back to his side, waiting for Stu to speak, and after a few more seconds he finally did.

"I've been watching you this weekend," Stu said flatly his eyes locked on Nicks.

What the hell, who just comes out and says that! Well, it's not like I've done anything wrong, Nick
thought angrily as he quickly went over the events of the past few days in his head. Ok, as long as he didn't see me lose control at Gideon's bakery or hear my deal with Aaron, I should have nothing to be concerned about.

"Why?" Nick asked, deciding that worrying wouldn't get him anywhere.

"I didn't trust you," Stu said bluntly, but before Nick could say anything Stu held up a paw, "Let me finish, I didn't trust you and for good reason. The first time I met you, someone attacked you and from the way you talked to him, you two clearly knew each other.

Nick stayed silent as Stu continued, his reasons making more sense the longer he talked.

Stu, no longer able to stand still started pacing, "I didn't know why Judy and Bonnie trusted you so much. I mean, after that attack you lied about knowing the mammal and then when asked about your family and past, you seemed to be purposely vague about the details, like you were hiding something. So when I found out you were coming to visit, I decided to watch you as much as I could."

"And what did you find out?" Nick asked, his tone flat as his mask fell comfortably back into place.

"That I owe you an apology," Stu said as he stopped and turned towards Nick again.

Nick was completely stunned, so much so that the mask that had just fallen into place came crashing to the ground, leaving Nick slack jawed and wide eyed.

Seeing Nick was stunned silent, Stu continued, "You see Nick I watched as my children treated you so terribly, I watched as you bore the weight of their stares and whispers and I watched as you kept going, sticking around with a smile, always playing off the abuse and trying to get Judy to do the same. I see now that I was wrong; any normal mammal would have either struck back against such treatment or at least walked away, but you didn't. Instead you stayed by Judy's side and even managed to befriend Aaron, probably the most solitary of my grandkits."

Stu took in a deep breath before letting out an even bigger sigh. "I like to pride myself on being a good judge of character but I'm not too proud to admit my mistakes. I'm sorry Nick; I've treated you rather poorly and I hope you can find it in you to forgive this foolish old buck."

Nick was in complete shock but as Stu finished saying what he needed to say and stuck out his paw Nick didn't even have to think about what he was going to do next.

"It's water under the bridge, Mr. Hopps. I'm more than happy to forgive and forget," Nick said with a smile as he took Stu's paw and gave it a good shake.

"I'm relieved Nick, and I promise my kits will be dealt with and you should expect apologies from them too."

"No need for that, Mr. Hopps. I'd rather we just forget about everything," Nick offered, not wanting to cause more problems for the Hopps family.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that, Nick; you're a good friend to my Judy. And besides, as a father, I can't just let my kits get away with acting like that."

Nick sighed; he knew by the firm tone of Stu's voice that he wasn't going to change his mind.

"Alright, Mr. Hopps. If that's really what you want to do."
"It is, Nick. I would hate to see Judy lose a good friend over the actions of her siblings,"

"Trust me, Mr. Hopps, there's no chance of that. It would take a lot more than that to get in between our friendship." Nick added reassuringly.

"Well, that's good to hear. You and Judy seem quite close. Actually... I can't think any friend she's ever been as close to," Stu said questioningly.

"Oh... well, we've been through a lot together you know," Nick said awkwardly, not liking where this was going.

"You sure have, but you two seem to have a strange bond. I mean, I've never seen a fox and bunny get along so well or be so comfortable around one another! I mean, you're even sharing an apartment!"

"I-I don't think it's that unusual," Nick stammered.

"Don't lie to me, Nick." Stu admonished firmly. Then he asked something that made Nick's heart pound so hard he thought it'd burst.

"What is Judy to you?"

The night was suddenly eerily silent as Nick thought about his next move. It would be easy to lie; Nick had been doing it all his life and he was certain he could get away with it, but as Nick thought long and hard about what he was going to say a feeling of fatigue suddenly overtook him. Maybe it was the fact he'd just spoken to his sister and his defenses were down, or maybe Nick was just sick of lying, having done it so much in his life, or maybe subconsciously Nick just really wanted to open up. No matter what the cause Nick started speaking, unable to stop himself.

"I'm not sure how I'd describe it, Mr. Hopps," Nick said slowly as he tried to figure out the best way to explain himself.

"Well, using a metaphor, you might understand better. My life was like a field," Nick said, his voice taking on a sad and weary tone as he looked out at the cloudy night sky.

"At first the field was green and growing, so full of potential and life but as if overnight the once green and thriving field disappeared and was replaced with nothing but an ugly weed ridden patch of dirt, and for a long time I continued to walk along this field, thorns and pieces of broken glass cutting into my paws." As Stu listened to Nick's description of his life Stu felt his throat tighten as a wave of sorrow overtook him.

"Until one day I found a flower, a sturdy, strong-willed and beautiful, violet flower. This flower leaned towards me and changed my point of view and my life forever. It's been hard having to pull the weeds and plant the seeds of a better future, but I'm not doing it alone anymore. With that flower to remind me, things are starting to change for the better and my field has started to grow properly again and I'm finally starting to be content with my life. All of this, because of that beautiful, strong little amethyst flower."

Stu, silently holding his breath, looked on as this fox, who had seemed so cocky and sure of himself, suddenly looked so fragile. The tired, beaten down look in the fox's eyes along with the intense emotion in his voice showed Stu this wasn't just an act, but something that had been weighing on the fox for some time.

"If some day that flower was to start to wither and die or suffer in any way because of its place in my life I would not hesitate to walk away from it and let it grow in peace, because no matter how happy
I've become I would never sacrifice something so beautiful to achieve it." As Nick said this he turned to Stu, his eyes taking on a serious glare, "Mr. Hopps, I'm sure you already know that Judy is that flower, she's saved me in more ways than I think she'll ever know, and I would risk everything to protect her and I would never do anything to hurt her. So, no matter what the future holds as long as she wants me as her friend and I'm not causing her trouble, I'll be by her side."

Stu swallowed hard thinking to himself, *this is love, plain and simple. No matter what he might say, this fox is in love with my daughter, and as much as I want to chase him away, pitchfork in one paw and a shotgun in the other, I can't seem to find it in myself to do it.*

"Nick," Stu said solemnly as he walked over and placed a paw gently on the fox's arm, "I have two things I'd like to say to you and I need you to hear me out. Can you do that?"

Nick was frozen in place as he felt Stu's paw on his arm, and all he could do was gulp as his thoughts raced to try and predict what the older buck was going to say.

"S-sure," Nick said, his voice full of concern despite his efforts to remain calm.

"First things first, I can tell you've been through a lot; life's rarely easy for anyone, it kicks and shoves everyone from time to time just because it can, but it seems to have hit you a bit harder than most. While I'm sure you want to keep your secrets and I'm probably the last mammal you'd want to share with, if you ever need an ear, I still have two good ones…"

"… at least for a few more years anyway." Stu added with a chuckle as he scratched at the back of his head.

"Thanks Mr. Hopps," Nick said as he turned to look at the sky once more, suddenly feeling a little choked up.

