How to Treat a Festering Wound

by TheCatweazle

Summary

Dawn Bellwether is arrested - now what? What about Judy Hopps, the bunny most predators consider to be Enemy Number One after the disastrous press conference? What about the con-fox Nick Wilde? Will he have a chance to become a police officer? Can they heal the wounds they have caused?
What Was Left Behind

“I’m glad to be back. Yes, I am let loose from the noose that’s kept me hanging about.”

(AC/DC: “Back in Black” (Written by Malcolm Young, Angus Young, and Brian Johnson, from the album “Back in Black,” Albert/Atlantic, 1980))

Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

Welcome to the weird, wacky, and - hopefully - wonderful world of TheCatweazle!

In case this seems familiar to you, it is. This story once appeared, under the very same name, on fanfiction.net. (I was actually dying to give it a new name, since I’ve never been really satisfied with the original one, but nothing that came to mind sounded better than the original name, so I finally admitted defeat and decided to just stick with it.) And if I may say so, in all modesty, it was quite a success when I first published it. At least, the overall response I received, the reviews and comments, the number of followers, seemed to be quite impressive to me. On top of that, I like to think that I managed to gather a quite faithful group of followers, as the last days have proven! (Thanks again to all of you for your kind words of encouragement, by the way!)

Well, rejoice! Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf is back! Older, with graying hair, still all but wise, still quite infantile, but just as mean, just as evil, just as weird and twisted and quirky as I have always been!

The reason why I moved the story here, to AO3, is quite unfortunate, and I don’t want to delve into it more deeply here. Let’s just say that if you come across a group of miscreants over at fanfiction.net who call themselves “Critics United,” just give them a wide berth! They’re little more than griefers who feast on making other people's lives miserable. (In case you wanna know more, in case you wanna hear my story of being harassed, just give me a shout! Or read the last chapters of the stories I published over on fanfiction.net, where I explain everything in full detail.)

Well, I don’t know about you, but it takes two to play that game, and I’m not interested in playing. I’m here on AO3, and I have no intention of leaving.

Or leaving this story behind!

Like I said, I published it once before. Back then, it was quite a different beast. It came to pass because I was in the middle of writing another story, named “Hammer to Fall,” also quite well-received, I might add, when several thoughts struck me which I decided to pursue. The result was “Wound,” where I basically dealt with the aftermath of Bellwether’s arrest, with what happened afterwards, how Judy, who was Public Enemy Number One after the press conference we get to see in the movie, became a beloved and well-respected police officer again, like so many fanfiction writers, including myself, automatically seem to assume. How Nick, a con-mammal of renown, managed to get accepted into the ranks of the ZPD. How Leodore Lionheart managed to become Mayor of Zootopia again.
The problem was, once I had started writing, I couldn’t stop myself! Ideas kept coming in from all directions, and I just wrote them down. And wrote them down. And ... you get the idea!

The short story, intended to encompass little more than three, maybe four chapters, became an unwieldy juggernaut of 22 chapters and more than 180,000 words of length.

And it ripped my other stories, “Hammer” and its prequel, “Now Your Nightmare Comes to Life,” completely to shreds.

Still I liked it so much that I made it the first part of what I later called the “Hammer Trilogy,” consisting of “Wound,” “Nightmare,” and “Hammer,” in that order.

Problem was, the storyline had become so convoluted, that I had, at points, completely lost track of the proceedings. I had to literally re-read parts of my stories to keep everything in sync.

And I never had the feeling things were in sync.

So, I’m using my move to AO3 to do something which I should probably have done ages ago:

A cold reboot!

Forget everything you ever may have read from yours truly. This is a true new beginning!

I’m starting the trilogy anew, and I’m going to do it properly this time. Starting with “Wound,” continuing with “Nightmare” and ending with “Hammer,” somewhere along the way! (Which, the way things are, will probably take me years! Yes, the storyline’s going to be ginormous, and yes, I’m in this for the long haul!)

To those of you who’ve read this story and its sequels before, you’ll notice that most of it is still the same, particularly in this chapter, which received little more than one big addition and a few tiny ones, on top of a bit of proof-reading. Other chapters will probably suffer a different fate. I will quite often add bits and pieces alluding to things which will only become important much later. Other parts I will redo completely, simply because they don’t fit in with the remainder of my storyline anymore.

With all that being said, on with ... no, I almost forgot!

An honest word of warning: The author’s notes I add to my chapters often are just as long as the chapters themselves. I just regularly feel the need to explain why I do what I do, to give the reason why I embarked on a particular storyline, to provide background information. In the past, several people have told me that this was known as “Catweazeling” within the community. I take that as a compliment! And since that’s the case, you can probably understand why I have no intention of changing my approach any time soon. So bear with me, please! I strongly urge you to at least try and read the author’s notes - you often won’t understand what I’m going on about otherwise! I try to make these notes as entertaining as possible, I promise!

Now, on with the show!
The story itself starts during the events of the movie, a few minutes after Chief Bogo and the ZPD officers arrested Dawn Bellwether, and there are so many canon and original characters in this story, it’s kind of pointless to name them all. I’ve given it a “Teen and Up” rating, because some of the stuff I mentioned isn’t suitable for children or the faint of heart. Zootopia may be a movie suitable for children of all ages, but this story is not. Plus I’m well-known for using the odd four-letter word. I do it in real life, I do it in my stories. Sometimes things just are like shit, and if they are, I think it’s perfectly fine to just say so. So yes, my characters, even those goody-two-shoes like Judy, use the occasional swear word every now and then. Not often, certainly not regularly, but they do. If this offends you, I’m sorry, I really am, but it’s my story, and I tell it as I see fit.

Before I come to the obligatory disclaimer, two last personal comments:

I have a very strict review-response policy. I will try and reply to every review, every comment coming my way. Which may sometimes take a few days, but rest assured a reply is always coming your way. Criticism, even when it’s harsh, is always welcome. As are suggestions and helpful tips. And if you should be willing to send me words of encouragement or praise, I certainly won’t stop you! ;-) Not sure yet how the review/message system works here at AO3, but I’m bound to find out, I guess!

In case this turns out to be too cumbersome over here, I can also make you this offer:

If you really wanna launch into a lengthy discussion with me, if you wanna discuss the finer points of my stories, something I always enjoy doing, you can also find me on Discord, on the “Zootopia” and the “ZNN Community Discord” servers. My username is “J.O. aka TheCatweazle,” although I’ll probably go on and delete the “J.O.” part of it pretty soon. I’m sick and tired of hiding behind initials. I did it for three years, and it never felt right to me. My name’s Jens Ostendorf, also known as TheCatweazle, and as far as I’m concerned, everyone has the right to know it!

And yes, as the name suggests, I’m German. And while I think I have given enough proof over the course of the years that my English is good enough for all intents and purposes, it still is a secondary language to me. So the odd mistake may crop up here and there. Should you come across one, please tell me about it! I strive to learn and improve, so telling me where I went wrong would be very much appreciated! And just so you know, I’m my own beta reader. I’m a perfectionist and a nitpicker, and nobody can ever be as harsh with me as I am myself!

Now, the disclaimer:

This story and everything therein was created by me, Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf, Brake, Germany, between 2016 and 2019. With one huge exception, the work is mine, and mine alone. There may be quotes from movies or books, one-liners, song lyrics and the likes cropping up here and there (and knowing me, their number won’t be exactly small, particularly because of a little game I will tell you about in the author’s notes towards the end of the chapter), but those will always be indicated, and I will always give credit where credit is due. For one, every chapter of mine begins with a quote from what I call a motto song which fits the tone of the chapter. If you come across an instance where I failed to give proper credit, please tell me about it, so that I can make the necessary corrections! Many thanks in
The exception is, of course, this:

The movie “Zootopia” and everything depicted therein belongs to Walt Disney Pictures/Walt Disney Animation Studios, copyrighted in 2016. I own nothing of it. Nor will I ever claim to. I enjoyed the movie way too much, obviously, to cause Disney and the guys who made the movie any harm. I’m merely using the movie’s content for my own sinister purposes. And let’s leave it at that, shall we?

Chapter One

What Was Left Behind

Oh, is it me they call hero? Oh, is it me they await? Oh, is it me they call hero? Heroes are there to change fate.

Van Canto: “Hero” (Written by Stefan Schmidt, from the album “Hero,” GUN Records (Sony BMG), 2008)

Zootopia Natural History Museum, City Center, Zootopia

A hiss. Then, suddenly, words. “… you sick of it?” The voice of Dawn Bellwether was slightly distorted, thanks to the rather low quality of the recording, but it was easily identifiable - and thus invaluable evidence in front of a court of law. “Predators! They may be strong and loud, but prey outnumber predators ten-to-one.”

“Let’s hope this works,” another voice was heard. A male voice, barely more than a whisper. A scraping sound almost drowned out the voice. “Never thought I’d enter a museum and push exhibits around one day.”

Chief Adrian Bogo looked down at the red fox standing in front of him. It looked as if his left arm was resting on the back of the mammal standing next to him, but the posture made it obvious that the fox was indeed making sure that the other mammal remained standing.

“Oh, look, they fit perfectly! As if the gun was made for shooting them.” A female voice, again barely more than a whisper. Bogo looked at the other mammal in front of him. It was obvious that Judy Hopps had seen better days. The last weeks had been hard on her, her appearance left no other explanation. On top of that, she was in obvious pain, standing on one leg while holding the other one up, bent at the knee. What appeared to be a red handkerchief was tied around her right leg, obviously because it had been bleeding at one point. But if she was in pain or distress, it failed to show up on her face - it sported the widest grin Bogo had ever seen on a rabbit.

“Think of it - 90 percent of the population united against a common enemy. We’ll be unstoppable.” Bellwether again. She was talking in a tone of voice Bogo had never heard her use. Gone was the meek sheep, to be replaced by someone who almost sounded like … a predator.

“Damn sheep can’t even calculate.” The fox again. “Ten to one is almost 91 percent.”

“Has anyone ever told you that you are a nitpicker?” Hopps.

“Didn’t take you long to find out that one, Fluff.” A pause. “I think it’s better if I take the serum. I
have a breast pocket. Why do clothes for women never have any pockets?”

“Hey, my trousers have pockets!”

“Yeah, and it would be a very bad idea to put this thing inside of it. It seems to be quite fragile, and if this breaks in your pocket, I have a savage bunny on my paws. Is the pen working?”

“It is.”

“You sure?”

“Positive!”

“Great! Well, here goes! Hold on tight!”

The sound of rapid pawfalls, then the sharp clang of a metal tube hitting concrete. Bellwether, shouting now: “Over there!” More pawfalls, combined with gasping and panting. Something that sounded like a punch, followed by shouts of pain. Then, silence. At least for a few seconds.

“That’s it?” Bogo asked.

“Wait for it,” the fox replied with a smug grin.

Suddenly, laughter. “Well, you should have just stayed on the carrot farm, huh?” Bellwether again. “It really is too bad. I … I did like you.” Bogo had no idea why, but the voice he had heard so often over the course of the last years had never sounded so insincere before.

Suddenly Hopps’ voice rang out, loud and strong: “What are you gonna do? Kill me?”

Bellwether’s answer was a happy-sounding giggle. “Oh, no, of course not.” With a chilling abruptness, her voice turned menacing. “He is.”

A strange sound, like from a silenced pistol, a grunt, Hopps shouting, “No! Oh, Nick!”

Bogo looked at the fox. On the left side of his neck, a blue stain was visible. “What’s that?”

“Blueberries. From her family’s farm,” the fox replied. “They are delicious. You should try some.”

Bogo shook his head and concentrated on the recording on this strange (and definitely not officially approved) carrot-shaped Dictaphone.

Bellwether had just made her phone call, alerting the ZPD of an emergency situation at the Natural History Museum. Now, Hopps was heard again. “No, Nick! Don’t do this! Fight it!”

Bellwether’s voice cut in. “Oh, but he can’t help it, can he? Since preds are just biologically predisposed to be savages.” The glee in her voice was unmistakable.

Suddenly a growl was heard, violent and feral. More gasps, irregular pawfalls, and growling. Lots of growling.

Suddenly, Bellwether’s voice was drowning out the noise. “Gosh, think of the headline! ‘Hero cop killed by savage fox!’”

Hopps answered: “So that’s it. Prey fears predator and you stay in power?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”
Bogo nodded. “And that’s the smoking gun.” He looked at the pen. “How do I turn this thing off?”

“Just press the button once, and shortly, sir,” Hopps said.

Bogo did, and the pen went silent. “You still have the serum you took out of the gun?”

“It’s right here.” The fox took something out of his breast pocket. “I suggest you handle it with care. It’s the last one left, and if this breaks in your hoof, you’ll turn savage.”

Bogo nodded, taking the tiny blue sphere with extreme caution. It almost vanished in his enormous hoof. “McHorn!” he shouted.

Brian McHorn, who had been standing a few yards to the side, surveying the crime scene, approached the small group at once. “Yes, sir?”

“You have an evidence bag with you?”

“I have.” McHorn took a tiny plastic Ziploc bag out of one of the pockets of his uniform.

Bogo put the sphere into the bag. While McHorn sealed it, Bogo ordered: “Get this to forensics on the double! And keep the bag closed at all times until you’re there! Do not, I repeat, do not allow anyone to touch what’s inside! That includes you!”

“Acknowledged, sir!” McHorn turned around and, true to his orders, ran towards the exit with surprising deftness, considering his massive stature.

Bogo took out his cell phone, dialed a number and waited a few seconds. “Doctor Peralta? Chief Bogo here. Listen up! Officer McHorn is on his way to you; he will arrive in a few minutes. He’s carrying an evidence bag containing a tiny pellet. You will analyze the contents of the pellet. Consider it a Class A poison. Full protective suit.” He waited for a reply. “What it is? Well, we think the contents are the reason why predators have been turning savage. You’ll start working on an antidote, and you’ll do it now.” Another pause. “I don’t care. From now on, this is your top priority. Everything, and I mean everything, else can wait. You are hereby authorized to make use of every resource imaginable, and you’re authorized to consult with every expert who you think may be able to help you. This needs solving, and it needs solving YESTERDAY. Understood? Good.”

Bogo disconnected and pocketed his cell phone again. “So, let me see if I get this straight, Hopps: You find out that the reason for predators to turn savage is a serum, created from a flower which happens to grow in your home town. You return to Zootopia to rectify the mistakes you made, and instead of coming to the ZPD, you ask this fox for help?”

To his surprise, Hopps bristled. “This fox, sir, has a name,” she spat. “His name is Nicholas …”

“Wilde, I know.”

After he had first met the fox on the platform in the Rainforest District, Bogo had at first dismissed him as an innocent bystander, a mere eye witness to whatever had happened back then. But then he had revealed himself as somebody who had been supporting Hopps in her quest to find the missing otter. He had openly, and without hesitation, defended her, and in doing so, he had defied Bogo himself, a mammal so massive, compared to him, Bogo could have crushed him by simply
stepping on him. And he even had appeared at Precinct One HQ, where Hopps had made a complete mess of things while trying to explain the case to the assembled pressmammals.

It was obvious that this small, innocent-looking fox was way more than met the eye.

Bogo had been intrigued. That’s why he had gone down to the Records department, the moment the press conference had ended, to try and see if they had a file on that fox, who obviously went by the name of Nicholas Wilde.

His hopes hadn’t been high though. While they had tons of files on quite a lot of citizens of Zootopia and the surrounding boroughs, you rarely found one on a law-abiding citizen. And Bogo didn’t for one second believe in the constant claims that foxes, on the whole, couldn’t be trusted. As far as he knew, this citizen of Zootopia couldn’t have had a criminal file.

And then, to his astonishment, Benjamin Clawhauser had presented him with a file that was almost two inches thick.

Seemed like Wilde wasn’t exactly a law-abiding citizen.

Bogo had spent the evening perusing the file which, truth be told, had turned out to be both a fascinating and a highly informative read. Wilde, it seemed, had a long history of skimming along the very borders of legality. He had been questioned by police officers countless times, but nobody had ever been able to accuse him of any outright crime. After reading a few pages, Bogo was convinced he was looking at the CV of a con-mammal, someone who made a living hustling other mammals out of their hard-earned money. And it seemed he had been highly successful doing so.

After all, nothing had ever been proven.

The more Bogo had read, the more this mammal had intrigued him. His number of business associates, for one, was nothing short of impressive. He was well-known for having worked together with another con-mammal of renown, a fennec fox named Stanley A. Barks, who was also famous as the bane of most civil servants of Zootopia, for he was a graffiti artist who had “prettified” countless buildings all over the city. Wilde was known for having worked together with a rather infamous hacker named Kathleen D. Fulva (currently serving time in the Zootopia Municipal Correctional Facility for theft of intellectual property and causing damage to countless computer systems), he had worked with a mysterious enforcer known only as Arctic Fire (current whereabouts unknown, presumed dead), and, of course, he had, for several years, worked as an employee of a really famous mammal named Carlo E. LaGrande.

Bogo had bristled at reading that name.

Mr. Big, as he was known within the criminal community, was the epitome of a mob boss. A second-generation crime lord, LaGrande had, under the pretense of being an entrepreneur running several successful companies, under the pretense of being a huge benefactor to several charity organizations, established a criminal empire so vast, merely getting through to him required to work your way through dozens of layers of bribed lawyers, corrupt politicians, countless enforcers and similar thugs, and what have you. Bogo couldn’t even rule out the possibility that LaGrande had several police officers in his pocket. Not at Precinct One though; Bogo would have known about those ... at least that’s what he hoped.

Working for Mr. Big ...

At this stage, Bogo was certain that he was looking at the file of a hardened criminal, a criminal so skilled at doing what he did, he had been able to avoid the long arm of the law, had been able to
prevent being caught, for almost two decades.

Why had a mammal like him, someone who would clearly be rather wanting to give police officers a wide berth, gone to the effort of helping Hopps in her quest, twice actually?

And why, on Earth, had he tried to apply for the Zootopia Police Academy?

That was what puzzled Bogo the most.

When Hopps’s locker had been emptied after she had left the ZPD, a piece of paper had been found, which turned out to be an application form for the ZPA, filled in by a fox named Nicholas P. Wilde.

The very same fox standing here in front of him, there was no doubt about that.

Bogo had no idea what this was all about, but he was intent on trying to find out.

Hoops looked up at Bogo in astonishment and even fear, while Wilde’s expression was difficult to read. His grin had vanished, though, but he seemed to be rather unperturbed by Bogo’s knowledge. If he was afraid, he managed to hide it completely.

If he was honest with himself, Bogo had to admit that he should have been the one to be afraid.

A former cop, or rather - and much worse -, a cute, tiny bunny, whom he had decided to belittle from the get-go, had joined forces with a well-known con-mammal, a sneaky, untrustworthy fox of all mammals (at this stage, even Bogo was inclined to think that foxes may really be nothing but sneaky and untrustworthy), vigilante-style, to unravel a crime which could have thrown Zootopia into chaos, possibly even civil war.

These two misfits had basically done the job he was paid to do.

Nothing even remotely similar had ever happened to him.

It was a truly humbling experience for Bogo.

Wilde obviously decided to play the cool, nothing-gets-to-me guy. “Have we met? I mean, other than back in the Rainforest District.”

Bogo shook his head. “We haven’t, as far as I know, but isn’t it true that you are in a business relationship with an infamous arctic shrew whom most mammals would characterize as a mob boss?”

The slightly widened eyes in Wilde’s face showed that Bogo had hit his mark. He opened his mouth to say something, but Bogo beat him to it. “And isn’t it true that you have a business associate going by the moniker of Finnick, with whom you have a long history of scamming and hustling?”

Hopps looked at Wilde in obvious distress, while Wilde still looked unmoved. “I have one question, if I may, Chief,” he said in a business-like tone.

“Go ahead.”

“Where are your pawcuffs?” He stepped away from Hopps and raised both paws in a gesture which clearly acknowledged defeat.

This move surprised both Bogo and Hopps. “No!” the bunny shouted. She tried to turn towards
Bogo, but her injured leg gave out immediately, and she toppled over with a yelp of pain. Before she was even close to hitting the ground, however, Wilde had managed to break her fall, pulling her upright again. She gave Wilde a look of gratitude, then she turned towards Bogo and said with a speed befitting a machine-gun: “Sir, without his help, I would have been truly and utterly lost. He doesn’t deserve to be arrested! Please, sir, don’t do this to him! He even …”

Bogo raised his hoof, which was very effective in silencing Hopps. Looking at Wilde, he said: “I don’t really understand the game you’re playing here, Wilde. You’re one of those mammals most would call an opportunist.” He looked around. “I fail to see your opportunity here.”

“You help to bring a criminal to justice without having been offered any kind of reward. You help a city which has done nothing to support you. You help a police officer you barely even know. And when you defend her, you defy me, a mammal ten times your size. And now you walk into the literal lion’s den, knowing full well that it could earn you a stint in prison. Why did you do all these things?”

Wilde took a deep breath. “I guess you don’t realize how life was for most predators in Zootopia over the course of the last few weeks.”

“You’re wrong, I do realize. As a matter of fact, I had to suspend several officers, with some outstanding ones among them, just because they were predators - the City Council gave me no choice. And every time someone reported some atrocity perpetrated by prey against predators, the District Attorney, who’s appointed by the City Council, was strangely reluctant to press charges.”

He looked towards the back, where Higgins was still reading Bellwether her rights. “I guess I understand this better now.”

“You’ve only seen the tip of the iceberg.” He made a pause, obviously thinking hard, then he plowed on. “You are right on all your accusations. I am a con-fox, I make a living hustling mammals out of their money. But not only was it becoming increasingly difficult lately to make ends meet, it sometimes became outright dangerous to walk the streets. I was harassed on an almost daily basis. Okay, I’ve been harassed before -comes with being a fox and a con-mammal, I guess -, but never this often, or this severely. It was high time that somebody did something about it. And when Officer Hopps asked me to help her, I knew I had to do it. I did it for myself, for my health, even for my survival, and for the health and survival of all the other predators forced to endure harassment. I did this despite being fully aware of the consequences. So if you wanna arrest me, now’s your chance. The way I see it, my hustling days are over anyway.”

“And why’s that?”

Wilde looked at Hopps. “Because I know a bunny who’d go into conniptions, should I return to my former lifestyle.”

“You’re willing to face jail time, just to please her?”

“I am.” There was not an ounce of hesitation to be found in Wilde, neither in his posture, nor in his words.

Bogo nodded. “I see. You know that Ms. Hopps left the ZPD a few weeks ago, I assume.”

“I may have read about this in some newspaper, yes.”

“Well, when she left, she emptied her locker, but she left behind a few things, obviously because
she thought she wouldn’t need them again. Among those was a small piece of paper which is currently sitting in a filing cabinet in my office. Tell me, are you really willing to enter the Zootopia Police Academy?"

_and finally I have gotten to you!

Wilde’s jaw dropped, his ears fell flat on his head, his eyes widened, and he stared at Bogo wordlessly. Bogo continued: “If you are, let me tell you that the ZPD demands full commitment. You either do this and walk the full mile, or you leave it be. There is no middle ground. You either make it, or somebody will break you. You cannot hustle your way through this.”

Wilde had obviously found his voice again. “Wait, that’s rubbish! I cannot apply. Not now, not when you know who I really am.”

Bogo allowed himself a small chuckle. “When reading your application form, I couldn’t help noticing that you answered the question whether you’ve ever been arrested or charged with a criminal offense by ticking the ‘Yes’ checkbox first, only to scribble over your answer and ticking ‘No.’ Do you really think it’s that easy?” He made a pause. “Do you really believe your criminal record would not have come under intense scrutiny, regardless of how you had answered the question, once you had applied to the ZPA? Application is one thing. Each year, hundreds of mammals apply to academy training. But most never even make it into the Academy - they’re rejected outright, usually because the initial tests show that they lack the qualities needed to become a police officer. Some, however, are rejected because of their criminal record. And just so you know, this includes trifles like traffic violations. A hustler, who’s probably guilty of felony tax evasion at least, would never stand a chance; he’d be rejected even before his application form could have reached the ZPA.”

Wilde frowned. “Why are you telling me this? If there’s no chance for me to apply …”

“Oh, you can apply, but in the current situation, being accepted into the ZPA is out of the question for you, and would probably even lead to you being arrested.” He made a pause, looking at Hopps. “However, if you could find a respected police officer, such as her, who would vouch for you, there may be a slight possibility that the Chief could put in a good word for you.” He made another pause, leaning forward and thus closing the gap between him and Wilde, fixing his stare on the much smaller mammal. To his credit, Wilde didn’t even flinch. “And if said Chief throws his weight and influence around, it may even be possible that the DA and the Mayor, whomever that will be, could offer you a full pardon, given what you’ve done for the city here. Which would in turn mean that your application would in all probability be accepted without compunction.”

Hopps gasped, her nose twitching wildly. Then the twitching subsided, her ears drooped, and her features softened. “I cannot vouch for him, Chief. I’m not a police officer anymore.”

Bogo nodded. “Right. However, should you happen to look into the aforementioned filing cabinet, you may also find a badge a certain rabbit police officer may have, ahem, lost in the Mayor’s office.”

Hopps gasped again. “You … you want me to return to duty?”

Bogo gave her one of his most stern stares. “Those are not the words I would use, Hopps. You solved this case, and I applaud you for it. However, the fact remains that you did it on your own, and I can’t, and won’t, promote vigilantism. Not to mention the fact that you made a complete and utter fool of the ZPD. You two managed, on your own and with very limited resources, what all the officers at the ZPD were unable to do.” He made a pause. “I’d much rather present you to the public as a police officer solving the case, instead of a vigilante who did the job we should have
done. You’ll still receive full credit, and you deserve it, as far as I’m concerned, but you’ll receive it as a police officer, working undercover to solve a case.”

Hopps visibly hesitated. After a few seconds, she opened her mouth, but at this moment, Wilde spoke up: “It’s what you wanted your entire life, Carrots.”

*Carrots?* Bogo flinched. Another one of the countless demeaning nicknames for rabbits. But she seemed to take it in stride. *Interesting.*

Hopps looked at Wilde, then she took a deep breath. “Chief Bogo, I am hereby officially requesting reinstatement into the ZPD, sir.”

“How about that, Officer Hopps?” Bogo nodded. “Welcome back, Officer Hopps!”

“Thank you, sir!” She looked at Wilde. “I would like to ask you to consider offering Nicholas Wilde the chance to apply to the Zootopia Police Academy, sir. I am confident that he could be an outstanding police officer. Without his help, I would never have been able to solve this case.”

Bogo looked at Wilde. “Mr. Wilde, do you want to apply to the ZPA?”

Wilde straightened, looking into the eyes of Bogo. “I do, sir,” he said without any hint of hesitation. Bogo noticed that, for the first time, Wilde had responded to him with a posture and tone of respect.

“Good. Rest assured that I will give this my full consideration. Please come to my office tomorrow morning, so we can go over your application one last time.”

“I will be there, sir. And thank you!”

“Good.” Bogo looked around. All other officers had left the museum, taking Bellwether and her henchmammals with them. “Let’s wrap things up here. Hopps, you should go to the hospital to have this leg looked at.”

She nodded. “Of course, sir.”

“Will you take her there, Wilde?”

“I will, Chief.”

“Good. There’s a press conference I need to conduct.”

“A press conference?” Hopps asked.

“Of course. That’s the second arrested Mayor in three months. It doesn’t get much more high-profile than that. The press gaggle will want answers.”

Hopps looked at Wilde, who grinned. “I guess we need to stop arresting Mayors, don’t you think, Carrots?”

Hopps returned the grin. “Dear me, we do seem to run through them, don’t we?”

Bogo shrugged and turned towards the entrance. Hopps and Wilde walked by his side, with the fox supporting the rabbit, who was limping in obvious pain. Bogo was walking very slowly to allow them keep up. “I couldn’t care less, Hopps. There’ll always be Mayors. There are far more than enough politicians in Zootopia - sometimes I think they spawn on damp locker room floors. One of them is sure to run for mayoralty.”
“The Assistant Mayor takes over first, right?” Hopps asked Bogo.

It was Wilde who answered. “Unfortunately, yes.”

She looked at him with a frown. “Why is it unfortunate?”

“Because Aries is a ram. And he was Bellwether’s campaign manager when she ran for office first, some twelve years ago. After she made it into the City Council, she made sure he’d follow her four years later. It’s just new wine in old wineskins.”

Bogo looked at him. “You think he’s in league with Bellwether?”

“You can bet your buffalo butt on it.”

For a second, Bogo felt tempted to rip Wilde’s head off for talking to him in such a disrespectful manner, but since Wilde had said it in such an honest, no-nonsense manner, he decided to let it slide. Best to cut him some slack here - he wants to become a police officer, after all. There’ll be enough time to teach him some manners later. “Should I let some of my officers look into it?”

“Couldn’t hurt. He’s corrupt and opportunistic, and he’d definitely profit from prey ruling over predators, seeing as he owns Aries Security, a security company founded by his father, who was just as bad as him. By the way, employees of Aries Security are responsible for quite a lot of harassment against predators.”

Bogo did a double-take. “They are?”

“They tried to beat up me and my colleague, for one. Thought playing hardball with a red fox and his tiny fennec fox friend was easy as pie.” Wilde grinned. “Unfortunately for them, Finnick always has a few baseball bats lying around, and he knows darn well how to put them to good use. And he’s much stronger than you’d expect from looking at him.”

“Well, you are con-artists …”

“Who were simply sitting in the back of his van, enjoying our after-work-beer. The work we had done before may have been bordering on being illegal, but at that very moment, we were doing nothing illegal whatsoever. Whoever opened the van to get us, I guess they can be accused of breaking a few laws, like breaking and entering. Especially since they had arrived in an unmarked black van with no license plates. One of them, however, had been stupid enough to still wear his uniform. That’s why we know who they work for. And I can tell you with certainty, none of them had been among the mammals we had hustled in the last three years. In fact I don’t recall ever having hustled goats and sheep working for a security company. So it can’t even have been revenge that drove the mammals.”

“Where did this happen?”

“Sahara Square, in the only side alley along Acacia Avenue, next to the pawn shop run by the hyena. Or was it a gnu? Ownership of that place has changed quite a lot over the last couple of years.”

Bogo knew the surveillance map of Zootopia like the back of his hoof, still he needed a few seconds to recall the important pieces of information. “There should be two traffic cameras in the vicinity. With any luck, we may have caught them in the act. I’ll have someone look into it.”

“Really?”
“You can bet your scruffy tail on it,” Bogo said deadpan, eliciting a slight chuckle from both small mammals. “A crime is a crime, whether it is committed against a law-abiding citizen or a hustler. If we have the incident on video, and if it affirms your story, heads will roll at Aries Security.”

“Great! It happened 17 days ago, just so you know.”

“So Aries isn’t any better,” Hopps said. “Who else is there?”

“Well, the Democrats have the majority, so the new Mayor will most likely be from their ranks. We have Swinton, who’s a lazy slob and not interested in anything else than her career and her make-up. Then there is Merino, another sheep who’s probably in league with Bellwether. She only joined the Council recently, but rumor has it she’s destined for great things. Caballus only became Councilmammal to prevent the Council from doing anything which could harm his construction company.” He made a pause. “The rest are mere yes-mammals who just sit there, doing nothing, barely even realizing that the citizens of Zootopia look up to them for guidance, hoping they’d make the right decisions for them and the city on the whole. Castor may be an alternative, but he’s too young and inexperienced, and he doesn’t have the support most other Councilmammals have. And I have no idea how high he is on the list of possible successors anyway.”

“You seem to be pretty knowledgeable when it comes to the City Council,” Bogo observed.

Wilde shrugged. “I know everybody.”

“So, what do we do?” Hopps asked.

Wilde looked at her with a frown. “We? What do you think? I’m going to take you to the hospital so you can have someone look after that leg of yours. And the Chief is on his way to the ZPD HQ for the press conference.”

Bogo nodded. “It is not our responsibility to determine who the next Mayor of Zootopia will be, Hopps. It’ll sort itself out without our help.”

“Yes, but Zootopia needs a good Mayor now, not just the next in line.”

Wilde actually laughed at that. “You’re a regular riot, Carrots! The Councilmammals are all just politicians, which means they are cheats and liars, and when they’re not kissing cubs, they’re stealing their pawpsicles. All that changes are names and faces, that’s it.”

“Lionheart was better.”

Wilde hesitated. “Well, yes, he was, but … he’s a liar. And a criminal.”

“No, he isn’t. You heard Bellwether.”

Bogo stopped dead in his tracks. “What did you just say?”

“Bellwether told us that she framed him.” She pointed at the carrot pen Bogo still held in his left hoof. “It’s all on the pen, the final thing before the recording ends.”

“You think he’s innocent?”

“We believe so, sir.”

Wilde shook his head. “You believe so Carrots. I don’t. He falsely imprisoned fifteen mammals to
make sure he stayed in power. Doesn’t sound like being innocent to me.”

“Yes, but … he didn’t have a choice.” Hopps took a deep breath. “He was right. When we arrested him, he told me that what had happened could destroy Zootopia.” She looked up at Bogo “You were there, too, sir. You heard him say that he imprisoned the missing mammals to protect the city. And seeing what happened after …,” her nose began to twitch again, “after I shot my mouth during the press conference, I have to agree with him. He has been right all along. You can’t blame a Mayor for doing what is best for his city.”

Wilde considered this. “Maybe that’s true, Fluff. Still, he broke the law.”

Suddenly, Hopps grinned. “Look at you, Slick! We’ll make a law-abiding citizen out of you yet.”

Wilde shrugged. “I better start acting like a cop, I guess, seeing that I just applied to become one.”

“That’s the spirit, Nick!” She looked up at Bogo. “Lionheart’s your friend, right?”

Bogo’s posture became rigid. “How’d you figure out that one?”

“When you arrested Lionheart, you told him, and I quote: ‘Never thought you’d do something like this, Leo.’” She made a pause. “Sounds like you go back a long way.”

“We do,” Bogo said. “We first met in High School, and we’ve been buddies ever since. Hell, I was his best mammal! I’m his oldest cub’s godfather!”

“So you were disappointed.”

“I was. Still am.” Bogo sighed. “I’m with Wilde on this one. He may have had all the good reasons in the world, still he committed a crime, and for that, he needs to be punished. It doesn’t matter if Bellwether hoodwinked him into doing what he did, the decision itself was his, and his alone.”

“Sure, Chief, but what should he have done? Letting savage mammals go on a rampage? Let the public know that predators turn savage? You saw what happened when the public found out. Back when we arrested him, I thought he’d done it merely to make sure he stayed in office. I’m not so sure anymore. He had seen the problems and had done what was in his power to make sure they never materialize.”

“Yes, but false imprisonment is a crime, Hopps!”

“Maybe so, but if someone is coerced into committing a crime, don’t you think it could count as extenuating circumstances?”

Bogo hesitated. “I think so. I’m not a lawyer, nor a judge. I’m just a cop.”

“And you’d probably be pleased if your old friend is released from prison and reinstated.”

“Of course, but … I just can’t imagine how that could ever happen. The City Council’s not likely to invite him back with open arms.”

“Maybe someone could convince them.”

“And who could this mammal be?”

“You, for example.”

Bogo let out a guffaw. “Weren’t you listening, Hopps? Lionheart’s my friend! The moment I start
putting in a good word for him, that’s the moment when mammals start accusing me of being biased. I am the Chief of Police at Precinct One. I need to be impartial. All mammals are equal before the law. I merely enforce the law, and I’m not allowed to care who the perp is.”

“But let’s put your friendship, let’s put the fact that you are the Chief of Police aside for a second. You’d agree with me that, as far as mayoralty is concerned, he would be the best option.”

Bogo looked at Wilde, who returned the gaze and nodded. Bogo nodded, too. “He would certainly be.”

“He was the first Mayor in a long time who really cared about the citizens, all of them,” Wilde added. “When he became Mayor, things finally began to change. Before that, it sometimes was outright dangerous for a fox to cross the streets at night. Lionheart and the City Council appointed a new DA, and he immediately stepped up to press charges against thugs who went after foxes. Or weasels. Or any other species. Yes, there still is a long way to go, but under Lionheart, things finally started to improve for everyone involved, not just for one group of mammals. It seems that he really believes in that old mantra that anyone can be anything. Yep, if I had any say in this matter, I’d prefer Lionheart over most of his competitors.”

“Me too,” Bogo said, “but my opinion will count as biased. So I cannot put in a good word for him.”

“Then let me do it, Chief,” Hopps said.

“You?”

“Yes, sir. I will put in a good word for him. I will tell the people of Zootopia that Lionheart is the Mayor this city needs.”

“Hopps, you are a police officer. You’re a subject of the City Council, too. You cannot take sides. You need to be impartial at all times. Justice knows no favoritism.”

“Do I really need to show favoritism? All I need to do is to present the facts of the case. I can show that Lionheart had no choice but to act like the way he did, that Bellwether forced his paw. She was the true culprit behind everything - she coerced Lionheart into his criminal behavior. She even admitted that she framed Lionheart, it’s on the pen, and Nick and I can confirm it. If I mention all this, maybe the Councilmammals and all of Zootopia will realize that he is their best option.”

Bogo sighed. “Of course, but you need to avoid sounding like you officially endorse Lionheart.”

“That goes without saying, sir.”

“And when will you want to do this?”

She hesitated, but then she looked Bogo in the eyes. “At your press conference.”

Bogo stared at her in surprise. “That’s out of the question, Hopps! You belong in a hospital!”

“Sir,” Hopps stare became even more intense, “I need to do this! I screwed up royally the first time. It’s my fault this city almost fell into an all-out riot. My fault, and mine alone. I need to make this right! I need to make amends! Sir, please, let me accompany you to the press conference!”

“No, Hopps! You are in no fit state to address the press!”

“Sir, this is more important than me! To hell with my leg - I need to do this, even if I can’t walk
anymore after this! I need to fix this, and I need to do it now!”

“You can’t even stand on your own!”

“Nick will support me.”

“I will,” Wilde said immediately. He put on a smirk. “Besides, I guess the press wants to see the bunny who solved the case.”

“And the fox who helped her do it,” Hopps added, looking at Wilde.

Bogo looked from her to him, and back again. He so wanted the two of them to go directly to the hospital. A deep gash in the shin was not to be trifled with, particularly one which probably was infected already.

But he wouldn’t force them to go to the hospital.

During her first press conference, Hopps had turned herself into Enemy Number One of a lot of predators in Zootopia. Her inexperience, her naivety, her lack of knowledge, had caused her to make a blunder of galactic proportions, a blunder which caused a lot of pain and suffering.

It was high time this came to an end.

It was high time for Judy Hopps to apologize to the mammals of Zootopia, to start making amends.

Bogo heaved a sigh. “Fine, Hopps.”

*This rabbit will be the death of me yet! She and her fox friend!*

And that’s it for today!

Now let me introduce you to a little game I started playing at one point, the one I mentioned towards the beginning of this chapter.

As some of you might have noticed, I hid a few quotes in this chapter, namely these:

I hid one quote from the book “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.” (Written by J.K. Rowling in 1998, published by Bloomsbury in the same year.)

Another quote, slightly changed this time, is from the movie (not the book) “The Hunt for Red October” by John McTiernan, published by Paramount Pictures in 1990.

Now, I kindly ask you to try and find those quotes and tell me about it. In case you manage to do it, you can expect me to give you a honorific mention in the very next chapter I publish.

(And for those of you who already played that game back on fanfiction.net: Yes, the quotes still are the same, so if you wanna participate again, feel free to do so! Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone! ;-))

Thanks for reading! Please send me your reviews, or whatever they’re called around here, to let me know what you think about what I’m doing here!

Take care!
Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

The reboot is proceeding surprisingly smoothly thus far. Granted, “Wound” is the story that needs the least amount of work, but I must confess that I’m surprised how well everything seems to work here.

Which also goes for being on AO3. So far, I like it very much. Slowly getting used to the new environment. And I must say that I really enjoy it. Seems like a very pleasant place to be. And the fact that I have received nothing but supportive comments so far, on fanfiction.net, on the Discord servers as well as here on AO3, only serves as an added bonus. Again, I want to thank everyone who supported me over the course of the last couple of days! You guys seriously rock!

In short, I’m having a great time! And I have you, dear Reader, to thank for it as well! Can you see my bow of gratitude? I guess not. What a pity! ;-)

So much for a few personal notes. Now, back to the story!

Sometimes things need to get worse before they get better …

This is exactly what this chapter’s all about. In here, I’ll deal with the repercussions of the first press conference, how it influenced several mammals, both characters from the movie as well as OCs. This is a heavy one, but absolutely necessary. There will be angst, pain, oppression, the whole shebang. I’m taking a leaf out of history books, but apart from that, I just thought of the most ugly possibilities and put them in here.

It was a very tough chapter to write, having to deal with such a host of dark emotions. It took me quite a lot of tries to get the tone right. I hope I managed to deliver.

I’ve made it a habit to give the current stats when posting new chapters, which are quite different here than they were over on fanfiction.net. Yet here they are:

105 Hits, 15 Kudos, 9 subscriptions, 5 comment threads, and 2 bookmarks. On top of that, I also received 21 user subscriptions.

I have no idea if these are impressive numbers on AO3 or not, but they sound seriously impressive to me! Many thanks to all of you for reading my stuff and supporting me!

The comment threads were initiated by giftheck, GhostWolf88, FirnenOne, Armasyll, and ConfusedGoatee_01, who alerted me of an absolutely hilarious typo I made (and corrected in the meantime). Judy the Pirate! Nice idea actually. Imagine her saying “Avast, ye scurvy dogs!” before arresting someone! Anyway, I’m bowing down in gratitude yet again, my friends!

It took giftheck no time at all to find one of the quotes I gave in chapter 1. In the book “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,” Albus Dumbledore tells Harry that he needs to draft an advertisement for the Daily Prophet, asking for a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher,
because, as he puts it: “Dear me, we do seem to run through them, don’t we?” I loved the line so much, I decided to use it here, and I opted to give it to Judy, because out of her mouth, the deadpan humor sounds most Riddikulus. Oh, erm, sorry, I meant ridiculous! ;-) Kudos to you, giftheck, for finding that one, and that fast, too!

The other quote is elusive as of yet, but since so little time has passed, maybe I should cut you guys some slack here.

Chapter Two

Yeah, But It Might Be Worse!

There’s desperation in the air. It leaves a stain on all your clothes and no detergent gets it out.


Zootopia News Network Headquarters, Office of Peter Moosebridge and Fabienne Growley, City Center, Zootopia

Peter Moosebridge looked at his wristwatch, trying his hardest to not let his nervousness show. For the third time in two weeks, his co-anchor Fabienne Growley was late in coming to the studio for the Evening News. Until those two weeks ago, lateness and Growley had been things you wouldn’t have found in one sentence together. But ever since some mysterious mammal had started targeting the snow leopard, making her private life a living hell, she had either arrived at the studio at the very last minute, which had quickly become a regular occurrence, or very, very late.