"Think nothing of it Nick, and we're not strangers so feel free to call me Stu. Now, the other thing say is more of a request, something I need to ask of you male to male, and it's no small favor…" Stu said before trailing off.

Nick turned to Stu, curious as to why he'd stopped speaking, and as Nick looked down at the old rabbit, he could see the conflict in the buck's mind as it played like a movie across his face.

"Mr. Ho- Stu, are you alright?" Nick asked softly as he quickly caught his slip up.

"I am son, It's just a hard thing for a father to ask of someone else, but I think you're the only mammal I can trust with this Nick," Stu said, his voice taking on a serious tone, a tone full of so many different and seemingly conflicting emotions that Nick was completely drawn in, entirely focused on whatever was coming next.

"Nick, I want you to protect Judy. I know you've told me you would, but I felt that as her father I needed to ask you myself. I know she's a tough doe, and she can handle herself better than most mammals, but as a father, I worry despite myself. So, knowing that someone like you, who cares so much for her, is by her side will put me at ease. I know you've already done so before and you have my deepest thanks for that, and I regret not thanking you much sooner for all you've done for her, but I couldn't see past my own bias before. I was hardheaded, and it was wrong of me, and I know it's selfish for me to ask this considering how I've treated you, but as one male asking another, will you help and protect my daughter from whatever life tries to throw at her?" Having said his peace Stu stood there waiting, and Nick could see the tension in Stu's body building as he waited for Nick's reply.
"Stu, I appreciate everything you've said tonight, it means a lot to me and I want to say that I meant what I said before. I'm willing to let everything that happened in the past stay there. I promise I will do everything in my power to keep Judy safe, but it's ultimately up to her. If she wants to keep me around then I'll gladly be there, but if not... I'll still do my best to watch out for her. You have my word."

"Thank you, Nick," Stu said relieved as the tension slowly left his body, "You have no idea how hard it is for a father to admit he can no longer take care of one of his children. It's something you'd figure I'd be used to by now, especially with Judy, since she's been stronger than me for a long time now, but it never gets any easier."

"Now if you'll excuse me I gotta get my little ones to bed. I'm gonna hold you to your promise Nick, and I hope you'll come back soon," Stu said before heading inside.

Alone once more Nick went back to his silent reflections, with Stu's request now taking up most of his thoughts, until a few minutes later Judy returned.

"Hey Slick, it's time to go," Judy said as she offered a paw to help Nick up.

"Thanks Fluff," Nick said, dusting himself off, "So, you got us a ride?"

"Yeah; surprisingly, my Mom offered to drive us," Judy explained as the two started walking to the parking lot.

"That's nice of her. Oh, I forgot I need to go grab my bag, I'll be right back,"

But before Nick could run into the house Judy grabbed his paw stopping him.

"I grabbed your stuff and put it in the truck already," Judy said as she kept her grip on his paw, leading him along until they finally reached the truck and got inside.

Bonnie was already in the truck as Nick and Judy climbed inside, and Nick could tell with one look at Bonnie that she was pissed. As soon as Nick had closed the door, Bonnie started the truck and drove off without a word.

"Pssssttt... Psssstttt... Judy," Nick whispered, keeping his voice as low as possible while bringing his muzzle right next to Judy's ear.

"What Nick?" Judy whispered back.

"Did you tell your Mom about what happened with the kits? Because she seems really angry and I can't think of any reason other than that."

"She didn't have to tell me." Bonnie said sharply, causing both Nick and Judy to jolt up in their seats.

"How did you already find out Mom?" Judy asked, shocked the news had reached the Hopps matriarch so soon.

"Well, as you know news travels fast in this burrow, even if you don't roar at the top of your lungs and scare more than half the adults in the burrow, Judith." Bonnie said sternly.

Nick could feel Judy shrink into him slightly and he didn't blame her; Bonnie seemed as much of a force to be reckoned with as Judy, if not more so. So being on the receiving end of her anger was not something Nick wanted to experience firsthand.
"I'm not apologizing! I wasn't in the wrong." Judy said defiantly while still sliding closer and closer to Nick.

Nick's shock was written all over his face, not only was Judy able to speak in front of such an imposing figure, she wasn't even backing down, managing to hold her metaphorical ground, even as she retreated physically.

"Oh really?" Bonnie said curiously, one eyebrow raised.

"Yes Mom. What they did was completely unacceptable," Judy said firmly as she prepared herself for the coming argument.

"I completely agree."

"They had no right to treat Nick like… Wait, what did you just say?" Judy asked as Bonnie's expression changed from anger to amusement.

"I said I agree with you Judy. While you could have gone about it in a better way, you were not wrong, and along with you scaring the cotton out of your siblings tails, I will be punishing them severely." Bonnie explained, a hard gleam in her eye.

"What are you going to do to them, Mrs. Hopps?" Nick asked, suddenly worried for the poor bunnies.

"I thought I told you to call me Bonnie, Nick. As for what I'm going to do to them, I'm going to make them go camping," Bonnie said with a smile.

"Aaaanmnnddd….?" Judy said, knowing there had to be more to this punishment.

"And that's pretty much it, they'll be living outside for the next week only having bread, water, timothy hay, and anything they can find in the forest. They will still have to work of course, but instead of working in the fields they'll be cleaning out the warehouses."

Judy gasped, "That's usually something we do as a family, and even then it takes a day and a half to finish,"

"It was something that needed to get done anyway, but now instead of the whole family doing it, it'll just be them, and after the workday they will go back to the forest, they'll only be allowed the clothes on their backs, one sleeping bag each, and no technology or entertainment of any kind. They also won't be able to see their kits during this time either." The further Bonnie explained the punishment, the bigger Judy's smile got.

"That's perfect, how did you think of something like this?" Judy asked gleefully. This really was an almost perfect punishment since the nights were sure to still be long and cold despite it already being spring.

"Oh, I have learned lots of creative ways to punish my kits. I picked this one because mistrusting and mistreating others because of their species is something that should stay in the dark ages, so if that's how they want to act, then they can live like they're in the dark ages. I also told them all to write an apology letter to Nick, making sure they explain why what they did was wrong, and anyone whose letter is unsatisfactory will spend another week outside," Bonnie said cheerfully.

"Mom, you are terrifying," Judy said in between bits of laughter.

"I know, keep that in mind before you try and pull one over on me," Bonnie warned causing Judy to
gulp as she remembered her own lie.

"That goes for you too, Mr. Wilde. You might not be my kit, but I'm still not a bunny to be trifled with."

"Noted," Nick said as he suppressed a shiver.

"But aren't you being a little too harsh on them?" Nick asked, recoiling a bit at both Judy and Bonnie shooting him identical glares. "I mean what if it rains or someone gets hurt, plus they could easily get someone to bring them stuff, honestly I think it would be better."

"Don't finish that sentence Mr. Wilde," Bonnie said sternly taking her eyes off the road to shoot him another glare.

"But-"

"Don't Nick, nobody would dare defy a direct order from my parents especially not someone who still lives at home," Judy explained.

"And as for your concerns about their safety…. I already had some of my better-behaved kits set up the area they'll be sleeping in; it comes with a canopy to keep out the rain, and they'll be given radios in case of emergency. It's not exactly the first time the Hopps's have gone camping, Nick." Bonnie said, finishing the explanation. "Now I don't want to hear another word of letting them off easy, understood?"