Today she was very, very late.

The door opened a bit, and Larry White, one of ZNN’s production assistants, pushed his horned head through the gap. “Fabienne’s still not arrived?”

Moosebridge spread his arms. “Do you see her here?”

The oryx clicked his tongue in irritation. “When push comes to shove, you need to do it alone today.”

“I know, but you know perfectly well that I’m loath to do so, Larry,” Moosebridge replied immediately. He shook his head. “Why does nobody interfere? She’s been harassed for weeks, still the authorities do nothing about it.”

White didn’t appear to be particularly sorry for Growley. “That’s what you get for being a stinkin’ pred.” He pulled back his head.

“NOW WAIT JUST ONE SECOND,” Moosebridge thundered. White’s head reappeared. “You didn’t just say that, did you?”

If White was upset over Moosebridge’s tone, he concealed it well. “What if I did?”

“That was the single most disgusting thing I’ve ever heard. Fabienne is one of two reasons you have a job, young mammal.” He got up, towering over White. “I am the other one. So I strongly suggest you show her the respect she deserves, and show me that you can behave. Otherwise you’ll
find this hoof,” he pointed at his right hind leg, “at a certain place where the sun doesn’t shine. Along with your walking papers.”

It certainly was unusual for a news anchor to issue such threats. However, Peter Moosebridge wasn’t your usual news anchor.

For more than 35 years, Moosebridge had been the “voice of Zootopia,” as most of his colleagues, and thus the public, called him. He was the prime news anchor and thus a familiar face for mammals in both Zootopia as well as the surrounding boroughs. He was immensely popular and therefore in constant demand. He hosted his own talk show, Moosebridge One on One, he had been the narrator for countless documentary features and had recently even begun doing voiceover work for animated movies. He was a well-known staple in advertising and a welcome face in other talk shows. He was famous for knowing a lot of politicians on quite an intimate basis, and there were few mammals in Zootopia who knew more about the political proceedings than he did. Which is why most citizens of Zootopia valued his opinion highly.

All this had made him a wealthy mammal. Combined with an extraordinary skill in making investments, the money he had at his disposal even put the most overpaid sport celebrities to shame. And when the ZNN had been facing financial troubles, it had enabled him to buy 51 percent of stock, which in turn meant that he was basically running the whole company.

When Moosebridge told someone that his job at the ZNN was on the line, it was no empty threat. White’s jaw dropped. “You wouldn’t!”

“I am the majority shareholder of this company; I can, and I will. So, don’t you dare talk about Fabienne like that! Just get out and do what you’re paid for!”

White’s head was gone faster than Moosebridge had ever seen a mammal move.

He sat down again and sighed. Times had surely changed!

He’d been living in Zootopia for most of his adult life, and he had seen a lot of changes in society lately. Every day, he had seen the prejudice, the bigotry, the false hopes, the animosity. At this particular moment, there was very little which could have served to convince him that in Zootopia, anyone could be anything, as the former Mayor Leodore Lionheart had constantly claimed.

And after the press conference following the solving of the Missing Mammals case, things had taken a turn for the worst. Now, open harassment against predators happened on a daily basis. Every day, news of atrocious crimes, always perpetrated by prey mammals, and always with predators as the victims, flooded his office. And strangely enough, the city’s administration seemed to be somewhat reluctant to put the criminals to justice.

Each and every day, things got worse. So far, injuries and property damage had been the worst outcome, but Moosebridge was secretly dreading the day when reports of outright murder would make it onto his desk. In his opinion, it was just a matter of time.

Suddenly, the door leading into his shared office opened with a bang, and Fabienne Growley stormed into the room, completely out of breath and looking quite disheveled. “I don’t believe it!” she shouted instead of a greeting.

“What is it?” Moosebridge asked.

“I finally know who was molesting me. I found him slashing the tires of my car!”
“Again? What, it’s like the third time.”

“It is. And can you imagine who did it?”

“No idea.”

“My neighbor.”

Moosebridge flinched. “The zebra? Hold on a second, didn’t you tell me you were getting along just fine? Didn’t you invite him to your last birthday party.”

“I did, but ’were’ is the operative word here.” Growley collapsed into her office chair, trying hard to calm her breathing. “Seems like he had a change of mind. Now I’m just a dirty, no-good pred, according to him.”

Moosebridge shook his head. “The nerve! Did you report him to the police?”

She snorted. “I tried. Turns out that their staffing level is stretched really thin right now, so there was no officer available to receive my report. All they told me was that they would call back as soon as an officer is available. Which will probably take years, if it happens at all.” She leaned back and sighed. “So I had to take a cab, or rather, I tried. Nine cabs just rushed past me; each one of them driven by prey. One even flipped the bird at me. The tenth cab was driven by an ocelot. He seemed to be happy to have a customer. According to him, business is extremely slow, because no prey wants to ride in a cab driven by a predator.” She looked at the wall clock. “That’s why I’m late. Guess we need to skip the …”

At this moment, the door opened again, and the editor-in-charge appeared. Patrick Mephitis was a skunk, a no-nonsense mammal who did not have a sense of humor he was aware of. “Get a move on! We have a news-flash! We’re on the air in five!”


“Just got word from the ZPD. Seems like they arrested Mayor Bellwether.”

“WHAT?” both Growley and Moosebridge shouted.

“Yeah. She is charged with conspiracy, as far as I know. Press conference will start in ten minutes. Mike has already arrived at the ZPD. Just get yourselves presentable; we’ll talk once you reach the studio.” With that, he left the office.

Moosebridge looked at Growley, who looked like she’d just seen a ghost. “What the hell …,” she said slowly.

“We’ll find out what this is all about,” Moosebridge said, rising from his chair. “Get yourself a blazer and let Meggie apply some make-up. We don’t have time to ponder on what’s happening.”

“Right,” Growley said, getting up, too. “Fortunately, I’m always prepared.”

“Felinae Homestead” Apartment House, The Otterton Apartment, Rainforest District, Zootopia

Natalie Otterton entered the apartment, closed the door and leaned against the wall next to it with a sigh.
The workload was slowly, but surely, catching-up with her. She was absolutely dead on her feet.

She had been forced to run her husband’s florist’s shop after his disappearance. She had to care for their children Shawn and Francis. She still had to deal with the usual household chores. And her husbands’ unchanging condition only served as an additional load on her small shoulders.

And on top of that, her husband’s lifelong dream, the florist’s shop, seemed to be gradually coming apart at the seams.

To say that business in his shop had been slow was an understatement. Business had been virtually non-existent.

She had seen no prey mammals the whole day, only a few predators. Each and every one of them had looked harassed and the worse for wear, and they had spent little money on few flowers. The reason for the peculiar absence of prey mammals had become obvious when she had spotted a poster she had completely overlooked when unlocking the shop in the morning.

It had been a plain white poster which had borne, in fat, black letters, the following slogan:

Zootopians!

Defend Yourselves!

Don’t Buy From Predators!

No wonder most mammals had shunned the shop!

She had taken down the poster, then she had gone to the back to brew herself a cup of tea.

And when she had returned to the shop proper, somebody had replaced the poster.

Three times she had torn down the poster, three times it had been replaced almost immediately. And she had never been able to catch the culprit who was responsible for this impudence.

Someone had been watching the shop the whole time, making sure that the harassment of her and her husband’s livelihood would continue unimpeded.

In the end, after the third attempt, she had stopped trying to stop the mammals, whoever they were. She was just too tired.

Too tired to deal with the constant harassment. Too tired to deal with the constant prejudice.

Too tired to care about her own well-being.

Come on, Natalie! You need to eat something! Starving yourself is going to help no-one.

She wished Emmitt was there. He had always found ways to cheer her up.

She sorely missed him.

The apartment was empty, which surprised her for a second, until she remembered that her sister, who had volunteered to help her with childcare, had promised to take her two boys to Central Park today. They wouldn’t return before seven in the evening. She sincerely hoped their day had been better than hers had been.

With a groan, Natalie pushed herself off of the wall, walking over to the kitchen. Opening her
fridge, looking at the food it contained, she decided that for today, a smoothie would have to suffice. She simply was too tired to prepare a wholesome dinner for herself.

Switching on the radio, she hoped that the latest in pop music would cheer her up. But even this wasn’t working in her favor today. Because instead of soothing music, a female newscaster was currently giving her report.

“… are still waiting for the Chief of Police, Adrian Bogo, to appear. So far, all we have are rumors.”

Another voice, a male one, was heard: “What do those rumors say? Do they revolve around Mayor Bellwether?”

“They revolve around her exclusively.” The female again. “The ZPD issued a statement that today, at around five pm, the Mayor had been arrested. No further information has been given, so we don’t know the reason yet. A ZPD spokesmammal announced that Chief Bogo would give details on the case, the reason for the arrest. All we can do now is wait for him to appear.”

“The main problem Zootopia is facing right now is the ever-increasing number of predators turning savage. Is it possible that there is a connection there?”

“That’s the possible reason mentioned the most around here. In fact, it’s virtually the only reason anyone here can think of.”

“Just this week, Mayor Bellwether had announced a motion to strengthen control over predators. There has even been talk about a device currently in construction, which would allow predators to live next to prey without posing a possible threat to them.”

“You’re right, but the Mayor has been shallow on the details. Nobody knows what kind of device we’re talking about, nor how it will work. And the fact remains that among the 865,000 predators living in Zootopia, only a few dozen have turned savage so far. Detractors have said that the administration’s attempt at controlling the situation is like taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut.”

“But it is true that savage predators have posed a threat lately.”

“That’s certainly true, yet those detractors say that the numbers are so few and so well-contained, that it would be counter-productive to impose laws on such a large number of citizens.”

Natalie looked at the radio, the smoothie in her paw forgotten.

The Mayor has been arrested? Talk about laws against predators? Rumors?

What the hell was going on?

“The Watering Hole” Bar, Savanna Central, Zootopia

“Howdy, Freddie!” Reginald Pocock looked at the new arrival with a smile while dropping the rag with which he had polished the bar. “The usual?”

“Yeah, and make it a tall one,” Frederick Delgato said. “And a beer.” He sat down on one of the bar stools with a sigh.

While the tiger barkeeper was pulling the beer, he asked: “That bad?”
“You have no idea, Reg. ZPD’s still doing nothing, and nobody’s looking for a middle-aged lion who’s well-versed in paw-to-paw combat.”

“Not even the security companies?”

Delgato snorted. “They’re all run by prey. What do you expect?”

“Shit!” Pocock sighed. “It gets worse.”

“No kidding!”

While waiting for the barkeeper to finish pulling the beer and pouring him a tall scotch, Delgato looked around. The bar, usually one of the more crowded ones in Savanna Central, was almost completely deserted. Apart from Delgato, only a couple of weasels were sitting in a booth along the back wall. “Business seems slow,” Delgato commented.

“That’s the understatement of the year,” Pocock said matter-of-factly. “Then again, it’s not that surprising.”

“What do you mean?”

“Have you seen the posters adorning several shop windows here?”

Delgato shook his head. “I had other worries on my mind.”

“I understand. However … no, it’s better if I just show you.” He placed the two glasses in front of Delgato, then he knelt down to take something from under the counter. “My first thought was to simply throw it into the trash can, but I had a hunch that you might come here today, so I kept it to show it to you. What do you think?”

Delgato looked at the poster with a frown. “Zootopians! Defend Yourselves! Don’t … you gotta be kiddin’!”

“Nice, isn’t it?”

“Who did this?” Delgato examined the poster. “PPS … what the heck’s that supposed to be?”

“They call themselves the Prey Protection Society. Little more than a bunch of prejudiced, self-righteous, violent prey, with way too much money at their disposal and way too much time on their paws. Seems like they’ve have made it their lifetime ambition to make the lives of predators a living hell. I watched them place the posters on most shops owned by predators here.”

“A minor case of Damage to Property, a small fine, maybe a few hours of community work,” Delgato said automatically.

“Do you honestly think they care that it’s illegal, Freddie? They do it anyway! They probably know that the police is doing nothing about them. When you call the ZPD right now, all they tell you is that they’re really low on officers, and that they’d call back as soon as someone is available. But they never do. Seems like they cannot be bothered with petty things like criminal mischief at the moment.” He looked at Delgato. “I knew them showing guys like you the door would bite them sooner or later.”

“So you just tore it off?”

“I did. Ten minutes later, a sheep and a pig turned up, trying to put a new poster in place. Which
was when I showed them just how long a tiger’s claws really are.”

“You attacked them?”

Pocock snorted. “Attack? Certainly not! The situation’s bad enough without predators attacking prey without having turned savage before. All I did was ask them to refrain from putting the poster up, and threaten them with bodily harm, should they do it anyway.”

“What did they do?”

Pocock shrugged. “Must have made quite an impression on the pair, because they ran. But the pig shouted at me that they would call the police. But, seeing as the ZPD’s staffing level is so thin right now, I guess they don’t have the time to deal with me.”

“I rather think they know what they’re doing is illegal, so they’re afraid to go to the ZPD.”

“Maybe.” Pocock looked at the poster and sighed. “Anyway, it feels like Zootopia isn’t a nice place for predators to live in anymore.”

Delgato gave a low-pitched growl. “And where to? Reg, I was born and raised in Zootopia! I have left this city a grand total of seven times, five of which were on ZPD duty or Academy-related. This is my home! I don’t think I could settle in Deerbrooke County or the Tri-Burrows!” He picked up his scotch and downed it quickly. “Another one, please.”

“At once.”

Delgato picked up his glass of beer and took a big gulp. The three weasels in the background ignored him completely; they were deeply engrossed in a heated conversation, and if their facial expressions were any indication, the topic they were talking about was less than pleasant. Given the shady reputation of weasels, probability was high that they were meddling in some less-than-legal affairs. Delgato watched them for a few seconds before deciding that he didn’t care. He no longer was a police officer, probably never would be again, so whether or not these weasels were involved in illicit activity simply was of no concern to him. In addition to that, Delgato thought, was it prejudice like that - weasels being considered slippery and untrustworthy, therefore promptly assuming that any weasel you saw was up to no good - which had turned the situation between predators and prey into such an unbearable mess. After all, because a tiny number of predators had turned savage for unknown reason, the prey in Zootopia were about to dish out some collective punishment to all predators.

Suddenly all concepts of right and wrong, everything Delgato had ever believed in, had gone out the window.

He took another sip. It was probably best to not think about it too much. The thought alone was much too depressing.

He looked up at the TV screen hanging from the wall instead. It showed a rerun of a popular TV series, where a group of mammals, among them a somewhat angry looking walrus wearing a black beret and a hyperactive wolf who, for some reason or another, was missing an eyebrow, tried to prove or disprove urban myths. This particular episode showed them trying to rip the rear axle from under a car with a strong cable, as shown in a popular movie from the seventies.

“Won’t work with police cruisers, that’s for sure,” Delgato said, taking another gulp.

“What won’t work?” Pocock asked, placing the next glass of scotch in front of Delgato.
“Hooking up a cable and hoping it would yank the rear axle out from under a police car.” He pointed at the screen. “Might work on some cars suitable for smaller mammals, but we don’t even have those. All we have are our heavy cruisers, and it certainly won’t work on those.”

“Why?”

“Hello? Have you seen one? These things can carry up to four rhinos! They weigh more than ten metric tons! They have hybrid drives, four electric motors plus two turbocharged petrol engines, and can put out more than 2,000 bhp! No cable in the world will be able to withstand …”

Suddenly, the image on the TV screen changed, along with a short jingle. The image of the remote-controlled police car was replaced by that of a male koala bear wearing an ill-fitting maroon suit.

“We apologize for the interruption of our current program, but we have received some very important piece of news for you, dear citizens of Zootopia,” the koala said. “The ZPD had just announced that Zootopia’s Mayor, Dawn Bellwether, has been arrested. No further information is available at this stage. We’re switching over to the ZPD headquarters at City Center, where a press conference is scheduled to begin in a few minutes.”

Delgato looked away from the screen, his face showing complete and utter incomprehension. A look at Pocock revealed a similar facial expression.

“What the …?”

**Zootopia Municipal Correctional Facility, Mess Hall, Sahara Square, Zootopia**

As per custom, the three principal meals in Zootopia’s largest prison were served in the mess hall; meals were usually shared by all prisoners, with the exception of those in solitary confinement. This was why Madge Badger was sitting at a table situated inside the enormous, hall-like room, watching several fellow inmates. Most of them had by this time, after more than one month of imprisonment, become a familiar sight, even if the sights themselves may have seemed odd under different circumstances.

Badger would never have imagined watching a truly gigantic rhino walking next to a tiny vixen. Even if she had tried imagining something like this, the rhino would never have looked that enormous, or that menacing, and the vixen would never have sported that many earrings and would most certainly never have dyed her head fur in such a violent shade of green.

Yet here they were, walking next to each other, engrossed in an animated and, obviously, very entertaining conversation, if their respective grins were any indication.

Other mammals looked even more weird, sometimes even outright irritating.

But the mammal whose presence irritated her the most was the most ordinary-looking one by far and away.

If you didn’t know it, you’d never have guessed that Leodore Lionheart was just as much a prisoner as Badger was. But he was, and as such, he was in an even worse position than she was. As the instigator of the Missing Mammals affair, he had been sentenced to ten years, whereas she, as his mere accessory, had been sentenced to two-and-a-half years.

Yet he didn’t behave like an inmate. More like a tourist on an extended vacation.

He was “holding court,” there was no other expression for it. Mammals approached him - other inmates, sometimes even guards - to have a conversation with him. Most asked him about some
legal counsel, others for background information on certain Very-Important-Mammals of Zootopia, yet others wanted to discuss the latest football scores with him. And he responded to each and every single one of them with the same smile, the same patience.

As if he was the prison’s official counselor.

The strangest thing about it was that he never tried to let this fact work into his favor.

From Day One of his imprisonment, six weeks ago, the guards had offered him quite a lot of amenities, only for him to reject them all. He was, for all instants and purposes, just your usual, everyday convict.

It seemed like he had accepted his fate with a certain fatalism. Which wasn’t all that surprising, given the fact that he was still young enough to return to his former occupation after his release. He might even be able to run for a seat on the City Council again. Despite his criminal record, his future life probably wasn’t in any serious jeopardy.

Unlike hers. In contrast to Lionheart, she would hit rock bottom when she left the prison. Unlike him, she had no savings, no job, no future whatsoever. And nobody would hire an ex-convict, especially someone whose arrest had happened under the very eyes of the public. Particularly not Zootopia General Hospital, where she had worked prior to having been hired by Lionheart to unravel the mystery of the savage predators.

Lionheart’s future probably held some inconvenience. In Badger’s future, she saw nothing but trouble.

“What’s the matter, Honey?” Lionheart asked when he finally joined her at their table. “You seem distraught.”

Badger rolled her eyes “I told you a thousand times, Lionheart, only my friends may call me Honey.”

Lionheart blinked. “Ah. My mistake. I thought that, given the fact that we share a table in this mess hall, we would at least be on friendly terms.”

“And that’s at least the thousandth time you told me that,” Badger replied irritably.

Lionheart shrugged. “I’m merely trying to be friendly.”

“No, you’re not. You’re trying to be overfriendly.”

He still looked at her, but his expression changed drastically. Every trace of friendliness left the lion in an instant. “I’m not, to the contrary. But if you really want to spend your time here moping, bemoaning your fate, instead of socializing and trying to get others to understand your problems, maybe even let them try and help fixing it, be my guest.” He got up again.

Badger sighed. “Why do you feel the need to come over and pester me?”

“Pester you? Apart from the fact that this is my assigned table, that this is the place where I eat my meals, please refresh my memory, when have I ever pestered you?”

Badger had enough. “Fine. Feel free to talk to all and sundry. But unless you want me to bite you, leave me out of your grand schemes.”

She had hoped to goad Lionheart into leaving her alone, but he simply sat down again. “So that’s
what you think I’m doing.”

Badger snorted. “Of course. You’re a politician, you’re always scheming.”

“Excuse me?” Lionheart made an encompassing gesture. “Do you see any politicians here? Any political discussion? Any political opportunities.” He made a pause. “Face it, Doctor, I’m just as much a prisoner as everyone else here.”

“Yeah, right! You, the mighty Mayor, the most important mammal in all of Zootopia …”

“Do you know what I did for a living before I became the Mayor?”

Badger was taken aback by this sudden question, this sudden change in topic. “Uh, I have no idea. Teacher? Administrative official?”

Lionheart shook his head. “I was a judge.”

“A judge?”

Lionheart made another encompassing gesture. “Behold the beauty of my work! Almost forty percent of the inmates in here were sent here by me.”

He closed the gap to Badger, who shrank back immediately, suddenly and uncomfortably reminded of his fit of rage in Cliffside Asylum, shortly before they were arrested. But his voice was silent and calm when he continued. “The reason I’m trying my damndest to socialize with my fellow inmates is that if I don’t, probability is high that someone tries to do me in. I’m the reason they’re in here. Some might be after my blood. And if they are, they’re probably going to get it. Despite the claws and the fangs, I know next to nothing about self-defense. I may be tall, I may be strong, but that won’t help me much if someone sinks a blade into my chest.” He made a pause. “All I’m trying to do is stay alive!”

Surprised, Badger looked around, taking in the other prisoners. And while most of them looked at Lionheart with a look of indifference, one or two eyed Lionheart with what can only be described as loathing.

She took a deep breath. “It can’t be that bad.”

“No, it’s even worse. Just so you know, I received three anonymous death threats in less than five hours when I came here. The Warden takes them seriously, and so do I.”

Badger gave a grunt. “So, you need to survive. Tough luck! We all do. It’s no easier for me. Or do you think I’m spared, just because I’m a girl?”

“Did you receive a death threat yet?”

She hesitated. “No.”

“I rest my case. For the record, I’ve received seventeen so far.”

Badger rolled her eyes. “At least you’ll probably leave the prison before I do.”

“You think so? I disagree. The current administration isn’t too predator-friendly, and I doubt Smellwether likes me enough to grant me a pardon. No, I guess I’ll have to ride out the full ten years, regardless of what I do. I don’t think they’ll release me early, even if I’m on my very best behavior.”
“But when you leave, you can still be …”

Lionheart snorted. “Oh, please, don’t give me the ‘you-were-a-Mayor,-you-are-well-cared-for’ crap!”

“But you are!”

“I’m not! My days as a politician are over. Nobody will trust me enough again to vote for me, ever. I will never make it back into the City Council. And I can certainly never work as a judge again, and I doubt someone will want me as their lawyer. My career is stone cold dead.”

Badger looked at him, crestfallen. If he was speaking the truth, his fate might even be worse than hers. Then again … “At least you’ll be able to survive afterwards, unlike me. I have nothing. No job, no savings, nothing.”

“And you think I do?”

She stared at him, flabbergasted. “You don’t?”

He managed to give her a smile, but it was taking him a visible effort. “The common misconception about Mayors. Most people seem to think that once you are a Mayor, you’ve got it made. Most seem to think that you make a fortune doing your job. Fact of the matter is, you don’t. Yes, your salary is huge, but so are your expenses. You may be able to live a life without worries, but you certainly don’t amass riches while in office.” He made a pause. “Of course, this changes the moment you leave the office. When you do, you’re granted a substantial pension, two-thirds of your last salary actually. And since your expenses go down drastically, you can become a wealthy mammal in a matter of less than two years.”

He leaned back, bringing more distance between him and Badger. “However, since I have to suffer this … inconvenience, I lost the right to a Mayor’s pension. Right now, I’m no longer in office, so I get nothing. And I will continue to get nothing, even after I’m released. Of course I may get the judge’s pension, but right now, even that is doubtful.” His face took on a dreamy expression. “And given the fact that some of the organizations which sponsored me want their money back, I’ll probably be up to my neck in debt by the time I am released. I had to sell my hacienda in the Pawaiian Islands already. My cars are gone, as is my yacht, and my estate is probably up next. And when it’s gone, there’s not much left. My wife is currently working double shifts to make ends meet, to support herself and our three children. I simply can’t do it.” He made yet another pause. “Please, be so kind and enlighten me, Doctor, where’s my advantage over you?”

She just stared at him, open-mouthed. Lionheart looked around. “So excuse me for trying to be friendly. That’s all I have left, trying to be helpful and friendly to others. Helping them survive.”

He made another pause. “Maybe this’ll help me survive.”

He straightened himself, looking at the serving counter. “Hope they’ll get a move on. I’m hungry.”

Badger had the feeling of being doused with ice water. In her arrogance, she had assumed that he was much better off than she was, when in fact it seemed to be the exact opposite.

Yet he didn’t complain, he had simply stated the facts.

Facts which, if everything unfolded exactly as he seemed to expect it, would lead to him being dishonored, bankrupt, with a family in disgrace and no future whatsoever.

_I’m such a moron!,_ Badger thought.
Opening her mouth to render an apology, she found that Lionheart wasn’t even looking at her. Instead, he was peering over the serving counter into the kitchen behind it. Badger followed his example, only to see a strange sight.

The serving counter and the kitchen looked just as usual, but the absence of mammals was highly suspicious.

And they weren’t the only inmates to notice this.

“What’s going on?” someone asked.

“Where is everyone?” another one demanded to know.

“I want me munchies!” a third one shouted. Others joined in, and soon a chant was beginning to form. But before it had gained too much momentum, a single voice drowned it out completely:

“SHUT IT!”

All heads turned towards the mammal that had uttered those words in a thunderous voice. The massive rhino Badger had watched earlier had risen from his bench, looking around menacingly. “Sit down!” he bellowed, “and shut your pie-holes!”

If any other prisoner had dared to try and discipline the other inmates, everybody would have laughed into his face. But this was not any old inmate.

Not only was Rufus O’Malley a convicted murderer, his track record of violence was outright fear-inducing - at least forty mammals had been crippled by him. On top of that, he was so huge, so scary-looking, that nobody dared to mess with him. Even some of the guards seem to prefer giving him a wide berth.

The strange thing about this was that it was a well-known fact that O’Malley had renounced his violent ways completely. According to what Badger had learned about him, he must have been a menace on two legs in the past, but she had only gotten to know him as a mild-mannered, even benevolent mammal. As far as she knew, it had been years since he had threatened someone with bodily harm. She had no idea what had made him change his ways, but as far as she was concerned, the world was a better place because of it.

The one thing that obviously hadn’t change was his booming voice, easily capable of drowning out even the loudest chants.

Complete and utter silence fell over the assembled mammals. Until one single mammal cleared his throat.

“Thank you, Rufus,” one of the guards, another rhino, said in a rather soft voice - or maybe it only sounded soft because O’Malley’s voice had sounded so booming.

O’Malley simply nodded and sat down again. He looked down at the vixen sitting next to him, who returned his gaze with a smile and reached up to pat his arm.

Meanwhile, the guard had walked towards the serving counter in long strides and pounded the counter so hard, Badger was secretly surprised that the thing didn’t collapse on the spot. “What’s going on in the kitchen!”

A young-looking ocelot was poking his head through the wide door. “You won’t believe it!” he shouted with unconcealed excitement. “Looks like they solved the Savage Predators case!”
The rhino blinked. “Really?”

“They say so on ZNN. Mayor Bellwether has been arrested!”

Badger looked at Lionheart, only to find that he was staring at her, his face looking just as incredulous as she was feeling. Both said the same thing at the same time:

“Smellwether?!?!”

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Records Department, City Center, Zootopia

With a sigh, Benjamin Clawhauser placed the last files in the filing cabinet and looked around. His workplace looked pristine, apart from the occasional sprinkles littering every tabletop, shelf, and filing cabinet.

Working at Records probably was the most tedious job the ZPD had to offer. Safe, yes, but tedious. When doing parking duty, you at least had the occasional complaint to deal with. Here, nothing was alleviating the dull job - even radio reception was dismal, due to being in the basement of the huge building. On top of that, his phone had run out of juice two hours ago, and he had forgotten the charging cable.

Out of sheer boredom, he had spent the last four days sorting all the files into an alphabetical order. Given the fact that this meant dealing with tens of thousands of files, he had expected this to take at least two weeks.

He had needed four days.

Clawhauser would have been the first one to admit that he wasn’t the most diligent of mammals, still even his penchant for distraction hadn’t hindered him to finish the task much quicker than anyone, including himself, had anticipated.

Not that he had seen anyone the whole day.

Which was even worse than the boredom. While he had been much slimmer and much more athletic in the past, he had never been the best and most physically fit mammal, he had never been the greatest investigator, he had never been the go-to-guy when things got rough.

But as a receptionist, as a dispatcher, he was unrivaled.

Everybody liked him. He was famous for being able to calm down even the most exited, most distraught mammals. Nobody was able to be cross with him for any lengthy period of time. He was just the epitome of a nice guy, the friendly face which made even the grossest of crimes, the most dire situations, seem less ugly.

At the Records department, his talents, his social skills, were going to waste. Everyone knew it, but nobody seemed to want to do anything about it.

He was missing his place at the front desk. He was missing the constant coming and going of the most diverse mammals you could possibly imagine. He was missing the small talk, the occasional banter with his workmates, the corny jokes, the social interaction.

Here, only his donuts were keeping him company. And he had even run out of those an hour ago.

Hardly anyone ever came down here for a bit of small talk. And when someone did find his or her
way down into the basement, it was usually only to dump a new stack of files on his desk.

He looked at his wristwatch. Another thirty minutes, and he would be able to clock out, wrapping up another lost day.

He sighed again and started swiping the sprinkles off his desktop and into the trash can.

When, quite suddenly, the door leading into his office opened with a bang, startling him.

Thomas Higgins, the hippo officer and orderly to Chief Bogo, appeared in the doorway, panting heavily. “You need to see this, Ben,” he managed to gasp.

“What? What’s wrong, Tom?”

“Bogo’s staging a press conference now. They solved the Savage Predators case. Guess who’s behind it!”

“No idea.”

“Mayor Bellwether.”

Clawhauser guffawed. “Sure. The sheep was …”

“I was there when we arrested her!”

This gave Clawhauser pause. “Really?”

“Yes. And you’ll never guess who made it all possible.”

“Who?” Clawhauser was almost screaming. Higgins was well-known for liking to keep others on tenterhooks for as long as possible.

“Judy Hopps.”

“Judy?” He let out a whoop. “She’s back?”

“She is. And she cracked the case. She’s with Bogo - they’re going to address the press soon. Thought you might want to see this.”

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Press Conference Assembly, City Center, Zootopia

Adrian Bogo looked around slowly. The whole press gaggle was present - every major network seemed to have sent a few reporters and cameramammals. So were most of the officers working at Precinct One. He counted their number in his head and had to work hard to hide his sigh. They were so few … He needed to do something about it, and quickly.

Mental note to self: Request reinstatement of predator officers. Let’s see if the City Council is more inclined to listen to reason now.

But first …

He approached the lectern and cleared his throat, trying his hardest to ignore the constant camera flashes. “Ladies and Gentlemammals,” he began, “the rumors you may have heard already are true. Today, around 5 pm, our dispatcher, Officer Christine Caballus, received a distress call from Mayor Dawn Bellwether, about a savage fox in the Natural History Museum and a gravely injured
police officer. Upon arrival at the scene, however, the officer was mostly unscathed, and the fox was all but savage. As it turns out, it had all been a ruse, instigated by Mayor Bellwether. We have evidence that she might be the mastermind behind the predators turning savage. We also have evidence that she intended to use those as the means to establish a dictatorial rule over Zootopia. So we arrested her, and she’ll be charged with so many crimes, it’ll make the heads of most mammals spin.”

He made a pause, and when several reporters raised their paws or hooves, already shouting questions, he held up his own hoof. “Unfortunately, this is about as far as my knowledge about this case goes. I will now give the floor to the police officer who made the arrest possible. She will be able to explain everything behind this ineffable affair.” He pointed at Hopps, standing next to the lectern. Wilde was still standing next to her, supporting her. “Officer Judy Hopps.”

Without hesitation, Hopps approached the lectern while Bogo stepped aside. With the help of Wilde, she managed to climb the lectern, not without hissing and clenching of teeth. It was a sorry sight, and that a fox was lending her a helping paw seemed to be even more incongruous.

Finally, she had reached the top. Trying to stand on her own and realizing that her leg wouldn’t properly support her weight, she simply sat down.

And looked to the floor.

The reporters in front of her were shouting countless questions, hoping that she would have answers for them.

But Hopps refused to acknowledge the presence of even one of them. Eyes closed, ears droopy, she sat on top of the lectern, with the red fox one step behind it, half-hidden behind the lectern. She said no word, she moved no muscle, she simply sat there with her head bowed.

The posture of a repentant sinner.

Gradually, the noise died down. When it had become almost completely silent, Hopps finally looked up and opened her purple eyes.

And then she did … what? Yeah, I know, I’m mean! But I just love cliffhangers!

Don’t worry, the next chapter’s bound to come your way really soon!

The “Zootopians!” poster mentioned in this chapter was, of course, inspired by the atrocious “Deutsche! Wehrt Euch! Kauft nicht bei Juden!” posters used during the dark period of time known as the Third Reich by the German Nazis to harass the Jewish population from 1933 onwards. To be honest, I hated the very idea of using a poster like that in this story, but as a plot device, it’s priceless. (I guess it goes without saying that I abhor Nazis and racism in all its manifestations! If I had my way, earth itself would open up and swallow the lot! Nuff said!)

A lot of the original characters I invented over the course of the years were inspired by real-life people, whether in name or in personality. That also goes for the barkeeper of “The Watering Hole.” Reginald Innes Pocock was a British taxonomist, famous for subordinating the tiger under the genus Panthera, giving it the scientific name Panthera tigris. Thought it would be fitting for a tiger.
One word on two of the characters which appear in here. I guess those of you who already read the story have recognized the vixen - yes, it’s her -, but Rufus O’Malley is a new creation of mine. His existence was suggested to me by GhostWolf88, back on fanfiction.net, and he’ll reappear waaaaaayyy down the road, at some point during “Hammer to Fall.” In some later part I haven’t written yet. Thanks, GhostWolf, for suggesting somebody like him to me! And yes, he has quite an interesting background story ...

Despite the serious tone in this chapter, I couldn’t help throwing a bit of fun into it. The TV series watched by Delgado is, of course, Discovery Channel’s “Mythbusters,” one of my all-time favorites. It was a sad, sad day when Discovery Channel announced the cancellation of the series. I just loved seeing them blow crap up! The episode mentioned herein was called “Explosive Decompression.” It was the twelfth episode overall, and one of the three myths they put to the test, named “Rear Axle,” revolved around the question whether it was possible to yank the rear axle from underneath a driving car, as depicted in George Lucas’s 1973 movie, “American Graffiti.” (Just in case you are curious, their verdict was that the myth is busted; even with a ridiculously weakened rear axle and a cable much stronger than the one used in the movie, all the cable did to the car was rip the axle itself loose, still it was held in place by the wheel wells. On top of that, even a cable twice as strong wasn’t able to withstand the enormous forces at work there and snapped violently. Jamie “When in doubt - C4!” Hyneman and Adam “I reject your reality and substitute my own!” Savage concluded that a ramp was used to lift the car high enough for the cable to yank the axle from underneath the car.)

As far as quotes are concerned, I hid a completely new one in here, one that wasn’t there before. It was stolen ... ahem ... taken from the movie “Men in Black” by Barry Sonnenfeld, released by Columbia Pictures in 1997. It needed to be altered a bit, but I still think it’s recognizable. Have fun trying to find it!

I actually hid another quote in here before that even I hadn’t been aware of. While proof-reading the chapter, it suddenly occurred to me that I had accidentally used a line from the song “Gangsta’s Paradise” by Coolio. (Written by Artis Ivey Jr., Larry Sanders, Doug Rasheed, and Stevie Wonder, from the album “Gangsta’s Paradise,” Warner Bros., 1995). Sometimes I even use quotes without being aware of it. I’m a weird guy, that’s for sure! Anyway, can you tell me which quote I’m referring to?

That’s it for the moment! Thanks for reading, thanks for supporting me, thanks for sticking with me! And please send me your comments! Preferably in droves!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

This chapter was the reason why I embarked on this story, way back when I first thought of writing this explanatory tale. It’s quite long (but I’ve written longer chapters), chock-full of mono- and dialogue, and it’s absolutely essential for everything that comes after it. And since that’s the case, I wanted to get it right, so I spent months pondering on possible interactions, on Judy’s exact words, on all the stuff you’d expect from such a vital chapter. Re-publishing it now was much easier. Since I had pondered on stuff for such a long time, there was very little that needed doing. Which will probably be the last time I’m able to say that. Because if I remember correctly, from chapter four onwards, the amount of work that needs to be done will increase steadily. So the pace in which I can put out new chapters will probably become slower, I’m afraid! Please, bear with me. I wanna do it right this time!

With that being said, these are the current stats:

205 Hits, 21 Kudos, 11 subscriptions, 8 comment threads, 6 bookmarks, plus 24 user subscriptions.

Thank you for following and supporting this story!

I also want to thank GhostWolf88, ConfusedGoatee_01, and niraD for sending comments. Always appreciated, always enjoyed, always cherished! Over on Discord, thehellion117 has also begun commenting on this story, making helpful suggestions how I can improve this story. Many thanks for that, thehellion117!

No more quotes have been found. I sincerely hope this will change soon!

For all those of you who know the chapter’s motto song, you’ll notice that it seems to be ill-fitting. After all, it’s about a woman who apologizes to her lover for hurting him. Then again, she doesn’t apologize, because she goes on telling him that nothing about this will ever change: “I’m sorry, but I ain’t gonna change my ways! You know I’ve tried, but I’m still the same. [...] It’s too bad, but hey, that’s me!” Probably one of the most cynical songs I know. But when you take the given verses out of the song’s context, a really strong apology remains.

Chapter Three

Version 2.0

I’m sorry for the times that I made you scream, for the times that I killed your dreams, for the times that I made your whole world rumble, for the times that I made you cry, for the times that I told you lies, for the times that I watched and let you stumble.

Anouk: “Nobody’s Wife” (Written by Anouk Teeuwé, Bart van Veen and Satindra Kalpoe, from the album “Together Alone,” Dino Music BMG, 1997)
Center, Zootopia

Adrian Bogo had hardly stepped down from the lectern when he was approached by his orderly,
Thomas Higgins. “Chief?”

“What is it, Sergeant?” Bogo said softly.

“Officer Rhinowitz just reported in. Just like Ms. Hopps told …”

“Officer Hopps.”

“Beg your pardon?”

“Officer Hopps.” Bogo fixed his icy glare on Higgins. “She never left the ZPD. Understood?”

Higgins thought about this for a few seconds, then he nodded. “Of course. Well, just like Officer
Hopps told us,” he put an extra emphasis on her rank, “we found three rams along the subway line.
Preliminary investigation identifies them as Doug Ramses, a well-known chemist, and Woolter
White and Jesse Shearman, two small-time thugs and criminals. They were all the worse for wear.
Ramses is suffering from whiplash - according to his own words, he received an almighty kick in
the back, no doubt by courtesy of Officer Hopps - , White was found near the lever of a railway
switch, with several broken ribs and some heavy bruises. Shearman suffered some bruises as well,
plus he was missing all his fleece along the tummy.”

“Aha. How did that happen?”

“No idea. Maybe Officer Hopps knows more.”

“She probably does. What about the subway station near the museum?”

“Looks worse than it actually is. The subway car seems to have contained several propane tanks
which ruptured during the crash and blew up violently, but there wasn’t all that much in the car
itself or in its vicinity to sustain the fire, so we had a huge conflagration and not much else. The
car’s shell is bent along the middle, but almost completely intact otherwise. However, everything
in it was burnt to a crisp. The damage to the station itself is superficial. A bit of bricklaying, a new
coat of paint, and it’s as good as new. At least that’s what Major Saltador from ZFD told me. It
didn’t look that good to me, but he’s the expert.”

Bogo nodded while looking at Hopps, who had reached the top of the lectern in the meantime.
Now she was just sitting there, looking down to the ground, without moving so much as a muscle.
“Good. Anything else?”

“Yes, sir. Doctor Peralta requested another scientist for his research group.”

“Who is it?” Higgins told him the name. “Then why are you still standing here?”

“Sir,” Higgins said reluctantly, “you know where she is, right?”

“I know, and I don’t care. I told Peralta he can have access to all resources imaginable, can consult
with any expert he can think of. And if he thinks she’s the one to ask, you will make sure he can.
Are we clear?”

Higgins straightened himself. “Yes, sir!”

“So, get a move on fetching her! This is an emergency!”
“At once, sir!” Higgins saluted, turned around and left the building at a run. Bogo looked at Hopps again, who had yet to begin her explanation.

When she had entered the ZPD, when she had joined the officers at Precinct One, Bogo had read her résumé as well as her graduation certificate from the Zootopia Police Academy. And at first glance, he had liked what he had gotten to see. Her college diploma was exemplary, she had become valedictorian of her ZPA class, her grades were outstanding and her physical abilities astonishing, given the fact that she was so much smaller than most other cadets. With an evaluation like that, it wasn’t difficult to predict that great things would be in her future. He had been looking at the makings of a true career officer.

However, if there was one thing Bogo was proud of, it was his ability to read between the lines. Something about the rabbit had just sounded off. This was why he had given an old friend of his, Major Ursula Friedkin, one of the instructors at the Academy, a phone call. And the polar bear had painted a completely different picture of Hopps.

According to Friedkin, Hopps may have graduated top of her class and may even have garnered her respect, but as a team player, Hopps was more than ill-suited. As an example, Friedkin had told him how Hopps had scaled the frigid ice wall during the final physical evaluation, using her fellow cadets as literal stepping stones with absolutely ruthless efficiency. The word “ruthless” had actually come up during their conversation a couple of times. Friedkin described her as selfish and overambitious, with an unquenchable thirst to prove herself, a huge ego, almost ruthless aggression, and no qualms to use everything and everybody to get ahead, without ever looking back at those she used and abused on her way to the top. At the same time, she was young and incredibly naïve. A VERY dangerous combination.

“You need to cut her down to size, Adrian,” she had said at one point. “She may be small, but she thinks she can do everything, even things she’ll never be able to do. She thinks she can move mountains, she thinks she rules the world. The rate she’s going, the first hardened criminal she’ll come across and cannot subdue immediately will maim her for life! Physically or mentally, maybe both. You need to protect her from herself!”

This was why Bogo had assigned her to parking duty during her first day, something he would have done anyway. Hopps may not have known it, but it was just his usual way of evaluating new recruits. Every officer who had started his career at Precinct One under Chief Bogo had spent their first four weeks of duty putting tickets on parked cars. Nobody underwent this ordeal without being cut down to size. Using this method - and his almost proverbial dismissive approach towards rookies -, Bogo had always been able to cure new recruits from any feelings of hubris, selfishness, and over-ambitiousness they may have secretly harbored.

Until Hopps arrived. She had proven Friedkin right almost immediately, when she had demanded to be assigned to one of the Missing Mammals cases, even stressing the point of having been valedictorian of her class. And when, only one day later, she apprehended a thief she should never have pursued in the first place, Bogo knew he had a ticking time bomb on his hooves.

But then, the Missing Mammals Case happened. A case which she, along with the help of Nicholas Wilde, solved in record time, achieving things nobody else at the ZPD had been able to do.

It had been her proudest moment, and she had displayed that pride afterwards. Which was perfectly fine, in Bogo’s opinion. After all, she had done the work, and there was no officer at the ZPD who had begrudged her the plaudits she had received for solving this difficult case.

Up until that fateful press conference afterwards.
Hopps had never been the same since. The overambitious rabbit ceased to exist, to be replaced with a meek, depressed rabbit who looked, and obviously felt, very out-of-place at the ZPD. Her resignation weeks later had merely been a consequence of everything that had happened. Bogo had tried his hardest to act surprised that day, but deep in his heart he had known what she would do. She had simply seen no other alternative. Nor had he, come to think of it.

And now she had solved the Savage Predators Case as well, again with the help of Wilde.

But now, everything was different.

Had she the right to be proud of what she had achieved? Certainly.

Had she the right to tell everyone just how good she was? Probably.

Did she do any of those things? Not even remotely.

The Judy Hopps sitting atop the lectern was a changed mammal, in looks as well as in appearance. Gone was the overambitious, selfish, slightly ruthless rabbit, to be replaced with a modest, meek rabbit who was well aware of the fact that she had made a major mistake. A mistake she was now willing to take the blame for. A rabbit who was well aware of the fact that she hadn’t been able to achieve success on her own, who was willing to take a step back to let others receive the plaudits.

A rabbit well aware of her flaws and shortcomings.

This wasn’t the overambitious, yet clueless, bunny he had met and despised three months ago. She had matured; the past events had truly humbled her.

Bogo hadn’t needed to cut her down to size; life itself, the events of the last couple of months, had done that for him.

And through this, she had become larger than ever. Larger than life itself.

*She has learned a lot,* Bogo thought. *In a very short amount of time.*

For one, she took her time to begin to speak this time. Head bowed down as if looking at a point in front of her - which she couldn’t have, since her eyes were closed -, she refused to acknowledge the press. Her posture looked like that of a repentant sinner, of someone who was about to receive a tongue-lashing and was okay with it.

*Yes, Bogo thought, this is the bunny who can achieve greatness. This is the valedictorian, living proof that anyone can be anything.*

*I just wish she would start talking any time soon!*

---

**ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Press Conference Assembly, The Lectern, City Center, Zootopia**

Judy Hopps had no idea what she wanted to say, what she should say, what she even *could* say.

Head bowed, eyes closed, she was racking her brain for an appropriate apology, for the right words to say to the public. She was well aware of the fact that this press conference could make or break her.

If she just responded to the questions, like she had done the first time, without acknowledging her
own mistakes and flaws first, it might end up in a major catastrophe. And the premature end of her
career, this time for good.

This was why she ignored the questions shouted at her. She had a lot of things to say, but she
needed to say them on her own terms, not because of having been urged and manipulated by a
press gaggle that was, ultimately, out for blood.

Her own, or someone else’s.

*I need to apologize to so many, to hundreds of thousands of predators, for what I did. To Nick.
Even to Gideon Grey. If I can manage to pull that off, it’ll be nothing short of a miracle!*

*Why not start at the beginning? With Gideon?*

She waited for the noise to die down. The questions slowly ebbed up, as everyone was obviously
asking themselves what she was up to. Finally, when hardly anyone was talking anymore, she
raised her head and opened her eyes. Everyone was looking at her expectantly, notepads and pens
in paws or hooves, Dictaphones at the ready, waiting for her to explain what had happened. She
took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

“When I was a kit, …”

---

**Hopps Family Farm, Storage Shed, Bunnyburrow, Tri-Burrows**

Stu Hopps placed the last empty crate on the stack in the back shed and let out a huge sigh. “That’s
been dealt with. Thanks, Gid! Without your help, I wouldn’t have been able to make it.”

“No problem, Mr. H,” Gideon Grey said. “Glad I could help you, what with you having no car and
all.”

Stu smiled. “You want a beer?”

“You won’t hear me say no to that.” Gideon chuckled. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” Stu made a pause. “I just wonder where Judy went off to in such a hurry.”

“No idea. It was all about those Nighthowlers, I guess.”

“Seems like it. Every bunny knows they’re dangerous, but if you wanna get rid of bugs, there’s
nothing better. You just need to steer clear of them.”

“Well, I wouldn’t touch ‘em with a ten-foot-pole. The stuff *reek*!”

“Is it that bad for foxes?”

“I don’t know if it’s just foxes who think so, but I sure think they smell awful.”

“I don’t like the smell much myself, but since we started using them, our bug problems came to an
end, so I’m not complaining.”

“Go with what works, eh?”

“Something like that.”

They left the shed and walked towards the entrance to the main building, when suddenly the door
opened with a bang, and a very tall rabbit appeared. Seeing the two of them, Billy Hopps shouted: “Judy’s on TV! Hurry up!” He disappeared again.

“Judy?” Stu frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Beats me.” Both sped up their walk towards the front door. “I thought Billy was at Zoo U.”

“He’s spent the last few days here, but he’ll return to university the day after tomorrow.”

They entered the main building and walked straight to their cinema. It was no real cinema, of course, but a room with seats for more than two hundred mammals and a large view screen to be used in connection with a projector sure looks like one, so every member of the Hopps family simply called the TV room “The Cinema.”

Upon entering the room, the first thing Gideon noted was that the place was packed. Most members of the Hopps family seemed to be present, their eyes glued to the screen. A screen which showed the enormous picture of the oldest daughter of Bonnie and Stu Hopps, sitting on top of a lectern, with her head bowed down. She was wearing the same clothes she had been wearing the whole day, but Gideon instantly noticed a red piece of cloth wrapped around her right lower leg.

“What’s with the red cloth?” he asked the bunny sitting closest to the entrance.

Without looking at him, the bunny (probably Jenny, but he could have been mistaken) said: “She was limping. Looks like she’s injured.”


“No idea. She hasn’t said a word yet. All we heard was this buffalo. Seems to be the Chief of Police.”

“What happened?”

“Looks like they arrested the Mayor.”

“Yeah, they did it weeks ago.”

“No, they arrested his replacement. She seems to be the culprit behind all the mess in Zootopia.”

Stu looked at Gideon, who shrugged. “Can’t make heads or tails of that, Mr. H.”

“Me neither,” Stu managed to say, when suddenly, Judy raised her head and opened her eyes. Looking straight into the TV camera, she opened her mouth.

“When I was a kit, I was scratched in the face by a bully.”

Gideon’s jaw dropped. Was this what this was all about? Him bullying her, almost sixteen years ago? He had apologized to her, for crying out loud!

“Ever since I was a tiny toddler, I had wanted to become a police officer,” Judy said. “That’s all I ever wanted, all I ever strove to become. I never seriously considered other career possibilities like farming or becoming a mechanic. So I naturally tried to act like a police officer, even at nine years of age. But on that particular day, I had bitten off more than I was able to chew. The bully, a red fox almost four times my size, overpowered me with ease, and he scratched my face to make sure I would never bother him again. Needless to say, since I don’t know when to quit, I refused to give in that easily.”
“Fast forward sixteen years, and I am a police officer. The bully didn’t succeed. The only thing he managed to do was to instill a certain distrust, even fear, towards foxes in me.”

She seemed to shrug. “That this fear was completely unfounded, unfair even, became clear to me when I met the very same bully earlier today. And what do you know, today he’s the best pastry chef in the Tri-Burrows, and he even became a business partner to my family. He’s the most humble mammal you can possibly imagine. And he did what I failed to do at that moment: He apologized to me for being a jerk, all those years ago.

“I guess when it comes to being a jerk, I make him look like an amateur.

“Gideon Grey, I don’t know if you see this, but if you do, please accept my apology for treating you like a jerk, for using you as a sorry excuse for my own bigotry, for my own prejudices. I’m very sorry for everything I did to you.”

Stu looked at Gideon, his face a mask of incredulity. An incredulity matched by the feeling Gideon had. “Did she harm you in any way?”

Gideon shook his head. “Not that I know of. You heard her, it was me who did her some harm!”

“I know.” Stu shook his head. “But that’s the past.” Suddenly he grinned. “But hey, gratuitous advertisement! They’ll overrun your shop now, I’m sure!”

Gideon had to grin, too. “Wouldn’t that be nice?”

---

The “Wilde” Homestead, Savanna Central, Zootopia

As usual after another round of chemotherapy, Vivian Wilde felt as if she had spent the last three hours in the tumble dryer. Every joint hurt, she felt nauseous, and she was shedding fur in copious amounts. And her headache was killing her.

The headache was the problem.

Surprisingly enough, it seemed that the colorectal carcinoma that had bothered her for almost four years, the tumor which doctors had been sure would kill her within two years, had been completely destroyed. But in response to her constant, nagging headaches, the doctors had subjected her to a CAT scan and detected what they assumed was a glioma, an aggressive type of brain tumor, with a very high mortality rate. There was no cure; radiation therapy would be iffy at best, chemotherapy was largely ineffective, and surgery was out of the question - the tumor was sitting at a location where any wrong incision could result in instant death. Surgery wasn’t really an option anyway, given her very weakened state.

Three different kinds of tumors hadn’t been able to bring her down, but this one might just do the trick.

With a sigh, Vivian sat down on her sofa, grabbing the remote. She would probably fall asleep while watching TV, but she had nothing else to do at the moment. With the pain in her joints, knitting was out of the question, she had already dealt with the usual household chores, and her persistent headache made the mere idea of reading preposterous.

When switching to ZNN, her first thought was that she was watching a rerun of the press conference where she had thought she had seen her only son, Nicholas Wilde, for she saw the very same bunny she saw three months earlier, literally sitting on top of a lectern. This time, however, she was wearing a pink flannel shirt instead of her police uniform. And she was talking about …
foxes? She was even apologizing to one Gideon Grey, whoever that might be.

The bunny looked over her shoulder and down, towards somebody or something not in the frame. “No, that’s not Gideon Grey. This fine mammal is the reason I’m standing here, or rather sitting here.” She looked into the camera again. “Without the help of this fox, I wouldn’t even be here. I know that I’m the one credited with solving the Missing Mammals case, but I wouldn’t have been able to solve the case on my own. Without him, the mammals would still be missing.”

She made a pause, and the cameramammal took the opportunity to tilt the camera down towards the foot of the lectern. A slender, male red fox was standing there, looking up with an unmistakable expression of affection on his features. He was clad in an offensively green shirt which reminded Vivian of the wallpaper in her old home, combined with a dark necktie with stripes of dark blue and red. It was the very same fox Vivian had seen during the first press conference. The very same fox who had led her to believe that her only son, Nicholas Wilde, had risen from the dead.

The bunny continued: “His name is Nicholas Wilde, and he …”

Vivian gasped.

IT IS HIM!

The bunny droned on, introducing the fox to the pressmammals, but Vivian wasn’t listening. She only had eyes for the fox. The cameramammal had reduced the zoom factor so that both he and the bunny were on the screen at the same time. The fox was standing behind the lectern and to the side, with a smirk on his face …

He’s the spitting image of Jason!

He was, and yet he wasn’t. His face was so similar to her late husband, her heart ached simply from looking at him. He was just as slender as Jason Wilde had been, yet far from being as muscular. He was standing in the exact same, relaxed pose Jason had been famous for. Even his eyes had the same emerald hue.

But the smirk …

It was the exact same smirk which had countless of her customers lust after Vivian. The smirk she had used since her early childhood, the smirk she had perfected during her years working the bar at the night club.

The rabbit continued: “About three months ago, I joined the ZPD as the first bunny cop in history. Since this was the case, I had the feeling that I had a lot to prove. I urged Chief Bogo to assign me to one of the Missing Mammals cases. It took some convincing, but he finally did. However, he made me tie my career to finding Mr. Emmitt Otterton, one of the missing mammals, an otter. I had 48 hours to find him. It was pretty much a do-or-die scenario - I don’t find the otter, I have to turn in my badge.”

She smiled. “Most of you probably think that I should never have accepted such a kind of deal. And you would be perfectly right - I shouldn’t have. I had no idea what I was in for, I had no idea just how much I was out of my depth. Chief Bogo certainly was well aware of this, and I guess he expected me to back down, to not take the bait, to refuse the deal. But I was so eager to prove myself that I willingly accepted what, in my eyes, was nothing more than a good challenge.”

She made a pause, and the smile vanished. “It was only after having seen the case file that I fully
understood just how tall the hurdle was that I had to clear. I had nothing, no leads, no eye
witnesses, no assistance from anyone, absolutely nothing. Add to this the fact that I’m from
Bunnyburrow and had spent a grand total of about 50 hours in Zootopia, and you can imagine that
I had no idea what to do, where to go, whom to ask.

“Fortunately, the case file contained a picture which linked Otterton to Nicholas Wilde, whom I
had met by chance just the day before. And it is safe to say that we hadn’t gotten along all that
well.” She grinned. “Let’s not mince words here: I despised him, and he probably dismissed me as
useless, and maybe rightly so. Under normal circumstances, I would never have asked him to help
me, but I was desperate. So I approached him, and when he flatly refused to lend me a helping
paw, I,” her face suddenly became serious again, “even went so far as to coerce him into helping
me.”

She made a pause as if wanting to let that sink in. “Yes, I was that desperate. I forced a mammal to
help me, and I did so in the most devious way imaginable, by coercing him. In a manner of
speaking, I blackmailed him, plain and simple. And yes, that is despicable and certainly unworthy,
particularly since I’m a ZPD officer, but in my mind, I was perfectly justified to do so. After all, I
was dealing with a fox,” she put extra emphasis on the species, “and as the redneck bunny from
some carrot-choked Podunk that I am, I didn’t know better than to treat foxes with contempt. Like
so many mammals in Zootopia and all around the world, I considered Nicholas to be sneaky,
shifty, and untrustworthy. So why should I have treated him with the respect that he deserves, that
every mammal deserves? I simply hadn’t been brought up to think that way, so I didn’t.

“And then, to my surprise, to my astonishment, he did help me. Not because I had coerced him into
helping me, but because he wanted to help me. He stood up for me when no-one else did, he tried
his hardest to solve the case, and through his ideas, his knowledge, his abilities, we indeed
managed to find all fourteen, or rather fifteen, missing mammals. I would never, not in a million
years, have been able to do it on my own. Yes, I may have received all the credit for it, yet I have
the feeling that I deserve very little of it. It was Nicholas Wilde who solved the case, with me
having only a very small part in it. He had the right ideas, he had the knowledge I was so sorely
lacking.

“And somewhere along the way, I stopped considering him to be shifty, sneaky, and untrustworthy. I
started seeing the mammal, not the fox. I started seeing an honest, trustworthy, hard-working
individual who had been treated unfairly, even been bullied, for most of his life. I started seeing
him not as a fox, but as a friend.”

She lowered her head. “And to show my gratitude, I threatened this friend with fox repellant.”

Vivian made a frown. What was that supposed to mean?

The bunny pointed at the assembled reporters. “After the Missing Mammals case was solved, after
the press conference, some of you asked me whether I had been threatened by the fox. Nothing
could have been further from the truth. He didn’t threaten me, he merely told me that I was wrong,
where I was wrong. I was the one who threatened him. I was the one reaching for the bottle of fox
repellant. I was the bully, not him. He had never been a bully, to the contrary. He has been bullied
for most of his life, and the only thing I proved that day was that I was just as bigoted, just as
prejudiced, just as outdated, as the worst bullies I have ever come across.

“And for this, Nicholas Wilde deserves my sincerest apologies. Like I said before, he deserves all
the plaudits I received for solving the Missing Mammals case. On top of that, I also owe him a debt
of gratitude I can never repay, for he forgave me, when I had given him no reason to.

“Nicholas Wilde, you are a far better mammal than I can ever be.”
Vivian stared at the picture of the fox, standing slightly to the side, still looking up at the bunny, never once acknowledging the pressmammals, with tears running down her face.

“Oh, my Nicky!” she whispered.

“However,” the bunny said, “threatening Nicholas Wilde, as bad as it has been, wasn’t the worst thing I did that day. Not by a long shot.”

The “LaGrande” Estate, Tundratown, Zootopia

“Don Carlo?”

Carlo LaGrande heaved a sigh. “What is it, Raymond?”

“Uh, we received a phone call from Mr. Fuente. He told me that some mammals vandalized his shop.”

The arctic shrew raised a bushy eyebrow. “His dry cleaner’s shop?”

“Of course.”

“This is a shop under our protection! Why was it vandalized? Whose assignment was it?” He looked at Massimiliano Puma, who was sitting next to him.

The cougar bowed his head. “That would be Percy and Ramirez, Don Carlo.”

“Percy and Ramirez. Two reliable soldati.” He turned to Raymond again. “As I’m sure you’re aware, Signor Fuente is a very dear friend of mine. When they fail him, they fail me. Tell me what made them fail me!”

“Well, er, that’s the problem.” It was obvious that Raymond wasn’t feeling comfortable - the polar bear was visibly hesitating. “Seems that some ZPD officers threatened to arrest them for loitering.”

Now LaGrande raised both eyebrows. “The ZPD?” Looking at Puma again, he asked in a soft voice: “Consigliere of mine, do you know of any change in the relationship between the ZPD and us?”

“If there was a change, I haven’t been informed,” Puma replied.

“Your contacts haven’t told you anything?”

“No. Come to think of it, I haven’t heard from them in a while.”

“Contact them. We need to find out what this is all about.”

“I will, Don Carlo, but I don’t think I need to ask them. The reason should be obvious.”

“Explain!”

Puma looked at Raymond. “Did Percy and Ramirez tell you who the officers were that threatened to arrest them?”

“All they told me was that it was two rams.”

“Ah. Figures.” He turned towards his Don. “Sir, I think what we see here are the excesses of what
happened three months ago.”

“You mean the aftermath of the press conference.” LaGrande snorted. “Sfrontatezza! After all we have done for the city …”

“Sir, it doesn’t matter at this point what we have done for the city. Atrocities have grown in number. You know this to be true, Don Carlo.”

“But our position is fortified! No-one can do us any harm!”

“Not us as a whole, no. But our soldati, individually, they can be harmed. And at this rate, it’s only a matter of time until things become really uncomfortable. For us. For every predator in Zootopia.”

“And you’re sure it’s not the other famiglia trying to claim what is ours?”

Puma shook his head. “If anything, they’re even worse off than we are. They don’t have any connections with the ZPD, at least not to the extent that we have. They are much more likely to being harassed by the police. There’s word on the street that the Pantera famiglia is thinking of leaving Zootopia for good.”

That gave LaGrande pause. “Guiseppe Pantera is one of the most stubborn and ferocious mammals I know. If somebody is able to bring him down, he must be formidabile.”

“It’s not necessarily one single mammal, sir. Strength comes in numbers.”

“You speak wisely. But what can we do about it?”

“At this moment? Not much, other than lay low. Maybe Judy Hopps is on to something, Don. She told us that she knew the reason for predators turning savage.”

“That is what’s behind all this?”

“It seems that way, sir. Fear and mistrust towards predators has escalated. The number of attacks on predators, perpetrated by prey, has risen exponentially. It is much higher than the number of predators who turned savage, by the way. It’s a safe bet that Signor Fuente is another victim.” He shook his head. “And to think it is Hopps’s fault! She put prey mammals at odds with predators. Almost single-pawed.”

“You don’t like her?”

“To be honest, I haven’t asked myself that question.”

“She was misinformed,” LaGrande said. “She’s still young and has a lot to learn.”

“She isn’t in a position where you have the luxury of time and opportunity to learn.”

“That may be the case, still my daughter adores her, and she’s going to be the godmother of my first granddaughter, which makes her famiglia. And you know what I always say about famiglia, don’t you?”

Puma made a face. “Pardon me for saying this, sir, but …”

At this moment, the door opened, and Boris Koslov entered the room, stooping low to fit through the door. Without saying anything, he walked over to the TV set and turned it on.

“What is it, Boris?” LaGrande asked.
“You need to see this,” Koslov said simply.

After a few seconds, an image appeared on the screen, showing the interior of the ZPD’s headquarter building, the usual place where press conferences were held after the conclusion of some major case. The very same setup they had seen three months ago, when the mayhem had started to take shape.

Even the mammal sitting on top of the lectern was the same.

“No, the worst thing I did was blaming predators on the whole,” Judy Hopps said. “I blamed their biological predisposition as the reason for them turning savage. I accused a whole host of species of potentially being violent, deadly monsters.”

“What’s wrong?” Puma asked.

“She solved the Savage Predators case,” Koslov said concisely. “Don’t know the details yet.”

Hopps continued: “And I did this despite having been helped by a predator myself, someone who had put his life on the line to assist me in solving the Missing Mammals case. In my arrogance, I even went so far as to tell him that I had only stated the facts of the case.”

“Is there anything I can say in my defense? No, no, there isn’t.”

Suddenly, her voice picked up in volume. “I had not been stating the facts of the case. As a matter of fact, I hadn’t even been close to knowing the facts of the case, at least not to their full extent. All I had displayed were my inherent prejudices, my ignorance, my small-mindedness. I had been so wrapped-up in my beliefs that the thought that I might have overlooked something hadn’t even occurred to me.”

Her voice became softer again. “And I had overlooked something. Something very big. But before I come to that, another apology is in order.”

She made a pause, looking up and directly into the camera. “I apologize to every predator in Zootopia for accusing them of guilt by association. I was so very wrong in blaming you and your genetic predispositions as the reason for some predators turning savage. You are no more savage than prey mammals are. Deep down, we may all still be animals, despite the fact that we have evolved beyond our primitive, savage ways, but we have long since overcome our ancient drives and needs. We are civilized mammals, prey and predators. There is no need to fear a predator sitting next to you on the streetcar, just because he’s big and has huge teeth and claws. These won’t be used against you. You are as safe in the presence of a predator than you are safe in the presence of prey.”

She shrugged. “It took the help of two foxes, one arctic shrew, and a weasel to finally come to the realization that I was wrong, that I have been wrong all along. There is no such thing as a savage predator, and I was so very wrong in suggesting there might be. I have, single-pawed, made life so much worse for so many predators. And, sadly, all I can do now is offer my apologies. It is impossible for me to right all the wrongs, to assist all the predators in regaining what they have lost. All I can say now is: I’m so very sorry! I really am just a dumb bunny.” She made a pause, and suddenly she smiled. “And yes, you can quote me.”

LaGrande smiled. “Seems like she is starting to learn already.”

Hopps continued: “Don’t get me wrong now; there are savage mammals out there.”
They’re called criminals,” Judy Hopps said.

Frederick Delgato’s jaw dropped.

The bunny continued: “They’re those mammals who deliberately, willingly, choose a life of crime, those mammals who decide that causing other mammals harm is what they want to do. It’s their deliberate choice. They are the murderers, the thugs, the bullies. They are the ones you should fear, not the lion sitting next to you, minding his own business.

“I took an oath to fight those criminals. They are the ones I’m sworn to protect you from” She sighed. “And I have failed miserably at that. I have made the situation better for criminals and worse for law enforcement officers.”

She looked around, obviously at a group of mammals standing nearby. “Chief Bogo told me that the City Council forced him to suspend several highly-decorated police officers recently for the simple reason of them being predators. And I am the reason for this. If I hadn’t shot my mouth during my first press conference, none of this would have happened. Again, I can only say that I do apologize for the pain and suffering I have caused.

“Now, if the City Council thought this might make the city more safe, they achieved the exact opposite effect. I am looking at a number of officers right now, a number way too small to offer all citizens of Zootopia protection. Just because some prey mammals high up decided they’d blame them as savages, instead of letting them deal with the real savages out there.”

She looked at the camera again. “At the same time, atrocities in this city have multiplied. I was told that there are prey mammals out there who’ve made it a habit of bullying predators. Predators have been beaten up, shops have been razed, the foulest of crimes have been committed against innocent predators.

“Who’s the savage here? The predators? Certainly not. No, it’s the prey mammals, the herbivores, who deliberately decided to commit crimes against predators. This needs to end, and it needs to end NOW!

“It is my fault this degenerated into the mess we’re in, so right now I can only say this: I know it’s not my call to make, but I strongly urge the City Council to revert those suspensions. Reinstate the predator officers immediately! Make sure that all those criminals perpetrating crimes against predators can be brought to justice! This dumb bunny was wrong! Using my stupidity as an excuse to rid the ZPD of their finest officers is doing the ZPD and the city a disservice, and a huge one at that. Please, I implore you, revert those suspensions!”

“Now that’s not something you hear every …” Reginald Pocock turned around, only to see that his customer wasn’t sitting on his bar stool anymore. There was a twenty-dollar-bill lying next to the unfinished glass of beer.

Hopps continued: “You know the difference between the predators who turned savage and savage criminals?”
amazement, even the most rambunctious inmates were listening quietly, with rapt attention.

“It’s very simple. Criminals decide to become savages. Those predators who turned savage, they didn’t have a choice. And they weren’t the only mammals who didn’t have a choice.

“Which brings me to the case proper.” Hopps waited for a few seconds for the sudden commotion between the pressmammals to die down. “As you will recall, the missing mammals were found, but the problems were far from over. Mayor Lionheart knew this. When we arrested him for imprisoning innocent mammals, he told me that what we were dealing with could tear Zootopia apart. He knew that the moment the public found out that predators turned savage for no apparent reason, the outcry would be devastating.

“Back then, I was convinced that he had only imprisoned the mammals to protect his own career - I even told him so. But as I found out over the course of the last few hours, I was wrong in my assessment. He wanted to protect the whole city from itself. And seeing what happened over the course of the last three months, I have to agree with him. The outcry has truly been devastating.

“Leodore Lionheart did what was in his power to protect Zootopia. He may have used illegal means, but as they say, sometimes the ends justify the means. He served his city to the bitter end, and right now, he is serving time in prison for basically doing what he was supposed to do. He put his career, his very future, on the line to protect Zootopia from itself. This is what he was sworn to do, and he did his duty, plain and simple as that.

“You cannot ask for more from a Mayor. He did it all for Zootopia. Unlike some devious sheep who pretended to serve the city while secretly following her very own agenda. A sheep who framed him to take the fall for a crime she had committed herself. And before you ask, we have Dawn Bellwether’s verbal confession on record.”

Another small commotion ensued, but Hopps continued regardless. “Leodore Lionheart did nothing wrong. He did his job, and in my opinion …” She made a pause, shook her head, and continued: “As a police officer, I am sworn to be impartial. I’m not allowed to care who the Mayor is, I only do my job, serving and protecting the public, regardless of the ruling administration. But you know what? I don’t give a damn! I’m telling you right now what I think!

“Who is the right Mayor for this city? Is it a prey mammal who aims for prey supremacy, trying to force predators out of their jobs, out of their livelihoods, into hiding or out of the city? Is it a prey mammal who runs a company whose employees approach predators in their free time to beat them up, maybe even kill them?” This created some noise from the assembled press gaggle. Hopps continued: “I wish this was just a tall tale, but it’s not, to the contrary! It has been brought to our attention that employees of our esteemed Assistant Mayor, erm,” she made a pause, looking down at the fox standing behind her. “What was his name again?”

“Aries, Judy. Robert Aries,” the fox responded.

“Right, Aries Security. Thanks, Nick!” She looked at the pressmammals again with a smile. “I really need to sit down and learn the names of the high and mighty of Zootopia at one point.” This elicited a soft chuckle from most pressmammals. Hopps continued: “Anyway, it has been brought to our attention that employees of Aries Security, the company run by our esteemed Assistant Mayor Robert Aries, may be responsible for savage attacks on predators. We will look into this, and believe me when I say this: If we find proof that the accusations are indeed true, the perpetrators will be brought to justice! Nothing justifies unprovoked attacks on other mammals, especially not prejudices!

“Back to the question at paw. Who is the right Mayor for this city? Is it possible that it is a
predator who spent his career fighting injustice, first as a judge, then as the Mayor? Is it possible that this is the one who can help heal this city, treating prey and predators with the same respect and reverence the current administration so sorely lacks? In my opinion, Zootopia never had it better than when Leodore Lionheart was in office. Under his leadership, prejudice-driven attacks on other mammals were a capital offense, regardless of whether they were perpetrated by predators or by prey mammals. Unlike the current administration, which thinks it’s perfectly fine for prey to subject predators to constant abuse while punishing predators severely for crimes they didn’t even commit. He may not be the Mayor some of you want, but he is the public servant this city needs. Zootopia needs healing, now more than ever, and I think Lionheart is the right, no, the ONLY mammal for this job.

“It is time for all citizens of Zootopia, prey and predators alike, to stand together, side by side, to start making this world a better place again. Just as it has been before. It is time to put your trust in a mammal, a predator, who has proven that he earns said trust.

“Leodore Lionheart is innocent. His arrest and persecution were based on false accusations, he is in prison for something he didn’t even do. He may have imprisoned the savage predators, but he has been forced to do so by someone else. He was coerced, he simply had no other choice. He should never have been removed from office, and if I had my way, he would be reinstated immediately.”

Leodore Lionheart stared at the screen, obviously dumbstruck. “See, someone is still siding with you,” Madge Badger said silently.

Lionheart came out of his stupor with a snort. “So what? She has no leverage with the City Council. It’s just her word, and how many mammals will listen to a rabbit who’s obviously way out of her depth? No, regardless of what she says, nothing will change.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that.” Badger made an encompassing gesture. Lionheart’s gaze followed her paw, and to his astonishment, most mammals watching the screen were nodding or otherwise showing their approval, prey and predators alike, even some of those who had openly expressed their dislike towards him. “She’s not the only one believing in you,” Badger concluded.

Meanwhile, Hopps had continued: “For the last several minutes I’ve been sort of dancing around the main reason why I’m here, why we’re all here. Well, now the time has come to finally tell you what really happened.”

“Felinae Homestead” Apartment House, The Otterton Apartment, Rainforest District, Zootopia

When had she taken a smoothie out of the fridge? For the life of her, Natalie Otterton couldn’t remember. The radio transmission had her transfixed, glued to the speaker, listening to the bunny who’d found her Emmitt apologizing to the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker.

“I just told you that the predators turning savage had no choice,” Hopps now said. “It wasn’t their decision. Unfortunately, when we found them, we didn’t know this. For all we, and especially I knew, they may have decided to turn violent and savage. Which is what I insinuated during the last press conference. Or rather, I said that they were unable to help it. In this, I was right, but for all the wrong reasons, as I learned only this morning.

“They were unable to help it, unable to prevent turning savage, not because of their biological predisposition, but because they had been subjected to a poison which drove them mad.”
“A poison?” Natalie gasped. “My Emmitt … was poisoned?!?”

Hopps continued: “And the weirdest thing about this is, I grew up with said poison all around me. In my home in Bunnyburrow, you’ll find it everywhere. Even on the farm where I grew up.

“The poison is contained within a flower, a crocus variant called Midnicampum holicithias which exudes a rather acrid odor which bugs don’t like at all. Plant enough of these around your fields, and bugs won’t even come close to your produce. If subjected to the stench long enough, the bugs may even die. It’s highly effective, so effective indeed that it’s the first and best weapon of choice for farmers all over the world. Like I said, I literally grew up around the stuff. My father started using them on our farm some two decades ago, and since then, bug problems were a thing of the past.

“Now, every bunny growing up around these plants knows that they are highly dangerous. One of the first lessons my father taught me was ‘Stay away from the Midnicampum holicithias, Judy! Do NOT approach them. Do NOT touch them. And, most importantly, even when you’re starving, do NOT eat them!’

“To some of you, this may sound like over-protectiveness. It isn’t. An uncle of mine ate one of the flowers when he was a kit, and my mother still bears the scars to tell the tale. Because after eating the plant, my uncle turned savage, biting my mother in the arm.

“Not only does Midnicampum holicithias smell extremely pungent, it also contains a psychotropic drug. When ingested, the drug messes with the brain, to the extent that you lose all ability to control yourself. You are simply reduced to nothing more than a savage beast. And this goes for every mammal, prey and predator alike. It doesn’t matter whether you are a ferocious tiger or a meek bunny. You eat one of the flowers, you turn savage.

“Yes, even bunnies can go savage!

“The good news about this is that the effect is only temporary. Usually, someone eating Midnicampum holicithias recovers within a few days. The same can, sadly, not be said about the savage predators. The first cases happened about four months ago, and the victims have not yet recovered. The reason for this is that they were not subjected to the poison of one little flower, they were subjected to the poison extracted from several dozen of the plants. Nicholas Wilde and I saw the production process with our own eyes. Several dozen of the flowers, maybe even hundreds of them.

“Fortunately, we didn’t only see the production process, we were also able to obtain a sample of the poison used to turn predators savage. At this moment, it is in the ZPD’s forensic lab to be analyzed. The best scientists of Zootopia are working on an antidote, and I am confident that we will see results in the near future, that all the savage predators can, and will, be cured.”

Natalie suddenly realized that her vision had become blurry. Tears ran down her face as she listened to the first words of hope in months.

“Bless you, bless you, little bunny!”

Hopps Family Farm, Main Building, “Cinema,” Bunnyburrow, Tri-Burrows

“You may ask yourself now: ‘If she knows all this, and has known since childhood, why did it take her so long to solve the case?’” Judy made a pause. “This is actually very simple to explain. There is a reason why I was calling the flower by its scientific name, Midnicampum holicithias. Until this
morning, it was the only name I knew. As a rule, bunnies take a certain pride in knowing their plants, their fruits and vegetables, their flowers. Identifying plants and knowing everything there is to know about them is kind of a normality for us. Even those who don’t work in farming, like myself, sure know our plants, and we have no problems with all those tongue twisters nobody in their right mind would want to speak aloud.” She made a pause and grinned. “I may have problems remembering names, but only if it’s the names of mammals. The scientific names of plants, I never had any problems with those.” Again, the pressmammals chuckled at her slightly self-deprecating sense of humor.

Judy waited for a few seconds for the pressmammals to become silent again, then she continued. “Since childhood, I knew the plant only by its scientific name. And then, just this morning, the fox Gideon Grey, the very same one I told you about at the beginning, told me how the flower was called in his family.

“They call it Nighthowler.”

“That’s what she meant! That’s what she was so excited about,” Stu Hopps said, grinning. He punched Gideon Grey in the arm. “Seems like you really helped her solve the case.”

“I had no idea,” Gideon said automatically. “Are Nighthowlers that dangerous?”

“You can bet they are. You heard her.”

“Damn! And they used them to make preds go savage?”

“Seems like it.”

“It’s a sad, sad world where preds and prey can’t live in peace and harmony.”

Stu looked up at him, then he smiled. “Well, not in Zootopia, they can’t. But here in Bunnyburrow, we sure can. Right, Gid?”

Gideon looked down at the older bunny, smiling himself. “We sure can, Mr. H.”

---

**Zootopia Municipal Correctional Facility, Sahara Square, Zootopia**

“It’s a poison!” Badger said tonelessly. “Damn it! Why didn’t I find this?”

Lionheart shrugged. “You can’t win ‘em all, Doctor.”

In the meantime, Hopps had continued: “Nicholas Wilde and I had come across the term during our investigation into the Missing Mammals case. It had been uttered by the mammal I had been tasked to find, the otter named Emmitt Otterton. It was the last word he had managed to say before turning savage. His driver at the time, a jaguar named Renato Manchas, told us about it.

“And then he turned savage himself, for no apparent reason.

“We managed to escape, and I even managed to cuff him to a lamppost. We alerted HQ of the incident, and several officers, including Chief Bogo, came to arrest Mr. Manchas.

“But all we found was an empty spot where a jaguar should have been. Mr. Manchas had miraculously disappeared.

“It was only when Nicholas and I were watching the footage recorded by traffic surveillance
cameras that we learned what had happened. The footage showed two timberwolves subduing and abducting Mr. Manchas. And after they had successfully apprehended him, they started to howl.

“And we thought we had the solution. Wolves howl, that’s common knowledge. They often do so at night. So I came to the conclusion that wolves were the Nighthowlers, that they were the culprits behind the disappearance of the missing mammals. We followed their trail, which led us to Cliffside Asylum. We found the missing mammals, we arrested Mayor Lionheart, and I patted myself on the shoulder for having solved the case.

“But as we all know, the case was far from being solved. Predators still turned savage, and nobody knew why.

“It was only after I had learned that Nighthowlers are flowers, not wolves, flowers that I knew were poisonous, that I started to see the big picture. I knew the true reason for predators turning savage. But I didn’t know who was responsible for it. All I knew was that Nighthowler bulbs had been stolen from a flower shop in Zootopia - I had managed to apprehend the thief myself. I had to assume that the thief had been stealing them for someone else, who in turn was using them to turn predators savage. I only had to find the thief, and maybe he would be able to point me in the right direction. But being the redneck bunny that I am, finding him in a city which was still completely alien to me sounded like an exercise in futility.”

Hopps looked down at Wilde, who was still standing next to the lectern with a smirk on his face. “Fortunately, I knew a certain fox who was born and raised in Zootopia, who, in his own words, knows everybody. He helped me find the thief, and after some convincing, the thief told us that he had been stealing the Nighthowler bulbs for a ram named Doug. He even told us where to find him.

“And find him we did. And we finally saw, with our own eyes, what had been done to the predators.

“The ram was hiding in a disused subway car he had turned into a laboratory. In it, he was growing Nighthowlers in huge numbers. Once they were big enough, he was extracting the poison to create pellets the size and color of blueberries, with the concentrated poison of at least a few dozen flowers, maybe even way more. He had used those to target predators, using an air-powered gun. He shot the predators with the pellets, they smashed on impact, and the poison was absorbed by the victim’s skin, turning the mammal savage.”

For the second time in less than twenty minutes, Madge Badger had the feeling of being doused in ice water.

Pellets full of poison? Pellets the color of blueberries?

Suddenly, and with frightening clarity, an image popped up in her mind, an image of a tiger who had turned savage. Heavily sedated, stripped down to his underpants, he had been lying on her examination table. And she had noticed a blue stain along his neck.

A stain she had dismissed as a food stain.

It had never occurred to her that she had been looking at the reason why the mammal had turned savage.

“I am such an idiot!” she said aloud.

“Excuse me?” Lionheart said, looking at her for the first time in minutes.

“I have seen it!” Badger shouted. “I have seen the stains! I should have realized they weren’t
"Hell, I even cleaned some of the stains!" Tears started rolling down her face. Other mammals started to look at her, noticing the same thing Lionheart was seeing: Badger was close to a complete breakdown. Huge sobs wracked her body. "I w-would only have needed to examine the stains or e-extracted the poison from the cloth I used to wash the victims." Suddenly, she screamed: "I AM SUCH AN IDIOT!"

"Hey, pipe down, will ya?" someone shouted.

Badger apparently didn’t even hear him. "I-I could have s-solved the case ages ago!" By now, she was positively bawling. "But no, I was completely i-ignoring the elephant in the r-room!"

Lionheart looked at her with concern on his face. "Listen, Doctor, we all make mistakes. We …"

"NO!" she screamed. Even more mammals were staring at her now. "It was m-my duty to f-find the reason b-behind all this! I should have …"

"Excuse me?" another voice spoke up.

Both Badger and Lionheart looked up. A hippo was standing in front of their table, wearing a ZPD uniform with the rank insignia of Sergeant. "Are you Doctor Madge Badger?" If he was concerned about her bawling, he didn’t let it show.

When Badger didn’t respond, Lionheart answered in her stead: "She is."

"Excellent. I’m Sergeant Thomas Higgins, ZPD. I was ordered to take you to the ZPD’s forensic lab immediately."

Badger just stared at him. "What?"

"Chief Bogo told me to take you to the forensic lab," Higgins repeated. "We have found a sample of the serum used to turn predators savage. Doctor Peralta asks for your assistance."

"What?"

Higgins sighed. "Listen, Doctor. We have the poison, we need to find an antidote, and quickly. Doctor Peralta was authorized to use every resource imaginable to find it. He considers you one of the best chemists in Zootopia. He asks for your help. So, would you please accompany me?"

Badger still stared at him, obviously not taking in any word Higgins had said. Lionheart sighed and placed his large paw on her shoulder.

"Doctor, listen! We all make mistakes, some bigger, some smaller. Yes, we have both made grave mistakes, and we have to take full responsibility for it. But you are just being given a shot at redemption! Find the cure! Help cure the savage predators!"

Badger looked at him, taking a deep breath. The tears subsided. "So, Doctor, off you go!"

Lionheart added.

Slowly, Badger nodded. She got up from her chair even more slowly. Looking up at Higgins, she said: "Sergeant, I’m ready to go wherever you take me."

"Good," Higgins said. He turned towards one of the guards who had approached them. "I was authorized by Chief Bogo to take her with me," he told the rhino. "Her assistance is needed to find an antidote for the serum turning predators savage."
“I need to see signed release papers, Tom,” the rhino countered.

“Don’t worry, Paul, you’ll receive them tomorrow, first thing in the morning. I’ll deliver them to you personally. But right now, time is of the essence. So, if you would please excuse us.”

Badger had turned towards Lionheart. “Thank you, Lionheart.”

Lionheart smiled. “Please, call me Leodore.”

“And you can call me Honey.” She turned towards Higgins. “Let’s go!”

---

**ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Press Conference Assembly, City Center, Zootopia**

Everybody in the room had leaned forward on their respective chairs, listening with rapt attention. Chief Bogo, arms folded, was watching Hopps deliver one of the best speeches he had heard in his entire life. Without any notes, completely off the cuff. All nervousness which had surrounded her like a dark cloud at the beginning of her speech had vanished completely. She was calm, she was confident, yet she was humble.

_She’d make one hell of a politician!_

The chief he was couldn’t approve of what she had just done, especially her words on Lionheart, but the mammal he was couldn’t help but applaud her bravado. She was really exposing herself in ways he could never have imagined.

He turned his head to look at the officers standing in the background, and to his surprise he noticed that their number had grown. He saw the lion Frederick Delgato, the polar bears Virgil Andersen and Markus Grizzoli, the wolf Harry Wolford, the tiger James Fangmeyer, - all predator officers he had been forced to suspend. They were all wearing civilian clothing, and they were all staring at Hopps, with strange expressions on their faces.

Hopps continued: “Nicholas and I were able to overpower Doug and his henchmammals, and we were able to obtain a case containing an air-powered pistol loaded with one of the Nighthowler pellets. We tried to take it to this very building, cutting through the Natural History Museum, but we were ambushed.

“We were ambushed by no other than Mayor Dawn Bellwether and three of her henchmammals.

“At first, I thought she wanted to help us, but then I became suspicious. How had she been able to find us? I hadn’t given her a phone call, I hadn’t even alerted the ZPD of what had happened. How had she known which route we would take? How had she known what we had done?