"Understood," Nick said defeatedly.

"Wonderful! Now tell me, what did you think of the farm?" Bonnie asked cheerily, her tone and body language returning to normal and with it the tone of the entire car ride changed. The rest of the ride was spent pleasantly chatting about Nick's time on the farm until after what seemed like only a few minutes later they pulled into the station parking lot.

"Thanks for everything, Bonnie. You have a really lovely home," Nick said as the train entered the station.

"Mr. Wilde, I appreciate you saying that, but I know your time here was less than ideal and I promise the next time you visit will be better, so don't hesitate to come back."

"Please, call me Nick, and while I graciously accept your offer it might take a while before I can come back, police training and all," Nick said, not wanting Bonnie to feel like there was any hard feelings.

"Alright Nick, and please take good care of Judy. Make sure she's not getting into too much trouble, if you do I promise to send you blueberries every month," Bonnie said, getting Nick to smile while Judy groaned.

"Mom, please don't start this again, I'm a grown doe who can take care of herself, plus I don't need to deal with a fox with an inflated ego,"

Bonnie just smiled, "I know dear, but I worry…"

"Well, Bonnie, if you're willing to pay my fee of blueberries then I guess I can be persuaded to become Judy's personal body guard," Nick said with an even wider smile.

"Oh, great, he's never going to let this go," Judy groaned.
"It's a deal Nick," Bonnie said, going in for a pawshake to seal the deal which Nick took up eagerly.

"This is going to be such a pain in the tail," Judy whispered to herself as she watched her Mom and Nick shake paws.

"Judy, stop mumbling to yourself and come say goodbye," Bonnie scolded.

"Coming."

So after a heartfelt goodbye Nick and Judy headed over to the train doors, Nick made sure to bow and allow Judy to enter first mentioning that he'd already checked the train for hostiles and explosive devices, earning a small giggle and a light punch from Judy. And as Bonnie watched the two, waving until the train was out of sight, she still couldn't shake the feeling there was something more between them.

"I guess I'll have to do some digging; even if it's a wild goose chase, I shouldn't ignore my motherly instincts," Bonnie said to herself as she headed back to the parking lot.

One (Too Short) Train Ride Later...

Nick and Judy spent the entirety of the train ride to the ZPA station pleasantly chatting between themselves, completely ignoring the rest of the world as they tried to squeeze in as much as they could before they had to say goodbye. Had they been paying attention to anything outside of their conversation, they would have noticed the looks of disdain and the harsh whispered words directed their way as the other passengers took note of how close the very friendly fox and bunny were sitting despite there being ample space in the cabin.

So as the train came to a screeching halt and the doors opened onto the platform, Nick and Judy said their final goodbyes, with Judy promising to visit Nick sometime at the academy and Nick promising to call her every once and a while. As Nick turned to walk out the door, he was unsurprised to find Judy's grip on his paw hadn't let up, so to the shock of both Judy, the voices in his head, and even Nick himself, Nick pulled Judy into a deep long hug which she melted into without protest.

"I'm going to miss you... so, so much" Nick whispered into Judy's ear before quickly letting her go and running off the train, leaving Judy stunned and wondering why Nick ran off without letting her say anything back to him as the train pulled away from the station.

A Long (Not Long Enough) Walk Later...

Nick had decided to walk back to the ZPA instead of catching a cab, figuring he could use that time to clear his head and prepare himself for the coming week of training. But as Nick tried to focus on the week ahead his thoughts kept getting pulled back into the events of the weekend, his loss of control with Gideon, his conversation with Hannah, and his promise to Stu, these three things weighed heavily on Nick's mind.

But as Nick approached the gates to the ZPA those worries were pushed from his mind as Nick caught a glimpse of Tom and a group of fellow cadets joking and laughing together as they entered the dorms. As soon as Nick caught sight of the brown wolf, the memories of the muzzle problem and his current strained relationship with Tom came flooding back.

"Out of the frying pan and into the fire," Nick said to himself as he wondered why exactly he seemed to be unable to catch a break.

"I think I do owe Tom an apology, he's been nothing but nice to me and if I can I'd like to fix our friendship," with that said Nick steeled his resolve and continued on his way to the dorms determined
to make things right with Tom.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all. Also If for some reason you don't want to comment but still want to suggest something or talk to me personally don't hesitate to PM me, I'll respond when I have time.

Song Suggestion for this chapter is: Closing Time By SemiSonic (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=da9p24bJCJ0)- It's a great song.

Also Nick's "Metaphor" in this chapter was inspired by the song The Good Left Undone by Rise Against (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26htBnf2f2o) Also a great song you could check out.

I'll keep suggesting Music forever, feel free to ignore it or tell me what you thought of the song, also if you have a favorite song suggest it to me, music is a great thing that you can never have too much of.

Lastly LakesideMiners had some words for you all.

Hello everyone, it is me, LakesideMiners, I would like to make a bit of an announcement, this is about a member of the furry fandom we have recently lost.

In March of 2018, Dogbomb(Tony Barrett) was diagnosed with ALS and was told he would have one to three years to live. Despite this, he remained active and participated in a trial to try to stop the disease. It sadly failed as you can see, but there is a good side to this. While he was living out his life after he was diagnosed, with the help of the furry fandom, raised over ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS! And that was only from one fundraiser!

But on March 29, 2019, he made the decision he would end his life on April 5 though euthanasia knowing that he did not have much time left. And on April 5th at 3:00 PM he Tweeted for the last time (https://twitter.com/dogbomb1/status/1114286592737210368) "Dogbomb has left the building. I love all y'all!" So, I would like to request that you help make his wish that we will find a cure for ALS come true. He loved doing fundraisers. So please, if at all possible, PLEASE donate to and help make this come true.

Good Night Dogbomb, may the best good boi rest in peace.
Chapter 21 – Et tu, Judy?

Chapter Summary

It's a Judy only chapter for what that's worth, get reading already.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone welcome to Chapter 21, This chapter is a Judy chapter and it was rather difficult to write and took wayyyyy too long, but it's here now for you and I can hopefully get another chapter out in a more timely manner. I'm glad most of you liked the field metaphor and got some emotional response from it, I wasn't sure how it was going to be received but when inspiration strikes what can you do but let it happen.

A note for this chapter - I in the past have used "Zollars" as the currency for the story. It has come to my attention that they did use Dollars in the movie, so from now on I will also use Dollars, and I will go back in my story and change Zollars to Dollars to fix my little mistake.

Another Note is that I'm using NYPD police codes since I have used the NYPD as a template for the ZPD in this story, that's why I used their codes as opposed to the "10 police codes" other stories use so that's where the 10-63 comes from

As Always I have two people to thank for adding some ideas for this chapter and making it significantly better, so give thanks to

Anteroinen - He catches plot holes and adds logic when I go off the rails, and

LakesideMiners - He gives me helpful and fun suggestions

AN: Thanks as always to my other editor's SaberGatomon and Toren6000.

One Last thing before I go. I know that the start of my story is lacking in many aspects and I have thought about re-doing it a few times but I didn't because I wanted to keep it as a marker of progress. But I wanted to ask you, the readers what you think, it would take some time and might delay future chapters but it would make it better for new readers and re-readers. Let me know your thoughts in the comments. Now please enjoy chapter 21.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 21 – Et tu, Judy?

Precinct 1 Lobby, Savannah Central, Monday Morning, 8:00am

The lobby of Precinct 1 was bustling as usual, Cops and civilians filling the massive space as they went about their business. Some wore expressions of indifference, some were angry or sad and some were even laughing and smiling, but one mammal's expression stood out. It was Judy who entered the building with a huge smile on her face and a skip in her step that was noticed by everyone in the building. As Judy walked up to the front desk, she made sure to greet everyone she passed and was surprised to see that almost everyone responded with a smile and a greeting of their own.

"Good morning Clawhauser." Judy greeted happily as she approached the front desk where the pudgy cheetah was happily munching on some cereal.

"Oh, good morning Judy, you seem extra peppy this morning." Clawhauser greeted her, food still in his mouth.

"It's just another great day for making the world a better place. Plus, everyone is greeting me back now, unlike my first week." Judy replied, as she gave a wave to Fangmeyer who was passing by.

"Well, you changed a lot of mammals minds when you solved two of the biggest cases in ZPD history."

"I didn't really do all that much. Plus, I wasn't alone." Judy said dismissively.

Clawhauser just smiled, this was what Judy always said when asked about the case, before going into great detail explaining how much Nick, her fox friend, had helped.

"Say what you will Judy, but you gained a lot of respect because of that. So, how was your weekend?" Clawhauser asked, not wanting Judy to go off like she normally did.

"Oh, my weekend was fine; I went home to visit my family." Judy said as her already bright smile got even brighter. "I even brought Nick along to show him around!"

"That sounds like fun, I bet he loved that. I remember taking every chance I could to get away from the academy grounds," Clawhauser said, managing to keep a straight face despite the massive squeal echoing across his mind. *EEEEHHHHHHHHH. Oh Em Goodness, I can't believe she took him home to meet her family, they're totally dating.*

"Yeah, it was great! I showed him the town and the farm, he got to meet my family and play with some of the kits, they even got along really well." Judy explained with a smile, deciding to omit the less happy details of the trip.

"Sounds like fun, I'm glad you and Nick got to spend some time together. I know you were missing him quite a bit." Clawhauser said slyly.
"Well, he is my best friend." Judy said dismissively, hoping the gossipy cheetah wouldn't get any ideas.

"Now I gotta get going or else I'll be late to roll call. See ya' later, Clawhauser!"

"Bye Judy!" Clawhauser yelled to her retreating form.

As Judy disappeared around the corner and out of sight Clawhauser quickly pulled out his phone and frantically started typing out a message to Wolford and Fangmeyer.

Clawhauser: OMG guys I just found out some BIG news!

Wolford: Clawhauser I'm really not interested in a hearing about a new Gazelle song right now.

Fangmeyer: I'm at roll call, this better be good.

Clawhauser: Nonononononono guys this is about Nick and Judy, this weekend she took him home to meet her family!

Wolford: Wow, that is big. Looks like someone is going to win this bet : )

Fangmeyer: This is definitely interesting, but you haven't won anything yet Wolfie, this is only bad for those who bet against their possible relationship.

Clawhauser: I don't care who wins as long as they get together they are TOO CUTE! But remember the terms of the bet. Wolford's group wins if they are currently dating, Fangmeyer and her group wins if at least one of the two admits having feelings for the others, and the Nay-sayers win if neither of them have romantic interests in the other.

Fangmeyer: Yah yah yah, we remember. Now I need to put my phone away before Bogo shows up.

With the information dispersed Clawhauser put his phone down and went back to happily eating his cereal, his mind filled with thoughts of Gazelle, food, and how cute Nick and Judy would look as a couple.

The Bullpen minutes later…

As Judy entered the bullpen, she noticed it was as rowdy as ever, a tiger and a lion playing punch for punch, a group of wolves laughing at some unheard joke, and Officer Francine was playing keep away with a rhino and a polar bear, somehow managing to keep both at bay while holding their phones high above her head in her trunk.

As she walked along the row of oversized chairs and desks Judy was greeting Officers left and right, having finally managed to get everyone's names and faces down. After arriving at her unofficial assigned seat and effortlessly jumping onto it, Judy then took a minute to fire off one last text to Nick before the work day.

Judy: Hey Slick I know you're not going to need it but good luck today!

Judy didn't even have time to put her phone away before Nick had replied.

Nick: Thanks Fluff, be safe out there alright, I can't lose my inside source to the Hopps Family blueberries.

As Judy read the message she couldn't hold back a little giggle, I can't wait until he graduates then
we can joke in person instead of over the phone. Judy thought to herself as she pictured what it would be like, we’d probably share this chair, we’d get to sit right next to each other maybe a bit closer than mammals normally would, Judy mused, Nick would probably try and antagonize Bogo and get everyone to laugh even if it got him yelled at. Nick just needs to graduate already! Then we can ride around the city helping mammals and making the world a better place!

"Morning, Hopps." A booming voice greeted, breaking Judy from her daydream. It was Officer McHorn, the rhino who sat next to Judy, and to the rabbits surprise the normally stone-faced Officer was holding out his hoof for a fist bump.

"Ready to make the world a better place?" McHorn asked, the corner of his lips turned up in a slight smile which Judy happily mirrored.

"Good morning to you as well, Officer McHorn, and I was born ready." Judy replied as she bumped her tiny paw against his.

"Good."

"Good Morning to you as well Fangmeyer." Judy called out to the Tigress who seemed engrossed in her phone, hastily texting on her phone.

"Yeah…good morning Hopps." Fangmeyer replied absently.

"You should put the phone away before Bogo shows up," a Lion sitting behind Fangmeyer said as she continued texting away.

"Just a second…. Aaannd done." Fangmeyer said as she quickly slammed her finger down on the send button and threw her phone in her pocket as Higgins cried out.

"Atten-Hut!" and every mammal in the room began pounding on their desks, as Bogo approached the podium, assignments at the ready.

"Alright, Alright…. ENOUGH." Bogo roared, instantly quieting down the rowdy police mammals before passing out assignments to everyone until only Judy and Fangmeyer were left.

"Hopps you'll be on patrol with Officer Fangmeyer this week while Officer Wolford is on leave for Pack Week. Fangmeyer is one of our most experienced officers so I expect you to follow her lead and learn as much as you can." Bogo explained gruffly.

"Understood sir." Judy replied eagerly, giving a crisp salute which Bogo returned before walking back to his office.

"Welp, it looks like we'll be working together for the next week. I'm looking forward to learning from you." Judy said with a smile.

"Happy to have you along, Hopps. I'm sure we'll both learn a lot from each other. Now, let's get to the motor pool so we can get this patrol started." Fangmeyer said enthusiastically as she pulled out her phone and sent one last text.

Fangmeyer: I'm working with Judy this week, so we'll have an answer by the end of the workday Friday if not sooner.

Clawhauser: Ooohhh, good luck!