“The only possible reason I can think of is that Doug, or one of his henchmammals, I don’t know, must have called her, telling her what had happened.

“Bellwether told me to surrender the case. I refused to do so, and Nicholas and I attempted to flee.” She pointed at her leg. “Unfortunately, I hit something on our way out, injuring my leg. I wasn’t able to run. Nicholas and I hid behind some exhibit, with Bellwether approaching.

“And then she started telling us about her great plan. She tried to win me over for her cause, called predators our ‘common enemy,’ an enemy she wanted to use to stay in power. We have all this on record. I was carrying a Dictaphone with me, which recorded everything she told us.

“We needed an escape plan. We needed to get to the ZPD and avoid her at the same time. With my
leg, it was a daunting, maybe even an outright impossible task.

“And then, Nicholas Wilde came up with an ingenious plan. By replacing the Nighthowler pellet in the gun with a blueberry he had been carrying around with him, we rendered the weapon completely harmless. We then made a feeble attempt to escape, which was hopeless from the get-go, because Nicholas had to carry me. We were caught quickly by one of Bellwethers ram henchmammals. When he shoved us down into a pit, Nicholas intentionally dropped the case. Bellwether took it and shot Nicholas with the blueberry, thinking it was the Nighthowler serum. She wanted him to turn savage and kill me.

“Nicholas pretended to turn savage while I was trying to make Bellwether confess to her crimes. Which she did without hesitation, thinking that I would be dead soon. So I have a full confession on record. A recording which will be used against her in a court of law. Chief Bogo and some other ZPD officers arrived and took Bellwether and her henchmammals into custody.”

She made a pause and looked around. “And those really are the facts of the case, every single one of them. Are there still any questions that need answering?”

The room literally exploded in hundreds of questions by dozens of mammals.

The noise was substantial, and Bogo fully expected Hopps to shrink back from this much commotion - after all, her outstanding sense of hearing must have made this quite an uncomfortable situation for her.

But again, she managed to surprise him, for she merely put on a winning smile and raised both arms. “Please, Ladies and Gentlemammals, not everyone at the same time! Let’s behave like the civilized mammals we are, shall we?” Her voice was just as calm as her outside appearance.

Gradually, the noise died down, or rather, the din became at least bearable. Hopps nodded. “Thank you very much!” She pointed at a female wolf standing further towards the back of the assembled group. She had started to jump up to make herself get noticed. “Yes, ma’am? You seem to be quite eager to ask me some questions. So, fell free to fire away!”

She is one heck of a fast learner!

Is this even still the same bunny?

---

Hopps Family Farm, Main Building, “Cinema,” Bunnyburrow, Tri-Burrows

“That’s our Judy!” Bonnie Hopps had walked over to her husband, putting her arm around his waist while still looking at the screen, seeing her daughter deal with the first questions with calm confidence. “I’m so proud of you, sweetheart!”

“Way to go, Dude!” The pride in Stu’s voice was undeniable.

Gideon chuckled. “And to think that I told her that no bunny could ever become a cop! Just look at her! Now here’s a cop if I ever saw one! Solved the big case!”

Bonnie looked at him, smiling. “With the help of a fox!”

“Yup.” Stu looked at Gideon, too. “Fox and bunny as a team.”

Now, Gideon laughed. “Who’d have thought, huh?”
Stu nodded. “Three months ago? Certainly not me!”

The screen showed Judy pointing at someone behind the camera. “Yes, sir? How may I help you?”

A male voice was heard: “Officer Hopps, you told us that Mr. Wilde pretended to turn savage. Can you elaborate?”

Judy shrugged. “We had seen Mr. Manchas turn savage, and Nicholas simply tried to imitate what we had seen, the growling, the aggressive stance. He looked very convincing, let me tell you! He obviously managed to completely fool Dawn Bellwether and her henchmammals.” She grinned. “Heck, he was so convincing, he could have fooled me.” She looked down at the fox standing next to the lectern. “But of course I knew better.”

“Did he attack you?”

She looked back at the mammal asking the question. “Of course he did; he had to, otherwise it wouldn’t have looked convincing. We needed to convince Bellwether that he was about to kill me. In the end, he even went so far as to put his jaws around my neck.”

“What?” Bonnie shouted, and she wasn’t the only bunny in this room who did it.

Surprisingly enough, even a few reporters had raised their voices in shock. Despite the din, Judy continued, supremely calm: “But it was, of course, completely harmless. As a matter of fact, I felt completely safe. I trusted Nicholas to do what was necessary, and he delivered in spectacular fashion.”

“Our daughter’s neck … in the jaws of a predator?” Stu said, incredulousness in his voice. He quickly looked at Gideon, who was looking at the screen with raised eyebrows. “Uh, sorry, Gid. It was … nothing against foxes.”

Gideon didn’t even seem to hear him. “Huh,” he said, “hope you’re into foxes, Judy.”

Stu stiffened. “What was that?”

Gideon looked down at Stu, and suddenly he seemed to realize what he had just said. “Oh boy!”

“What’s the matter, Gideon?” Bonnie asked with her warm voice.

“Uh … when a fox nibbles another mammal,” Gideon said haltingly, “he wants to mate with her. Love bites. That’s how we call ‘em.”

Stu just stared at him. “Love … bites?”

“Sure! You bunnies do it yourselves, don’t you?”

“Y-yes, we groom each other,” Bonnie said hesitantly. “It’s part of being a colony.”

“But you only do it to those you love, right?”

“Yes, of course. We’re family, after all.”

“See? It’s the same with foxes.”

Stu narrowed his eyes. “So you think this … Nicholas likes our Judy?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he does.” He looked at the screen, which showed both Judy and the fox.
“Just look at him! See how he looks at Judy!”

Both bunnies looked at the screen, examining the red fox. He looked up at Judy, who at this point was returning the gaze. And the looks on both their faces were unmistakable.

A thought struck both Stu and Bonnie, but both didn’t manage to find the right words. It was one of the kits sitting nearby who put their thoughts into words: “Mommie, is this Judy’s boyfriend?”

And just like that, the silence in the cinema was a thing of the past.

Dozens of bunny kits started voicing their opinions, and they all decided to do it at the very same time.

“No, he’s not!”

“He looks really cuddly!”

“He’s in love with Judy!”

“Have you seen his tail?”

“Fox and Judy sitting in the tree, kay-eye-ess- … uhm …”

“Foxes eat bunnies, don’t they?”

“Bet when this is over, they start smooching each other.”

“Will he bite her?”

Stu and Bonnie looked at each other in helpless bewilderment, while Gideon pondered whether he should beat a hasty retreat now.

______________________________________________________________

The “Wilde” Homestead, Savanna Central, Zootopia

“You allowed a predator, a fox, to put his jaws around your neck?” The reporter asking the question sounded incredulous.

Just as incredulous as Vivian Wilde felt.

“Yes, I did. Why?” The bunny was still as cool as a cucumber.

“Well, seeing as foxes and bunnies are natural enemies …”

The bunny raised an eyebrow and interrupted him rudely. “Excuse me?”

“It’s a well known fact that ...” the reporter’s voice faded.

And Vivian couldn’t blame him.

She had seen quite a lot of bunnies in her time, but she had never seen a bunny look at someone in even a slightly similar manner.

Gone was the friendly gaze. Gone was the slight smile. Gone was the relaxed pose.

It was as if a light bulb illuminating the bunny’s face had suddenly been turned off.
Gradually, one by one, all mammals stopped talking or even whispering.

“Are you insinuating that I should fear foxes just because they may have been my species’ natural enemies in times immemorial?” The bunny was speaking slowly, accentuating every syllable. Her features showed a grim expression, her icy stare was fixed on the mammal, unmoving, unblinking. Threatening.

“No, of course not,” the reporter said hastily.

The bunny nodded. “Good. Because if you were ... Keep in mind that I am a police officer, sworn to defend and protect the citizens of Zootopia. Which includes foxes.”

Vivian could have heard a pin drop.

The bunny had said the words matter-of-factly, and her voice hadn’t been particularly loud, yet her words seemed to fill the massive room.

She started to look around, still with the same grim expression, as if daring anyone to come forth with similar disparaging remarks about foxes. When nobody made his or her voice heard, she looked back in the direction of the reporter who had earned her ire. “Bunnies and foxes may have been natural enemies at one point, sir, but that was millennia ago! Hundreds of millennia ago! We have evolved since then. Nicholas Wilde isn’t my enemy, he’s my friend. I’d trust him with my life!”

And all of a sudden, the grim expression vanished, she put on a smile, and her voice became positively cheerful. “Already have, as a matter of fact.”

You don’t even see the problem, Vivian thought, as the noise in the room started to pick up again.

Her son had nibbled this bunny!

The bunny was obviously completely unaware of the implications; Vivian wondered if Nicky, at least, knew what his action implied.

She looked at him, watched him look up at the bunny, who returned the gaze. There was affection in their gazes, maybe even a bit more.

They like each other. They like each other very much.

Over the years, Vivian had seen countless relationships between herbivores and carnivores. Which, in retrospect, wasn’t all that surprising, given the fact that she had been working at a nightclub of slightly dubious reputation, situated in one of the seedier streets in Happytown. And usually she had no problems dealing with them. To each his own, that has always been her mantra. Inter-gender relationships, inter-species relationships, prey-predator relationships - she couldn’t have cared less.

She had never thought her own son would want to have an interspecies relationship, too. With a bunny even!

“Maybe you’re reading too much into it,” she said aloud.

After all, if the bunny’s words were true, Nicky and herself had gotten to know each other three months ago, most of which they had spent in separation. They knew each other for maybe four days, tops.
Still, she had allowed her son to put his jaws around her neck.

And now she had bluntly threatened to arrest a reporter for insulting and defaming foxes in general.

Vivian heaved a sigh. “Finally someone who trusts foxes!”

“And you should trust Nicholas Wilde, too,” the bunny said after the noise had died down again. “Because he has just handed in his application for the Zootopia Police Academy. In three months, he’s going to enroll at the Academy, and nine months later, he’ll be a police officer. He’ll be the first fox officer in ZPD history. And I honestly can’t wait till he joins. I can’t wait for the day when we can become partners on the force.”

Vivian couldn’t believe her ears.

Her son, her bunny-loving son, her soon-to-be-police-officer son …

She got up from her armchair slowly, walking over to the mini-bar.

To hell with chemotherapy! I need a drink!

Inside a Van, Side Alley along Acacia Avenue, Sahara Square, Zootopia

Another fox had trouble trusting his sense of hearing.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Finnick shouted.

Nick, the shamus!

Who would have thought?

…

I would have.

One of the first lessons every hustler had to learn was to stake a claim. Each and every hustler had his own turf, the district he was working in - which wasn’t necessarily the one they lived in. There was nothing worse than a hustler working on another hustler’s turf. The outcome was invariably annoying and/or painful.

To allow for several hustlers to work in the same district, diversification was necessary. When every hustler did the exact same thing, rivalries were common. Even worse, their victims soon became wise to the acts, not falling for scams anymore.

When you wanted to be a successful hustler, you needed to stand out; you needed an ability, an area of expertise which distinguished you from your competition. In Finnick’s case, it was his acting abilities, his ability to successful portray a toddler, Nick’s son, despite the fact that he was eleven years his senior. And if that wasn’t enough, he was always carrying a huge amount of unchecked aggression around with him - along with his trusty baseball bat -, which usually took the much larger mammals completely off guard. Nobody expected a fennec fox to pick up a fight with a hippo, but that’s exactly what Finnick was infamous for.

With Nick, it was just that he was … different.

After a particularly well-played hustle, Finnick had heard one of his victims yell at him: “Your moral compass is either missing or broken.”
Nick’s moral compass had always been both very present and very well adjusted.

Sure, he cheated mammals out of their hard-earned money, but he did it strictly for survival. Which was just how things work when you spend your life among the dregs of society. On top of that, he also had to pay the bills for his mother’s cancer treatment. Which was a most noble cause, one that cost a lot of money.

Nick had always been in need of huge amounts of money. Still, he had absolutely refused to resort to stealing. He had never extorted money. He had always tried to scam the rich people, sparing the poor. He was even known for helping other unfortunate mammals survive by giving them money or helping them with their work.

Among hustlers, Nick was the Good Samaritan.

Not for the first time, Finnick asked himself what Nick’s story was. All he knew was that Nick had been bullied at one point in his life, but he had flatly refused to give more details. Nick was highly intelligent, had impeccable business savvy, an almost photographic memory for mammals, places, and events, a silver tongue and sort of a sixth sense regarding the need to disappear. The lapses in judgment that befell every hustler had rarely happened to him - apart from the infamous skunk butt rug he had sold Mr. Big, Nick’s hustling history was almost spotless. Flawlessly executed hustles, scams so convincing that the victims never knew what hit them - Nick was hugely successful at what he did, which was part of the reason why Nick had made that much money.

Giving his mother most of it, retaining only a small portion for himself. He led an absolutely frugal life, usually spending his time under the bridge or in the disused and slightly derelict factory building nearby. He ate just as much as necessary to remain healthy, he rarely drank alcohol, didn’t smoke, took no drugs, unlike Finnick, who liked his cigarette, his one evening beer or five, and did even enjoy the occasional joint. And Finnick had more sex partners in one month than Nick had in an entire decade.

What had made a mammal so gifted, so talented, choose to live a life of hustling and scheming? Simple prejudice? A lot of foxes had honest jobs, foxes who were much less intelligent or capable than Nick. So why not Nick?

Mr. Big had once told Nick that he wasn’t a hustler, a notion Nick had merely scoffed at.

Seems like it had taken a bunny to convince him that the arctic shrew had been right all along.

*She hustled you, Nick. She hustled you GOOD!*

Finnick knew that Nick had the potential to become a highly successful police officer.

Which in turn meant he might very well turn into an adversary.

Even worse, their successful run, it seemed, had just come to an end.

Yet somehow, despite his greatest efforts, the anger at Nick refused to erupt.

He simply was unable to hate him.

They had had good times, they had had bad times. Nick had always had Finnick’s back and vice versa. They had been a good team. No, make that an excellent team!

But all good things must come to an end.
Finnick raised his can of beer in a toast.

“Here’s to you, cub! Way to go!”

_ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Press Conference Assembly, City Center, Zootopia_

Chief Bogo had to bite down on his tongue. If he hadn’t, he would probably have laughed out loud.

_What a clever, clever bunny!_

By telling the assembled press, and thus all of Zootopia, that Wilde would be enrolling at the ZPA, Hopps was effectively trying to force the paws of the councilmammals of Zootopia. Being an integral part in the solving of such a high-profile case, with repercussions felt throughout the whole city, Nicholas Wilde had certainly proven his trustworthiness. Still, with his past and the usual bad reputation of foxes, even Bogo’s recommendation might not have been enough to secure Wilde a place at the ZPA. A lot of the councilmammals, consisting mostly of prey, might disagree with Bogo’s assessment.

Now however, after Hopps had made Wilde’s application public, they would risk loss of face if they chose to deny the fox who had risked life and limb to save the city the chance to become a police officer. The press would probably start asking inconvenient questions, questions no politician likes to hear, especially in times like these.

_A really smart move, Hopps! And to think that you have screwed up so completely, so utterly during your first press conference!_

Still the same bunny, but yet completely different!

Bogo nodded to himself. This was an officer to his liking. If she went on like that, she would become an asset to Precinct One.

Bogo decided that it had been a good decision to offer her to return to the ZPD.

She was still answering questions from the press gaggle, and she did it in the most calm and confident manner. However, it was obvious that after almost one hour of constant talking, Hopps was flying on fumes. The last weeks had taken a toll on her, and her injury was visibly bothering her enormously. After Bogo saw her starting to fight a yawn, he decided it was time to end this press conference to finally allow her to get her leg looked after.

However, he simply wasn’t fast enough.

Wilde had obviously seen the same thing Bogo had. With one single leap, he jumped onto the top step of the lectern, pushed past Hopps and said in an almost casual tone: “Ladies and Gentlemammals, as you can see, Officer Hopps is injured. If you have more questions, I am sure Chief Bogo and the ZPD personnel will be willing and able to answer them. Officer Hopps belongs in a hospital, and that’s exactly where I am going to take her. So, if you would please excuse us …”

This was when Bogo reached the lectern.

“Mr. Wilde is right.” he said with his grave voice. “Officer Hopps needs medical attention. If you have any more questions, you can ask me.” He nodded towards both Wilde and Hopps. “But before you do, allow me to express my thankfulness to both Officer Hopps and Mr. Wilde for solving the case. And, for the record, Mr. Wilde, I am looking forward to having you as a police officer
working at Precinct One.” Let’s see if we can increase the pressure on the City Council even more!

Wilde raised an eyebrow while putting on an almost mischievous grin. “The feeling’s mutual, sir.” He put his arm around Hopps’s shoulder. “Let’s get you to a hospital, Judy.”

They climbed down the lectern with some difficulty and tried to turn towards the exit. However, with a literal wall of mammals between them and the door, getting through looked like an exercise in futility.

Until suddenly, several large mammals stepped in front of them.

Bogo watched in surprise as, without having been given orders, several of his large officers, including those whom he had had to suspend, pushed their way through the crowd, allowing Wilde, who had opted to simply carry Hopps, to follow in their trail. Bogo saw Frederick Delgato and his old partner, Brian McHorn, assume position next to the exit, nodding towards both Hopps and Wilde.

Once they had left the room, Bogo cleared his throat. “So, Ladies and Gentlemammals, any more questions?”

---

**Zootopia News Network Headquarters, TV Studio Four, City Center, Zootopia**

“I don’t believe it!” Fabienne Growley shouted. “This devious sheep! The nerve! Wrecking the whole city just to stay in power!”

Patrick Mephitis, the editor-in-charge, was flinching visibly. “Uhm, Fab, your mic is still hot …”

Growley ignored him. “And to think I gave her my vote! Hope she rots in prison! I just wish all those unrest comes to an end now!”

Peter Moosebridge made a quick decision. “We all do,” he said in his calm “news voice,” as he usually called it. “It is time for Zootopia to find peace again, after all the destruction and unprovoked attacks.” He looked directly into the active camera. “If there is any new development, we will interrupt our program to keep you, dear viewers, informed. Until then. I am Peter Moosebridge, for ZNN, Zootopia.”

“All right, we’re off the air,” Mephitis announced.

Growley’s face fell. “I was … on the air?”

Moosebridge shrugged. “You know, under normal circumstances, I would lecture you now on what good journalism is and what isn’t. Do you know the basic rules of good journalism?”

“Uh, keep your distance, do not associate with a cause, even with a good one, do not fall into public concern, keep cool when dealing with catastrophes without appearing cold.”

“Right.” He gave her a smile. “Sounded to me like you were violating quite a lot of those rules. However,” he reached over with his hoof and placed it on her paw, “under the given circumstances, I think you can be forgiven.” He got up. “Do you want a beer? There’s a bar just around the corner. You look like you could use some liquid fortification.”

Growley got up, too. “That I do, Peter, that I do.”
Another one done and dusted! On to the - lengthy - final author’s notes! Sorry, but being brief just isn’t my forte - and I have this chapter to prove it!

The name “Major Ursula Friedkin” actually isn’t my invention. The polar bear is called Ursula in most stories I read over the course of the years. It is a really fitting name, as *Ursus arctos* is the scientific name of the polar bear, but it’s a first name in Germany, so I was never really comfortable with it. In the original screenplay by Jared Bush and Phil Johnston, which can be found on the internet, she was explicitly called Major Friedkin. So I just picked that name and added Ursula to it as the first name.

Yep, I’ve decided to give Mr. Big a name - a name which literally translates to “Charlemagne” (or “Charles the Great” to all those who’re not interested in history), which sounds quite fitting to me, seeing that everyone calls him Mr. Big. Sue me! I like the character so much, I decided to go the whole hog and give him a proper Italian immigrant background, similar to Don Vito Corleone in “The Godfather.” And of course all of this will become important much later in this storyline.

Bigger groups of rabbits are called colonies or nests, so the extensive Hopps Family can just as easily be called the Hopps Colony. Sounds strange, doesn’t it?

Grooming is an important part of social interaction between rabbits. They lick and nibble each other to help with keeping the fur clean and pest-free. It can even happen between bunnies and their human owners! If the rabbit really likes you, he will lick and sometimes even nibble you affectionately. We had a rabbit once which had taken a liking to me. I kept my hair really short back then, and he liked to keep it clean by licking and nibbling my head hair any chance he got. Which can be quite painful, let me tell you! He once even did it with my beard, biting me in the lip in the process! Which was very ... OUCH! (In case you doubt this, I have the pictures (and scars) to prove it - my wife thought it looked so cute, she needed to take several photos of our little Purzel (that was his name) grooming me.) Don’t know if it’s that important for foxes, but I assume it is - most mammals groom each other on a regular basis, so I just assumed foxes would do it, too. Besides, it’s just such a great plot device here!

Growley’s response to Moosebridge’s admonishment was taken from an interview published in 1995 by the German news magazine “Der Spiegel.” In it, the German journalist Hanns-Joachim Friedrichs gave his final interview, days before his untimely death - his legacy, so to speak. The given sentence was his mantra. When asked what good journalism was, he said, and I quote: “*Distanz halten, sich nicht gemein machen mit einer Sache, auch nicht mit einer guten, nicht in öffentliche Betroffenheit versinken, im Umgang mit Katastrophen cool bleiben, ohne kalt zu sein.*” I simply translated the sentence.

Those who’ve read this chapter before may have realized that I decided to let Gideon and Finnick speak in normal, straightforward English. In the original version, Gideon was talking in some kind of, I don’t know, Texan drawl or something, while Finnick was just slurring words.

Yes, me, a German, tried his hand on a dialect in a foreign language, a dialect he hasn’t even properly heard before! I have no idea what a Texan drawl even sounds like! I’ve never been there, after all! (As a matter of fact, I’ve yet to travel to a country where English is the official
language. Never been to England, to America, to Australia. Just Italy, France, Belgium, and The Netherlands. Oh, and Bulgaria, but I was only two years old back then, so this doesn’t really count - I hardly remember it anyway.)

Stupid idea, really! Bad, bad Jens!

At one point, I started regretting ever having had that crazy idea.

I should really have stuck with the stuff I know, just plain, straightforward English.

So, neither Gideon nor Finnick will talk in a different manner than the other mammals in this story. Everybody will speak the English I know, the one I learned to speak myself.

There probably are tons of quotes in this chapter, although I didn’t actively try and hide some in here. Writing the chapter was hard enough as it is. In case you find some, let me know, and I will acknowledge your detective skills in the next chapter!

Thank you for reading, and comments are always appreciated!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

And this was the point where “Wound” began to spin out of control.

Up to this point, pretty much everything had been going on as planned. The three previous chapters had, more or less exactly, turned out to be what I had wanted them to be.

But then, just as I was preparing to write one last chapter which was supposed to serve as an epilogue to the story, I received several comments which made it very obvious to me that I was far from being done with “Wound.” In plain words, I had been overlooking quite a lot of things.

Yes, Judy apologized to all and sundry, but is it enough to heal the festering wound caused by Bellwether and Judy herself? The aforementioned comments suggested to the contrary, and I tended to agree with them. So I kept on writing, taking a few hints from others and ideas of mine and added them, one by one. Those in turn led to new ideas and more suggestions, and suddenly I found myself smack in the middle of a story that kept expanding and expanding.

Much like J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings,” this was a tale that grew in telling. Or rather, it exploded in telling!

So, let’s delve deeper into the chaos the first press conference caused, shall we?

One word of warning: This is the first of several chapters which made me assign the “Teen and up” rating to this story. Some of the stuff in here isn’t for the faint of heart. Yet it’s important for the story as such. So please, bear with me!

These are the current stats: 284 Hits, 28 Kudos, 18 subscriptions, 11 comment threads, 8 bookmarks, plus 26 user subscriptions. Yet again, thank you very much!

J Shute Norway gave a comment on chapter two, while GhostWolf88, niraD, and Combat Engineer commented on the third one. As always, your support is highly appreciated!

Thanks for wasting your time on what I’m doing here! For the second time! As a matter of fact, back then, is was Combat Engineer who made me realize that this story was far from over; he was the main reason for me to keep going on expanding and exploring ideas and little snippets. And now he comments on them again!

Guys like you, Combat Engineer, are the reason why I keep on doing this! And since I’m having a great time at the moment, I really cannot thank you enough for it!

Again, no more quotes have been found. Pity!

Chapter Four

Facing the Pain

We have made the decision, there is forgiveness, if you need. But this is not in this world. You have
“Well, the cut itself isn’t all that bad to begin with, although a slight infection has already begun to set in, but this’ll be easy enough to deal with.” The doctor was a springbok whose name tag identified him as Randall T. Antidorcas, M.D., and everything about him was crisp and efficient. He had examined Judy’s leg with crisp efficiency, and now he explained the results to her in the same manner of speech. “However, you’ve partially ruptured the *peronaeus longus* and the *tibialis anterior*. Those are two of the muscles responsible for paw movement. Sorry, but you’ll not be running around in the foreseeable future.”

Judy nodded, having suspected as much. Given the fact that every movement of her right leg was causing her excruciating pain, much more pain than a simple cut could have caused, muscle damage had always been the most likely diagnosis. “For how long?”

“Well, the cut itself isn’t all that bad to begin with, although a slight infection has already begun to set in, but this’ll be easy enough to deal with.” The doctor was a springbok whose name tag identified him as Randall T. Antidorcas, M.D., and everything about him was crisp and efficient. He had examined Judy’s leg with crisp efficiency, and now he explained the results to her in the same manner of speech. “However, you’ve partially ruptured the *peronaeus longus* and the *tibialis anterior*. Those are two of the muscles responsible for paw movement. Sorry, but you’ll not be running around in the foreseeable future.”

Judy nodded, having suspected as much. Given the fact that every movement of her right leg was causing her excruciating pain, much more pain than a simple cut could have caused, muscle damage had always been the most likely diagnosis. “For how long?”

“Three weeks, minimum. Depends on your ability to sit still.”

“Which, as far as I can tell, is virtually non-existent,” Nick said with a grin.

“Har har,” Judy said, grinning herself. Looking at Antidorcas, she continued: “Seriously though, no running around?”

“Not if you can help it. The better you can stay off your paws, the faster your recovery will be.” He looked down at the wound again. “The ruptures themselves will heal on their own, since they’re not too extensive. However, your skin will probably not. I could sew it shut right now, but like I said before, I’m looking at a slight infection. Since the bleeding has stopped, I’d say we clean the wound and wait for 12 hours, then we’ll apply the stitches. I hope you didn’t make any plans for tonight.”

“You wanna keep me here?”

“For one day. We’ll administer some antiseptics, and just to be sure, we can give you a low-level antibiotic, although I don’t think it’ll be necessary. You’re vaccinated against tetanus, I hope.”

“I am. Every police officer is. It’s part of our regular medical examinations. I received the latest dose of vaccine when I joined Precinct One, three months ago.”

“Excellent! One less thing to worry about. Oh, and if you want, you can have an analgesic, too.”

“Excuse me, a *what*?”

“A painkiller, Carrots,” Nick said with a smirk. “Doctors like to talk in a language only they can understand. It’s called medspeak.”

Antidorcas smiled. “It’s obvious you speak medspeak, too.”

“I do. To some extent at least.”

Judy looked at Nick, who had the very same smirk on his features he had sported when he had told
her that she was nothing but a dumb bunny. Back then, it had annoyed the heck out of her. But now, she was slowly getting used to it. And after they had hoodwinked Bellwether into admitting to her crimes, she had even begun to like it. That was just Nick, that was just what he looked like.

*He probably needed the knowledge for a hustle,* she thought, then found out to her own surprise that the thought didn’t bother her at all. Nick had officially applied for the Academy, he had been sincere, and if Chief Bogo was willing to overlook his shady past, who was she to second-guess him? “Lucky you!” Turning towards Antidorcas, she added: “Yes, a painkiller would be nice.”

They heard someone clear his throat. All heads turned around towards the mammal standing near the door. “So Officer Hopps will be out of action for three weeks?” Brian McHorn asked.

“At least,” Antidorcas said. “Certainly not earlier, probably even longer.”

McHorn nodded. “It takes as long as it takes. Right, Doctor?”

“Pretty much, Officer.”

“Good. Just wanted to know what I should tell Chief Bogo. He’ll want to know when he can expect Officer Hopps to return to duty.”

“I can tell him myself, if you would like me to.”

“No need, Doctor. You probably have more than enough things that need doing, and the Chief expects me to return to Precinct One anyway.” McHorn looked at Wilde. “Should I take you home, Mr. Wilde?”

Nick shook his head. “I’m good, Officer, but thanks for the offer!”

“You’re welcome! If my presence is no longer needed ... the Chief’s probably waiting for me.”

“Hey, McHorn,” Judy said.

“Yes, Hopps?”

“Thanks for giving us a ride!”

McHorn nodded. “That’s what we do at the ZPD.” He gave a two-finger-salute, turned around and left the room without any sort of farewell.

“And here’s a gruff fellow if I ever saw one,” Nick said, as Antidorcas left the room as well, leaving them alone with a nurse who seemed to be busy preparing sterile gauze pads and bandages.

Judy sighed. “You have no idea! On my first day, I wanted to greet him with a pawbump. He pushed me across the floor. Didn’t take me seriously for one second. When I was chasing Weaselton, he shouted after me to wait for the real cops.”

For a fleeting second, Nick’s features darkened. “He did?”

“Yup.” She sighed again. “Back then, nobody took me seriously. Bogo in particular. Or why do you think he made me do parking duty? Here I was, first in my class, and he made me do parking duty!”

Nick put on his smirk again - *did he ever do anything else but smirk?* “I tend to think they learned their lesson, Fluff. They’ll probably not underestimate you again in a hurry.”
She looked up at him. “You sure? I had a lot of help, after all.”

“Believe me, they hold you in very high esteem. Or why, do you think, did they clear the way for us? For you? Bogo hadn’t ordered them to do so, they did it on their own. Simply because they wanted to. Every single one of them. Even those the City Council kicked out.” He made a pause. “You have arrived, Officer Hopps. You truly are one of them.”

“You think so?”

“I know it, Fluff.”

Judy gave him a smile and opened her mouth to say something, but at that moment, the nurse, a pygmy hippo, approached her. “So, let’s get that leg of yours treated. I’m sorry, Officer Hopps, but this one will probably be a bit uncomfortable.”

A few minutes later, the nurse had cleaned the wound, amidst much hissing and groaning from Judy, had applied a bandage with surprising deftness, considering she was dealing with a mammal less than half her size, and had given Judy both two tiny pills and an ice pack to apply “for no longer than 20 minutes at a time,” as she had told her. Sitting in a wheelchair, the injured leg propped up with the adjustable paw rest, Judy simply enjoyed being pampered as Nick pushed her through the mostly empty corridors of Zootopia General Hospital, following the nurse who was about to take her to the room where she would be staying for the night. The pain in her leg was subsiding slowly, and since it had been a long, exhausting day and her last meal had been breakfast, more than twelve hours ago, the analgesic, however mild it might have been, left her decidedly light-headed.

“Why did you tell the press gaggle that I applied for the Academy?” Nick asked suddenly.

Judy shrugged. “You know just as well as I do that your application is sort of a gamble. The City Council and the Academy might still reject you. The Chief might have a lot of muscle, both literally and figuratively, but his influence only goes so far. I just wanted to go public with this to increase your chances, to increase the pressure on both the City Council and the Academy.”

“Why, thank you, Fluff! Much appreciated.” He gave her an honest, open smile.

“Don’t thank me too early, Slick,” Judy said, her features darkening. “You would be the second small mammal to apply after Lionheart’s Mammal Inclusion Initiative, and I was met with enough derision, sometimes even open hostility.” She lowered her voice, both in pitch as well as in volume. “Go back to the burrows, farm girl! No bunny has ever become a police officer, and no bunny ever will!” She sighed. “It was bad enough at the time, but I pulled through. Your fate will probably be much worse. Many will think that a former hustler as a police officer will cast a poor light on the ZPD as a whole. Plus, a lot of mammals distrust foxes on principle.” She added hastily: “No offense!”

Nick smiled. “None taken. You’re right, after all. And you don’t belong to those mammals, obviously.”

Judy looked up at him. “Not anymore. I had my share of prejudice and outright …”

Nick put a paw on her mouth, silencing her. “It’s okay, Judy, I believe you. After what you did today, how could I not trust you? Or rather, after what you allowed me to do.”

“You mean the bite?” She grinned. “It didn’t feel dangerous at all. It actually felt … nice.”

Nick raised an eyebrow. “It did?” After a pause he added: “Are you into foxes?”
Judy made a frown. “Er, what?”

“Do foxes hold a certain appeal to you?” Nick accentuated every syllable.

“Uh, to be honest, that’s not something I’ve wasted any thoughts on.” Suddenly it dawned on her.

“Wait a second, was this something …”

Nick shrugged. “Nibbling somebody is a sign of affection among foxes. I wouldn’t be surprised if every fox who heard you will believe that we are an item.”

She snickered. “A fox and a bunny?”

“I’ve seen worse.”

“You have?”

“When you live on skid row, you get to see all those things the public doesn’t want to admit. Including prey-predator-relationships. Some of the more conservative mammals might disagree, claiming that there are none, but that doesn’t mean they speak the truth.”

“Really?”

“You can bet your fluffy butt on that.”

Judy had to laugh at that. “What is it with you and butts?”

Before Nick was able to respond, the pygmy hippo said without looking at them: “Oh, before I forget, I hope you’re not bothered by the fact that we cannot provide you with a separate room.”

Judy made a dismissive gesture. “I hadn’t counted on getting a separate room anyway. I’m from Bunnyburrow. Wherever you are, it’s always going to be crowded. Last time I was in hospital, I had to share my room with five other bunnies.”

“Five?” Nick asked.

“Yes. And it was one of the less crowded rooms.”

Nick cleared his throat. “Carrots, just how big is Bunnyburrow?”

“Some 81 million mammals and counting.”

“81 million? That’s almost ten times bigger than Zootopia!”

Judy shrugged. “Like I said, we are good at multiplying.”

Nick shook his head. “And I always thought it was just a cliché!”

“Part of it is, part of it isn’t. There are families in Bunnyburrow who have less than ten children. My family, on the other paw … I have 275 siblings.” Nick’s jaw dropped. Judy continued, rather matter-of-factly: “Most are adults now, some have already left our home and established their own families, still there are always more than 200 bunnies living on my family’s farm, since some of my brothers and sisters stayed with their respective spouses. This of course means that the next generation has already arrived. By my last count, I have some forty nieces and nephews who live on the farm.”

“275 siblings? Wow! Must be hard to stand out.”
Judy hesitated. “To be honest, I can’t say all that much about it. I’m from their first litter of five, the third kit, to be precise. Only my brothers Billy and Jamie are older, and I was the only girl in my litter. So I always stood out, sort of.”

“And when you decided to become a cop, it became worse.”

“It did … and yet it didn’t. My parents are great. Even with all their kits and grandkits, you will hear no member of the Hopps family say that they’ve been neglected by my parents, ever. I don’t know how they do it, but somehow they always managed to make everyone feel important. Do you have any siblings?”

“No, I’m an only child.”

“Really? I envy you.”

“You do?”

Judy hesitated. “Well, with so many rabbits about, there’s no such thing as privacy.”

“But at least you were never lonely.”

“You were?”

“I was, pretty much all the time. All I had was my mother. I would have loved to have siblings.”

Judy grinned. “Maybe I can share some with you.”

“Sorry to decline. Too much cuteness is bad for your blood sugar level.”

“I thought I told you not to call me cute!”

“I haven’t called you cute, I’ve just talked about the general cuteness of …”

“I wouldn’t finish that sentence if I were you, Nick!”

Any retort Nick might have had in mind was prevented by the pygmy hippo nurse. “We’re here.” She opened the door to a room and stood aside to let Nick push Judy past her.

It was a double bedroom. One of the rhino-sized beds was empty, while a young female lynx occupied the other one. Two adult lynxes, one male, one female, were sitting next to her bed. Upon seeing them, Nick slowed to a stop, and both he and Judy looked at the patient in discomfort.

It was instantly obvious that the kit was in a very bad shape. Her whole head was a disfigured mess, a heart monitor was connected to her and a respirator was attached to her snout. Her right arm was in a cast, while the left one …

A tiny stump was all that remained of her left arm.

And the rest of her body, thankfully hidden underneath a blanket, looked oddly deformed.

“Oh my!” Nick said in barely more than a whisper.

Both adult lynxes looked at them with sadness on their features. The eyes of the male lynx widened upon seeing them. “You’re Judy Hopps!”

“I am,” Judy said in a very subdued voice.
Suddenly the sadness left his face, to be replaced by pure hatred. “Behold your handiwork!” He pointed at the kit lying in bed.

“I beg your pardon?” If it had been possible for Judy to physically shrink, she would have done so.

“Look at what you did to our daughter!”

Suddenly, Nick spoke up with a surprisingly harsh tone in his voice. “Judy did nothing to your daughter!”

The lynx snorted. “Of course not! She’s the hero of Zootopia!” He got up and closed the gap to them. “You’ve ruined our daughter’s life!” he hissed venomously, looking down at Judy.

“What happened?” Judy asked almost soundlessly.

“After you made sure that every Zootopian knows that predators are biologically predisposed to become savages, some prey mammals decided that our daughter was a threat to them. So they did this to her.” He pointed at his daughter again.

Judy looked at the kit in horror. “Prey mammals … did this?”

The lynx nodded. “But as it turns out, nobody believes us.”

“What do you mean?” Nick asked. “What happened?”

“Karen was on her way home from school. When she didn’t come home, I started looking for her. Found her next to a dumpster in a dark side alley. I called 911, the ambulance came and took her here. ZPD was there, too, but they told me that there was nothing they could do about it. There were no witnesses. One of the officers even had the guts to tell me in the face that for all he knew, the injuries might be self-inflicted.”

The horror Judy felt was replaced by outrage. “He did WHAT?”

“Don’t tell me,” Nick said. “The officers, they were two rams, right?”

The lynx looked at him in surprise. “How do you know?”

Nick shrugged. “I didn’t, I was merely guessing, but my guesses are usually good. Those two rams have been arrested today for conspiring with Mayor Bellwether. They are police officers, as far as I know,” he looked at Judy, who nodded, “yet it seems that they have secretly been working for someone else.”

“It is true, then? Bellwether was behind it?”

“It is,” Judy said. “We have her confession on record, and she’ll be charged with conspiracy, inciting a riot, attempted murder, aggravated assault, and heaven knows how many other charges. All her cronies have been arrested, too.”

“What makes you so sure it was prey mammals who did this?” Nick asked.

“Because she told me.” He turned towards his daughter. “The last words she said before she blacked out. Has been in a coma ever since.”

“She suffered numerous injuries,” the nurse added in a soft voice. “Broken skull, broken spine, broken pelvis, broken ribs. Her left arm and both her legs were comminuted so badly that they had to be amputated. Her lung collapsed, her spleen ruptured, she lost one kidney, her brain was
severely contused …,” her voice trailed off.

“How did they do this?” Nick asked.

The nurse took a deep breath. It was obvious that the kit’s fate was affecting her deeply. “Doctor Hendrix said it looked like injuries you would suffer from being hit with baseball bats, numerous times and with excessive force. Plus they had used pliers to tear all her teeth and claws out.”

“Say again?”

“They tore out all her teeth and claws while she was still conscious.”

Nick, in an obviously involuntary motion, clenched his paws as if he was afraid of losing his own claws.

At this point, Judy was angry beyond belief. “And despite all this, the rams claimed it was self-inflicted?” she all but shouted.

The lynx snorted. “Please, don’t pretend that you care!”

Judy’s head whipped around. “Excuse me?”

In a sudden movement, the lynx approached and came so close to Judy that she could feel his breath on her fur. Looking down at her, adjusting his glasses, he hissed: “It was your statements in front of the press that made life for predators in Zootopia a living hell! My wife lost her job! The only reason I’m not out of work is because I’m self-employed, and God knows for how long, seeing that business is virtually non-existent. Nobody wants to buy books from a predator nowadays. And our daughter …”

“None of this is her fault,” Nick said sharply.

“It isn’t?” the lynx retorted. “So you mean that after decades of peaceful co-existence, prey mammals just decided to turn on predators without instigation?”

Nick snorted. “Peaceful co-existence? Don’t make me laugh! There’s always been animosity between prey and predators. Or did you forget what Adolf Hirschler tried to do some seventy years ago?”

“What do you mean? The collars? They never worked.”

“Yes, back then they didn’t, but given today’s technology …”

“Sorry,” Judy said, “but what are you talking about?”

“Didn’t they teach you in your history lessons?” Nick asked.

“Uh, they might have, but I wasn’t that interested in history.”

“Well, you should be. So many things that are important right now can only be understood when you know the history behind it. Some seventy years ago, in Gnuganda, a new government led by a stag called Adolf Hirschler ran an oppressive regime. Prey were the rulers, predators were the victims. They were forced to wear special collars which were originally intended to deliver electric shocks on predators if they became too agitated. Thankfully, they never worked. Or maybe that wasn’t so good a thing, because it gave them the excuse to incarcerate countless predators for being savage beasts. In the end, they even had concentration camps in Gnuganda, where they killed
millions of predators.”

Judy’s jaw dropped. “Millions?”

“In most big cities all over the world, you’ll find a prey-predator ratio of about ten-to-one. In most Gnugandan big cities, the ratio is closer to twenty-to-one. Coincidence?” Nick took a deep breath. “Most historians believe that some six million predators were killed during what Hirschler called the Thousand-Year-Reich. The numbers still haven’t picked up again.”

“The prey-predator ratio in Bunnyburrow is 1000-to-one,” Judy said softly.

“Yes, because it’s always been that way. Two hundred years ago, you would have been hard-pressed to find even one single predator in Bunnyburrow. Or why, do you think, is it called Bunnyburrow? It was founded by bunnies, is run by bunnies, so even today, the vast majority of mammals living their are bunnies, and I don’t think this will change any time soon. Big cities are a different story. They are melting pots where a lot of mammals who flee the rural areas converge. Prior to Hirschler’s regime, the prey-predator ratio in most Gnugandan cities was close to eight, maybe even seven-to-one. After the regime had run its course, it had dropped to some thirty-to-one. And the numbers are only slowly picking up again. Some wounds simply take a lot of time to heal.” He gave a snort. “Guess Bellwether would have been ecstatic, should she have managed to achieve the same numbers here.”

“She would never have been that successful, if not for her,” the lynx shouted, pointing at Judy.

“Now wait just …”

“He’s right, Nick,” Judy said softly, looking up at the lynx. “This is my fault. It’s my fault that your daughter was beaten up, that your wife lost her job. These prey mammals used my prejudices as an excuse to inflict unspeakable pain on so many predators.” She closed her eyes and sighed. “And I’m afraid I can’t make it better again.”