Wolford: Get ready to pay up then. I'll expect cash in my paw on Monday morning.
Savannah Central, Unnamed City Street, 12:30pm, Monday Afternoon

Judy and Fangmeyer had a relatively uneventful first half of the day; they drove around the city streets in search of crime but found nothing. As they drove, the two filled the empty hours with conversation; they talked about many things spanning a wide array of topics, everything from police work to personal matters. They discussed their weekends, Judy once again omitting the less pleasant details while Fangmeyer described the fascinating world of apartment decoration, complete with a tutorial on the best way to get dried paint out of one's fur. Eventually their discussion was interrupted by the low growling of Fangmeyer empty stomach.

"Well, it sounds like it's time for lunch," Fangmeyer joked as she picked up the cars radio.

"Dispatch, Car 113Z, request to go 10-63"

"Car 113Z this is Dispatch, you are cleared for a 30-minute lunch, enjoy your break," Clawhauser's gargled voice replied over the radio.

"Awesome, there's a fantastic sandwich shop a block away. They also do salads that I hear are pretty good, if that's ok with you." Fangmeyer said as she started the car letting the engine roar to life.

"Works for me, lucky we're close by," Judy commented as they pulled onto the street.

"Nothing lucky about it Judy, as cops we don't have much time to eat so a good trick is to be right next to the place where you want to eat. It also works to force your partner into eating where you want since there isn't much time to find a new place;"

"Oooohhh that's good, I'll have to remember that when Nick and I start working together;"

"Stick with me bunny and I'll show you all the tips and tricks to this job," Fangmeyer said with a chuckle.

After a minute of driving, a minute to find a spot, and another five minutes to order and get their food the two finally sat down and dug into their food, chatting pleasantly while they ate. Their lunch was interrupted however when a rabbit buck around the age of 24 approached their table.

"Good afternoon Officers, I'm sorry to bother you but I noticed that you're Judy Hopps, the first rabbit in the ZPD and I just had to come over and say hello." The buck said with a charming smile.

Judy gave the buck a quick once over, he was decent enough looking, reasonably fit for a bunny, all brown fur with a few white spots on his ears and wearing blue jeans and a black tee shirt. Here we go again, Judy thought with a sigh as she put on a smile of her own.

"Yep that's me, Judy Hopps. It's a pleasure to meet you mister…"

"Skipps, Josh Skipps, and the pleasure is all mine I assure you." The buck said as he stuck his paw out.

As Fangmeyer watched the two rabbits interact she could tell from Judy's body language that she was not interested in the slightest, but what Fangmeyer noticed right away seemed to fly right over Skipps head, and after five excruciatingly long minutes of attempted flirting Skipps finally made his move.

"So Judy, I'm sure your suuuuper busy with work and all, but I'd love to go out to dinner with you sometime-"
"As much as I'd like to, I don't know when I'd be free…" Judy said politely.

"I bet, I bet." Josh said dismissively, "Well here's my phone number, give me a call when you're free." Josh said confidently as he handed a slip of paper before strutting out the door.

"Yeah, no thank you." Judy said as she crumpled up the paper and tossed it into the trash.

"Well, that was interesting." Fangmeyer said after taking a long sip from her drink.

"It was awful, I know." Judy sighed. "And now I've completely lost my appetite." Judy said as she pushed away her mostly finished salad.

"I bet." Fangmeyer agreed as she finished her sandwich.

"But why didn't you give him a shot? He could have been a nice guy. I mean I don't know what bunnies find physically appealing, but he was at least confident enough to come talk to you so that's gotta count for something."

"Yeah, his confidence was definitely commendable, but he doesn't seem like the kind of guy I'd want to date." Judy said as she started spinning her straw around her cup.

"That may be true but you won't know for sure unless you try, I mean what's the harm? You're both young and single, and if the date ends poorly you both can part ways and ever see each other again." Fangmeyer reasoned.

"You sound like my mother, Fangmeyer," Judy joked, "I just don't want to waste my time on random bucks especially since they all end up wanting the same thing."

"Tell me about it Hopps; Males are all the same, no matter the species."

"It's more than that with bunny bucks though. If it was just sex it would be a bit more bearable but every relationship I've ever been in ended because the guy wanted me to give up on being a cop so I could stay home and start a family, and that's not something I was willing to give up on." Judy said frustratedly.

"I mean if I found the right guy I wouldn't mind eventually starting a family, but not right now or anytime in the near future." Judy continued, her tone getting softer as she looked off into the distance longingly and imagined what a family with Nick would be like; The small three-bedroom house in the suburbs, sitting on the couch together watching crime dramas, and even the pitter patter of little paws on hardwood floors…

"Ahem, Hopps." Fangmeyer said, clearing her throat and breaking Judy from her daydream.

"Oh, ah, sorry I spaced out a little, what were you saying?" Judy asked as she tried to hide her embarrassment and ignore the heat rising to her face and ears.

"I asked what the right guy would look like?"

"Excuse me?"

"Well, you said you'd settle down with the right guy, so I wanted to know what type of guy that would be?"

"Oh I don't know... I mean I'm sure I'd know when I meet him, but I don't have any specifics." Judy said dismissively.
"Malarkey." Fangmeyer said bluntly, "Don't lie to me Hopps. Every mammal has a type and knows what they want in a mate, so spill it."

"...Fine you got me. I'm just not used to talking about this stuff; I never paid males any mind when I was younger since I had a dream to focus on so I was usually left out of conversations like this," Judy explained plainly.

"But if I was being pressed for an answer by a rather pushy tigress," Judy said with a smile, "I would say I'd want a guy who is supportive of my dreams and is willing to help me achieve them. He'd also need to be loyal, brave, kind, and the type of mammal who's there for me, to make me happy when I'm sad, and is not afraid to tell me when I'm wrong."

"So Nick then," Fangmeyer said with a smirk. I got her now, Fangmeyer thought to herself as Judy's face dropped and her ears turned an even deeper shade of red.

"Wh-What in the world gave you that idea, Nick doesn't fit that description at all," Judy said, managing to reign in her emotions.

"Judy, from what I hear, Nick fits everything you just said,"

"Psssshhhh, no he doesn't..."

"Oh really," Fangmeyer said, eyebrow raised skeptically.

"Let's see, everyone in the Precinct has heard of the fox who stood up to Bogo for you when you were about to lose your job, so loyalty is a check, and if that's not enough he also stood up to the media for you even though you said he didn't even want to be there," Fangmeyer explained, cutting off Judy's rebuttal.

"Now onto bravery; I don't know about you but I think a mammal that was willing to go through both the Night Howler case and the Missing Mammals case with no weapons or training would be considered brave,"

"You have a point there,' Judy said, unable to refute the tigress.

"Great. Now, as for kindness, you told me about how he forgave you for what you said and has constantly been going out of his way to make sure you're alright so I think that's another check, and after you said those things at the conference he told you off for it so telling you when your wrong is also a check." Fangmeyer continued as Judy sat there speechless shrinking back into her seat.

"Now as for making you laugh; I've seen that first pawed, and he's so supportive of you and your dream that he's going through the hell of the ZPA just so he can stand by your side. So, in the face of all that evidence, can you really tell me that Nick is not your kind of male?"

Judy hung her head; she knew she had only one way to counter and as much as she didn't want to, she knew it was the answer that was expected.

"Heh heh, I guess you have a point there Nick fits that description pretty well. Too bad he's a fox; I mean, there's no way a fox and a bunny would date, that would be bizarre. Although it is kinda funny to think about." Judy said, forcing a smile and a fake laugh.

I don't want to say this but it's for the best. I want Nick to have a place in the ZPD and if others found out about my feelings it would inconvenience him too. So I'll deny it, no matter how much it hurts, that way he'll be safe from those who would oppose how I feel, Judy thought sadly.
"A bunny falling in love with a fox would be unnatural." Judy whispered, her false cheer falling flat as her ears came down against her back.

"Oh Judy." Fangmeyer whispered back compassionately.

"You're not fooling me with a sad attempt like that. I've been aiming for detective since I joined the force but even if I was a schmuck off of the street, I could still tell you're not being honest."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Judy said firmly as she got herself under control.

"Judy there's nothing wrong with a bunny falling for a fox, or an elephant falling for a rhino; love is love. We don't choose who we fall for and even if we don't want to, love has a way of sneaking up on mammals. There's nothing unnatural about how you feel because we mammals are helpless against love, no matter how much we struggle against it." Fangmeyer explained, her tone distant and sad.

"You sound like your talking from experience." Judy said sympathetically.

"Nah, I just watch too much tv." Fangmeyer lied.

"Oh, I see. Well, I appreciate the advice Fangmeyer, but I don't have a thing for Nick so let's talk about something else alright?" Judy asked, deciding to shift topics for her own sake.

But as the two made their way back to the cruiser the conversation stagnating Fangmeyer was struggling with whether or not to tell Judy the truth. On one paw, it would probably get her to open up about her relationship, but on the other paw, I really don't want to share because what if she actually doesn't like Nick. Fangmeyer continued contemplating this as she and Judy continued their patrol in a now quiet car.

30 Minutes later…

"Urrrggghhhh, Fine." Fangmeyer growled as she gripped the steering wheel tightly.

"Uuuhhh, what?" Judy asked, confused at the sudden outburst.

"Sorry Hopps. I've just been thinking, and I'd like to make a deal with you." Fangmeyer said as she relaxed a little.

"What kind of deal?" Judy asked warily.

"An equal exchange of information, I will tell you who I have feelings for and then you'll do the same, how does that sound?"

"I don't know…" Judy said nervously, "It's probably better if you don't tell me..."

"It's Derek." Fangmeyer blurted, not giving it a second thought.

"…Who?"

"You know, Derek… Wolford," Fangmeyer whispered embarrassedly.

"No Way!" Judy exclaimed, covering her mouth with her paws. "When did this happen?" Judy asked, her words muffled slightly by her paws.

"I honestly couldn't pinpoint the exact moment, even if I wanted to. We were in the same class in the academy; back then we somehow became rivals, competing at everything. We were pretty evenly
matched, and I admired and respected him as my rival." Fangmeyer explained thoughtfully as she reminisced about the past.

"Eventually, we graduated, and I beat him to valedictorian by one point. Then, we were both assigned to Precinct One and we eventually ended up becoming partners. During that time we've laughed together, cried together and protected each other, growing closer and closer the entire time until one day I realized I was in love with the wolf. Hopelessly, and happily in love with the wolf who can drive me up the wall with frustration."

"That's really, really sweet Fangmeyer." Judy said before taking in and letting out a deep breath. "Now I guess it's my turn."

"You don't have too Judy, I feel bad forcing you into this, just promise you'll keep what I just told you between us."

"No, it's ok, I mean you pretty much called me out on it anyway, I'm in love with, but not dating, Nick Wilde, my snarky, foolish, irritating, fox best friend."

"I KNEW IT!" Fangmeyer shouted, causing Judy to jump in her seat slightly.

"Have I really been that obvious about it?" Judy asked nervously.

"I wouldn't say you've been obvious about it, but you aren't exactly hiding it either; then again I'm pretty perceptive. Now, tell me everything."

So Judy did, she explained how she started getting closer to Nick throughout both cases and the time they spent together, how it took prompting from a friend to get her to realize what her feelings were, and how now she was just waiting, trying to figure out Nick's feelings.

"That's really sweet Judy, and while I might not know Nick all that well I think you've got a shot with him," Fangmeyer added after Judy had finished her story.

"Thanks, Fangmeyer. I hope you're right, and good luck with Wolford; I think you two would look good together."

"I appreciate that, Judy, but I'm not going to pursue a relationship with him, it's for the best if we just remain friends," Fangmeyer said sadly.

"And before you say anything," Fangmeyer said, cutting Judy off before she could start speaking, "Canines and Felines have too much bad blood for a relationship to work."

"And I know it sounds hypocritical since I was just encouraging you to try your luck with Nick but feline-canine relationships are worse than fox-bunny ones. I mean, yeah, foxes used to eat bunnies when we were savages, but once mammals started becoming civilized that all changed. Felines and Canines on the other paw continued their fights and disagreements until about 100 years ago." Fangmeyer continued, talking faster and faster, countering Judy's points despite her not having a chance to voice them.

"You done?" Judy asked, her voice soft and free of judgement.

"Yes."

"Good. Now listen, if you're going to advise others you should have the courage to follow your own advice. I know that it might be hard but if you do truly love Wolford, then you owe it to yourself to try. Right?"
"You may have a point," Fangmeyer begrudgingly agreed, "but if I'm going to try, then so are you!"

"What?"

"Let's make a deal Hopps; we both agree to ask out the dumb males we've fallen for, and we'll support each other no matter the outcome. Sound like a deal?" Fangmeyer asked as she stuck out her paw.

"Deal." Judy said with a smile as she grabbed Fangmeyer's massive paw with her own and shook.

"But I'm going to wait until after Nick graduates to tell him. I think it's better if he focuses on training since the academy can be hard enough without extra things on you mind."

"Good idea, now we have a patrol to finish." Fangmeyer said enthusiastically as a speeding car shot past their cruiser.

Walking home through Savannah Central, 6:45pm

Judy had decided to walk back home after work, having an excess of energy leftover from the day. As she strolled down the street Judy took her time, looking at the surrounding area, the shops and other buildings that lined the streets as well as the mammals she passed. As she turned the corner, she found a gym. The gym looked rather plain, with a faded yellow and red sign with a cartoonish muscular tiger that told her the place was called "Average Joe's". The exterior was a basic brick square, with its only defining feature being how dirty and graffitied the walls were, making the building look almost abandoned. What had caught Judy's attention however wasn't the graffiti or even the sign, but one van that was sitting in the parking lot. A van with a familiar paint job of a brown wolf with a massive sword on his back holding a swooning white vixen as lightning struck behind them, which Judy recognized instantly.

"I know that van." Judy remarked as she quickly changed direction and headed to the parking lot.

As soon as Judy reached the van she gave three solid knocks on the door, and after a minute of silence she gave a few more, continuing until finally she heard a voice yell out.