“Don’t tell me you really want to,” the lynx said savagely.

Judy opened her eyes again, looking up at the lynx. “I can’t make you believe me, sir, but I can try to give you justice.”

As far as Judy’s injury is concerned, yep, we’re talking human anatomy here, but given the fact that all mammals in Zootopia walk like human beings, I just assume the skeletal and muscular system are quite similar, too.

This actually goes for everything concerning the nature of mammals in Zootopia. For the record, I will always assume that in regards of their respective physiologies, all mammals are closer to human beings than they are to the animals they might be. Their lifespan is human, their physiology is human, their behavior is mostly human. With the exception of several animalistic traits they have, like the outstanding sense of hearing of bunnies or the speed of cheetahs or the respective sizes, all mammals basically act like human beings in animal guise. And all physiologies are pretty much identical, regardless of the species of mammals we’re dealing with. About the only true difference I can make out is the fact that we have a clear distinction between herbivores, i.e. prey, and carnivores, i.e. predators. Apart from that, a giraffe is just a very tall human being and a mouse a really small one.

And before you ask, this is one of the most important aspects of the storyline I’m about to
develop here. At one point, somewhere down the road, you’ll understand why I’m saying this. Unfortunately, we’re quite far from being there yet. So I’m asking you for A LOT of patience here! It won’t be until we reach the part of “Hammer to Fall” that I haven’t been able to write yet that this will become vital. And when I say “vital,” I mean it! In the truest sense of the word!

Is Bunnyburrow really ten times bigger than Zootopia? Seems to be. When the guys at Disney created the movie, two of the numerous templates they used to create Zootopia were New York and London. Two metropolises of almost the same number of inhabitants (roughly 8.5 million each). So in my universe, Zootopia has about 8.5 million citizens. Don’t know if it’s canon, but it’s good enough for me.

And I just felt the need to talk about being one in 276. Growing up the third of three boys, the only thing that made me stand out was my big mouth. ;-)

The name “Gnuganda” actually was taken from the German dub of the movie. When Judy explains to Nick that she’s from Bunnyburrow, the sentence she uses is: “Podunk is in Deerbrooke County. I grew up in Bunnyburrow.” In the German dub, the sentence becomes: “Pusemuckel ist in Gnuganda. Ich bin in Nageria aufgewachsen.” Since I thought the names were really funny, I decided to use all three of them. “Gnuganda” became the name for my version of Germany, with “Pusemuckel,” which really is one of the numerous German words for “Podunk,” being a town in Gnuganda, although it won’t crop up all that often again. And “Nageria” became the name for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The names Gnuganda and Nageria will feature quite often in my stories. Just thought you should know.

And yes, Adolf Hirschler is my version of Adolf Hitler - “Hirsch” is the German word for stag. When I first wrote this chapter, the whole topic was little more than a spur-of-the-moment thing, little more than a slightly crazy idea. What if they had similar problems in the world of Zootopia, problems we had prior to and during World War II? What if Nazis are prey mammals? What if Jews are similar to predators? What if the shock collars from the original plot for Zootopia are a different version of the “Yellow Badge,” the patch of cloth in the shape of the Star of David, which Jews were forced to stitch to their clothing during the Third Reich? Certainly food for thought.

So much food for thought actually that this seemingly small aspect of history is bound to become really important later in this story and will also have repercussions that will be felt in the other stories.

And yes, if you want to discuss the finer details of this with me, my doors are always open! History’s been one of my most favorite subjects at school, and it carried over into adult life. Over the course of the years, I’ve studied the intricacies of Nazi Germany with ever-increasing intensity, because I’m still seeking answers to these questions: What made all this possible? Why did nobody interfere? Why did nobody try and stop Hitler? What made a country full of intelligent, sensible people fall for a dangerous lunatic? Another reason why I love Zootopia so much - the parallels between Bellwether’s vision for Zootopia and Nazi Germany are staggering.

There happens to be one quote in this chapter, but the problem is that I can’t, for the life of
me, remember where exactly I found it. At one point, I had Nick say that “my guesses are usually good.” As far as I recall, the exact same sentence was once used by Albus Dumbledore in one of the “Harry Potter” books by J.K. Rowling, but I have no idea which book it was, and trying to find it sounds like too much of a bother right now - in plain English, I’m way too lazy to go and look for it. So, if you can tell me in which book the quote can be found, it would be very much appreciated!

Apart from that, I didn’t actually try and hide quotes in this chapter, but that doesn’t necessarily mean there are none. Maybe I just gave some without even realizing it. Happens to me all the time! So in case you find one, please tell me about it! Thanks a bundle!

That’s it for now! Thanks for reading, and please, send your comments my way!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

I just presented you with one of the results of Judy’s first press conference, now let’s take a closer look at the detective work it ensues! And other complications we might stumble across along the way, like the state and decision of the City Council.

Which means this is also the first chapter where we receive glimpses into the political system of Zootopia. And I guess I don’t need to tell you that it’s quite vital for things to come, both in this story as well as in the upcoming ones. All my stories are quite heavy on politics anyway, simply because I’m not only interested in history, but politics as well. To me, politics is in everything, and everything turns into history. In case that isn’t exactly your cup of tea, I’ll always try and provide explanations for what I’m talking about. And in case that’s not enough, feel free to bombard me with questions! There’s no such thing as a stupid question, only stupid answers. ;-)

I guess I should stop looking at the stats. Back when I started writing fanfiction, I was amazed that people actually read what I had been writing. And I wanted the world to know that I was amazed. Now, after what happened over at fanfiction.net, I know that I have managed to garner a faithful and quite dedicated fanbase, which is of course even more amazing and will always be a huge honor. So by now, giving the stats just feels like bragging to me. And I don’t really understand why my replies count towards the total number of comments anyway. So I simply say this: Thanks again to all those who read this story so far (or back then), who subscribed to it and sung their praises! Hearing that this is among one’s favorite stories still is, and always will be, amazing! And it’s just such an honor! (Thanks again, niraD, for telling me!)

Thanks to GhostWolf88, CombatEngineer, ChaoticRyhmer, and niraD for sending me their comments! A lot of insight, as usual. I particularly liked the comment CombatEngineer sent me. Yeah, it sure felt uncomfortable as heck! But it needed to be done. Sometimes the end justifies the means! (Boy, that was dark, eh?)

Yet again, nobody found any of the other quotes I hid in the previous chapters. Just so you know, I’m going to reveal all of them when we reach the last chapter, so you still have a few weeks to get the job done!

Chapter Five

The Missing Hour

So I’m workin’ even when it’s hurtin’, that’s the only way to make an honest day’s wage.

Big Smo feat. Alexander King: “Workin’” (Written by John Lee Smith, Jon Conner, Alexander King and Orig, from the album “Kuntry Livin’,” Elektra Nashville/Warner Bros., 2014)
With a sigh, Benjamin Clawhauser closed the file, leant back on his chair and rubbed his eyes.

Yet another outrageously boring day was coming to a close.

After the mayhem the previous day had brought the city, business had, on the whole, been rather slow. The City Council had been in session the whole day, with the councilmammals trying to sift their way through the chaos Bellwether had unleashed. So far, no results had been forthcoming. The rest of the city seemed to be suspended, as if everybody was just waiting for the City Council to make decisions before dealing with the usual problems.

Clawhauser was waiting anxiously for any announcement, too. Maybe they would reverse their initial decision, allowing Clawhauser to finally leave the dratted Records Department for good. His hopes weren’t high, though.

For decades, the City Council had consisted of 18 predators and 32 prey mammals, which was a disproportional amount, given the ten-to-one prey-predator ratio in Zootopia and the significantly more imbalanced ratios of the surrounding boroughs. However, having that many predators made sure that prey were unable to get a two-thirds majority to change laws, even when the Mayor, who did not count towards the number of councilmammals and whose vote counted double, in case there was a stalemate, was a prey mammal. The system, while certainly not perfect, had worked for more than eighty years so far.

However, not only had Lionheart been arrested, but three more predator councilmammals had been forced to resign from the City Council. Two of them had the dubious honor of having been charged with felony tax evasion, thoroughly ruining their respective reputations in the process, basically forcing them into early retirement. The third predator had resigned on his own, although there were rumors that the life of his three kits had been threatened. All three seats had then been taken by prey mammals, so the ratio had changed to 15 predators versus 35 prey. With Bellwether holding the reins, the remaining predators had no possibility to prevent anti-predator laws from being approved. Which was the prime reason why Chief Bogo had been forced to suspend so many predators and to reassign a lot of those that still were allowed to stay, like Clawhauser himself.

Clawhauser didn’t blame his superior. Bogo was, first and foremost, a crime fighter. In his eyes, suspending capable police officers, regardless of their species, and reassigning others only meant the ZPD was weakened. It had been with extreme reluctance that he had announced the suspension of no less than five predator officers, most of them quite highly decorated. Since he was appointed by the City Council, just like every police officer was, he was subject to their decisions, and there was nothing he was able to do about it. The City Council had, in a manner of speaking, been forcing his hooves, so nobody held it against him.

And Precinct One wasn’t the only precinct the City Council had wreaked havoc with. In the other precincts, the numbers and assignments had changed in a similar manner, sometimes an even worse one. It was basically only in Precincts Four, Sahara Square, and Nine, Happytown, that the respective rosters had been left virtually untouched. And that was only because over there, prey had the vast majority anyway, unlike the other Precincts, where they had often had about as many predators as prey mammals working on the beat.

Even after Bellwether’s arrest, prey still held more than two thirds of the seats in City Council. They still had all the possibilities in the world to make decisions which did little but ruin the lives of predators.

Clawhauser was interrupted in his idle musings by a solid knock at the door. Finally someone to talk to! Since the beginning of his work shift, he hadn’t seen a single mammal. “Come in!”
The door opened to reveal a sight Clawhauser had never expected. It wasn’t that Chief Bogo had never gone down to Records before, but whenever he had gone there, he had always been accompanied by another police officer, and in most cases they had been searching for some specific file or had wanted to watch the footage of traffic surveillance cameras. This time, the only mammal accompanying him was a civilian, a red fox wearing a shirt and tie of somewhat jarring colors. The foxes’ face showed a smile which looked almost mischievous.

“Clawhauser,” Bogo said without preamble, “you’ve already seen Mr. Wilde yesterday, during the press conference. He would like to ask for your assistance in identifying a few attackers.”

Clawhauser looked down at the fox who approached, paw extended. “So you are the mammal Judy shouted at when we were chased by a savage jaguar.”

“Yes, that would be me,” Clawhauser said while shaking the foxes’ paw. “Benjamin Clawhauser. Just call me Clawhauser. Everyone does.”

“I’m Nicholas Wilde, or Nick for short.”

“So it’s true, you wanna become a police officer.”

“I do, yes.”

“Is that why you’re here?”

“Not exactly.” Wilde looked at Bogo with a grin. “The Chief here asked me to fill him in on a few of the more, uhm, sordid details of my past life before joining the Academy.”

“Sordid details?”

The foxes’ grin only became wider, showing his full set of teeth. “Let’s just say I wasn’t always a law-abiding citizen.”

Clawhauser gasped. “What did you do?”

Wilde shrugged. “I was a hustler. I earned a living through scamming mammals.”

Clawhauser looked at Bogo. “And yet …”

“Yet he receives my full recommendation,” Bogo interrupted the cheetah. “Given what Mr. Wilde did for this city, I am more than willing to overlook his somewhat shady past. But I wanted to know who the mammal is I am going to recommend for entering the Academy.”

“Not that the Chief ends up endorsing a murderer,” Wilde said with a smirk.

Bogo gave him a somewhat perfunctory smile. “Would not be the first attempt.”

Wilde’s smirk vanished. “Are you serious?”

Bogo folded his massive arms. “As a rule, I’m not prone to joking about job-related things. So yes, I am very serious. You wouldn’t believe the nerve of some mammals applying for the Academy. We had murderers, rapists, thugs, thieves, the whole lot. Hardly a year goes by where some mammals don’t try their luck at applying, only to find themselves in the Gray Bar Hotel because of some misdemeanor they had long forgotten about. Some even try to cover the fact that they are hardened criminals, hoping that once they make it through the Academy, nobody will be able to touch them again. None of them succeeded so far, as far as I know.”
“In other words, I wouldn’t have been able to avoid being kicked out of the Academy? Or rather, not being accepted in the first place?”

Instead of answering the question, Bogo walked over to one filing cabinet. With surprising swiftness, he found a certain file, a rather sizeable one, and handed it to Wilde. “See for yourself.”

Wilde took the file, then his eyes widened. “You had a file … on me?”

“Of course. I’ve read it before, after you had helped Hopps find the Missing Mammals, and I read it again last evening, after the press conference was over. Very interesting lecture, I might add. I particularly found the numerous manners in which you managed to convince my police officers that you were innocent of all accusations most enlightening.”

Wilde opened the file, perusing a few of the pieces of paper in there. “So … so you knew about most of the things I told you today?”

“I did, yes. But you told me the same story, so you’re truthful. That was important for me. And no, this has nothing to do with you being a fox. I subject every wannabe officer to the very same scrutiny, regardless of species. As the events of the last weeks have proven, there are more than enough mammals who defy stereotypes in the worst possible way. Never thought I’d arrest a sheep for inciting a riot!” He looked at Clawhauser. “Speaking of which, Mr. Wilde told me that he and his friend were attacked by several rams and goats. They were able to repel the attack, but there may be more to this than meets the eye. We would like to take a look at the surveillance footage.”

Wilde said: “The attack happened on Saturday, August 6, around five pm, I’d say, maybe five thirty.”

Clawhauser turned around and walked over to his desk. Opening his laptop and taking it out of standby mode, he said: “That should be no problem. Footage from the surveillance cameras is stored on the ZPD’s server system for three years. On top of that, we also have Blu-ray discs as some sort of back-up.” He was typing so fast, his chubby paws were a blur. “August 6, 2016, check. What camera are we talking about?”

“Acacia Avenue. There is one unnamed side alley.”

Clawhauser perused a map hanging on the wall next to his desk. “That’s District Seven, Area Four, let’s see. I know the place. Isn’t that where this funky-looking van is usually parked?”

“It is. And the funky-looking van is exactly what I want to see here.”

“Ah. Then I know which camera … there we are! I’m activating the projector.”

A few seconds later, the image shown by the laptop was projected onto a whiteboard. It showed a slightly decrepit van with colorful artwork sitting on its own in the side alley. At first glance, nothing seemed to be amiss.

“Must be too early,” Wilde said. “Can we fast-forward?”

“Of course.” Clawhauser clicked the appertaining control, but the image remained unchanged. The only thing that changed rapidly was the timecode in the lower part of the screen.

“A quarter past five. Any minute now,” Wilde said. “And sure enough … Clawhauser, please …”

He needn’t have said this. As soon as a black van had appeared on screen, Clawhauser had slowed down the recording again.
“And there they are!” Wilde put on a smile as he looked at the whiteboard. The footage was quite grainy and the overall picture quality dismal, yet it was sufficient to give evidence that the attack on Finnick and himself had really happened.

Chief Bogo nodded. “Clawhauser, can you tell me more about the car?”

“Uh, no, sir”, Clawhauser said slowly. “It’s a standard black Ram Van with no unconventional features that I can make out. There are hundreds of those in Zootopia, I’m afraid. And I can’t make out a license plate.”

“There were none,” Wilde said. “Neither at the front nor at the back.”

Bogo sighed. “Why can’t things ever be easy?”

“Maybe we can follow their trail over the jam cams,” Wilde said.

“In a moment,” Bogo said. “First, I wanna see this.”

All three mammals watched in silence as five mammals left the black van to approach the other one. Three of them were rams, two were goats. They were armed with batons; on top of that, two rams were even carrying somewhat lengthy knives, one of which might even have been a machete. They had hardly left their van when one of the goats, who was wearing a dark uniform, unlike the other assailants who were wearing an odd assortment of sweat suits, walked over to the other one and yanked the back door open. About to climb into the van, he suddenly recoiled and left the immediate vicinity in a hurry. An instant later, the reason became obvious: A tiny-looking fennec fox appeared in the door, wielding a baseball bat which looked comically oversized on his diminutive frame. Even the grainy footage couldn’t hide the fennec’s enormous fury. Without much ado, he targeted the ram nearest to him, the one carrying the machete. One huge jump, one hellacious downward swing, and the ram collapsed to the ground in a senseless heap. In one fluid motion, the fennec hit the ground, spun around and hit the hoof of one of the goats with enough force to send the baton flying.

Bogo gave a slight whistle. “He’s good!”

Wilde grinned. “You ain’t seen nothing yet!"

It took the fennec less than fifteen seconds to strike down every mammal around. Only after every assailant had collapsed to the ground, with two of them being unconscious and the other three suffering from broken arms and legs, he stopped his vicious attack. Saying a few (probably X-rated) words to the rams and goats, he raised his hat again, ready to strike. In the meantime, another fox appeared in the van’s door, a red fox wearing a bright shirt. He, too, held a baseball bat in his paws, but his posture seemed relaxed - there simply was nothing more for him to do.

Bogo had seen a lot of fighting in his time, so he had (somewhat foolishly) believed that there would be nothing he hadn’t seen before, nothing that would surprise him anymore. He stood corrected. What the tiny-looking fennec fox had done, most large mammals working at the ZPD wouldn’t have been able to do. To say that he was impressed was an understatement.

“As you can see,” Wilde said in a conversational tone, “Finnick acted in self-defense.”

Bogo snorted. “Given the fact that he was the first one to strike, some judges might disagree.”

“But we were threatened.”

“That you were indeed. But that’s a rhetorical question. Somehow I doubt that the goats and rams
will press charges against your friend.”

“Probably not.” Wilde looked at the screen again, and his smile vanished. Bogo’s abilities at reading other mammals had always been somewhat lackluster, but he had no difficulties guessing what Wilde had on his mind. He had been there before himself.

Wilde and Bogo had spent the last four hours in Bogo’s office, with Wilde explaining to the Chief in minute detail how he had spent the last twenty years of his life. He had been given accounts of countless scams and hustles, nothing major, but enough to raise eyebrows. Both Nick and Finnick had never stooped so low to turn into outright criminals, but they’ve skirted the lines of the law to such a degree, it was almost a miracle that nobody had tried to exact revenge on them. There had obviously been close calls, and lots of them, yet somehow they had always managed to pull through unscathed. They had been a hugely successful team.

A team which would cease to exist, now that Nicholas Wilde had been given a chance, now that he had decided to pursue a career in law enforcement.

Finnick probably was the only mammal in the whole wide world whom Wilde would have called a friend. Yet despite this, once Wilde enrolled at the Academy, they would find themselves on different sides of the law.

Maybe the likelihood wasn’t all that big, but there was the possibility that if Finnick and Wilde would meet again, the roles would be very much different: Finnick would still be the same old hustler he had been for more than thirty years, and Wilde would be a police officer. (This would only be valid, of course, if Wilde would manage to graduate from the Academy, but after their conversation, Bogo didn’t doubt his determination, dedication, and focus for just one second. He would be the first fox in the ZPD, and he would make it there with relative ease and top grades.)

Bogo hoped for Wilde’s sake that the fox would never find himself in the position of being forced to arrest his best friend. He had been there before himself, and it had almost turned his whole world upside-down.

He cleared his throat. “So the attack happened, and we can prove it. Now, where does the black van go?”

Clawhauser used the controls again to speed up the recording. They saw both foxes climb back into the van. The rams and goats tried to return to their own van, which took them a lot of work, due to their extensive injuries. The three conscious mammals had a really hard time rousing their senseless colleagues.

“Maybe it would be a good idea to ask around if three rams and two goats were treated at one of the hospitals here,” Wilde mused.

“We will certainly ask them,” Bogo replied. “But maybe we don’t need to. Is this the uniform of Aries Security I see there?”

“It looked like it. I wouldn’t have said it otherwise.”

“Clawhauser, can we zoom in on the leftmost goat?”

“Yes, sir.” Clawhauser clicked the appertaining controls, and the image changed to focus on the goat lying on the pavement, nursing his broken arm. “This looks like a ram’s head to me.”

Bogo nodded. “That is indeed the logo of Aries Security. The nerve!”
Wilde shook his head. “Seems really stupid, if you ask me. Wearing a uniform when trying to beat someone up.”

“They obviously hadn’t counted on being defeated.”

Slowly, the five mammals managed to make it back into the black van, which took off. “Acacia Avenue, headed towards Paddington Station,” Clawhauser said. A few clicks later, they were following the van as it drove through the streets of Zootopia.

“The HQ of Aries Security is in Sahara Square, right?” Bogo asked.

“Near Bagheera Boulevard, yes,” Wilde said. “So they need to take a left turn here … there you go!” Wilde kept giving a running commentary on their route, which indeed seemed to lead them where he said it would. It was obvious that he knew their route like the back of his paw. No surprise there - having grown up on the streets of the juggernaut that was Zootopia, of course his knowledge of the city’s layout was extraordinary.

Seven minutes later, the unmarked van did indeed enter the lot of Aries Security. All five mammals left the van and entered the building.

Bogo cleared his throat. “Alright, we’ve seen enough. Clawhauser, can you make a copy of this footage? I want to be able to present it to the District Attorney.”

“Of course, sir. I’ve written down the timecode of each of the …”

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. Frowning, Clawhauser looked at Bogo, who shrugged. “Enter!” the cape buffalo shouted.

The door opened, revealing a tiny-looking bunny wearing a flannel shirt, holding crutches.

Bogo frowned. “Hopps! What are you doing here? You’re on sick leave! You belong on a couch, resting your leg!”

Judy Hopps approached the table, hobbling slightly. She held her right leg up at an angle, preventing it to ever touch the floor. “With all due respect, sir, but I have a job to do. I cannot …”

Bogo interrupted her rudely. “You have nothing of that sort! Doctor Antidorcas told me of some extensive muscle tissue damage!”

Her ears were droopy as she looked up at her superior. “I am terribly sorry, sir, but I cannot sit idly on my couch, watching the world go by. Not when a most hideous crime has been brought to my attention, and …”

“Sorry, are you talking about the lynx girl?” Wilde asked.

“What lynx girl?” Bogo looked at Hopps with curiosity on his features.

Hopps sighed. “When I was in hospital, I was sharing a room for the night with a young lynx. She had been savagely beaten up by prey mammals. And the ZPD did nothing to find the culprits.”

Bogo raised an eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

“It’s like I said. Two officers arrived at the scene, but all they told the father was that as far as they know, her injuries might just as well be self-inflicted.” Hopps snorted. “As if you’re able to break your own spine.”
“Maybe she jumped off a building,” Clawhauser suggested with a rather timid voice.

“On her way home from school? No, she was conscious when her father found her, and she told him she was attacked by prey. She’s in a coma now, so we can’t ask her. Her injuries are extensive. She lost one arm and both legs, her spine was shattered beyond recognition, her skull fractured, she lost one kidney ...” Hopps lowered her head. “The nurse told me her survival is highly unlikely. And given her injuries, that might even be a blessing. The assailants even used pliers to tear out her claws and teeth while she was still conscious.”

“Do you happen to know the names of the two officers?” Bogo’s voice, while soft, held a menace which was chilling to hear, even when you were not the addressee of his fury.

“All I know is that it was two rams.”

Bogo’s posture became visibly tense. “Fleecewood and Ramington, I presume?”

“I’m not entirely sure, but it seems that way.”

“Those were two of the rams who were arrested along with Bellwether, right?” Wilde asked.

“They were indeed. They started working here shortly after we found the Missing Mammals. Their transfer from Precinct Nine to Precinct One was arranged by none other than Bellwether.”

“Aha? Figures.”

“Back then I thought nothing of it. Given the fact that things deteriorated fast in my precinct, I was happy for every mammal I could put to good use.” Bogo heaved a sigh. “Seems their malpractices run deeper than we thought. When did the attack happen?”

“Some two weeks ago,” Hopps said. “The father wasn’t too specific, and I didn’t want to pry.”

“Why not?”

Hopps sighed. “Their only daughter will probably die, his business is in shambles, his wife lost her job - their life is bad enough as it is. The last thing they need is the very same mammal who brought all this misfortune upon them to stick her nose into their own business.”

“I told you before, Hopps, most of it isn’t your fault.”

“Yes, but some of it is. Besides, the father holds me responsible.”

“So you think you can make it up to them by finding the culprits?”

Hopps shook her head. “I don’t think I’ll ever be able to make it up to them. But justice needs to be served.”

“I agree, but we need something more specific, more tangible.”

“Maybe not,” Clawhauser intervened. “Maybe it’s enough to search the case files of Fleecewood and Ramington.”

Bogo nodded. “Do it!”

“With pleasure.” Clawhauser got up from his chair to walk over to one of the numerous filing cabinets. Opening one drawer, he pulled out a file. “Here are the latest case files of Cedric Ramington, covering the last four weeks. Their report on the incident should be in there.”
“Good. Please fetch me Fleecewood’s files, too, just to make sure the report is accurate.”

“Of course.” The cheetah handed the file to Bogo and walked over to another filing cabinet.

Bogo opened the file and perused it briefly. “Do you happen to know where the attack took place, Hopps?”

“Somewhere in Savanna Central, in a dark side alley. That’s all I know,” the bunny answered.

Bogo nodded. “Fleecewood and Ramington spent the last three weeks on patrol duty, but they’ve been assigned to patrol Savanna Central on only two of those days, August 10 and August 19. August 10 was two weeks ago.”

“I don’t think you’ll find anything important in there,” Wilde said in an almost casual tone.

Bogo looked up at him. “What do you mean?”

“Isn’t it obvious? They come across a badly injured predator, with their father claiming that she had been attacked by prey. Their only response is to tell him that the injuries were most likely self-inflicted. Which, given the circumstances, is a gross professional misconduct. Do you honestly think they’ll put an honest account on what happened down in writing? All you’ll find in there will be a few short sentences, telling you that they found an injured lynx girl.”

“Yes, Nick,” Hopps said, “but at least we’ll have a time and a location, so we can use the traffic cameras to see what really happened.”

“And you honestly think we’ll find any useful recording, Carrots?”

Hopps stiffened visibly. “They wouldn’t go so far as to delete the recordings.”

“How do you know? Have you ever been forced to deal with hardened criminals, Carrots? I have, on an almost daily basis.”

“Come on! They’re police officers, not hardened criminals!”

“I beg to differ. Working together with someone trying to overthrow Zootopia, destroying everything they were sworn to protect - it doesn’t get much more criminal than that. The way I see it, if they weren’t hardened criminals at that stage, they were well on their way down into a life of crime. Still they kept their cover of being upstanding, law-abiding and law-upholding police officers. Which in turn means that if they really did the wrong thing, the last thing they’ll want anyone to see is what really happened, what they really did.”

“But they can’t just delete a recording!” Hopps turned around to look at Bogo.

The Chief shook his head. “The only way to delete the footage from the surveillance cameras is to physically do it in this very room. And, as you can see,” he pointed at Clawhauser, who was standing next to him, another file in his paws, “this room is manned 24/7.”

The only response Wilde had for that was a chuckle. A few seconds later, after nobody had said another word, Wilde said in a very casual tone: “Please, Chief, don’t tell me you really believe this! I hate to break this to you, sir, but there are enough hackers out there who’ll eat your security systems for breakfast. And I should know, seeing that I knew one who was able to do stuff like that with ease. Breaking into the jam cam system, that would have been a walk in the park for her. No computer system can ever be completely safe. You need to physically remove the server system from the rest of the internet to really protect it from outside attacks. Which would render the whole
system pointless, sort of. So you didn’t, you did the exact opposite, didn’t you? I assume the servers here are in direct connection to City Hall, right? Maybe they even form a LAN.”

“We have a wireless LAN system that connects our servers to those at City Hall, yes. It’s right next door, after all. Makes data exchange much more convenient.”

“And don’t you happen to know at least one mammal who used to sit at City Hall and would have had a very strong motive to want footage like that to never see the light of day?” Wilde pointed at the laptop. “Look for yourself, but I doubt you’ll find anything useful.”

Bogo looked down at the file in his hooves and turned several pages, only to stare at an almost empty piece of paper. “It says here that they found a severely injured lynx by the name of Karen Pardinus. Having alerted an ambulance, they questioned their father.” He looked up again. “And that’s it.”

Wilde shrugged. “What did I tell you?”

“Wait a second! That’s all?” Hopps seemed to be beside herself.

“Of course, Fluff!” said Wilde. “What did you expect? They were in league with Bellwether. Publicly admitting that prey mammals were just as bad as predators, that would have seriously undermined Bellwether’s position. So of course they had to make believe that there was no attack by prey mammals. Do you honestly think they would have written anything different from what they told the father?”

“No, but …”

“Wilde is right,” Bogo said in a dark voice. “It seems both officers were deeply enmeshed in Bellwether’s schemes. I think,” he looked at Clawhauser, “it would be a good idea to put their respective files under an intense scrutiny.”

“At once, sir, as soon as I’m done with the copy of the footage showing the attack on Mr. Wilde,” Clawhauser retorted, pulling a freshly burned Blu-ray disc out of the laptop’s slot. “And here you are.”

Bogo’s eyes widened. “You’re done already?”

“I am. Like I was about to say when Officer Hopps walked in, I had written down the timecodes, so collecting the corresponding files was easy. Burning the files on a Blu-ray disc was what took longest. So yes, I’m done, Chief. Everything you need is on this disk.”

Bogo took it with surprising gentleness, given his strength and the size of his hooves. “You know, Clawhauser, since becoming Chief, I had to deal with five different mammals working at Records. Officer Caballus may be a close second, but apart from her, nobody had even come close to being as capable as you are.”

If the Chief’s praise was intended to encourage the cheetah, it had the exact opposite effect. If anything, Clawhauser’s facial expression became even more morose than it had been before. His whole posture indicated that this was the very last thing he had wanted to hear.

“With that being said,” Bogo added, “I still think your talent is going to waste down here. Precinct One needs its best dispatcher back, and soon.”

Clawhauser raised his head, looking at his superior, and for the first time in weeks, there was a hint of a smile on his face. “Thank you, sir.”
Bogo shrugged. “I’m just stating the obvious. Precinct One worked fine before the City Council forced me to suspend several officers and reassign others. I want this precinct and all the other ones to work again as …”

He was interrupted by a cheerful rendition of “Whenever, Wherever” by Gazelle. Everybody stared at Bogo as he took his smartphone out of one of his pockets. Ignoring their incredulous stares, the cape buffalo activated the phone. “Bogo here.” He listened intently. “So why don’t you patch him through?” Another pause. “I don’t care! Just patch the mammal through! Don’t tell me you … yes, I’m waiting!” He gave a sigh, looking at Clawhauser again. “We definitely need you back at Dispatch!”

“Problems?” Hopps asked.

“Depends. The Acting Mayor wants to talk to me, and Officer Caballus still seems to have difficulties distinguishing the important calls from the unimportant ones.”

Wilde snorted. “You mean the horse sitting at the receptionist’s counter? She seemed to be more interested in her hoof polish.”

“That’s exactly the problem, Wilde. Officer Caballus is a competent data processor. I don’t think being a dispatcher will ever be her calling. She belongs back here at Records. And Clawhauser belongs back at Dispatch. Just as it has been before.” He looked at his smartphone, and with one quick motion he activated something on its screen. “I guess you should listen to this.”

Wilde’s eyes widened. “Uhm, Chief …”

“Yes, even you, Wilde. After all, you’re the one who’s been attacked …”

At this very moment, a male voice erupted from the smartphone. “Hello?”

Bogo cleared his throat. “Mr. Aries, Chief Bogo here.”

“Oh.” The ram’s voice was the very definition of smooth unctuousness. “Greetings to you, Chief! How are you?”

Bogo rolled his eyes. “Please, Mr. Aries, save the pleasantries for someone who can appreciate them. I just want to hear the decision of the Council. I take it there has been a decision.”

“Ah, well, yes, there has been a decision.” The Acting Mayor audibly hesitated.

“Aaaaannnnndddd?” Chief Bogo had never been known for being overly patient, but at this very moment, patience and Bogo simply seemed to be two things as adverse to each other as fire and water.

“Well, it …,” Aries began haltingly.

“Spill it out!” Bogo hissed.

“Uhm, yes. Well, after … careful consideration, the City Council has reached the conclusion of not agreeing with your assessment. The suspension of predators within Precinct One has been done for a reason, a reason which most mammals in the City Council still consider so valid that …”

Bogo used one simple word to interrupt the mammal: “Bullshit!”

Aries paused. “I beg your pardon?”
Bogo took a deep breath, then he said with a surprisingly calm voice: “Mr. Aries, the City Council made a grave mistake when it forced me to suspend some of the finest officers this precinct has ever seen. The very same mistake took place at most of the other precincts. In total, this mistake cost the ZPD no less than 45 capable officers. Capable civil servants. Capable public defenders. This mistake opened the doors for countless criminals to plot their nefarious schemes. All you managed to do was weaken law enforcement in Zootopia. Every crime that’s perpetrated in this city that could have been prevented if we still had all those fine officers at our disposal, each of those crimes in on YOUR conscience! I wonder if you can still sleep at night!”

“Excuse me, Chief, but apart from those predators turning savage, the number of crimes in this city hasn’t risen at all, as far as I …”

Bogo interrupted him again. “That’s only because ex-Mayor Bellwether personally re-assigned several new officers to work at my precinct who made sure that most of the crimes, especially those perpetrated by prey mammals, would never see the light of day.” He looked at the disk he was still holding in his other hoof. “I’m looking at one particular example of such footage right now. The footage proves the attack on two harmless mammals who were simply minding their own business. They were attacked by two goats and three rams. All five of them,” he made a pause for added effect, “seem to be employees of a certain company called Aries Security. I guess you heard the name, right?”

The ram on the other end of the line became quiet for a few seconds before speaking up again - and surprisingly enough, his voice had lost all traces of unctuousness. “Video footage can be manipulated,” he hissed.

“Maybe so, but given the fact that I have the account of at least one eye witness, one of the two mammals who has been attacked in fact, I tend to think the footage is accurate.”

“One of the two … they survived the attack?”

“Oh, you wish they hadn’t?”

There was a short pause. “Of course not, Chief, but …”

“Yes, they survived.” Bogo’s voice was barely more than a hiss. “They emerged without so much as a scratch. The same, however, cannot be said about the five assailants. Unless I am very much mistaken, the footage showed several broken bones and concussions. If I were to examine the personal records of Aries Security, how likely do you think it is for me to find the names of five of your employees who were treated for extensive injuries some three weeks ago?”

He made a pause, and when Aries failed to respond, he dropped the last vestiges of being civil. His voice sounded like a veritable thunderstorm when he said: “Let’s face it, Aries: Your employees are responsible for savage attacks on innocent predators, and I have the means to prove it! Do not pretend there is no threat to predators! There’s one lynx girl in hospital right now! She was attacked by several prey mammals, and her survival is highly unlikely. Prey did this! Prey which wasn’t exposed to Nighthowler serum! Prey that willingly decided to harm predators, maybe even kill them! The way I see it, prey mammals are the savages here!”

He dropped his voice and said in a most vicious snarl. “And yet you have the audacity to tell me into my face that predators are the only mammals which pose a threat? You dare to tell me that prey mammals are innocent?”

“But …”
“Just so you know,” Bogo said harshly, “I will look into every single crime perpetrated by prey mammals against innocent predators. And I’m starting with you!”

“You cannot …”

“Oh, I can, and I will. And of course I will go public with this! I have the means to prove that your employees are little more than dangerous criminals who belong behind bars. All that remains for me to do is to link you to those crimes.” He made a pause. “And when I do, and I think I will be able to with ease, your star will drop faster than an elephant without a parachute.”

“You wouldn’t dare …”

“If you had any sense of responsibility, you would resign now.”

“I will do nothing of that sort!” Aries shouted.

Bogo shrugged. “Have it your way then, Aries! Whatever you do, you will fall!” With that, he disconnected his smartphone and put it back in his pocket.

Wilde looked at the Chief with a smirk. “I’m impressed, Chief. You’re really willing to stir the hornet’s nest!”

“You can bet I am, Wilde,” Bogo said, breathing heavily. “A crime took place. It is my job to fight crime. So you can bet your bottom dollar that I will do everything that’s in my power to make sure the perpetrators are brought to justice. And if that means stepping on a few hooves along the way, or arresting a few more VIMs, so be it! This needs to end, and fast!”

Clawhauser sighed. “So I’m still stuck here.”

Before Bogo was able to say anything, Wilde said: “Don’t be too surprised, Clawhauser. Prey mammals hold the majority in City Council, and a lot of ‘em were in cahoots with Bellwether. Unless we can do something about this, it’s unlikely someone will be able to make them overturn their … uhm, Carrots, what are you doing?”

Both Clawhauser and Bogo turned around, looking at Hopps who had moved over to the laptop. However, given the fact that the office, like most offices at Precinct One, was wolf-sized, she was much too small to be able to reach it, and since her leg obviously wasn’t fully supporting her weight, she simply was incapable of jumping on the tabletop. “I want to look for footage proving the attack on the lynx girl.”

“Forget it, Fluff!” Wilde said, shaking his head. “Like I said, you won’t find anything in there.”

“Not with what the ZPD has for a filing system, anyway,” Clawhauser added, walking up to the desk. “Here, let me help you.”

“Thanks, Clawhauser.” Hopps turned towards Wilde. “What makes you so sure that we won’t find anything?”

“Just the fact that we’re dealing with hardened criminals. Bellwether wanted to wreak havoc, simply to stay in power. You heard just how ruthless she is. Do you think her henchmammals are any better? Ignoring the fact that a crime took place under their very noses, even disavowing the fact, that takes a lot of criminal energy. Believe me, destroying evidence of their wrongdoings was the first thing on their minds, if only to cover their tracks. Especially since Bellwether wanted the public to be left in the dark about the threat prey mammals posed to predators. No, Carrots, you won’t find anything useful there.”
“Maybe they made a mistake.”

“Unlikely. I guess most cops know the locations of the more important jam cams, and most are in clear sight anyway. Deleting the footage will have been the first thing on their minds.”

“How?”

Wilde shrugged. “I can even imagine a scenario where Bellwether did it for them. You saw how capable she was when dealing with the jam cams.”

“He’s right,” Clawhauser said suddenly. “There’s nothing here.”

“What?” Hopps exclaimed.

They all looked at the whiteboard. And sure enough, the footage showed no attack. One second, the alley was deserted, the next, a female lynx was lying in a pool of her own blood, as if having been teleported there.

Wilde shook his head. “They didn’t even try and hide the manipulation! You need any more proof, Fluff?”

Bogo approached the whiteboard, examining the footage closely, taking in the SMPTE timecode which showed an inexplicable gap of almost one hour. “This is severe,” he said in a soft, but strained voice. “I guess Fleecewood and Ramington have some explaining to do.”

“If they want to talk,” Wilde said, “which is quite doubtful.”

“Let me talk to them,” Hopps said.

“That is out of the question!” Bogo said immediately. “You have never conducted an interrogation before, Hopps, you probably don’t even know how do deal with …”

“Excuse me, sir, I was valedictorian of my class, and my grades during our interrogation practices were outstanding.”

“I don’t doubt that, Hopps, but interrogations at the Academy are a lot different from those in real life. Besides, even if the two of them are scum, they were trained as police officers, so they probably know everything there is to know about police interrogation techniques. I don’t think a rookie like you will be able to make them talk.” He folded his arms over his enormous chest. “And besides that, you don’t even belong here! You’re on sick leave, for crying out loud! Go home, Hopps! That’s an order!”

“To do what?” Hopps fired back. “You’re right, Chief, this needs to end, and fast! And it is my duty to do what’s in my power to help it ends as fast as it possibly can.”

“Yes, but only when you’re fit for duty, which you’re not.”

She looked down at her leg. The leggings she was wearing showed a significant bulk over her right calf, indicating that her leg was bandaged extensively. “I don’t need my leg to talk.”

“But you’ll need it later, when you’re back on the beat!”

“My leg will heal just fine. Please, Chief, let me at least listen to how you conduct an interrogation! Even if I can’t help you, there’s a lot I can learn!”

Bogo hesitated. “Why are you so eager to be involved in all this?”
“Because it’s my fault this degenerated so badly! The father of the girl holds me responsible, and he’s right! Even if all those prey mammals who attacked predators did so on their own volition, they always used my prejudice as an excuse. I need to make sure that they will be brought to justice, and I need to show to everybody in Zootopia that I’ve learned my lesson, that they cannot use me as an excuse to validate their own prejudices. Please, Chief, give me that chance! You can put me on parking duty for the rest of my career, I’ll gladly do it, but please, give me that chance!”

Bogo looked down at the tiny rabbit. She was truly a sorry sight. With her crutches, her droopy ears, her pleading eyes almost disappearing behind huge rings, she was the very picture of consciousness of guilt. It was true, she had made a mistake of epic proportions, and although she had started making amends, the road lying in front of her was steep, rough, and winding.

What would happen if he kept on denying her to be involved in the interrogation? She would certainly be down in the dumps.

What would happen if he allowed her to be part of the investigation? Probably nothing bad. Whether she was at home or at Precinct One, he doubted that she would allow herself even one second of respite until the damage that had been inflicted by her was mended as well as it was in her power to make happen.

And if he allowed her to join them during the interrogation, at least he would be able to have an eye on her, to prevent her from doing something incredibly stupid, like taking the law into her own paws.

Bogo heaved a sigh. “Alright, Hopps, you may accompany me. But,” He bowed down, fixing his stare on her, “you will not interfere! You will keep your tiny mouth shut! Watch and learn! Are we clear?”

Hopps beamed at him. “Crystal, sir!”

---

Yeah, the unmarked black van is a Dodge Ram Van, and you cannot imagine a better name for a car in Zootopia!

Like the name suggests, Karen Pardinus, our poor lynx girl, is an Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*). I specifically picked that kind of animal because the Iberian lynx is known for being a prolific rabbit hunter - about 80 percent of the lynx’s diet consists of European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) - and guess what kind of animal Judy is … I just wanted there to be a real, tangible threat when Judy was facing Karen’s father.

And of course, “Whenever, Wherever” was Shakira’s first major hit single. Since she’s the voice of Gazelle, I thought their oeuvres should be identical.

In case you wanna know why I keep on mentioning the boroughs that surround Zootopia, there’s a very good reason for this.

It’s been quite well-established within the Zootopia fandom that Zootopia, if it was real, would be situated in the United States of America. (Or rather, the United States of Animalia, as it’s usually called.) It has also been well-established that it is unique - the only metropolis on the whole planet where prey and predators live together and do so in huge numbers. Which means that other cities on the planet probably mainly consist of just a few species, with just the odd predator living among prey, for example.
Given this uniqueness, Zootopia obviously stands out - it feels pretty much like a city that’s quite independent from the country it’s situated in. Much like Singapore, which is both a state and a city.

Which is exactly what I envision Zootopia to be, although I won’t go so far and turn Zootopia into a country of its own.