"Who the hell is pounding on my van?!" Finnick roared as he came around the side of the car his teeth bared, and his fists clenched.

"Hey Finnick," Judy said nervously as Finnick's mask of rage dropped and was replaced with a profound look of confusion.

"What the hell are you doing here, bunny cop?" Finnick asked as he rubbed his eyes to make sure he was seeing straight.

"I was walking home and I spotted your van. I was curious so I came over, and figured I could say hello and see how you were doing."

"I'm fine," Finnick said bluntly.

"That's good, so what brings you to this gym?" Judy asked, trying to keep the conversation going.

"I'm getting ready for work."

"I see.... So, why at a gym?"

"I live in a van," Finnick said curtly.
"Yeah, I figured that out," Judy shot back.

"Wouldn't be much of a cop if you couldn't, but anyway I have no shower in this van so I got a membership at this gym, for 15 dollars a month I can work out and shower whenever I want since the owner lives here and runs it 24/7."

"Oh, that makes sense."

"I know it does, that's why I do it. Can't take credit for the idea tho; your boyfriend was the one who came up with it." Finnick said gruffly as he opened the back of his van, hopped in and closed the door behind him.

"Nick's not my boyfriend." Judy yelled to the now shut doors.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever you say." Finnick yelled back, "Now, what did you really want, since I really doubt you came here just to ask about me."

"I really did just come to see how you were doing, but since you seem hell bent on stone-walling that conversation would you mind telling me more about Nick?" Judy asked cautiously.

Silence was the only reply Judy got from the van aside from the occasional squeak of the suspension as Finnick moved around the back, until after a few minutes the doors opened once again revealing a Finnick sporting a white apron and a look of doubt.

"What's going on here?" Finnick asked, clearly suspicious.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if you want to know about Nick, you could ask him yourself, so he's either already told you and you're looking to see if he's lying, or he won't tell you. Both possibilities end with my tail in the fire if I tell you, so you see my concern." Finnick explained, still looking at Judy like she was trying to sell him volcano insurance.

"I-I-I-It's not like that," Judy stammered, putting up her paws defensively. "I just want to know more about him, I mean, it's impossible to get him to talk about himself so I thought you could help me, b-b-but if you're going to get in trouble then just forget about it. Maybe you could just tell me about fox culture instead?"

Finnick's expression turned from suspicion to joy in an instant as a barking laughter erupted from his muzzle. Judy could do nothing but stand there as Finnick laughed and laughed, her nervousness slowly becoming annoyance as her foot began thumping against the ground.

"Ahahahahahaha, I'm sorry bunny cop but that was too funny," Finnick said, calming himself down. "Do you really want to know about "fox culture"? I mean really, why would you want to spend your time off with me, learning about the traditions of long dead mammals."

"I do though. I mean, you're not the most pleasant mammal in the world." Judy said jokingly getting a chuckle and a "You got that right," from Finnick.

"I still want to learn as much as I can." Judy finished, determination gleaming in her eyes.

Seeing this look Finnick realized that this wasn't going to end anytime soon. Finnick knew Judy was a stubborn mammal, and even if he blew her off today, she'd be back again, especially since she knew where his gym was.
"Fine," Finnick sighed, "I'm about to head over to the diner to start work, so if you come, sit at the counter, and order something I'll answer your damn questions about foxes and about Wilde."

"Really? Thanks Finnick!" Judy beamed excitedly.

"Don't thank me yet, Officer Toot-toot; I won't be spillin' any of his secrets! We foxes of former crime have a code to follow, now hop in and we'll be on our way." Finnick grumbled as he made his way to the driver's seat and started the van, driving off without even checking if Judy was inside.

**The Mid-Bite Diner, Downtown Savannah Central, 7:30pm**

The Mid-Bite diner hadn't changed in the few weeks since Judy had last been there, its simple sheet metal exterior with red neon lights running along the top still making the diner look like it was pulled straight out of the seventies. The old vixen Helen was there too, the fur on top of her head still fluffed up, and an excessive number of bracelets still jingling on her wrist.

"Finny, you brought a friend!" Helen exclaimed excitedly as Finnick and Judy entered the diner.

"Calm down Helen, and I wouldn't exactly call her a friend, it's just Judy Hopps the Bunny Cop, she was here with Nick a few weeks ago remember?"

"Ohhh I remember you, how have you been sweetie?" Helen asked as Judy took her seat at the bar.

"I've been good, working a lot and counting the days until Nick graduates." Judy said dismissively as she started reading the menu.

"Graduates, from what?" Helen asked questioningly.

"Nick didn't tell you? He's at the Zootopia Police Academy, he's gonna be a cop!" Judy explained proudly.

Helen just stood there, dumfounded as her jaw fell to the floor, "Nicky's going to be a cop?"

"Yeah," Judy said nervously as she remembered how Nick said foxes in general didn't like cops. But before Judy could say anything to remedy the situation Helen let out a cheer drawing the curious gazes of the other mammals in the diner.

"Oh, I knew that boy would get his act together one of these days! But I will have to give him an earful for not telling me when he gets back. Finny did you know about this?"

"Yeah I did, and before you say anything else I wasn't going to tell you unless Nick did, and since you never brought it up, I figured he hadn't told you," Finnick replied as he took his place behind the stove.

"You're the pits," Helen said, pouting for a moment before turning back to Judy with a big smile.

"So what brings you back? I mean I know this place is great and all but it's not a place smaller prey like yourself would normally visit," Helen said bluntly.

"O-oh, well you see, Finnick promised to tell me about fox culture and a little about Nick as long as I ordered some food," Judy explained as she put down her menu.

"Oh really," Helen said as she shot a raised eyebrow at Finnick, "well then, let me get your order so you can start asking your questions."

"Alright, I'll have the beet salad with a light balsamic vinaigrette dressing on the side please, and a
"Coming right up, Judy! Now Finny, I believe you owe this bunny some answers about 'Fox Culture,' and be quick about it," Helen said with a chuckle.

"You got it boss, I'll tell her all about 'Fox Culture'" Finnick said sarcastically, as he took his place at the grill, replacing the ferret who had been cooking when they came in.

"Why do you guys keep saying it like that?" Judy asked as Helen put a glass of water in front of her.

"Well, my dear bunny cop," Finnick said with a chuckle, "It's because what you're looking for isn't exactly a real thing."

"I don't understand."

"You see Judy, foxes don't share much culture between the different species, Fennec foxes like Finny come from the desert so their cultural stories and celebrations reflect that, while Red foxes like myself come from forests and such which is why Robin Hood, one of our greatest folk legends operated in Nottingham a land surrounded by forest." Helen clarified, deciding to take pity on the confused bunny.

"Oh, I see. I apologize for generalizing then, I didn't mean to." Judy said sincerely, her embarrassment clear on her face.

"No need to get all droopy eared, it's a common mistake. That said, most fox traditions and heroes have similarities. For example, the fox hero from 1000 and 1 Furabian Nights, Aladdin, a young thief who's the only mammal pure enough of heart to enter the cave of wonders. He finds a lamp with a Genie who grants three wishes, with those wishes he becomes a prince, marries a princess and after tricking an evil sorcerer lives happily ever after." Finnick explained quickly, not wanting to go into the whole legend.

"What is it with fox heroes and petty crime," Judy mused.

"Well, Officer Toot-Toot, it's because foxes have been looked down upon for as long as history has been recorded, so we created heroes that rise above that, or are revered for what we're hated for," Finnick said bluntly.

"Oh," Judy said awkwardly, not knowing what else to say.

"So, what specifically are you lookin' for, Miss Judy?" Helen asked as Judy sat silently sipping her water.

"Well, I'm not sure exactly. You see, I just wanted to know things to avoid now that I'm living with Nick."

"YOU'RE LIVING WITH NICKY!?" Helen shouted, getting every mammal in the diner to openly stare at her.

"Uhhh, yes? It was the best option since we'll work together and it allowed us to get a bigger place," Judy whispered, not wanting to give the other patrons more to stare at.

"Sure, I can dig that, but Nicky's such a loner I never would've guessed he'd live with someone else, even if it was a good deal." Helen remarked.

"True enough, that fox holds his secrets closer than a banker holds onto other mammals' money."
Finnick grumbled.

"Well, as surprising as that is, I guess I can help ya out. Rule one is don't go in his room unless you're invited, we foxes are very territorial." Helen explained as Judy listened attentively.

"Don't try and parent him either, that's less a fox thing and more of a Nick thing, he's likely to disappear if you get too bossy," Finnick added

"Yeah Nicky has been known to drop mammals like a bad habit over stuff like that." Helen agreed.

The next few minutes passed this way, with either Helen or Finnick telling Judy how to best live with the fox known as Nick Wilde, everything from keeping curtains drawn to prevent hurting Nick's eyes, to how to best split responsibilities around the house so Judy wasn't stuck with all of them.

"And that's pretty much it; hope you were takin notes, Miss Judy," Helen said as she set Judy's salad down in front of her.

"Thanks Helen, I'll put all of it to good use," Judy said earnestly as she poured her dressing onto her salad.

"You better! Now, did you want to know anything else?" Finnick asked, feigning impatience.

"Could you tell me about how foxes show they're interested in another fox?" Judy asked in between bites of salad, trying as hard as she could to sound nonchalant.

"Now that's a choice piece of information, Miss Judy! Why might you want to know something like that?" Helen asked back curiously as she and Finnick shared a side-eyed look.

"Well, since I'll be working and living with Nick, it would be helpful to spot when he's interested in some vixen so I don't get in the way, or I can point out when some vixen is interested in him. Either way, it's good to know." Judy explained calmly; happy she'd come up with an excuse beforehand.

Oh that is such shit, she wants Nick, Finnick thought to himself, but before he could call Judy out on it he felt a paw smack the back of his head.

"Be nice, Finny," Helen whispered, "Let's just let this play out, ok?"

"Fine," Finnick grumbled.

"What was that?" Judy asked, having been unable to make out what the two were saying.

"Oh nothing, I was just telling Finny to keep an eye on the grill so he doesn't burn the food again. So, you want to learn for Nick's sake, Well, aren't you the helpful sort Judy, Nicky's lucky to have you lookin' out for him."

"I'm just trying to be a good friend," Judy said bashfully.

"I bet you are, now as far as Nicky making moves on a vixen, that's not how fox courtship works. The vixen is the one who will make the first actual move, until then a male will show interest by following the vixen around. If the vixen is interested, she'll make her move by literally pouncing on the Todd who has piqued her interest. After that the dating period begins, then it's a mix of little hints from the vixen that she's ready to move the relationship along, until they eventually either break up or get married." Helen explained, Judy listening intently, as she continued eating her salad.
"That's fascinating! So, the male will just follow the vixen around. That's pretty cool considering how pushy rabbit bucks can be." Judy said as she finished up her salad.

"Pretty much, sometimes if they're not getting anywhere by just following they'll try to show off in some way to make themselves look better; they might make jokes, sing, or help the vixen out in some way, anything to stand out and convince the vixen to give him a chance."

"Still better than being constantly pressured for dates." Judy lamented.

"So, has Nick ever tried singing for any vixens, because I hear his voice is something else." Judy said with a laugh.

"Nice try, Bunny Cop, but I ain't saying nothing," Finnick jeered. His words went unnoticed by both females however, as Judy's attention was on Helen.

"My goodness, something else doesn't even begin to describe it. That boy's voice is so moving, I just, aaahhh, I can't begin to describe it. I will say this though, if Nicky sang he could get just about any vixen he wanted and that's without using his smooth talking. What a voice he has and what a waste it is, since he never sings in front of people intentionally; I only figured it out after catching him singing as he came out of the restroom."

"But I thought."

"That Nick was a terrible singer." Finnick said, cutting Judy off mid-sentence, "That's what he tells everyone, and that's why I wasn't going to say anything, but since Helen already spilled the beans, there's no use hiding it. Nick Wilde is one of the best singers I know."

"That's so like him," Judy said sadly, "Why is Nick like this? He's so closed off, he stays out of the spotlight, and downplays all the good things he does like he's allergic to recognition, and trying to learn about him is like pulling teeth, it's driving me crazy," Judy said, slamming her fist on the counter top.

"Heh, if you want Nick to be 'more open' and to tell you his past, you've got your work cut out for you, Bunny Cop, cus you ain't the first mammal to try," Finnick remarked cynically.

"What do you mean by that?" Judy asked accusingly.

"Not spillin anything else, I believe you learned enough" Finnick replied firmly.

Judy huffed, she could tell Finnick wasn't going to say anymore so she turned to Helen for assistance, but before Helen could say anything Finnick preemptively cut her off.

"Helen, I'd pick my next move very carefully if I was you. Nick has no trouble cutting people out of his life; say too much and you'll never see him again, I promise you."

Hearing this deflated the vixen, her tail falling completely limp as she turned to Judy, eyes downcast, "Sorry Judy."

"It's fine Helen, you've told me more than enough," Judy assured the now dejected vixen.

"That warning goes for you too Judy, be careful how fast and how deep you dig into Nick's personal matters, cus he can cut you off easier than you think," Finnick warned gruffly as he continued cooking.

"Thanks for the food and the warning, Finnick. I think I'll head home. Goodnight Helen," Judy said
as she gently put some money on the counter and headed out.

The sun had gone down, and the wind had picked up by the time Judy began walking home, and as Judy pulled up Zoogle Maps to avoid getting lost she had to suppress a shiver that had nothing to do with the weather. Finnick's warning along with everything else she had learned was playing over and over again in Judy's head. But despite all that had been said and despite her own worries, Judy was still undeterred, and was determined to learn as much as she could.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, if you enjoyed it feel free to drop a review down below, tell me what worked, what didn't, what you want to see, ect. I love hearing from you all. Also If for some reason you don't want to comment but still want to suggest something or talk to me personally don't hesitate to PM me, I'll respond when I have time.

Song Suggestion for this chapter is: The Scientist by Coldplay - It's a great song that was suggested to me by Toren6000.

I'll keep suggesting Music forever, feel free to ignore it or tell me what you thought of the song, also if you have a favorite song suggest it to me, music is a great thing that you can never have too much of.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!