To me, Zootopia is both a federal state of the United States of Animalia (yes, I’m using that name, too) and a city. Which means that the Mayor is also the Governor, in a manner of speaking. And the surrounding boroughs consist of several places which also fall under Zootopian administration, with one of them being the Tri-Burrows, or in other words, Bunnyburrow as well. These places will have their own Mayors, but they’re basically governed by the Zootopian administration, or rather, the City Council.

If this wasn’t the case, Judy would probably not have been able to become a Zootopian cop that easily.

All this probably isn’t canon, but it makes the most sense to me. So I’m going to stick with it.

I actually don’t know at this stage if this will become important at one point or not. Right now, it’s a mere footnote, but I can imagine a scenario where this will be of utmost importance, way down in “Hammer to Fall.” I’m still fiddling with this thing, on top of overhauling my older stories.

And yes, if you have better ideas, if you have suggestions which are better than this idea, I’d love to hear them. I’m always open to suggestions!

And now for something completely different! (Man, this Monty Python quote will never get old!)

I hid the name of a rather old song in this chapter. Don’t know if you’re able to identify it, but it actually isn’t that hard.

Apart from that, there probably are tons of quotes hidden in this chapter, but I didn’t bother looking for where I found them. If you find some, pray tell me, and I’ll make sure the world knows just how smart you are!

More to come - and soon! Thanks for reading, and feel free to send me your comments!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

A really quick update this time. As it turns out, there wasn’t much that needed doing. Which is bound to change pretty soon. Particularly because I have decided to add quite a lot of extra bits and pieces at some later point, after I have completed “Wound.” I’d been wanting to do so anyway, but back when I first wrote the story, I just wanted to be able to return to “Hammer” as quickly as possible, a decision I have learned to regret in the meantime. Now I’m going to do things right. I’m going to add quite a lot of stuff that will be of importance along the way, stuff like Nick’s struggle to make it into the ZPD, a few glimpses into the daily life of a fox and a bunny working on the beat, a few encounters they have and the repercussions these encounters cause - all the stuff I took for granted when writing “Nightmare.”

So you better brace yourself, the party’s only getting started ...

Thanks to all of you for following “Wound” this far! I want to particularly thank GhostWolf88, ConfusedGoatee_01, BrutusDeagon, and niraD for leaving their comments on AO3. Another shout goes out to all those who contacted me over on Discord, particularly Upplet, thehellion117, and JKnight97.

Just so you know, this chapter’s motto song is still somewhat elusive, even after all this time. I first came across it while browsing several videos on YouTube, finally ending up with some unbelievable Basketball shenanigans performed by a group of five men known as Dude Perfect. (In case you don’t know them, check them out and prepare to be thoroughly impressed! I visit their YouTube channel on a regular basis, and the antics of the “Tall Guy, Beard, Twins, Purple Hoser” never cease to amaze me! Oh, and while we’re at it: “Team Coby all the way!”) The particular video I came across was the “Dude Perfect Summer Camp Edition,” and while these dudes shot hoops from insane distances and under incredible circumstances, a song was playing I quickly learned to like a lot. While I was able to find most of the info on the song and the publisher, I have no idea who exactly wrote the song, so I simply gave credit to all five members of Manic Bloom. If someone knows better, please tell me, so I can finally give credit where it is due.

Chapter Six

Raising Hell

Think you always get your way? Don’t waste my time. Try to tell me what to say? I’ll say what’s on my mind. If you want to give me hell, then just get in line. I don’t care how much you yell. No, I never will back down.

Manic Bloom: “Never Back Down” (Written by Jeff Brinkley, Jeff Hildebrand, Matt Lawrence, Andy Neale, and David Joel Stevenson, from the album “In Loving Memory,” Brinklebrand Records, 2010)
Chief Bogo looked down at the mammal sitting behind the desk with barely contained annoyance. He had thought the evidence he had presented Andrew Horner with was completely irrefutable, proving an attempted attack on two innocent mammals by several armed thugs. In Bogo’s mind, there was no doubt that he was justified in asking Zootopia’s current District Attorney for a search warrant, so his officers would be able to find the culprits behind the attack. But so far, Horner had watched the footage shown on his laptop with stony silence. Not for the first time, Bogo was asking himself how it was possible that this gutless nimrod belonged to the same species which had also brought forth the compassionate, courageous, entertaining, and beautiful Gazelle.

Finally, after more than ten minutes of silence, Horner stopped the recording and looked at Bogo over the rims of his glasses. If he recognized Bogo’s annoyance as such, he somehow managed to not let it show. “You want me to give you a search warrant so you can investigate the involvement of Aries Security in what you showed me here. Am I right?”

“Why are you asking the obvious?” Bogo said with a grunt. “I tend to think that I have every right to do so. I provided you with video footage which proves an unprovoked attack on two innocent predators by a group of prey mammals.”

“Does it really prove it? From what I see, it could just as easily be said that a few prey mammals approached a couple of predators for a nice chat, only to be beaten up viciously and without compunction.”

Bogo’s eyes narrowed. “Excuse me, just what exactly are you insinuating here?”

Horner smiled. “Oh, I agree with your assessment. I’m merely playing *Advocatus diaboli* here. What I just told you is exactly what any lawyer would tell you when you present him with this footage.”

Bogo nodded. At least Horner was on his side. Whether he would give him the search warrant he was asking him for remained to be seen. Well, if the DA wanted to play this little game with him, Bogo was more than willing to play along. “Right. If you were a lawyer defending those culprits, I’d tell you that most mammals expecting a nice chat don’t arm themselves with billy clubs and knives beforehand.”

“Those weapons are easily understandable, given the fact that so many predators turned savage for no apparent reason.”

Bogo raised an eyebrow. “The reason for predators turning savage is well known now.”

“Yes, *now* it is. It wasn’t back then.”

“Even so, five prey mammals, well-versed in self-defense and armed to the teeth, approaching a car and opening it without any probable cause - to me, it looks and sounds like an attack. Besides, I could understand the billy clubs, not the knives.”

“Well, if your life is threatened, sometimes deadly force is justifiable.”

“Was their life threatened? If they wanted to avoid any threats to their lives, all they would have needed to do was give the van a wide birth. Instead they actively approached it, even trying their luck at breaking and entering. If they had really been in danger of losing their lives at one point, it was all due to their own actions. That fennec fox may be known for his fiery temper, but …”

“You know him?”
We have an extensive file on him. Stanley A. Barks, commonly known as Finnick, 43 years of age, a small-time hustler and trickster and a legend among graffiti artists. He’s been known for having lived on the streets for about thirty years. He certainly antagonized a lot of mammals over the course of the years, still he always went to great pains to never give anybody any reason to try and kill him. Beat him up maybe, never kill him.” Bogo pointed at the screen again. “Those rams and goats had no reason to approach them. They did, so he defended himself. And I want to stress the point here that he may have injured the attackers, but once they were out for the count, he never attacked them again. This is the very essence of what self-defense is all about - prevent the attack, make sure no further attacks can take place. But once the attack is prevented, cease any further attacks yourself. This was, in a manner of speaking, a textbook approach.”

“You seem impressed.”

“I am. Most of my officers wouldn’t have been able to thwart an attack by so many mammals that quickly and efficiently, especially when being ridiculously outnumbered and outsized, and when only being armed with a baseball bat.”

“I agree. This small guy sure packs a punch.” Horner sighed. “And then they leave the scene and drive over to Aries Security. You think this is enough proof?”

This time, Bogo smiled. “Officer Clawhauser actually looked at more footage, footage I can also present you with. It shows one of the five mammals before the attack, removing the license plates from the very van you saw here. We were able to take a good look at the plates, and they belong to a van which is owned by Aries Security.” He pointed at the frozen image on the DA’s laptop. “I don’t think you need more proof.”

Horner sighed again. “Well, everything seems to indeed point at Aries Security.” He shook his head. “You understand my position here, Chief, do you?”

Bogo straightened himself on his chair. “To be honest, I don’t care. You are the DA, and I need a search warrant. Which is why I’m here. I simply want to bring several criminals to justice.”

“Forcing me to allow an investigation into a company run by the Acting Mayor.”

“Excuse me, Horner, but that’s your job! And the way I see it, being the Acting Mayor doesn’t elevate you above the law.”

“It doesn’t, yet … I was appointed by the City Council.”

Bogo had counted on him saying this and quickly readied his proverbial guns. “So was I, still I rather see it that justice is served, instead of refusing to investigate against a member of a City Council which is very much different from the one we have today. We don’t have the one third-two third predator-prey balance anymore. Predators are in the minority, and there currently are several prey councilmammals who think just like Bellwether and continue along her lines of work, using the number’s game to their advantage. Just so you know, the prey majority within the City Council has decided to deny me the means to properly fight crime in this city by refusing to reinstate the predator officers they forced me to suspend. Not because they have reason on their side, but because they are either spineless jerks or speciesist, bigoted assholes who do nothing but feed their prejudices, perpetuating Bellwether’s schemes in the process. Our dear Acting Mayor, for example, was in league with Bellwether for years! He was her campaign manager when she first ran for office!”

“He was? I had no idea! Just how did you manage to learn about this one?”
“I didn’t. I heard it from a very interesting mammal, a hustler who, in his own words, knows everybody.” Bogo pointed at the frozen image on the DA’s laptop. “It’s this fox here in fact, the one still standing in the van’s door. By the way, he was the one who brought this incident here to my attention.”

Horner looked surprised. “That fox? So he’s a hustler?”

Bogo shook his head. “I guess you can say that’s in his past. You’ve actually seen him yesterday, during the press conference. He was the one who helped Officer Hopps solve the Savage Predators case. His name’s Nicholas Wilde, and it’s true what Hopps told the public about him: This very morning, he officially applied for the Zootopia Police Academy. There are a few speed bumps along the way, like the fact that he has no high school diploma to his name, but once he got that sorted out, he will join the ZPD. Maybe even Precinct One. If his guts, his resourcefulness, and his determination are any indication, he would be a worthy addition to every precinct’s roster.”

“A fox?”

“Yes. And before you shoot your mouth here, I spent most of the morning talking to him. He was a hustler, yes, but he is more than willing to renounce his old ways and join the side of law enforcement.”

“Can you really trust him?”

“Hopps has trusted him with her life. And after talking to him, I know why. He has always been trustworthy, but society gave him no chance. Can you imagine what a nine-year-old cub must feel like when he’s denied the chance to become a Junior Ranger Scout, just because he is a predator? Can you imagine what he must feel like when he is muzzled by mammals he thinks are his friends? This is what happened to Wilde. Others may have turned into psychopaths over something like that. He didn’t. All he did was treat a society which denied him every chance to become a respected citizen with utter contempt. He hustled for two reasons: One, even today, most foxes still have a very hard time finding respectable jobs, simply because everyone considers them shifty, sneaky, and untrustworthy. He needed to survive, so he hustled. And the other reason is, because of the negative image of foxes, he simply saw no use in trying to be something else. No matter how hard he had tried, he had always been shunned and bullied. I would probably have reacted in a quite similar way.”

Bogo made a short pause and leaned forward on his chair. “So, to answer your question, yes, I trust him. He told me the plain truth when he gave me an account of the story of his life - everything he said is consistent with the file we have on him, a file he didn’t even know existed. He told me everything that happened to him, everything he did, even those things he isn’t, and cannot be, particularly proud of.”

“But if he’s a hustler, he’ll have a criminal record.”

“Well, there are indications within his file that he has conned mammals for almost two decades, and quite a lot of them at that, but he has never been found guilty of an outright crime. He was never arrested, never convicted, never served time. Besides, his criminal record surely is something a Mayor or the DA can do something about, I think.”

“You want a pardon?”

“No, I don’t want it. Mr. Wilde probably doesn’t want it either; at least he told me several times that he was willing and able to go to jail for the things he did. He simply deserves a pardon. He put his life on the line several times to help Officer Hopps solve a case which could have destroyed the
very foundation Zootopia was built upon. He did it without expecting anything in return. He
doesn’t want money, he doesn’t want medals. All he wants is to be treated with respect and
trustfulness, which will probably be a first for him. And I like to think he earns it.”

“So, does he have a criminal record or not?”

“Technically, no. He always skimmed the very fringes of the law, sometimes even stepping a bit
beyond, but he never stooped so low to turn to outright crime. He never broke into anything, he
never stole, he never resorted to unprovoked violence. Disregarding the slightly shady nature of his
business ventures, what he did was little more than simple business, the very same one all those
countless businessmammals in Zootopia do. Probably the only laws he broke outright were the tax
laws, and let’s be honest, what businessmammal doesn’t?”

“I’m afraid I have to agree with you on that one.” Horner became silent again. Then, after almost
one minute of silence, he slowly said: “What do you expect to find at Aries Security?”

“Probably not all that much. The five assailants will probably be at home, seeing that they will
hardly be fit for duty, given their injuries. And I don’t think anyone at Aries Security could have
been stupid enough to run anything like that,” he pointed at the laptop, “over the official channels.
All we’ll probably find are names and addresses. Which is fine, because all I want right now is to
find the culprits behind the attack.” He made a pause. “However, if we come across evidence
which links the higher-up to the crime, I’m also willing and able to arrest the mammals in question.
Highly unlikely, I admit it, but my gut feeling tells me these five assailants aren’t the only
employees of Aries Security responsible for attacks on predators.”

“For this, you need to find evidence.”

“Of course. The video footage proves the attack on Wilde and Barks, so I can easily use this to
arrest the mammals responsible. But given the fact that they’ve gone to great lengths to not be
identified, I tend to think there’s more to this than meets the eye. If there is proof of any more
crimes to be found at Aries Security, I want to find it.”

“Thoroughly antagonizing the Acting Mayor in the process.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t back down, Bogo, do you?”

“I have never backed down, Horner, and you know it!”

Horner sighed yet again. “I know, I know.” He leaned back in his chair and took of his glasses,
twirling them in his hoof. “You know, one hour ago, I received a phone call.”

Bogo nodded. “Let me guess, Robert Aries.”

“The only one. He alerted me of the fact that you would probably arrive here shortly afterwards to
ask for a search warrant regarding Aries Security. He told me your claims were preposterous and
outright lies, and that I should shoot you down.”

Bogo leaned back himself, a small smile playing on his features. “So this is crunch time, Horner.
Caught between a buffalo and a hard place. So what’s it gonna be?”

“Well, given the fact that Aries told me in no uncertain terms that my career would be over if I
gave in to your ridiculous claims - his words, not mine -, I don’t think I have a choice.”
“Oh, you do. Believe me, you do.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“You see,” Bogo said in the most conversational tone that he could muster, “the phone call basically tells me one thing: Aries doesn’t want us to search his company, because he’s afraid we might come across something which might link him, personally, to these crimes. Which in turn means that there probably is something that could be used as incriminating evidence. He doesn’t want it to be found, because he thinks that it might end his career and put his ram butt behind bars. You with me so far?”

“Of course I am.”

“So we search the company, we find something, we arrest him. Another Mayor shot down. Which would effectively remove him as a threat to you and your position.”

“Only if you find something. If not …”

“Oh, we will find something, believe me. After that phone call, I’m certain of it.”

“Yes, but so his replacement steps in, a replacement that, if your words are true, will just continue along the lines of his predecessor. Again, I will be out of a job.”

“Not if we go public with this immediately and tell everyone about Aries’s crimes and his attempt at threatening you.”

“You think that’s enough?”

“After what Hopps told the public? She alerted the press of Aries’s possible involvement already. Or why do you think he’s so nervous? He sees his career unravel before his very eyes. He tries to protect it at all costs, which is where you come in. He puts pressure on you, so you deny me the chance to do my job. Tell me, just how likely do you think it is that he’s perfectly innocent?”

“Quite unlikely, I admit it. Still …”

Bogo sighed. It seemed that Horner wasn’t willing to listen to reason, so he had to put the squeeze on him. Not something he had wanted to do, but it seemed that the DA was forcing his hooves.

“So, I won’t get the search warrant, right?”

“Uhm, I’m afraid that’s right. I mean, I’m sorry, Bogo, but … you know.”

“Fine. You know what I’m going to do now?” A dangerous edge had crept into Bogo’s voice. An edge Horner had recognized immediately; he turned quite pale under his fur. “Er, no.”

“Did you ever come across the name Joop Temminck?”

“Isn’t that the journalist who works for the Times?”

“That he is. He also happens to be a childhood friend of mine. So this is what I’m going to do: Once I leave this building, I’ll go just around the corner and into the HQ of the Zootopia Times. I’ll pay my old friend Joop a visit and tell him just what a gutless jerk our dear DA is. And just like that, you’ll find your face plastered on every newspaper in this city, along with quite a few unflattering lines insinuating you of possible involvement in criminal activity.”

Horner’s eyes widened. “You wouldn’t dare!”
Bogo discarded every last vestige of civility. “Give me the search warrant; I’m not asking you again!” he growled.

“Are you threatening me?” Horner looked absolutely flabbergasted.

“Yes, I am! If you turn me down now, I will make sure that every citizen of Zootopia knows that you don’t have the balls to do what is right, that you decided not to do what you’re supposed to do! It’s your job to make sure that I can do my job, and if you don’t do your job as you’re supposed to, it’s high time this city gets a new DA who’s more willing to listen to reason!”

“You cannot possibly be serious!” Horner got up, straightening himself to quite an impressive height. “Don’t you know what I can do to you?”

Bogo got up, too, which was much more impressive. Horner seemed to shrink with every inch Bogo gained in height. “Do you honestly think I care what you do at this stage? So go to the City Council and have them fire me! I don’t care! If you do, I will go public with this, and believe me, after all is said and done, the City Council will have lost some more councilmammals, you will find yourself out on the streets without a job, and the new Mayor, whomever it will be, will beg me to return to the ZPD. Mark my words, there is no scenario in this where you come out on top.”

Horner literally fell back into his office chair, shaking his head. Bogo continued, somewhat more sedately: “Right now, I’m under the impression that the whole City Council is deeply enmeshed in Bellwether’s schemes. It’s high time we put an end to this! This here is the first step towards doing so. If our investigation really proves that Aries is guilty, everybody will know that the ZPD is being serious about bringing all those to justice who thought attacking predators is a fun pastime. Attacks will cease, hopefully, and the City Council may even start to listen to reason again. Maybe, after we get a new Mayor, Zootopia might once again be the place where anyone can be anything. Right now, the city very firmly shows every predator that their place within society is at the very bottom. It’s not something I will stand for, it’s not something you should stand for. And if that means forcing the paws and hooves of the members of City Council, then so be it!” He sighed again. “I don’t want to do this, I really don’t. But if that’s the way things are gonna be, then we’ll part ways for good, and I can promise you that the next weeks are going to be highly unpleasant for you. Then again, if you find your balls and allow me to follow through with my investigation, I will make sure that every pressmammal in Zootopia knows that you didn’t back down when things got rough, that you did what was right, that you did it all in the name of law and order. Your choice.”

“This is blackmail!” Horner hissed.

“Why, yes, it is.” With a sudden movement, Bogo slammed both hooves onto the desktop, shocking Horner. “Ever since Bellwether came to power,” he thundered, “it was as if someone had taken my hooves and horns away from me! I ran into roadblock after roadblock after roadblock, simply because I was trying to do my job! No officer of mine was able to do his or her job unimpeded! We were robbed of resources! We had to suspend or reassign so many highly decorated officers that the ZPD is on the verge of total collapse! Someone high up there didn’t want us to do our jobs properly! And now that Bellwether’s been identified as the culprit and removed from office, nothing has changed! I am sick to the back teeth! This city is on its way down to hell, just because some are so interested in keeping their jobs, they forget to do their jobs! I will put an end to this! And if that means I have to bend the laws,” he made a pause and leaned forward, closing the gap between Horner and himself, “I will not hesitate even one second to do it!”

Horner looked up at him in shock. “You are crazy, Bogo!”

Bogo came even closer. “You keep stalling me, I will turn crazy, Horner! And believe me, you do
not want to see a crazy cape buffalo! You refuse me this, and heads will roll, and that’s a fact!”

With shaking hooves, Horner turned to his laptop. He switched tasks to his word processor, opened a file, made several inputs and sent the file to the printer. Getting up, he retrieved the freshly printed piece of paper and signed it. His signature looked a bit shaky, but identifiable. “For the record, it is with extreme reluctance that I do this,” he said.

Bogo took the piece of paper, and his posture changed immediately. With his most friendly voice, he said: “For the record, while Joop indeed is a childhood friend of mine, I have never talked to him about my line of work, nor will I ever do so.”

Yet again, Horner’s jaw dropped. “You … you lied to me?”

Bogo shrugged. “What was it Mr. Wilde said to me? Oh, yes: It’s called a hustle, sweetheart!”

Horner just stared at him, opening his mouth and closing it again like a fish out of water. Bogo simply turned around, saying without looking at him: “You did the right thing, Horner. Believe me, everything will turn out fine. Have a nice day!”

He had hardly left the office when he broke into a run, search warrant firmly in his hoof.

Convincing the DA had taken longer than anticipated, and seeing that Aries knew what was going to happen, time was of the essence. While he had lost precious time getting the search warrant, Aries may very well have made sure that no traces of wrongdoing could be found by his officers. Every minute counted, so Bogo left the “Herbert C. Hoofer Office” at full speed, running the several hundred yards as fast as his legs were able to carry him.

He was slightly out of breath when he reached Precinct One, where he was greeted by several mammals wearing full riot gear. One of them was his orderly, Sergeant Higgins. He was standing next to a ram wearing the insignia of a Lieutenant. Bogo approached the two mammals, saying: “Thanks for joining us on such a short notice, Lieutenant Pecora. Our staffing level’s stretched to capacity.”

Pecora gave him a smile. “Always glad to help out, Chief. Wouldn’t wanna miss the party for anything in the world anyway. You know you always have friends at Precinct Four.” He made a pause. “That’s goats and rams we’re talking about, right?”

“Almost exclusively.”

Pecora gave a hiss. “It’s always the same! A few idiots bring a whole species into discredit.”

Bogo shrugged. “That’s how it’s always been. You wouldn’t believe how many buffaloes I had to arrest over the course of the years.”

“Comes with the job, eh?”

“Comes with the job.” Bog made a pause, holding up the search warrant. Higgins’ eyes widened. “You got it, Sir?”

Bogo allowed himself a smile. “I do.”

Pecora raised an eyebrow. “How did you manage to do that?”

“Well, I took a leaf out of the book of a certain hustler who helped solve both the Missing Mammals case and the Savage Predators case.”
“Mr. Wilde?” Higgins asked.

“It was his idea to tell the DA that I was about to go public with my knowledge of him doing nothing to prevent crime in this city.”

“Wow! That’s sly!”

Pecora grinned. “That’s brilliant! And he really wants to become a cop?”

“He does,” Bogo said.

“Good. The ZPD could always use someone who can beat criminals at their own game. All those goody-two-shoes can only get you this far.”

Bogo nodded. “I think you’re right. His knowledge is extensive, and I hope we can put it to good use. Anyway,” he handed the search warrant to Pecora, “here it is. You’re in charge. We’re mainly looking for duty rosters, personal files, patient records, stuff like that. Oh, and you’ll confiscate every single computer you come across. Maybe they were dumb enough … Higgins here will keep me posted on any interesting developments.”

Pecora had read the search warrant and stuffed it into the breast pocket of the shirt he was wearing under his bulletproof vest. “Of course, Chief.” He looked at Higgins. “You ready?”

“You bet I am,” Higgins countered calmly. He turned to Bogo. “By the way, Major Mastiff has taken over the interrogation of Ramington.”

Bogo’s eyes widened. “The lynx girl died?”

Higgins nodded slowly. “We got the news shortly after you left, so he took over, seeing that we’re dealing with a murder case now.”

“Any progress?”

“None that I can see. Maybe you should take over personally.”

Bogo shook his head. “Major Mastiff’s the best interrogator we have. If he can’t get through, nobody can.”

Higgins shrugged. “Well, Wilde said he could do better.”

Bogo’s eyes widened. “He’s still here?”

“He is. So is Hopps.”

“Damn it!” Bogo shouted. “Wilde’s still a civilian, and Hopps belongs on a couch to rest her leg!”

“Major Mastiff seems to disagree. He personally asked them to stay.”

“He did?” Bogo made a frown. “Guess I need to talk to the old wolf.”

Pecora smiled. “You do that. In the meantime, we have a security company to bust.”

Bogo nodded. “Do it!”

Pecora raised his voice. “All right, girls, mission starts now! Man the trucks!”
Less than one minute later, Bogo was the last remaining mammal in the foyer of Precinct One, apart from the horse sitting behind the receptionist’s desk, looking bored out of her skull. Bogo paid her no heed as he turned and walked towards the staircase taking him to the basement, towards the interrogation rooms.

The day had been more than interesting so far, and the evening promised to be even more so.

---

Rest in peace, Karen Pardinus!

My, am I a devious one! Create a character, establish a bit of background knowledge, only to kill her two chapters later! Well, there’s a reason why there are two sides to my avatar picture. After all, “I just wanna be Jekyll, but I’m always fighting Hyde.” (Five Finger Death Punch, “Jekyll and Hyde,” written by Zoltan Bathory, Kevin Churko, Ivan L. Moody, Jason Hook, and Jeremy Spencer, from the album “Got Your Six,” Prospect Park, 2015.)

Herbert Clark Hoover was the 31st President of the United States, serving from 1929 to 1933, during the Great Depression, and his name lends itself excellently to some fursonification. ;-)

The Hoover Dam was also named after him, somewhat controversially though.

Andrew Horner is a Thomson’s gazelle (*Eudorcas thomsonii*), named after the Scottish explorer Joseph Thomson who played a very important role during the colonization of Africa. At one point, he was gored by a buffalo, although he survived this encounter. (But no, Bogo isn’t likely to gore anyone with his horns in my story. He’s dangerous enough as it is without needing to resort to using his horns.) Gazelle is a Thomson’s gazelle, too, which is why in my universe, her full name is Gazelle Thomson. Sue me! ;-) A few words on the journalist mentioned in here, the childhood friend of Bogo: Joop Temminck is named after the Dutch zoologist Coenraad Jacob Temminck, who was so famous during his lifetime that no less than 47 animals were named after him. As far as his first name is concerned, it’s basically the same as John - Joop is just the Dutch variant of it (just as my first name, Jens, is a Frisian variant of it). He’ll return in “Hammer,” and he’ll play quite an ... well, I wouldn’t say important, but certainly an interesting role.

Now, Major Mastiff. We’ll get to meet him in the next chapter, obviously, but before we do, a few short words on the character: He actually was the second original character I created. (The first one was a bunny who plays an only small, but crucial part in “Nightmare.”) Back then, he was little more than a last name. And obviously, I wanted him to be a mastiff. But then it dawned on me that there can be no mastiffs in Zootopia - there are no human beings, so there can be no domesticated mammals. So Mastiff had to be a wolf by default. I wanted to reintroduce him in “Hammer, somewhere around chapter 14 or so. But then I received a review by a user named Galaxyexplorer74, who was one of my staunchest supporters back at fanfiction.net. And since he had supported me so massively, I was more than willing to fulfill his wish to introduce a wolf to the story - he happened to like wolves a lot. So I pulled Mastiff out of my bag of tricks much earlier than intended, in chapter six of “Hammer” actually. And then I reintroduced him here, in “Wound,” a story I have begun (and finished) writing after having completed chapter seven of “Hammer.”

There are two reasons why I’m telling you this: One, Mastiff is without the shadow of a doubt the most important OC I have ever created. He will play a very important role in
“Wound,” he’ll play a crucial role in “Hammer.” But the more important reason is this: I had left the first name of Mastiff (which I’ll tell you in the next chapter) and his gender (obviously male) for Galaxyexplorer74 to decide. So I’m not the only guy who can take credit for creating the old wolf, and this is what I want to acknowledge here.

No, there are no more quotes this time, at least none that I’m aware of.

Well, that’s it for the moment! Thanks for reading, and please let me know what you think of this. And if you find mistakes, please point them out to me! Thanks in advance!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

This was one of the chapters I really enjoyed writing, even more so than usual. Back when I did it, I had little more than a basic idea of what I wanted to achieve. And as usual, I merely started writing, waiting for the characters to tell me their story. Which is my usual approach when writing stories: I try to think myself into the heads of the protagonists and let them tell me the story, simply writing it down.

And little more than two hours later, I was done.

I still don’t know why, but this chapter basically wrote itself. And after re-reading it right now, I must say that I’m still very pleased with the result.

Still this chapter underwent quite a lot of changes. I needed to properly introduce Major Mastiff this time around, and I was never really satisfied with Nick’s line of reasoning, so I changed quite a lot during the conversation between Nick, Bogo, and Mastiff. In case you’ve read the story before and want to know what I’m talking about, just read on! And if you haven’t, just read on! ;-)

Yet again, I want to thank everyone who followed this story so far. A particularly loud shout goes out to niraD, GhostWolf88, and HawkTooth for sending me their comments! Many thanks for that!

Speaking of HawkTooth, my dear friend has created quite a lot of pictures and published them on Flickr. Among those are two particular interesting ones. One of them shows what Major Mastiff looks like, while the other one shows a character named Rockwell MacIntyre who hasn’t made an appearance in this story yet, and it will take a few chapters until he does. In case you wanna take a look yourself, the pictures can be found at

https://www.flickr.com/photos/127653455@N03/albums/72157674260547772

I want to use this opportunity to thank HawkTooth yet again for creating these pictures! Please give him your kudos when you visit his page, okay? And I also want to thank him for giving me a few hints on how to improve this chapter!

And again, no quotes had been found. Their number will start to increase massively at one point, you know!

Chapter Seven

The Great Sheep Conspiracy

*The people you say cause all the crime? Wake up, motherfucker, and smell the slime!*

When Chief Bogo entered the antechamber leading to the second interrogation room, he got to
witness a rather peculiar scene. There were three mammals sitting in the room. One was Francine
Pennington, an elephant and one of the ZPD’s senior officers. The other two were Judy Hopps and
Nick Wilde. Hopps was sitting next to Pennington in front of the one-way mirror, following the
proceedings in the interrogation room with rapt attention, her bandaged leg resting on an empty
chair. Wilde, on the other hoof, obviously wasn’t the least bit interested in the interrogation itself;
he was sitting at a nearby table, thumbing through a newspaper in what looked like an idle manner,
and slurping from a Styrofoam cup which obviously contained coffee.

Bogo looked through the one-way mirror himself at the mammals present in the interrogation
room proper. There were three of them. One was Robert Rhinowitz, who was standing guard
towards the back wall of the room. Two mammals were sitting at the table; one was a rather
young-looking ram, the other one an elderly northern timberwolf. The ram probably was Michael
Fleecewood, but Bogo might have been mistaken, as even when looking at them through his
glasses, all sheep looked pretty much the same to him.

There was no mistaking the wolf though.

After all, how many mammals nowadays wear an eye patch?

To call Adimar Mastiff’s face a disfigured mess was almost an understatement. Numerous scars
ran across his muzzle and surrounded the eye patch which covered the empty socket where his left
eye had once been. And the rest of his body also looked the worse for wear. Numerous gunshot
wounds, an almost perfectly round scar on his abdomen, the result of having been gored by a
rhino, and two missing digits on his left paw gave testament to the fact that when things had gotten
rough, Mastiff had usually ended up with the short stick.

Not that any of this had made him slow down in his stride.

Not only had Mastiff survived numerous life-threatening injuries, but he had always returned from
sick leave in record time, only to go into the thick of things again immediately. Nobody at the ZPD
had spent more days in hospital due to having been injured in the line of duty, yet nobody had even
come close to Mastiff’s track record, as far as solved cases and arrested criminals were concerned.

Within the ZPD, Major Adimar Mastiff was simply a legend.

He was the leader of Homicide Squad and Bogo’s second-in-command, but nobody within the
ZPD thought of him as such. Maybe it was due to the fact that Mastiff had already been a Sergeant
when Bogo had joined the ZPD, maybe it was just due to his age, his experience, his track record,
but it was an open secret that even Bogo often thought of Mastiff as being his superior officer.

After having joined the ZPD, Bogo had been assigned to team up with Mastiff, and they had spent
the first four years of Bogo’s career as a team, a highly successful one. Until Mastiff had been
promoted to Lieutenant and reassigned to Homicide Squad. And that was the place where Mastiff’s
star had really begun to shine. So brightly in fact that by now, Mastiff was generally considered to
be the veteran of veterans - being one of the oldest and most seasoned officers the ZPD had to
offer, even Bogo stopped and listened whenever Mastiff had something to say. His almost flawless
service record, his achievements as a crime fighter, his steadfast approach and willingness to put
his life on the line in the line of duty had turned him into a role model of what a ZPD officer
should be. He was without the shadow of a doubt the most respected, even revered officer within
the ZPD and had therefore weathered any attempt by the City Council to be removed from service. Even Bellwether hadn’t dared to force Bogo to suspend him; doing so may have caused open rebellion within the ZPD.

It would certainly have caused Bogo to finally go up in arms against the City Council.

Now that the lynx girl had died, Mastiff had, as leader of Homicide Squad, taken over the interrogation, obviously from Pennington. And it was just as obvious, just from looking at the scene unfolding on the other side of the mirror, that the interrogation wasn’t exactly proceeding smoothly. Fleecewood seemingly was quite a tough nut to crack. Arms folded, the ram stared up at the much bigger wolf with an expression of defiance etched on his face.

“Report!” Bogo looked at Pennington, who got up from her massive chair at once.

“Nothing so far, Chief,” Pennington said. “The Major tried to interrogate Ramington, sir, but came up empty. And Fleecewood,” she gestured at the one-way-mirror, “isn’t any more pliable.”

Bogo looked at Mastiff, trying to read his posture. Over the course of the decades, Mastiff had conducted countless interrogations and had garnered the reputation of being most capable at worming secrets out of suspects. The posture he held now, however, indicated that he was nowhere near any point he wanted to reach. It seemed that nothing he had tried had proven to be successful so far, and the aging wolf was visibly frustrated at the obvious lack of results.

“So, you got the DA to play ball, Chief?” Wilde asked suddenly.

Bogo turned around, looking at Wilde. “Yes, it worked, Wilde. Thank you for telling me how I could do it!”

Wilde smiled while closing the newspaper. “Told you so, and you’re welcome.” He looked through the mirror at the proceedings in the interrogation room. “He’s wasting his time.”

“What do you mean?” Wilde had obviously followed the interrogation much more attentively than Bogo had thought on first impression.

Wilde shrugged. “It was a good call to turn to Fleecewood; Ramington’s much too experienced to allow anyone to try and break him in an interrogation. Fleecewood’s still young and much moresuggestible. However, even he is much too clever to get under his wool that easily. Just asking him to own up to what he did will not work.”

“You sure?”

Wilde gave him a smirk. “As you know, I’m pretty good at reading mammals - comes with my line of … my former line of work. The direct approach is useless; it simply rolls off his shoulders. If you want something from him, you need to break him.”

Hopps gasped. “Nick, are you suggesting violence?”

“Of course not, Carrots!” Wilde said in mock outrage. “There are much more simple ways to inflict pain. Words can hurt far more than a bullet or a claw. You know this to be true.”

Hopps was quiet for a few seconds. “I do,” she finally said in a soft voice.

Wilde hesitated, too. “Sorry, Judy, I didn’t mean for it sound like that.”

Hopps looked at him, a somewhat forced-looking smile plastered on her face. “It’s okay, Nick. I
learned my lesson. There’s no need to spare me.”

It was at this quite awkward moment that the door opened to reveal Mastiff. Bogo peered through the one-way-mirror quickly to make sure that Fleecewood was still being closely-guarded by Rhinowitz. The rhino just stood near the back wall, completely unmoving, his right hoof close to the tranq gun. His eyes were wide open and alert, prepared for any wrong movement. Bogo nodded and looked back at Mastiff. “And?”

Mastiff snorted. “I could be here all year, he still wouldn’t tell me what I want to know.”

Bogo pointed at Wilde. “Mr. Wilde here thinks we’re taking the wrong approach.”

“We do?” Mastiff looked at Wilde. “Please tell me, how would you do it?”

Wilde looked down at the newspaper. “If I were you, I’d stop interrogating him and try something different, but to be honest, I don’t think you have what it takes to do it, Major. Neither has the Chief, for that matter.” He looked up with a smile. “No disrespect intended.”

Mastiff merely raised an eyebrow, unlike Bogo, who was bristling visibly. Folding his arms over his chest, he bellowed: “Before I decide whether I should feel offended or not, you better explain yourself, Wilde!”

Wilde gave him a grin which bordered on being impertinent. “You two are way too nice to do something that devious.”

Mastiff chuckled. “That’s probably the first time in forever that someone called me too nice into my face!”

For a second, Bogo thought of disagreeing, but then he nodded. “Alright, no offense taken. So, what’s your suggestion, Wilde?”

Wilde nodded and got up from his chair. “Well, first of all, I’m fairly certain that both of you failed to realize that he’s under a lot of stress. I mean, he covers it really well, but I’m sure he is.”

“How do you know?” Mastiff looked through the mirror at Fleecewood. “He looks calm and collected to me.”

“He does, but check out his left hind hoof. See the way he grinds it against the floor? Not exactly normal ram behavior.”

Mastiff nodded. “You’re right. Wasn’t able to see it from my vantage point.”

“Excuse me, sir, but you didn’t?” Hopps piped in. “I was even able to hear it!”

Mastiff rolled his remaining eye. “Yeah, congratulations to everyone for being more attentive than me!” He looked at Wilde. “That’s actually quite an achievement, hiding something that obvious from me.”

Wilde shrugged. “I guess he had quite some practice. But he’s under a lot of duress, I’m certain of it. He’s trying his hardest to look calm, but that,” he pointed at Fleecewood, “doesn’t look calm to me.”

“I agree.”

“The big question is why. If he was certain that by not talking to you, by not answering your
questions, he could make it out of here unscathed, there would be no need for him to feel stressed. After all, it’s not that difficult to say nothing. That’s exactly what Ramington did, after all. With me so far?”

“So you think he’s afraid?”

“I wouldn’t necessarily say he’s afraid, more that he’s confused and doesn’t know what to do. So he simply keeps repeating what you already know. Or has he said anything so far that wasn’t known to you already?”

Mastiff shook his head. “He didn’t. He said quite a lot actually, but nothing substantial.”

“Like a broken record,” Pennington added.

“Something like that, yes.”

Wilde nodded. “Ramington was completely different. He didn’t say one word. Which, given the fact that we have Bellwether’s confession on record and have caught them in the act, seems completely pointless to me. He must know that he’s screwed. He must know that he’ll spent the next years in the pen, regardless of whether he confesses or not. Right?”

“With certainty,” Bogo said. “We have more than enough evidence to put them behind bars for quite a long time.”

“And they know it. Now, why does Ramington not talk at all while Fleecewood talks all the time without giving you anything worth telling?”

“I have no idea,” Mastiff said. “Do you?”

To Bogo’s surprise, Wilde nodded immediately. “You said both were transferred to Precinct One from Precinct Nine, right, Chief?”

“That’s right.”

“Which district is Precinct Nine?”

“Happytown.”

Wilde gave a smile. “Why am I not surprised? If I understand correctly, Precinct One’s pretty much the place to be, whereas the other precincts are considered somewhat lesser, right?”

“Not only somewhat lesser,” Mastiff said. “In theory, all precincts are of equal importance, but Precinct One trumps them all. We oversee all the other precincts, in a manner of speaking. Our officers are dispatched all over the city, working in the other precincts, mostly on the more important jobs. And all the other precincts are led by Assistant Chiefs, whereas Precinct One,” he pointed over his shoulder at Bogo, “is led by a Chief of Police, the only one in Zootopia. So of course, only the best cadets make it to Precinct One. If you are not among the very best, you’ll be assigned to other precincts. Every police officer worth his or her salt wants to make it to Precinct One.”

“And Precinct Nine is probably far down the list, somewhere near the bottom, right?”

“Pretty much, yes. Precinct Nine isn’t the most popular of places, just because Happytown certainly hasn’t the most stellar reputation.”
“I know. I was born there.”

“You were?”

Wilde shrugged. “Most foxes who live in Zootopia are. So if both were transferred here from Precinct Nine of all places, it begs the question: Are they good enough?”

Bogo snorted. “Certainly not. If I hadn’t been that desperate for support, I would never have added them to my roster. I took a look at their personal files. Ramington is a troublemaker. Been on the force for almost twenty years, but never made it above Third Detective. Started in Precinct Four, Sahara Square, was reassigned to Precinct Nine after little more than one year and has remained there ever since. Four promotions, three demotions. Has a reputation for not shying away from roughhousing suspects and disrespecting other officers, particularly those of equal or lower rank. His latest evaluation showed that he lacked a few very basic qualities, like resourcefulness, dedication, and readiness for duty.”

“Just one of those countless mammals who do their job only because it pays the bills while not caring about doing the job right. Something like that?”

“That’s one way to put it.”

“What about Fleecewood?”

Bogo shook his head. “Not much to tell you there. Joined the ZPD little more than one year ago. His graduation certificate shows that he was mediocre at best, although he has always been lauded for being exceptionally intelligent. He has a reputation for being quite lazy, which probably is the chief reason for why his grades weren’t better. But apart from that, there is nothing in his file that makes him stand out. At least his track record so far is spotless. Until we arrested him, there was no indication of any wrongdoing in his file.”

Wilde nodded, looking through the mirror at Fleecewood as if in deep thought. “Exceptionally intelligent, you said? Unlike Ramington, unless I am mistaken.”

Bogo narrowed his eyes. “Well, yes. Ramington almost didn’t graduate from the ZPA. His grades were barely good enough. So no, I don’t think he’s the most intelligent mammal.” He made a pause. “Is there any point to this, Wilde?”

“I can’t shake the feeling you knew all this already, didn’t you?” Mastiff added.

Wilde looked at Mastiff. “I didn’t know this per se, but I had a pretty good idea. Ramington isn’t the sharpest tool in the shed, while Fleecewood is smart, but insecure. After having seen them react to you, Major, I was fairly certain of it. Now, Ramington isn’t smart enough to know that it simply doesn’t matter if he confesses or not. That’s why he doesn’t talk. He still seems to think that he can get out of here unscathed if he just keeps his trap shut. Not exactly the most intelligent move, but he isn’t the most intelligent mammal.”

Wilde pointed at the mirror. “Fleecewood is a different story though. He’s definitely smart enough to know that there’s no way out of this, regardless of what he does here, regardless of whether he confesses or not. But something holds him back. Something, or rather someone.”

“What do you mean? You think Ramington ...”

Wilde raised his paw to silence Mastiff. “Do you have a better explanation? The way Fleecewood behaves, that’s not the behavior of someone who doesn’t want to say anything. He wants to say quite a lot. In fact I’m fairly certain that he’s dying to fess up. Ramington’s his superior, right?”
Bogo nodded. “He is, although it’s not much of a difference. Ramington’s a Third Detective, while Fleecewood is merely an Officer.”

Wilde gave a smile. “Which means bupkis to me right now. I have no idea what a Third Detective even is!”

Mastiff returned the smile. “Officer is the lowest rank within the ZPD, and Third Detective is just the rank above it. So you think Ramington ordered him to not say a word?”

Wilde nodded. “And Fleecewood knows, deep down inside, that it makes no difference if he follows the order or not. Still he follows it, although he knows that it’s pointless. That’s why he’s under so much stress.”

Mastiff looked at Bogo. “Sounds plausible enough. But where does this leave us? And how can we break the spell? How can we make Fleecewood confess?”

“The way I see it, there are two ways to get him to talk.”

“Which are?”

“One, you could try and tell him that he receives your full protection if he opens up to you.”

Mastiff shook his head. “Won’t work. As a key witness, he receives full protection anyway.”

Bogo added: “It was the very first thing I told both of them, before we even began interrogating either him or Ramington. It’s standard procedure anyway, and Fleecewood at least knows this very well. Still it seems that he won’t talk.”

Wilde nodded. “I thought so. Well, then it’s on to the second approach: Paint a picture for him, a picture showing his future and the future of all of Zootopia, using the darkest colors you can find.”

“Uh, and this is going to help us how?”

“Ask yourself one question, Chief: What made him do it? What made a young, highly intelligent officer with an unblemished reputation turn away from law enforcement and towards crime?”

“How would I know? Apart from what I read in his file, I barely know him at all. Money?”

Wilde snorted. “His father, Michael Fleecewood Sr., is running the only remaining sawmill in the Rainforest District, plus he owns three restaurants, four nightclubs, and an odd assortment of other shops. According to the current Furbes list, he’s the eleventh-richest mammal in all of Zootopia. Young Michael Jr. here was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Money’s never been an issue.” He made a pause for effect. “Power is.”

“What do you mean?”

“For all of his life, he has always been overshadowed by other mammals, despite being the oldest and heir apparent to his father’s businesses. You know why he became a cop? Because during his time at college, it turned out that he has no business savvy whatsoever. So the burden fell to his younger brother, who was a football standout at college and is now being trained to take over the family business. His sister, too, is having a highly successful career as a model and actress. He has always been sort of the fifth wheel. Quite smart, but very limited in his interests. Whether law enforcement was one of them, I can’t say, but he doesn’t strike me as the ‘I-want-to-make-the-world-a-better-place’ kind of guy.”
“How do you know all this?” Mastiff asked.

Wilde shrugged. “I know everybody. Now, imagine what happens in the brain of someone like him, the underachiever, the lost cause, the oddball, when a sly sheep approaches him, promising him an immensely successful career. If I might haphazard a guess, I think that Smellwether,” he grinned, “I need to thank Lionheart for that one, Smellwether promised him the world for a tiny bit of cooperation. He’s still young and incredibly naïve - another reason why he was such a failure at college. He probably thought that having the Assistant Mayor at his side would protect him and make sure he got promoted ahead of time.”

Wilde turned around to look at the sheep who had closed his eyes, looking very tired. “Just look at him! When you arrested Smellwether, you pulled the rug out from under his hooves. His protection is no more, is career is in shambles. His future is bleak, and deep down inside, he knows it. He's quite alone now. The only person he can turn to right now probably is Ramington, and I’m fairly certain that he told him to not say a word. And since he has no clue whom else to turn to, what else to do, that’s what he does.” He looked back at Mastiff and Bogo. “All you need to do is to show him that it simply doesn’t matter what Ramington told him. That there’s no way for him to get out of this, regardless of what Ramington told him to do. Believe me, if you manage to make him realize that, he won't stop talking.”

“You sure?” Mastiff asked.

“Want me to prove it?” Wilde gave him a grin.

Bogo shook his head. “That’s a no. I cannot allow a civilian, even one who applied for the ZPA, to conduct an interrogation. It won’t have any validity in a courtroom.”

Wilde spread his arms in the universal gesture of innocence. “Who says I want to interrogate him. I merely want to thank him.”

“You want what?”

---

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Antechamber to Interrogation Room #2, City Center, Zootopia - Twenty Minutes Later

“I’m still not sure this is a good idea,” Bogo said silently as he watched Wilde enter the main interrogation room.

Mastiff chuckled. “Relax, Adrian! What’s the worst that could happen? Fleecewood still refuses to cooperate. What’s the best that can happen? Fleecewood breaks down completely, assigning blame to everyone from his first nanny to his barber.”

“You think he’ll break down?”

Mastiff took his time answering that question, taking a look at Wilde first.

The fox was the picture of innocent indifference. With his green shirt and the aviator shades he had chosen to wear, ignoring the fact that the sun is unlikely to shine in a closed building, he definitely looked more like a tourist than like a guy trying to bring someone to spill his innermost secrets to him. He was carrying two Styrofoam cups full of coffee, and he had rolled up the newspaper and was carrying it under his arm.

It was obvious that Fleecewood hadn’t counted on a red fox in civilian clothing making an appearance, especially not the very same fox he had chased through the Natural History Museum.
He frowned at Wilde before looking at the one-way-mirror, knowing full well that Mastiff and Bogo were watching him from the other side. “You can’t be serious,” the ram said aloud.

Mastiff looked at Bogo and gave a grin which, due to the numerous scars across his muzzle, looked distinctly lopsided. “I tend to think so, yes.”

After having received no answer, Fleecewood turned towards Wilde. “What do you want, Fox?” he growled.

“And a good day to you, too,” Wilde said, his tone conversational. “My name’s Wilde. Nick Wilde. Pleased to meet you.” He sat down on the chair opposite to Fleecewood, placing the newspaper on the desk in front of him and taking a sip out of one of the Styrofoam cup. The other one he placed in front of Fleecewood.

Fleecewood looked down at the cup. “What’s that supposed to be?”

“It’s called coffee. You know, a slightly acidic hot beverage containing caffeine. Very popular with a lot of mammals, due to its stimulating effects.” Wilde pointed at the one-way-mirror. “After having seen you sit here for two hours straight without so much as a glass of water or a doughnut, I thought you might be in need of some liquid stimulation.”

“As if I am a guy accepting a drink from a fox,” Fleecewood countered, his voice little more than a hiss.

Wilde shrugged. “Your loss.” He leaned forward to retrieve the other cup of coffee. “Did you know that foxes are nocturnal? Without coffee, I wouldn’t be able to work during daytime.”

“Why don’t you just stick to your nocturnal routine, then? Would give a lot of mammals in Zootopia an easier time, knowing that sneaky and sly foxes won’t bother them in broad daylight.”

If Wilde felt insulted by this, he hid it very well. His aviator shades surely helped hiding his emotions. “What, and miss this great beverage? I love coffee. This ones from the cafeteria, and it tastes great.” He took a sip, making a face. “Okay, that was a lie, it tastes like hot dishwater. Still, it’s the caffeine that I’m after. And I guess this sorry excuse for a coffee delivers in spades.” He took another sip. “Pity its taste is such a disappointment.”

“What do you want?” Fleecewood asked again. “You’re not an officer. You cannot interrogate me. No judge in the whole wide world will listen to anything you have to say.” He made a pause, obviously for effect. “Especially not since you are a fox.”

Wilde leaned back, sipping his coffee. “Well, His Chiefness and the one-eyed Major told me the exact same thing. I had to do my very best hustle to be able to convince them to let me in here. Because all I want to do is thank you.”

Fleecewood flinched slightly, barely noticeable by Bogo. “What?”

“Well, Mick - I might call you Mick, right?”

“No, you may not!”

“Do you prefer Michael?”

“I would prefer you don’t talk to me at all, Fox!” Fleecewood hissed.

Wilde made a frown. “You hurt me, Michael! What have I done to you to deserve this kind of
treatment?"

Fleecewood seemed to try the sarcastic approach. “You mean, apart from the fact that you are a sneaky, conniving fox? Your species is the most hated one in all of Zootopia. I wouldn’t trust a fox if my life depended on it.”

Wilde gave him a smile. “Are you really sure your assessment is correct?”

Fleecewood stared at him. “Foxes have always been sneaky and untrustworthy. Everybody knows that.”

“Well, maybe that’s true, and maybe it isn’t,” Wilde said nonchalantly. “But are you really sure that my species is the most hated in all of Zootopia?”

“Of course I am!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure if I were you. See, it seems to me that you and your goons single-hoovedly managed to turn sheep into the most detested species in Zootopia.”

Now Fleecewood’s flinch was pronounced. “What are you talking about?”

Instead of an answer, Wilde picked up the newspaper and unfolded it to reveal the front page. In huge letters, the newspaper bore the headline: “The Great Sheep Conspiracy.”

Fleecewood stared at the newspaper as if he had seen a ghost. Wilde said in a very soft voice: “It says in here that a bunch of sheep, namely Mayor Dawn Bellwether, a scientist of renown named Doug Ramses, his henchmammals Woolter White and Jesse Shearman, plus three sheep police officers named Cedric Ramington, Moses Argali, and Michael Fleecewood Jr., have been single-hoovedly responsible for disturbing the peace in Zootopia.” When Fleecewood said nothing, Wilde continued: “There’s one op-ed article in there, too. In it, the author claims that it seems like sheep on the whole cannot be trusted anymore. Especially since Officer Hopps told the press gaggle yesterday that the current Acting Mayor, Robert Aries, might be involved in some unprovoked attacks on harmless predators.” He made a pause for effect. “I simply wanted to thank you and your cronies for making sure foxes are no longer at the low end of the food chain.” He dropped the paper again and took another sip from his cup.

“This is brilliant!” Mastiff said with an approving nod. “It took him less than a minute to thoroughly rattle Fleecewood.”

Bogo had to concur. “The thought to try something like this didn’t even occur to me.”

Mastiff gave a chuckle. “Maybe we really are too nice for this kind of stuff.”

“Maybe we are.”

Fleecewood still looked at the paper, while Wilde had his head turned in his direction - whether he was looking at him was hard to determine, due to his shades. “Just imagine what your father must feel like,” he said, his voice still calm and soft, almost soothing. “His own son bringing his entire species in discredit. I don’t think your father will be able to sell lumber to ITREEA anymore, seeing that their boss, Ingvar Älgrad, always made sure that a lot of his employees are predators. What a shame, seeing that they are his best business partners. What about his restaurants? Two of them cater mostly for predators. Do you think business will be booming? I guess your father’s ecstatic about what you did here.”

He leaned forward, and suddenly, his voice turned harsh. “And as far as you’re concerned,
Michael, you’re screwed! Bellwether will be in the can for the foreseeable future, and so are you and your buddies, regardless of what you do here, regardless of whether you own up to what you did or not. And do you honestly think all those predators in prison will take kindly to you and your cronies?” Wilde got up from his chair. “I’m giving you three years, tops, before you’ll be either dead or broken. You can keep the paper. Maybe it’ll keep you company in here. You can try and eat it, maybe it’ll make up for the meals you missed.” He turned to leave.

“There is no sheep conspiracy.” Fleecewood’s voice was soft, barely audible.

Wilde stopped dead in his tracks. “There isn’t?”

Fleecewood shook his head. “There are a lot of other mammals involved.”

And just like Wilde had predicted, once Fleecewood had started talking, there was no stopping him.

---

**ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Antechamber to Interrogation Room #2, City Center, Zootopia - Three Hours Later**

“This is unbelievable!” Mastiff was beside himself with glee. “Three more councilmammals, one lawyer, one judge, several smaller companies, including three security companies - just how many mammals were involved?”

Bogo shrugged. “I guess I need to pay Horner another visit. I need a few more search warrants.”

“Oh yes, you do! Speaking of which, what did the search at Aries Security reveal?”

“No idea. Haven’t heard from Higgins yet. Do you honestly think Ramington was stupid enough to keep a copy of the video footage they destroyed?”

Mastiff shook his head. “Don’t think so. Then again, a lot of criminals love keeping mementoes, reminding them of their successful crimes. Well, if there’s anything to be found, Pennington will find it.”

Bogo looked at his watch. A quarter to ten pm. He looked down at Hopps who, at one point during Wilde’s “interrogation,” had succumbed to her fatigue. She was sitting slumped in her chair, both feet resting on the empty chair, snoring softly.

Mastiff looked down at her, too. “Don’t know how she did it. This was so entertaining, stuff like that can keep me up for days!”

“The last weeks have been really hard on her. I guess before she’s fit for duty again, she needs to thoroughly rest and recuperate.”

The door opened, revealing Nick Wilde who was visibly tired, but smiling like he had just eaten a canary. “Hope you got all this on tape,” he said.

“We have,” Bogo said gravely. “Officer Pennington is trying to find the Blu-ray disc showing the attack on the lynx girl as we speak.”

“I don’t think she’ll find anything,” Wilde said with a dismissive gesture. “Ramington’s may not be the smartest of guys, but I guess he’s smart to not fall into such …”

He was interrupted by the door opening again. Pennington entered the room, holding a tiny-
looking disc in her hoof, not without some difficulty. “Found something, Chief,” she said. “It was in Ramington’s locker - what’s left of it. He had used some quite esoteric lock, so I had to smash the door.”

“It’s okay,” Bogo said, taking the disk carefully, as if handling a paw grenade with a pulled pin. “We can always replace those.”

Wilde looked at the disk. “Well, I stand corrected. Seems Ramington really is quite the stupid guy. Are you sure it’s the right one?”

Pennington shrugged. “It was the only one there.”

“There’s only one way to find out,” Mastiff said. He turned to Wilde, kneeling down in front of him and offering his paw. “That was probably the best interrogation I’ve ever seen! And I’ve seen a lot of ‘em. Outstanding work, Wilde!”

Wilde returned the pawshake. “Thank you, sir. It’s been a real pleasure, honestly.”

“Feels good to be working on this side of the law, eh?”

Wilde gave him a grin. “Surprisingly enough, it does. Never thought this would be so much fun.”

Mastiff nodded, then his features became stern. “So you’re serious about becoming a police officer. That’s right?”

“It is,” Wilde said without hesitation.

Mastiff nodded. “You are aware of the fact that even with Bogo’s ringing endorsement, being accepted into the ZPA’s still difficult for you.”

“I surmised as much.” Wilde’s tone suggested he was well aware of the shaky situation he was still in.

Mastiff got up again, looking at Fleecewood who was just being led out of the interrogation room by Rhinowitz. “I’ll tell you what, Wilde: After what you did today, I’d say losing your knowledge and abilities would be a damn shame. You got yourself another advocate. It so happens that I know most of the instructors at the ZPA personally, and my words carries some weight around them. I’ll make sure you make it into the ZPA, if it’s the last thing I do.”

Wilde gave him a slight bow. “Why, thank you, sir.”

“The rest is up to you, of course,” Mastiff continued. “But after what I’ve seen here, I’m sure you will succeed with distinction.”

“I hope so,” Wilde said, looking at Hopps with a frown. “She fell asleep?”

“She fell asleep almost an hour ago, so she saw the first part of your handiwork.”

Wilde looked at his wristwatch. “I was in there for three hours? No wonder I’m so tired!”

“I suggest you go home, Wilde,” Bogo said gently. “You’ve done enough today. Go get some sleep!”

Wilde nodded, hiding a yawn behind his paw. “Is it okay if I return tomorrow? I’d love to see what’s on that disc.”
Bogo nodded. “After what you achieved, I think you deserve the right to be in the know. In a manner of speaking, it’s as much your case as it is ours. We’ll continue tomorrow, at oh-eight-hundred sharp.”

“I’ll be there.” Wilde walked over to Hopps, placing a paw on her shoulder and giving her a gentle shake. “Wake up, Carrots! Time to go to bed!”

Hopps awoke with a start. “What’s the time?” she asked, then she gave a wide yawn. “Did I miss anything?”

“Not much,” Wilde said. “We’re done. Should I take you home? I think sleeping in a bed is better than sleeping on a chair.”

Hopps placed her hind paws on the ground again, hissing slightly. Grabbing both crutches and getting up from her chair, she said: “That would be very nice, thank you.”

“Where do you live, by the way?”

“Oh, my landlady still hadn’t relet my old room, so I’m living at the Grand Pangolin Arms apartment building again. Just like I did before.”

“You live at the Grand Pangolin Arms? My, just how small is your apartment?”

“You know the place?”

“Carrots, I grew up here. I know everything there is to know about Zootopia. And the Grand Pangolin Arms is known for its notoriously small apartments and its unbelievably thin walls.”

Hopps grinned at him. “Have you ever been in there?”

“No, not so far. Guess this changes today.”

“It does. But to answer your question, my apartment’s big enough for me, but probably too small for anything bigger than a bunny.”

Bogo approached the two of them. “Hopps, I expect you to stay at home until you’ve fully recovered. You were dead on your paws today, and I expect you to return here at the full height of your abilities. It was a good call of you to alert us to the crimes of Ramington and Fleecewood today, but your work here is done.”

Hopps opened her mouth, then she closed it again and gave a sigh. “You’re right, Chief. Thanks for giving me this opportunity today.”

“You’re welcome. Go home! Have a good night.”

“You too, Chief. Major Mastiff, it was a pleasure meeting you.”

“The feeling’s mutual,” Mastiff said with a smile. “Good night to you, Hopps. And Wilde.”

“Good night.” Wilde put his arm around Hopps’s shoulder. “Come on, Carrots, let’s get you home.”

They left the interrogation room antechamber together. Mastiff looked after them. As soon as they had shut the door behind them, he said: “They’re an odd couple, but it seems they do understand each other really well.”
“They do,” Bogo countered.

“Are you planning to team them up, when Wilde joins us here?”

“If he joins us … yes, probably.”

Mastiff gave a chuckle. “Criminals of Zootopia, beware! The over-energetic bunny and her devious partner are about to be let loose on this city!”

“Well, she wasn’t that over-energetic today.”

“She will be. And I promise you this, Adrian, you will have a lot of fun with the two of them.”

Bogo gave a sigh. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

---

So, that’s Adimar Mastiff for you. Like I said, the name was suggested to me by Galaxyexplorer74. It’s Germanic in origin and means “famous for his kindness.” So he needed to be a nice guy, but I also wanted him to be a badass, hence the injuries and his exemplary reputation.

Speaking of Galaxyexplorer74, I haven’t heard from my friend in a while - last time was in 2017, if I remember correctly. And he didn’t reply to the private message I sent him last year. No idea why. So if anyone knows where he is or what he does, I’d like to hear about it!

Yes, Michael “Mick” Fleecewood is a pun on Mick Fleetwood of Fleetwood Mac fame. And using his name is a huge disservice to this great hall-of-fame-musician, but I hope he can forgive me - the idea was just too good to drop.

Ingvar Kamprad was the founder of IKEA, and seeing that he was Swedish, I thought he needed to be a moose - älg is the Swedish word for moose.

Have you found my little allusion to the Disney movie “Frozen?”

Thanks for reading this chapter, and please, send me your comments!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Atrocities in Droves

Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

Another quick update here, because this is quite a short chapter, at least for me, and it remained virtually unchanged - there simply wasn’t all that much I needed to do here.

Since the chapter’s so short, there isn’t that much story or character development in here. It merely marks the transition to the next - and final - phase of this story. And just so you know, it’s all but nice and fluffy. Reader discretion is advised! And contrary to my usual approach to most things, no, this is NOT a joke!

I want to express my thankfulness towards all those who followed this story thus far, and I particularly want to thank GhostWolf88 and Thehellion115 for leaving their comments!

No more updates on the quotes front. Which I still think is a shame!

Chapter Eight

Atrocities in Droves

The ultimate in vanity, exploiting their supremacy.

Metallica: “… and Justice for All” (Lyrics by James Hetfield, Music by James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich, and Kirk Hammett, from the album “… and Justice for All,” Elektra, 1988)

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia

Somebody cleared his or her throat. Christine Caballus looked up from the fashion magazine she was perusing to look over the counter, but all she saw were two red, pointy ears. She straightened herself to look the mammal in the eyes.

Emerald eyes. Eyes belonging to a slender red fox, wearing a light green shirt which wouldn’t have looked out of place on Pawaii. He held a pair of aviator shades in his left paw and looked at her with a friendly, honest smile. “Good morning, officer,” he said.

“Good morning,” Caballus answered. “You must be Nicholas Wilde.”

“The only one. And your name’s Christine Caballus, right?”

Caballus looked at him in surprise. The name plate adorning the counter merely showed her last name. How the heck had this fox found out about her first one? “Do we know each other?”

“But that I’m aware of, but aren’t you the youngest daughter of Councilmammal Cameron Caballus?”

“Ah. Yes, I am.” She sighed. “Although that isn’t a source of particular pride right now.”

“What do you mean?”

Caballus put on a grin which, even to her, seemed quite forced. “The rate Chief Bogo’s going, there
won’t be many councilmammals left when he’s done.”

“Why? Have there been more arrests?”

“Well, the Chief left some ten minutes ago to arrest the Acting Mayor, Robert Aries. And after he’s done, he’s going to pay the DA another visit to get more search and arrest warrants. After all, Fleecewood told us that three more councilmammals and a heck of a lot more mammals were involved in Bellwether’s schemes. If they really were, the Chief will want to have them arrested as quickly as possible. In his opinion, every minute a criminal walks free is a minute wasted.”

“Understandable. The City Council played the ZPD for a sucker for way too long.”

Caballus looked down. “Yeah, looks like it.”

Wilde said softly: “But your father wasn’t among those doing it, right?”

“He wasn’t, but that’s little consolation now. A few weeks ago, being able to say that my father was a councilmammal was a source of pride. Now, it’s a source of shame.” She made a pause. “How did you know my father was opposed to predator officers being suspended?”

“I didn’t know, I merely assumed as much. There’s a healthy number of predators working in his company, and as far as I know, he hasn’t fired a single one of them so far.”

“And he won’t. There are a lot of predators among his friends and business partners. You won’t see him take sides against them. One of the mammals working for him even is a fox.”

“Ah. I had no idea.”

“Unless I’m mistaken, he works at administration, and he’s a financial genius, as far as I know.”

“Do you know the name?”

“No, sorry. I’m not that interested in my father’s work, to be honest.”

“You have your own, right?”

Caballus sighed again. “What little there is. Yesterday, when Aries forced through the motion to keep the predator officers suspended, my father voted against him, despite the fact that both belong to the same political party. Still, it wasn’t enough. His side lost by 24 votes to 26.”

“That makes merely fifty. Has nobody moved up to take the seat Aries had to leave behind after he became Acting Mayor?”

“Not so far, and now they even gonna need another one!”

Wilde gave a small smile. “Hopps was right, we really seem to be running through those Mayors at a terrifying rate. I mean, the third one in about three months? That’s nothing short of extraordinary. Speaking of being arrested, the search party really did find evidence pointing towards Aries?”

“And a whole lot of it. They found a computer with a hard drive which looked completely empty.”

Wilde made a frown. “Uhm, what do you do with a computer without any data on it?”

“Oh, there was data on it alright. The hard drive looked empty at first sight, but it wasn’t, not by a long shot, because nobody had bothered to wipe it.”
“Which means what?” He shrugged. “Sorry, but you’re talking to a complete dyslexic when it comes to computers. I know how to work with them, but I have no idea how they work.”

“No problem. It’s easy enough to understand actually. There were tons of data hidden on the drive. Someone tried to erase the data, but he or she obviously didn’t know the first thing about computers.”

Wilde grinned. “Sounds an awful lot like me. What did the mammal in question fail to know?”

“Well, if you merely delete a file, it isn’t gone. All the computer does is declaring open season on the file. The deleted file is simply marked as ‘to be overwritten’ in the Master File Table, which is sort of a table-of-contents of a hard drive. A file is completely erased only if every byte in it was overwritten by new data. As long as it isn’t, anyone could restore the data. You need to literally wipe a hard drive, overwrite every single byte on it, to make sure all data is deleted for good.”

“Oh. Interesting! So the files were still present?”

“All of them. And guess what, we even found a memo indicating that it was Aries himself who ordered the attacks on predators. You were among those they attacked, right?”

“I was. Me and my friend were, actually. But we were able to defend ourselves.”

“Well, the attack on you and your friend was only one of them. We found enough evidence to be able to accuse Aries of being responsible of ordering no less than eighteen similar attacks, most of which led to grievous injuries. As far as we know, employees of Aries Security were responsible for putting no less than thirty-three predators in hospital.”

Wilde gave a low whistle. “That was all still on the hard drive?”

“Every single file. Memos, rough drafts of emails, duty rosters, the whole shebang. Even the basic structure of the files was still intact. Everybody who’s into computers could have recovered the stuff. Seems like whoever tried deleting the files had no clue about basic security measures concerning computers. Which is quite funny, seeing as the mammal works at a security company.”

“Well, not everybody is as smart as you obviously are. You’re into computers?”

“Oh yes, I am. I grew up with computers, and I spend a lot of time tinkering with them.”

Wilde nodded. “Chief Bogo told me that you were the one working at Records, right?”

Caballus flinched visibly. “I was,” she responded flatly.

“So Clawhauser and you simply traded places.”

“Yeah.” She looked around carefully, making sure that nobody was able to overhear her. “And I so wish to be back at Records! I hate this! This must be the worst place in the whole wide world for me to work at!”

“And why is that?” Wilde’s voice was soft, encouraging, and his smile warm and inviting, coaxing her to tell him more.

Caballus pointed at the laptop sitting on the counter. “All I have here is this! Apart from the guys working at the IT department, there’s no-one at the ZPD who knows more about computers than I do, yet they put me here!”
“Funny,” Wilde said. “There’s a cheetah working down at Records who says the exact same thing, only in reverse.”

“Yes. There’s no-one at the ZPD better suited to be working at this counter, yet they put him in Records! Talk about mismanagement!”

“It’s not Bogo’s fault. The City Council forced him to do it.”

“I know, but do you think this makes it better? My own father wasn’t able to do anything about it. In the end, his inability is the reason for my reassignment. He knows it, he knows I hate it, and he hates that he had no choice.” She made a pause. “That sounds like he merely voted against Aries to make sure I have the job I like most.”

Wilde shrugged. “There are worse reasons for doing the right thing. Look at it this way: One of the mammals responsible for all those suspensions and reassignments is being arrested as we speak. And Bogo certainly won’t stop there. Give him one more week, and the City Council will be in shambles. And when we get there, the remaining councilmammals will certainly not oppose any more motions asking for predators to be reinstated. And as far as pride is concerned, if I were you, I would take pride in the fact that your father won’t be among those being arrested.”

“I know. My father would never have joined Bellwether and contributed to her crimes. He deeply believes in equality and personal freedom, a world without bias and prejudice.” She sighed. “I know he’s often accused of having become a councilmammal only to protect his construction company, but deep down inside, he wants to do good. It just happens that he doesn’t get the chance to do so very often.

“Even so, that’s something you can be proud of, a father who’s steadfast in his beliefs, who won’t give in to the majority if he thinks what the majority does is wrong. This city needs councilmammals like him.” He smiled. “And the ZPD needs the predator officers back, you need to be back at Records, and Clawhauser needs to be back here. And the way I see it, it won’t take much longer than one week before the City Council will give in and reverse their stupid decisions. We’ve given them enough evidence showing that predators are no threat. Upholding the suspensions will probably be the straw which breaks the camel’s back. The situation’s really tense at the moment. Did you know that a bunch of predators organized some sort of silent vigil in front of City Hall?”

“Yeah, my father told me yesterday. But it wasn’t predators?”

Wilde made a frown. “Not? When I walked past them, most of them seemed to be predators. There were some prey mammals among them, granted, but it seemed to be a predator thing to me.”

“Yes, but the vigil has been instigated and organized by Gazelle. She told the City Council, and thus my father, that she and her followers won’t leave until predators have the same rights as prey again. She even interrupted her tour to do it.”

“Wow! Maybe I should start listening to her music.”

“You didn’t so far?”

Wilde gave her a grin. “I’m more of a rock music fan.”

“You don’t know what you’re missing.” She returned the grin. “Tell me, how did you manage to make Fleecewood fess up?”

Wilde grinned. “Sorry, trade secret!”
Caballus guffawed. “Oh, come on!” It suddenly dawned on Caballus that she had never talked to someone she had just met in such a relaxed manner. She had never exactly been a mammal person, which was another reason why being stuck as dispatcher and receptionist had been such a bad idea. She simply preferred computers to mammals. Wilde had made her feel at ease in a way nobody before him had ever managed to do.

She had even admitted her misgivings towards all those mammals who had been responsible for her being stuck here to him. Something she hadn’t even told her boyfriend!

Bogo had told her that Wilde had been hugely successful at hustling mammals. She began to understand why.

“It was simple, actually,” Wilde said. “I merely showed Fleecewood just how deep the grave already was that he had dug for himself. He and his buddies pretty much destroyed the high esteem everybody held sheep in. Seeing that his father runs several companies relying heavily on trade with predators, seeing that there are a lot of predators in jail who won’t exactly like meeting one of the mammals responsible for mass harassment of predators, seeing that there’s no one in the whole wide world who’ll still support him - I guess the weight on his shoulders became a little bit too heavy to bear. I simply told him all those things.”

“That was it? It was that easy?”

Wilde shrugged. “To someone like me, it was, yes. The Chief and Major Mastiff could have done it just as well, but they didn’t even think of trying something like that.”

“So you really were a hustler.”

Wilde hesitated. “I was, yes. Still am, I think.”

Caballus shrugged. “So what? The Chief trusts you, and since I trust the Chief, I trust you.”

Wilde nodded. “Thank you very much.”

“Speaking of the Chief, he told me to tell you that you should go down and visit Clawhauser. He’s just sifting through the Blu-ray disc Pennington found in Ramington’s locker. They should both be down there. You know the way, I presume?”

“I do, yes. Oh, and by the way, if it’s any consolation, Chief Bogo told me that he would love to have Precinct One running like it did before, with Clawhauser sitting here and you being back with Records. I guess he will not rest idle until he has achieved this.”

“Yeah, I know, he told me already.” Caballus sighed. “I wish he succeeds. This sucks, badly.”

Wilde nodded. “I can tell. But just so you know, I think you’re doing a good job.”

“Why, thank you. Have a nice day!”

“You too, Officer.” Wilde turned away and sauntered through the lobby towards the staircase leading towards the basement.

“And you want to be a cop?” Caballus thought aloud and chuckled. “Criminals, beware! You won’t know what hit you!”

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Records Department, City Center, Zootopia
Francine Pennington looked up from the screen of the laptop to look at the mammal entering the room. “Ah, Nick. The Chief told me you’d be stopping by.”

“Hello, Trunks.” After having spent several hours within the confines of the interrogation room’s antechamber together, Pennington and Nick had quickly found out they liked each other, and by the end of the day they had been on first-name-terms - or in Nick’s case, on nickname-terms.

The fox looked around. “Where’s Clawhauser?”

Pennington sighed. “Ben is … indisposed.”

“Oh. Is he ill?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just take a look for yourself. But be warned: this is not for the faint of heart!”

Nick looked at the whiteboard which started showing the abandoned alleyway the lynx girl had been found in. “That bad?”

“You have no idea!” Pennington started the recording.

It didn’t take long for the scene to unfold itself. And the longer he looked at the screen, the harder it was for Nick to keep his composure, to maintain the façade of the “nothing-gets-to-me” person.

Seven mammals, all prey, were entering the frame, stalking a lynx girl. Nick spotted two zebras, three antelopes, one pig, and one sheep. Each and every one of them was armed with a baseball bat. The pig was the first one to strike, delivering a hefty blow to one of the girl’s legs. The lynx girl went down with a silent cry, and as if that was the initial spark, the other mammals joined in, starting to beat down on the girl. After one minute of rather feeble strikes, the hits increased in force, until the seven prey mammals pummeled on the girl without any shred of mercy whatsoever. The poor girl had no chance to defend herself, for whenever she tried to raise her arms or get out of the way, she was clobbered from a different direction, and with an ever increasing amount of force. The pig in particular was the epitome of savage cruelty. Every swing connected with massive force, cracking bones, opening wounds.

After about five more minutes of this atrocity, the lynx girl was hardly recognizable as such. She could just as well have been a bloodied, beaten-up gnu.

Or a pile of bloody rags for that matter.

But that was not what shocked Nick the most.

“Oh my God, these are … teenagers!”

“Nice, isn’t it?” Pennington said deadpan.

Finally, after the lynx girl had been beaten into a pile of blood and broken bones, the pig pulled a pair of pliers out of the pocket of his trousers. Approaching the bloody mess, he then proceeded to pull the girl’s teeth and claws out, slowly and methodically.

Nick was suddenly very glad for the lack of sound - the girl’s cries must have been absolutely heartrending.
“Sweet cheese and crackers!” he said soundlessly.

“So you’ve seen what Ramington’s been hiding,” he suddenly heard someone behind him say. He turned around to see Chief Bogo standing in the door. He had been so focused on the footage, he hadn’t even heard the cape buffalo enter the room.

Probably for the first time in years, Nick was at a complete loss for words. To him, words simply weren’t enough to describe what he had just witnessed.

He had seen a lot of atrocities over the course of the years, but nothing could have prepared him for this display of pure, unadulterated savagery.

“And to think this was done by some prey boys,” Bogo said. He turned to Pennington. “Any luck at identifying the mammals?”

“Not so far. Clawhauser tried it, but his stomach couldn’t handle it.”

“I understand. Most mammals won’t be able to stomach something like this.” He looked at Nick who was staring at the screen again. The pig was just in the process of pulling the last claws out.

“You okay?” Bogo asked. Nick gave no reply.

“Aries is in custody?” Pennington asked.

“He is. He flatly denied any involvement, of course, but we have the means to prove every single one of our accusations.” He sighed. “And another Mayor arrested. And I’m going to ask for arrest warrants for three more councilmammals. This is getting out of hoof!”

“You don’t know half of it,” Nick said suddenly. Even to him, his voice sounded strangely hollow.

“What do you mean?” Bogo said, turning towards Nick.

Nick walked over to the laptop, stopping the footage just as the pig’s face was fully visible. “Chief, meet Edward Swinton.”

“You know him?”

Nick nodded. With grim features, he added: “He’s the youngest son of our esteemed councilmammal, Tilda Swinton.”

Ouch! I see another councilmammal toppling very soon …

Yep, both councilmammal Cameron Caballus and his daughter Christine are my invention, which was sort of an accident. In my first draft, Caballus had no daughter, but then I realized I had assigned the name Caballus twice - once to the councilmammal mentioned in Chapter One, the one more interested in protecting his construction company than in doing his job as a councilmammal, and once to the horse working at reception. Upon finding out, I first thought of changing one of the names, but then it struck me that I could use this later. So here it is. (I should really work on my memory for names!)

Councilmammal Swinton was actually created by the guys at Disney. She was the Mayor of Zootopia in the infamous first draft concerned with collared predators and revolving around Nick needing to prove his innocence. The first name Tilda was created by Mead, one of the darn best graphic artists I’ve ever seen! His stories about Zootopia are simply awesome.
Check out his Tumblr account. For starters, I suggest reading his superb story “Judy is Dead,” which sounds awful, but is awesome! I simply borrowed the first name without asking for it. Please, Mead, if you read this, don’t be too mad at me!

I simply didn’t feel the need for more quotes in this chapter - it was tough enough to write as it is!

The next update might take me a bit longer. I’m a member of a non-profit organization in my hometown Brake, and tonight, we have our annual members’ meeting, and we’re going to elect a new board. Of which I am a member - secretary/recorder, to be precise. Which means I need to write the log and prepare it to be sent to every member. Doesn’t take that long to write it, still it’s something that needs doing. And unfortunately, it takes precedence over this story. But rest assured, you’ll hear from me pretty soon!

Thanks for reading, and please send me your comments!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Am I Evil?

Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

I’m back! And eager to get things going again! This chapter actually didn’t require a lot of overhauling, apart from a few bits and pieces.

I bow down in gratitude to all those who read this story so far, who sent their kudos and subscribed to it. On top of that, GhostWolf88, niraD, giftheck, thehellion115, Treerat, BrutusDeagon, J_Shute_Norway, tweiler18, and offender also commented on the last or previous chapters. Thanks a lot for that! Although it needs to be said that I’m still waiting for somebody to find more quotes ...

Apart from that, I don’t have all that much to say right now, so let’s hop straight in, shall we?

This chapter’s motto song has a little story behind it. After the previous chapter was published, a user named tweiler18 (yes, the very same one who sent a comment on my last chapter), asked me whether I like rock and heavy metal music, seeing that the last chapters motto song was taken out of a song by Metallica. After confirming this, I was asked if I like Skillet and Five Finger Death Punch. Well, I like Skillet alright, but back then, I hadn’t even heard the other band’s name before. So I checked them out. And you should, too, because they’re AWESOME! tweiler18 had even pointed out a certain song to me, and after listening to it, it was clear to me that this had to be the next chapter’s motto song. And through it, I also salute all those great human beings who gave us great music, only to leave us much too soon. Watch the song’s video on YouTube (just enter “Five Finger Death Punch I Apologize”), and you know what made me write this. Thanks a lot, tweiler18, for sharing this with me!

The chapter’s title itself is taken from the song of the same name, written by Sean Harris and Brian Tatler, first published by Diamond Head in 1980, on their album “Lightning to the Nations,” Happy Face Records, but popularized by Metallica, released on the B-side of their single “Creeping Death,” published in 1984 by Elektra/Megaforce.

Chapter Nine

Am I Evil?

All these times I simply stepped aside. I watched but never really listened as the whole world passed me by.


ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Office of the Chief of Police, City Center, Zootopia

With a crackle, the intercom came to life. “Chief Bogo?”
Bogo pressed the appropriate button. “What is it?”

“Excuse me, sir,” Officer Caballus said haltingly, “but Sergeant Higgins has returned.”

“With the suspect, I presume.”

“Correct.”

“Which interrogation room?”

“One.” She started saying something else, but stopped again, hesitating audibly.

Bogo rolled his eyes. “What is it, Officer?”

“Well, erm, Sergeant Higgins asked for a few minutes of your time, sir.”

“Tell him to wait. The interrogation takes precedence.”

“Er, well, he asked for a few minutes of your time before the interrogation, sir.”

“He did? Did he tell you why?”

“Uhm, yes, he did, but I think he should tell you himself”

Bogo made a frown. “Where is he?”

“He’s waiting down here with me.”

“I’m on my way.”

It took Bogo less than a minute to reach the receptionist’s desk. Higgins was standing in front of it, an unusually grave expression on his face. Without preamble, Bogo said: “Spill it, Higgins!”

Higgins straightened himself. “Sir, during the arrest, several things happened that you should know before you go down there.”

“Did you face any problems?”

“No, sir, none at all. Young Mr. Swinton didn’t try to resist arrest. That’s not what I wanted to talk to you about. You see, one of the tables in the classroom I found him in was empty, being converted into some sort of shrine.”

Bogo inhaled with a hiss. “Don’t tell me she was his classmate.”

“She was. And that’s not all. You know my eyesight’s not the best to begin with, but I could swear that among the other children, there were two zebras, three antelopes, and one sheep. And I guess, if we compare the footage with their faces …”

Bogo narrowed his gaze. “Are you trying to tell me that they ganged up to kill their own classmate?” His voice was barely more than a whisper, yet it held all the menace in the world.

Despite knowing that the Chief’s fury wasn’t directed at him, Higgins flinched, probably involuntarily. “It certainly seems that way, sir.”

Bogo involuntarily clenched his hooves. “Anything else?”

“Yes. I tried to keep the arrest low-key, as per your orders. I asked Mr. Swinton to simply follow
me outside, so his classmates wouldn’t be forced to hear the whole gruesome story. However, he had no qualms to admit to killing Ms. Pardinus, or, as he called her, the ‘filthy pred.’ His words, not mine.”

“He admitted to it?”

“He did.”

“In front of witnesses?”

“In front of his whole class, yes. His teacher, one Mr. Tantor, told me that he was willing to give a witness statement.”

“You have his phone number and address?”

“Of course.”

“Call him. Let him give that statement. Might save us a lot of trouble.” Bogo turned towards Caballus, who had followed their exchange with all signs of anxiety. “Call Major Mastiff, tell him …”

“He’s already down there,” Higgins interrupted him quietly. “He was waiting for my return here and took the boy to the interrogation room at once.”

Bogo nodded. “Carry on!” He turned on his heel and stormed towards the set of stairs leading to the basement. He was walking fast, with purpose. To the casual observer, he looked ever bit like a hurricane, threatening to unleash hell and havoc on the unfortunate mammal in his path of utter destruction.

Upon reaching the interrogation room’s antechamber, the door to the interrogation room proper opened, and Mastiff emerged, together with Officer Pennington. Bogo looked at them with a frown. Even at the best of times, Mastiff’s scarred face was difficult to read, so Bogo had gotten used to not being able to tell what he was thinking. Now, however, his facial expression left no room for any misconception:

Adimar Mastiff was shocked beyond all measure.

And Pennington looked, if indeed such a thing was possible, even worse.

“Well?” Bogo asked, looking at Mastiff. “Having difficulty getting him to talk?”

Mastiff seemed to ignore him. Looking at Pennington, he said in a rather faint voice: “Did this really happen, Francine? I didn’t, by any chance, mishear something?”

Pennington shook her head so violently that her trunk started swinging, narrowly missing the much smaller Mastiff. “I’m afraid you heard it quite well, Adimar. I heard it, too.”

“What’s wrong?” Bogo demanded to know. “Does he talk?”

Mastiff took a deep breath. “He does. Oh yes, he does!”

“Did he give a statement? Without a lawyer? There is no lawyer here yet, right?”

“Right on all accounts, Adrian.”

“He gave a statement without …”
Adimar raised his paw, silencing his superior. “Believe me, I tried to Mirandize him no less than three times. It seems like he doesn’t care.”

“You have a confession?”

Mastiff snorted. “Not only did he give a full confession, he literally made a boast of the murder. He told me, and I quote: ‘The stinking pred simply got what she deserved.’ And he even had the nerve to add: ‘You’re next.’”

Bogo’s eyes narrowed. No wonder Mastiff was looking so shocked. Having been told by an adolescent that he was the next in line to be killed, that would have shocked even the most hardened, most experienced veterans. Not out of fear, simply out of incredulity. “He did really say this?”

“He did. And before you ask, we recorded all of this. Plus Francine was present, as was Brian McHorn. He’s currently standing guard over the boy.”

“Let me get this straight. Higgins arrested him and brought him here, you started telling him his rights, he began a confession without waiting for legal counsel, he admitted to the crime and added more crimes to his name. Correct so far?”

“Couldn’t have put it better myself.” Mastiff took a deep breath. “And what do we do now?”

Pennington piped in: “Just how deep does this conspiracy run? Fleecewood mentioned three more councilmammals, among other mammals. Is this really all of them? Or are there more culprits we don’t know about yet?”

For a few seconds, Bogo was at a loss for words. It took him quite some effort to finally say: “Do you think that, if there still are mammals connected to the conspiracy that we haven’t been able to find yet, that he’s one of them? Or at least knows enough about it to say stuff like that?”

Pennington shook her head at once, while Mastiff considered the question for a moment. The wolf finally said: “I don’t think so. Would you really entrust a 15-year-old kid with knowledge of something very illegal?”

Bogo sucked in a sharp breath. “He’s just 15?”

“He turned 15 little more than a month ago.”

Pennington said: “I guess he’s still full of that ‘predators are dangerous’ crap. The stuff he says, it sounds just like the baloney all those anti-pred idiots were spouting up until a few days ago.”

Mastiff nodded. “Makes sense. If he’s into that stuff, threatening me is little more than consequential.”

Bogo eyed Mastiff sharply. “What do you think? Does he really believe in what he says?”

“Difficult to say. When I was 15, my head was still up in the clouds. My knowledge of the world at large, especially its inner workings, was negligible at best.”

“In other words, we must ask ourselves where his, ahem, ‘knowledge’ comes from.” Bogo thought he knew the answer, but he wanted to hear confirmation nonetheless.

“Oh, that’s easy.” Pennington said. “Probably his mother. She’s always been a staunch supporter of Bellwether. Nick, ehm, Mr. Wilde told me earlier that they played tennis together.”
Bogo nodded. “That’s what I thought. Do you think it would be better to leave the boy be and concentrate on his dear mother?”

“I wouldn’t necessarily leave the boy be, but it certainly won’t do any harm to ask her about it,” Mastiff said.

Bogo turned towards Pennington. “Officer, please go up to Clawhau… to Caballus and tell her to give Councilmammal Swinton a call.”

“Of course, sir.” Pennington turned and left.

“She’s the Acting Mayor now,” Mastiff said softly while watching Pennington leave.

Bogo groaned. “You gotta be kidding me!”

“I’m not, believe me. She was the fourth in line after Lionheart, Bellwether, and Aries.”

“Great! Who’s next? Hopps was so right, we do run through those Mayors at an alarming rate!”

“Not our fault, Adrian. And to answer your question, with both Pardalis and Murinus being forced out of office, the next in line seems to be Cameron Caballus.”

“Caballus? The father of Officer Caballus?” Bogo snorted. “Fantastic!”

Mastiff made a frown. “What’s wrong with him?”

“A few days ago, after we arrested Bellwether, I was discussing a possible successor for her with Wilde. He told me that all Caballus was interested in was protecting his construction company.” Upon seeing the surprise on Mastiff’s face, he quickly added: “Given the fact that Wilde seems to be most knowledgeable when it comes to other mammals, and councilmammals in particular, I tend to believe him.”

“That’s … not good.”

Bogo gave a sigh. “At least Caballus isn’t likely to put more spokes into our wheels.”

“Are you sure?”

“That’s what his daughter told me. He was voting against the motion of upholding the suspensions of our predator officers, but was outvoted.”

Suddenly, Mastiff gave his famous, lopsided grin. “Aren’t we getting a little ahead of ourselves here? Swinton’s still in office.”

“You don’t think she’ll abdicate?”

The grin vanished. “No idea. She’s done nothing wrong, strictly speaking. Her son’s the culprit, not her. I guess it depends on her willingness to take responsibility, and I’m afraid I don’t know her well enough to really be able to tell what she might do.”

“Wasn’t she playing tennis in her youth?”

“Oh, yes, she was. She’s still the only mammal on this planet who won the Golden Slam, the four major tennis tournaments plus the gold medal at the Zoolympic Games, in one year. And after her career, she used her popularity to become a politician.” Mastiff gave a pause. “My wife’s a huge fan of hers. Swinton was the reason why Carol picked up tennis as a hobby.”
“Ah. Are you a fan of hers, too?”

Mastiff chuckled. “Apart from the fact that I don’t like and therefore don’t play tennis, you know what Ayrton Hyenna said, Adrian? ‘I have no idols. I admire work, dedication, and competence.’”

Bogo snorted. “After I became Chief, I suddenly found myself in the company of the high and mighty. All those banquets and balls - I must have shaken the hooves and paws of virtually every celebrity Zootopia has to offer. You know what I found out? It simply makes no sense to have idols. Get to know some of those mammals worshipped by others as their idols, and you learn pretty quickly that they’re not the kind of guys you want to have as role models.”

“Is it really that …” Mastiff made a frown and looked past Bogo.

Bogo turned around to look in the same direction, towards the staircase. “What’s wrong?”

“Someone’s coming. Sounds like small hooves.”

Bogo did hear nothing, but that was hardly surprising. The sensory equipment of wolves was vastly superior to that of a cape buffalo. “Small hooves?”

“Yes. Much smaller than yours, and in quite a hurry at that. If I might haphazard a guess here, it seems our dear Acting Mayor got here before Francine or Caballus could give her a call.”

A few seconds later, Mastiff’s assessment was proven to be accurate, when a female pig wearing an elegant pants suit came down the stairs, taking the steps two at a time, an impressive feat for the rather small mammal. Despite the fact that Swinton’s career as a professional tennis player had ended some twenty years ago, her build was still slim and athletic, and there was a spring in her step which probably was the envy of mammals much younger than her. Her face, however, was all but pleasant to the eye. Not because she was ugly - Bogo had to admit to himself that Tilda Swinton was quite an attractive woman, for a sow -, but because she had schooled her facial features into a rather ugly scowl.

“Chief Bogo!” Her voice was the equivalent of her facial expression, harsh and incisive. “I received a phone call from my son’s high school. His homeroom teacher told me he was arrested, but he didn’t tell me why. Care to explain?”

Looking down at her, Bogo took a deep breath, bracing himself for the inevitable. Of all the different aspects of his job, talking to the relatives of criminals, most of whom had been completely unaware of the perpetrated crimes, was probably his least favorite part. Yet it had to be done. “Yes, Mrs. Swinton, your son was arrested, because we have reason to believe that he has committed a capital offense.”

“What?”

“Murder.”

“Murder!?” Swinton sounded absolutely flabbergasted. “You cannot possibly be serious, Bogo! My son’s no murderer!”

Bogo wanted to reply to that, but Mastiff beat him to it. Without looking at her, and with a strangely strained voice, he said: “Sorry, ma’am, but he is. We caught the crime on camera, and your son even admitted to the murder.”

“What?”
Finally, Mastiff looked up, locking eyes with Swinton. “Your son is responsible for the death of a young lynx girl, whether you like it or not.”

Bogo felt a peculiar chill creeping up his back. He had known Adimar Mastiff for decades, but he had rarely seen him in a mood like this. Whatever had happened during the interrogation of young Edward Swinton, it had shaken the old wolf to the core, and it showed in his mannerism. The humble, benevolent, funny, nice, old “Uncle Massie,” as he was usually and affectionately called by their colleagues when they were among themselves, had taken a step back. The mammal standing in front of Swinton now, it was a mammal Bogo hadn’t gotten to see in more than ten years.

Mastiff was seriously angry.

And a seriously angry Mastiff was always a threat, and a huge threat at that.

Bogo just hoped for the sake of Swinton that she was able to see it, too.

“You must be mistaken,” Swinton said in a tone of superior disdain.

She obviously wasn’t.

“We are not mistaken,” Mastiff said. His voice still was supremely calm, the remainder of him was all but calm. Bogo noted with dismay that Mastiff’s paws had started shaking at some point.

“Seven different officers saw the footage. Your son has been identified with certainty by a civilian, an informant who knows Zootopia and its main citizens like the back of his paw. And like I said before, your son admitted to the crime.”

Swinton snorted. “What is this? A smear campaign to paint my name black? Do you …”

That was as far as she got.

With surprising swiftness, given his age, Mastiff grabbed Swinton by both arms, lifting her effortlessly and slamming her against the wall. Swinton gasped, partly because the impact had forced the air out of her lungs, partly because she found herself eye to eye with a wolf.

With a wolf who was almost apoplectic with rage.

“Now listen to me, Swinton, and listen closely.” He was speaking slowly, as if it took him some effort to press the words out between his teeth. “Your son is a murderer. He decided to end the existence of another mammal, a young lynx girl who, as far as we know, would never have harmed a fly. He chose to kill her, just because she was a predator, or, as he put it, a ‘no-good, stinkin’, filthy pred.’ She is gone! She is dead! It is over!”

He made a pause, opening his jaws wide, exposing his impressive fangs.

And then he screamed.

“AND ALL YOU CARE ABOUT IS YOUR GODDAMN CAREER???”

Bogo placed his hoof on Mastiff’s shoulder, in an attempt to calm his friend down. “Adimar, please, this isn’t helping!”

Mastiff ignored him. “I’m really interested in learning whom he got the idea from. Why does your son believe that predators are only good for being killed? He had the audacity to threaten ME, of all mammals! In the presence of other officers who can testify!”
He let go of Swinton, and she fell to the ground, easily managing to break her fall. Staring up at him with a look of utter disbelief, her mouth opened and closed several times, but no words were forthcoming.

“Did you tell him?” Mastiff asked. Bogo noticed with relief that the worst of his anger seemed to have ebbed away. “Did you tell him that predators are no good? Was it you who gave him the idea that killing predators for fun is a great pastime?”

“I … I never …” Swinton was at a visible loss for words.

“You didn’t? Then who did? Didn’t you care about your son’s education and upbringing enough to prevent something like this?”

Bogo looked at Mastiff with a frown. During his long career, he had met thousands of criminals or relatives of criminals, and given the fact that Mastiff had joined the force ten years before Bogo had, his numbers certainly put Bogo’s to shame. He had seen Mastiff arrest the most hardened of criminals without slowing down in his stride.

Yes, what the teenagers had done to the lynx girl was despicable, an abomination. Yet, as a crime, it was commonplace, a simple and clear-cut murder case out of base motives. Bogo had seen countless similar cases over the course of the years. It certainly was the same with Mastiff.

Why was he reacting this strongly over such an ordinary murder case?

He couldn’t shake the feeling that there was more to this story than what met the eye.

Swinton looked up at Mastiff, taking a deep breath. “Where is he? May I see him?”

Bogo shook his head. “I’m sorry, ma’am, but that is out of the …”

Mastiff interrupted him rudely. “Certainly, Mrs. Swinton. Please follow me!”

Bogo stared at Mastiff. “What did you just say?”

“I said that she is welcome to visit her son any time she wants.” He looked up, no, he glared at Bogo, as if daring him to contradict him.

“That is against regulation!”

Mastiff’s voice betrayed his fury, but his words were very matter-of-factly: “You can lecture me on regulations all you like, Chief. I’m saying that she needs to see her son, and I honestly don’t give a damn if regulations tell me it’s not okay, sir!” He put extra emphasis on the last word.

Bogo looked at Swinton. “Would you please excuse us for a second?” Swinton nodded, and Bogo grabbed Mastiff by his arm and pulled him towards a corner in the corridor, not too gently.

Once they were out of earshot, he turned Mastiff towards himself. “Okay, Adimar, you wanna fill me in? What’s going on? Why are you behaving like a lunatic? Why did you manhandle a councilmammal, the Acting Mayor even? You know that I should suspend you from office for that one alone?”

Mastiff took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. “What should I have done? She thought it was little more than an attempt to besmirch her good name. I needed to make her see sense. I needed to make it absolutely clear to her just how serious this one is. Yeah, maybe I overdid it, but to be honest, I would be surprised if she presses charges against me. Right now, she’s shocked, and
that’s exactly what I wanted her to be. Because, well, you haven’t been in there. You haven’t heard that this boy doesn’t listen to reason. You haven’t heard that he seems to think that murdering another mammal is perfectly fine, as long as the mammal in question is a predator. It’s as if he’s trapped in his own little world, completely oblivious to the damage he caused. We need to get him out of there, and fast! He needs to tell us what really happened. He needs to give us a lot of names. There are six more murderers on the loose, and we need to catch them, like, yesterday! If they’re all as delusional as he is, we have a serious problem on our paws. Yes, I know Higgins believes they’re in his class, but we need more than the suspicions of a hippo with bad eyesight. He hasn’t cooperated with us at all so far, taking all the blame himself, implying that it was him, and him alone, who killed the girl. We know it isn’t true, but we need the names of his accomplices. We can’t arrest them otherwise. Every judge would read us the riot act, if we arrest some youngsters because of some suspicions we have.”

He said all of this very fast.

Bogo looked down at him with surprise. The fury that Mastiff had shown only seconds earlier had evaporated completely. He looked calm and composed, as usual. Something clicked within him.
“Are you trying to tell me that this was just a ruse?”

Mastiff gave him a grin. “Took you long enough to recognize it as such.”

Bogo groaned. “No wonder I’ve never been able to beat you at poker.”

“That’s because you’re so easy to manipulate, Adrian.” Mastiff reached up and gave him a pat on the shoulder. “And we all love you for it.”

Bogo allowed himself a small grin. “I seem to be surrounded by tricksters. First Wilde, now you …”

“You’d be well-advised to take a leaf out of Wilde’s book every now and then. Being nice and predictable, always following the rules, will only get you so far.”

“So it would seem. You think his mother will be able to get through to him?”

“I’m counting on it. He seems to think that his mother, the fact that she’s a councilmammal, will protect him from any sort of prosecution. At least that’s what I gather from the things he said.”

“Just how delusional is this boy?”

“You have no idea.”

Bogo nodded. “Very well, we’ll do this your way.” He held up his hoof.

Mastiff gave him a paw-bump immediately. “Just like old times, AJ.”

“Just like old times.”

They returned to Swinton. Bogo pointed towards the door leading into the interrogation room while looking down at her. “Alright, I’ve had my mind changed for me. Please follow us, Mrs. Swinton.” Without further ado, he turned towards the interrogation room and opened the door. Waiting in the doorway, he allowed both Swinton and Mastiff to enter the room before entering it himself.

The scene which presented itself to him was deceptively innocuous. Innocuous, because a young pig was sitting at the table, obviously playing a game on his smartphone that nobody seemed to
have confiscated. Deceptive, because there was no mistaking the righteous fury emanating from the mammal standing guard over him. Brian McHorn looked more than willing to gore him with his massive horn. It seemed like some of the things the young pig had said to the rhino didn’t sit too well with the latter.

Bogo looked at McHorn. Best to remove him from the room now. “Officer, would you please leave us for the moment? Wait outside until I call you again!”

“Yes, sir!” McHorn left the room like a mammal on a warpath.

The young pig didn’t even lift his gaze from the smartphone. It was obvious that Edward Swinton wasn’t the least bit interested in the mammals who had just entered the room. It was only after his mother cleared her throat that he finally looked up. “Mom! Finally! Can you tell these officers that …”

He broke off when looking at her, taking in her posture, her facial expression. His own face fell. “Mom?” In an instant, all the confidence he had displayed vanished completely.

Bogo couldn’t blame him. If Swinton had been his mother, he would have peed his pants!

Swinton simply stared at her son without saying anything, without moving a muscle. Her posture radiated fury, disgust, disappointment.

“Mom?” Edward asked again.

“Is it true, Edward?” she finally said with a surprisingly calm voice.

“What?”

“Is it true what these officers tell me? Did you really murder another mammal?” Her tone was still calm, but Bogo noticed a tiny edge creeping into her voice.

Edward shrugged and looked down at his smartphone again. “What if I did?”

Bogo looked down at Swinton, trying to gauge her reaction.

And then she wasn’t there anymore.

It all happened in less than two seconds. Three quick steps, the sound of a smartphone disintegrating against a wall, and a sudden yelp of pain.

Edward looked at his mother with a look of incredulity, his own hoof against his cheek. She had obviously delivered a slap to his face so fierce, it had cut his skin. Blood was oozing down his face, dripping onto the collar of his shirt. “Mom!” he exclaimed.

She stood in front of him, arms akimbo, staring at him with a look of utter disdain. “Please tell me this isn’t true! Edward, please!”

Edward’s short and sparse hair wasn’t able to hide his shock; he blanched visibly. Whatever reaction he had expected, this one hadn’t been among them.

And then, suddenly, his anger flared. “So what? Karen’s just a no-good, filthy …”


“Uh, yeah.”
“You are the guy who killed the daughter of Wesley Pardinus?”

Edward folded his arms. “What if I did?”

Swinton turned away, looking down on the ground. A few seconds later, Bogo was surprised to hear her start to snivel. “Why? Why, Edward? Why did you kill her?”

Edward stared at her, obviously flabbergasted. “What do you mean? Wasn’t that what you and the other councilmammals used to say in the last few weeks? Predators are dangerous? Predators need to be removed from Zootopia? Well, we removed Karen, and so …”

Swinton whirled around. “YOU REMOVED HER???” she shrieked. “You KILLED her! You are a MURDERER.” She made a pause, and all strength seemed to leave her. “I am the mother of a murderer!”

“Well, it was just a filthy predator!”

Without another word, Swinton walked towards the door.

“Hey, Mom,” Edward shouted. “Don’t leave me hanging here! Get me …”

She turned around slowly, as if it was costing her a lot of effort, eyeing her son with a look of contempt on her face. “Do you really think I can fix this?”

Edward flinched. “But …”

“And even if I could, do you really think I would want to fix this?”

“But … I’m your son!”

Swinton turned around again. “I have no son. Not anymore.” She left the room, leaving her son, and both policemammals, absolutely stunned.

“You stay here!” Bogo said to Mastiff.

“Gladly!” Mastiff countered grimly and walked over to the table.

Leaving the interrogation room, Bogo found Swinton sitting on the floor, slumped against a wall. Tears were running down her face, ruining her make-up. McHorn was standing next to her, and it was obvious that he had no idea how to deal with the situation. Following a quick gesture by Bogo, he returned into the interrogation room while Bogo knelt down beside Swinton. “Are you okay?” he asked gently.

“No. And I never will be again.” Her voice sounded just as miserable as her countenance suggested. “It’s my fault, and mine alone!”

“It was his decision.”

“You don’t understand. Deep down inside, I knew Bellwether was a lunatic, but I supported her. Still did, even after you arrested her.” She looked at the door behind which her son was sitting. “He obviously thought he’d help me. He killed my own goddaughter to help me.”

Bogo inhaled sharply. “Your goddaughter?”

She nodded. “Wesley was one of my mixed double partners, back in the days. We won several tournaments together. He named me his daughter’s godmother.” She shook her head. “My own son
took the life of the daughter of one of my oldest friends.”

“You played together with a predator?”

“I did, several in fact. I never had a problem with predators. But Bellwether told everyone that predators were a threat, and for a while, I believed her, going against my own convictions.”

“You weren’t the only one she hoodwinked. She had played me for a sucker, too.”

“It’s my own fault. It’s my fault that Karen’s dead.”

“You didn’t kill her.”

“I might as well.” Swinton placed her head against the wall. “He grew up so quickly! I was always away from home, even after the end of my career, playing senior tournaments, touring for sponsors, doing charity work. I was never there. Whenever I came back home, he had always grown by so much.” She sighed. “And then I ran for office. I was walking from door to door, trying to get the votes, trying to become a councilmammal. Again, I was never home. And now my son’s almost a grown-up, and I don’t recognize him anymore.”

She got up with surprising swiftness, lunging into her purse to produce a cell phone. Punching a button, she waited for a few seconds before saying: “Sammy, it’s me, Tilda. Listen, my son was arrested. Could you please come to Precinct One at once? You need to defend him.” She waited for a reply. “The charges? He’s a murderer.” Another pause. “Yes, a murderer. He killed a young lynx girl, and he obviously did it in cold blood.” Yet another pause. “I don’t care! The case seems to be waterproof, and as far as I’m concerned, Edward can rot in prison! What he has done, it’s unforgivable!” She listened again. “That goes without saying. Just do your job. Thanks! I owe you one.” She ended the call. “My lawyer’s on his way here. I trust you to do what’s necessary, Chief.”

Bogo nodded gravely. “I will.”

Swinton closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. “What, exactly, has happened? I’m going to meet Wesley in two days, at Karen’s funeral. I need to go there, I can’t go into hiding. I need to know what happened.”

“You knew about her death?”

“Of course! Wesley told me himself, seeing that I am - was - her godmother. I just didn’t know that she had died because my own flesh and blood had decided to end her existence. And Wesley doesn’t know either. I guess I need to tell him personally, before he learns it by reading tomorrow’s newspaper.” She shuddered. “I have no idea what to tell him.”

Boge gave her a quick summary of the contents of the surveillance footage. “From the looks of it, it seems that your son was the ringleader of the little gang. He was the first to strike. He was the one with the pliers. The other mammals involved looked like they were acting under his command.”

Swinton nodded, closing her eyes again. “Very astute observation, Chief. Those would be the Black Seven, I presume.”

“The Black Seven?”

Swinton shrugged. “A bunch of kids Edward met in Elementary School. They’ve been together ever since. In most cases, they’re so close, you can’t separate them with a stick. At one point, they started referring to themselves only as the Black Seven, and somehow the name stuck. I know each
and every one of them personally. They’ve been over at our house countless times. I’m on friendly terms with all their parents.”

“Could you give us their names?”

“Certainly.” She took her cell phone out of her purse again. “I’m going to send you a message containing the names, okay? What’s your phone number?”

Bogo rattled down his cell phone number while she was typing on her phone with frantic speed. Little more than one minute later, he received the promised text message. Bogo read the names and nodded. “Thank you for your assistance, Mrs. Swinton.”

She shrugged while turning towards the staircase. “Least I could do.”

“What are you going to do now?”

Swinton stopped and looked over her shoulder. “What do you think?” With that, she climbed the stairs.

Bogo looked down at the list of names again. None of the names did ring a bell, but that wasn’t saying much. It was some sort of relief for him that none of the mammals seemed to be connected to any other councilmammals.

The City Council’s shape already was bad enough as it was.

The door behind Bogo opened, and he turned around to see Mastiff emerge, a look of grim satisfaction on his features. “Did he talk?” Bogo asked.

“We have the names,” Mastiff said.

Bogo held up his phone, presenting the list to him. “Are these the ones he’s given?”

Mastiff squinted his one remaining eye while looking at the phone. “Did she tell you?”

Bogo nodded. “He formed a small gang years ago. Swinton called them the Black Seven. Sounds like the typical bunch of rambunctious kids ganging up to molest the weak and the feeble. She knows all of them since they went to Elementary School together.”

Mastiff looked over his shoulder at the door. “Quite the reaction she showed in there.”

Bogo sighed. “How would you react if your own son told you he killed the child of one of your best friends?”

Mastiff’s head whipped around again. “Say again!”

“Wesley Pardinus, Karen’s father, was one of her tennis partners years ago. Swinton was Karen’s godmother.”

“Sweet mother of mercy!”

Austin J. Robin Plaza, In Front of City Hall, City Center, Zootopia

Tensions between prey and predators may have vanished almost completely, but the wounds caused by the civil unrest would still take months, if not years, to fully heal. Zootopia was still in wild disarray. This was not helped by the fact that for the last three days, the City Council had
seemed to be unable to come to any decision which could help restore order within the metropolis. The only decision the councilmammals had made had been the outright refusal to rescind any new laws set in motion by Bellwether which had done nothing but oppress predators. Needless to say, this only decision hadn’t sat too well with the predators living in Zootopia. And now that another one of the councilmammals, the Acting Mayor even, had been revealed as having been in cahoots with Bellwether and responsible for atrocious attacks on predators, the complete chaos around the City Council was obvious to everyone in Zootopia, prey and predator alike. And most mammals hated the City Council for this, prey and predator alike.

Three arrested Mayors. Three more councilmammals under close investigation by the ZPD.

It was easy to come to the conclusion that the City Council was in an even worse shape than the city itself.

And at no place this could have been more evident than on the plaza in front of City Hall.

The place was filled completely to capacity. Tens of thousands of mammals were standing around, sitting on the floor or in folding chairs they had brought for the occasion. Nick Wilde spotted a few prey mammals, but the vast majority consisted of predators. And every species living in Zootopia seemed to be present. Nick saw countless felines, countless wolves, countless smaller predators, but he also saw an eclectic assortment of elephants, rhinos, hippos, buffaloes, rabbits, antelopes, mice, gerbils, squirrels …

Never before had Zootopia seen such a display of unity across the species.

Because all these mammals wanted was peace.

“All we are saying is give peace a chance!”

Nick had no idea who had started singing the song, but it had spread, and now most mammals around him were joining in, singing the verse over and over again.

And indeed, peace seemed to be all around him.

For the first time in years, Nick felt completely safe. Nobody, neither prey nor predator, had looked at him in the usual, dismissive way, disregarding him as a sneaky, untrustworthy mammal. To the contrary - he had been hugged by complete strangers, some had offered him tea from a thermos, and when one rather enthusiastic ocelot indentified him as the guy responsible for solving the Savage Predators case, the mammals in his vicinity felt obliged to thank him in person. Probably for the first time in his entire life, Nick felt respected, even liked.

I could get used to this, he thought.

Strangely, however, the feeling of peace and quiet around him wasn’t really reaching him. As a matter of fact, he had rarely felt less at peace with himself and the world as he did at that precise moment.

In almost all other situations, the con-mammal he was would have been able to hide his discomfort from the world with ease. There was, however, one mammal he would never have been able to fool.

“What’s eating at you, whelp?” Finnick asked.

Nick looked down at Finnick and sighed. There were a lot of things bothering him right now, and most of them revolved around the tiny fennec fox.
Without Finnick, Nick would never have survived.

With unbelievable naivety, Nick had left his home, left his mother, fully convinced that with his blossoming hustling skills, becoming a most successful hustler would be piece of cake.

Only to find out, in the hardest way imaginable, that surviving as a hustler on the streets of Zootopia was a whole different ball game. His scams at school, cheating young mammals, gullible kits and cubs, that was child’s play, literally. However, his rather simple attempts at hustling, while highly effective against children, completely failed to deliver against adults.

After four weeks of numerous attempts at hustling, with his earnings dwindling fast, he was facing the very possible prospect of dying from starvation.

Which was when Finnick found him by accident, hungry beyond belief, soaking wet from constant rain, freezing, utterly miserable. He took him in, gave him shelter, a bed, crust of bread and a job of sorts. They’d been together ever since, they’d worked together ever since, and they’d become as close as brothers.

Nick closed his eyes and sighed. The moment he deprived himself of any visual input, the images he’d seen when watching the video footage of the attack on the lynx occupied his thoughts completely. “Just this morning, I’ve seen something I’d rather forget, Fin.”

He opened his eyes and looked down at his diminutive partner. Contrary to his usual approach to things, Finnick was clad in casual clothing, not his usual romper suit they used when hustling mammals. Not that he hadn’t wanted to exploit the incredible daftness of most mammals around him - it was just that he had known with certainty that Nick wouldn’t want to be involved in stuff like that right now.

There was a certain rift between the two friends, a rift that nothing would be able to fix.

Finnick was a hustler and would, in all probability, always be.

Nick was on his way to become a fine upstanding citizen. He had applied for the ZPA, and although he still had his doubts about a possible admission, he might even become a cop.

They might at one point even become enemies.

How do you fix stuff like that?

Finnick gave a small chuckle. “The mighty Nick Wilde, shaken by something he’s seen? Must have been one hell of a picture.”

Nick shook his head. “Not a picture, video footage. Footage showing a band of teenage prey mammals clubbing a young lynx to death.”

Finnick’s smile vanished in an instant. “What?”

“You heard me. An unprovoked attack, just like the one those idiots from Aries Security performed on the two of us.”

Finnick was visibly aghast. “Teenagers?”

“Yup. They pummeled the poor girl with baseball bats, and when she was barely even recognizable as a mammal, one of the culprits proceeded to pull her teeth and claws out while she was still conscious.” Nick sighed again. “She died yesterday. And given the fact that she was maimed
Finnick opened and closed his mouth without saying anything. Finally, after almost one minute of silence, he asked: “Does the fuzz know who did it?” There was a distinct growl in his voice, a growl betraying his enormous fury.

“They do, at least they know one of them.”

“Who is it?” Finnick’s paw opened and closed, seemingly on its own account. He was probably longing for his baseball bat.

Nick raised an eyebrow. “What? You want to invoke mob law?”

“The thought has crossed my mind,” Finnick hissed.

Nick forced his features into a smile. “Relax, Finnick. Let the cops do their jobs.”

Finnick gave a snort. “Ah, I forgot you’re all chummy with the fuzz now.”

Nick looked down at his friend, not knowing what to say.

“It’s true, what the bunny said? You’re going to the police academy?” Finnick asked.

“Well, yes, I have applied, but as far as the question of going there is concerned …”

Finnick liked at him with a frown. “What do you mean?”

“I mean the cops know my past as a hustler. Their chief showed me a file this big,” Nick indicated a sizable gap with two digits, “containing a rather thorough account of most of my accomplishments.”

“So what? They could pardon you.”

“They certainly could, and the guys at the academy themselves won’t cause much of a problem. The problem is, every police officer is appointed by the City Council, and do you really think out current administration is likely to grant pardon to a hustler, a fox even? I seriously doubt it.”

“Come on! You’re a fucking hero, you’re everybody’s darling!”

“Some might disagree, and you know …”

Suddenly he heard someone call out his name. A female voice.

Finnick had heard it, too - his head was turning in all directions. “Uh oh!”

Nick had spotted a rather peculiar-looking mammal, a few yards to his left. It probably was the tallest rabbit he’d ever seen. The buck’s fur was a light brown, with no particular distinguishing features, apart from his height. He looked not even remotely related to the only other bunny he knew.

But it was the very same other rabbit that he was pushing around in a wheelchair.

“Nick!” Judy Hopps beamed at the fox. She was sitting in a comically large wheelchair, her bandaged leg prone on the adjustable paw rest.

Nick gave her a grin. “Carrots! How nice of you to stop by!”
“And Finnick, too! Hello!”

Finnick looked at her as if he’d seen a ghost. “Hello, Officer Toot-Toot.” He looked up at Nick. “Nicky, I gotta go. See ya!” Without any further comment, the fennec fox turned around and vanished in the crowd.

Nick looked after his friend with a frown. It was quite normal for Finnick to prefer being on his own over mixing with other mammals, but this was taking things to the extreme. It was quite obvious that he didn’t like Judy all that much - probably because she was a cop. Probably because she was the cop who’d convinced Nick to apply for the ZPA.

It suddenly occurred to Nick that this might very well have been the last time he’d seen his old friend.

Especially if, by some freak turn of events, he would really end up being a cop.

Turning around again, Nick saw Judy look up at the buck pushing her around. “Billy, this is Nick Wilde, the fox who helped me solve those cases.”

The buck grinned. “You don’t say.” He offered his paw for Nick to shake. “William Hopps, although everybody calls me Billy. Judy’s one of my countless sisters.”

Nick returned the pawshake, trying his hardest not to wince. His paw felt like it had accidentally caught in a door. “Ah. I hope you don’t hold it against me, but I would never have guessed that you’re related.”

Billy shrugged. “I’m taking after our father, she,” he pointed down at Judy, “takes after our mother.”

Nick had to look up at the buck. He was easily four inches taller than him and of sturdy build. “Your father must be quite tall, I presume.”

Billy chuckled. “He’s about as tall as Judy.”

“Really?”

Billy gave him a smirk. “Yup. It’s me who’s the freak of nature.”

“Come on!” Judy said. “You’re not a freak!”

“No, but most mammals look at me like I am.”

“You wanna talk about this?” Nick asked.

Billy shrugged. “You know, I don’t mind being asked about my height. Beats being looked at like I am a freak of nature. How good’s your knowledge of biology?”

“Pretty lackluster, I’d say.”

“Okay. You know there’s a certain growth hormone which governs how tall and big a mammal becomes when growing up.” Nick nodded. “This hormone, called somatotropin, is produced by the pituitary gland. When a mammal reaches the height predetermined in his or her genes, when the growth plates have all closed, the pituitary gland stops producing somatotropin. With me so far?”

“Of course.”
“Now, this works just fine in most mammals. However, there is a kind of tumor which, in some rare cases, develops in the pituitary gland. It prevents the gland from stopping to put out somatotropin, so the body is flooded with it well past the point where it’s good for the body. Bottom line is, if you have the tumor, you simply don’t stop growing. In all directions, mind. You become taller, you become wider.” He smiled, showing his buck teeth. There was a small, but noticeable gap between both teeth. “The jaw, for example, gets wider and wider, so at one point you develop gaps between the teeth.”

“That sounds … awful.”

Billy shrugged. “It is, when untreated. If you don’t treat this in any way, shape, or form, it will eventually kill you. Treatment, however, is fairly simple. You remove the tumor through surgery, and that’s it. In my case, the tumor was removed when I was 17, seven years ago. Haven’t grown one inch since then, but,” he spread his arms, “as you can see, the damage’s already been done.”

Now that Nick knew what to look for, the signs of abnormal growth were instantly recognizable. Billy’s paws were enormous, his chin was much wider than usual, and his whole body just seemed to be impossibly big - for a rabbit, that is. “Interesting. Never heard of stuff like that.”

“That’s the problem. Most mammals have no idea about interesting stuff like that.”

Judy rolled her eyes. “It may be interesting to you. To me, it’s boring.”

“Yes, Ms.-I-know-every-law-in-the-book.”

Nick had to grin at that. Seemed like Billy had a very special relationship with Judy. “She does?”

Billy gave a groan. “You have no idea.”

“Har har,” Judy said. “Better than knowing the Pschyrambel inside and out.”

“Excuse me, the what?” Nick asked.

“The Pschyrambel. It’s a clinical dictionary, named after its first editor, Willibald Pschyrambel.”

“Never heard of it either. You’re a doctor?” Nick asked Billy.

“No, and I’m not interested in becoming one. My field of work is biochemistry.”

“And if you don’t stop talking to him about this right now,” Judy said, “he’s going to chew your ears off.”

Billy stuck out his tongue. “You’re such a wet blanket, Jude!” Looking at Nick, he added: “Are you interested in biochemistry?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“What a pity.” Billy made a pause. “So, you’re gonna join Judy at the ZPD?”

Nick shrugged. “That’s the plan, yes, but there still are several obstacles in my way.”

“Such as?”

Nick pointed at City Hall. “Unless the City Council or someone of equal importance grants me a pardon, I doubt I’ll make it into the police academy.”
Billy made a frown. “A pardon? For what?”

“Well, let me put it this way: Until I met your sister, I was all but a law-abiding citizen.”

“Oh. How comes?”

Nick shrugged again. “Try and make a living when every mammal you meet treats you like a sly, slithering, untrustworthy piece of trash.”

“That bad?”

“Worse. Judy actually was the first mammal in about two decades who believed in me.”

Billy grinned, looking down at his sister. “Yeah, that’s our Judy! Always seeing the best in a mammal.” His voice was oozing sarcasm.

Nick raised an eyebrow. This would have been high praise if said with a little less sarcasm. Because of that sarcasm, however, little more than a veiled insult remained, targeting Judy’s obvious gullibility.

Before he was able to comment on his comment, however, the indistinct murmur around them grew in volume. Judy’s head whipped around. “What’s going on?”

“No idea.” Nick looked around, but they were surrounded by mammals who were much taller than him.

Fortunately, that wasn’t much of a problem. A tall tiger standing in their vicinity shouted, obviously for the benefit of all those smaller than him: “Someone just left City Hall and is walking towards the dais. Looks like a pig to me.”

“Councilmammal Swinton, perhaps?” Nick asked loudly.

“Could be,” a giraffe piped in.

Nick closed his eyes. “Great! Just great!”

“What’s wrong?” Judy asked.

Nick heaved a sigh. “Let’s just say I have a pretty good idea what she’s about to talk about, and it ain’t pretty.”

“What do you mean?”

Before Nick was able to answer, a loud female voice was heard over the din. “Citizens of Zootopia, may I have your attention, please?”

“Yes, it’s Swinton,” the giraffe said, perhaps unnecessarily.

“I am Matilda Swinton, and after the arrest of Robert Aries for ordering savage attacks on innocent predators, the burden of being the Acting Mayor came to rest on my shoulders.”

This created quite a bit of noise from the assembled mammals, but Swinton continued regardless. “You’ll probably expect me to be here on behalf of the City Council, as your Acting Mayor, to tell you about the current proceedings and discussions within the Council, but that’s not why I’m here.”
“Not?” Judy sounded surprised, and given the many commentaries Nick heard, she wasn’t the only surprised mammal around.

“Many of you,” Swinton said, “came here in protest over some crime committed by prey mammals against predators, demanding justice, demanding that things should happen that would make life in Zootopia enjoyable again, for both predators and prey. It is an issue the City Council has hardly dealt with in the past, and it shows. As a matter of fact, I experienced it myself, personally.”

She made a pause. “Back when I was a professional tennis player, one of my mixed double partners was a lynx named Wesley Pardinus. We were a hugely successful team, winning the Nagerian Open twice, among several other tournaments. Sadly, a nagging shoulder injury put a premature end to his career. He left the tennis circuit, became a bookseller, and started a family. And despite this, we still kept in touch. He was one of my best friends, so the question of him being a predator and me being prey never even occurred to us. He even honored me by asking me to be the godmother to his second child, a daughter named Karen.”

Someone had trained a camera on her, and her face appeared on the huge view screens situated to both sides of the dais. Nick was surprised to see that her appearance, usually immaculate, was less than perfect. Their even appeared to be black streaks on her face. It looked like she had cried a little while ago, and hadn’t bothered refreshing her make-up afterwards. Her eyes were downcast, her face that of someone who was in intense pain.

“A few weeks ago, Wesley’s daughter, my goddaughter, fell victim to a savage attack. She was beaten within an inch of death by a group of mammals. Yesterday she succumbed to her countless injuries. Just because seven mammals decided that it was fun to end her life by clubbing her to death.”

Shouts of shock and rage were heard all around Nick, who closed his eyes, sighing. The lynx killed by her son, she had been Swinton’s goddaughter?

Just what had Zootopia degenerated into?

Swinton continued: “Karen Pardinus died because seven PREY mammals decided to end her existence!”

The cries of shock became louder.

Swinton looked around. “I know what you’re thinking right now. You think that this has gone on long enough, you think that the perpetrators should be brought to justice, you think that predators should, once again, be allowed to live in peace and safety, something that hasn’t been granted to them over the course of the last few months.” Her voice sounded like it was about to crack. She cleared her throat. “I want you to know that I agree with you, and wholeheartedly at that. It is time for Zootopia to, once again, become the place where anyone can be anything, regardless of species, age, gender, and convictions.” She heaved a sigh. “Sadly, that is no longer my call to make.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” the giraffe asked.

“I came here to tell you that, a few minutes ago, I handed in my resignation. As of right now, I’m not the Acting Mayor of Zootopia anymore. I’m not even a councilmammal anymore. I have stepped down, and I have asked Councilmammal Cameron Caballus to take over as Acting Mayor.”

She took a deep breath. “The reason for this is that one of the thugs that beat Karen Pardinus to
death has been arrested a few hours ago, and as it turns out, it happens to be my youngest son, Edward Franklin Swinton.”

She looked up, directly into the camera, completely ignoring the shouts and cries from the throng. “Yes, Wesley, it was my very own son who killed your daughter. A son whom I may have brought into the world, but whom I completely failed to educate. I never taught him how to behave, I never taught him how not to behave. Because when he grew up, I was never at home.

“I let others watch over him. I trusted others to educate him, and I felt justified in doing so, simply because I was so busy. I merely watched him grow up. I watched him, I listened to him, but I never really took in what was happening to him. I merely stepped aside and watched him grow up, as the years passed me by.

“Now he’s almost an adult, and he’s turned into a monster.

“And it’s my fault, and mine alone.”

She looked down. “It’s my fault Karen Pardinus had to die. It’s my fault that one of my very best friends was robbed off his daughter. It’s my fault that my son will spend the foreseeable future in prison. All of this is my fault, because I failed to do what I was supposed to do.


“Because I stepped aside and let Dawn Bellwether establish a reign of terror. I even supported her by voting for each and every of her submissions that did little but harm predators.

“I’m no longer in any position to make decisions for you. Because I have proven that I’m not to be trusted with power. The power I was given by you had made me selfish, had made me forget what I was supposed to do. My inaction meant that predators had to suffer. I made my friends suffer. I made each and every one of you suffer. I caused a young lynx, who still had her whole life ahead of her, to die. This is my burden, my cross to bear.

“I have proven that I have never been worthy of being your elected councilmammal, which is why I step down now, to make place for mammals who are more suited for the job.

“But there is one last thing I’m going to do now, before I leave you and the City Council behind. I strongly urge all councilmammals to do what needs to be done! Revert Bellwether’s decisions! Prove to the world that you are willing to step up and end the atrocities perpetrated against predators! Do what I failed to do! Do not repeat my mistakes!

“Then, and only then, will Zootopia be the place where prey and predators can live together in peace and harmony! Only then will Zootopia be the place where anyone can be anything!

“Thank you for your attention!”

Swinton stepped down from the dais, not looking at anyone, her shoulders sagged.

Judy looked up at Nick. “You knew about this, didn’t you?”

Nick made a face. “I knew it was her son who killed the lynx girl. It was me who identified him on the footage.”

Judy shook her head. “Her own goddaughter! Killed by her own son. I wouldn’t want to be in her shoes now.”
“And now what?” Billy Hopps asked.

“That,” Nick said slowly, “is a very good question.”

A question the next chapter will answer … or rather, it will reveal the first part of the answer.

The “Ayrton Hyenna” quote was, of course, uttered by the late, great Ayrton Senna.

And yes, Tilda Swinton’s career as a professional tennis player is a nutty bow towards “Fräulein Forehand,” Steffi Graf, one of the most successful tennis players in history and, to date, the only person to achieve the “Golden Slam.” In 1988, she not only managed to win all four Grand Slam Tournaments - the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open -, she also emerged victoriously at the Olympic Games in Seoul in the very same year. And I guess I probably don’t do her much justice by heaping her accolades on a pig … ;-) (And no, I’m not a particular fan of hers. As a matter of fact, I’m not much of a fan of anyone. I’ve met quite a lot of important people and celebrities over the years, politicians mostly, and I couldn’t help noticing that if I had children, I wouldn’t want them to worship those celebrities as their role models. Some intelligent guy once said that great men have no idols, because they know too many people personally whom other people consider their idols. Sage words indeed!)

The Austin J. Tobin Plaza, that’s the real name, (also known as the WTC Plaza) was the name of the outdoor plaza at the World Trade Center, New York City. It was named after the former Director of the Port of New York Authority who oversaw the development of the World Trade Center. Thought the name was fitting for such an important plaza.

“Give Peace a Chance” was, of course, written by John Lennon (although credited to both Lennon and Paul McCartney) and performed by the Plastic Ono Band, Apple Records, 1969. This song is almost a cliché in itself, yet it fits the given situation like a glove.

When I created Billy Hopps, I always wanted him to stand out, both in character as well as in outward appearance, so it had always been clear to me that he had to be exceptionally tall. I had one particular picture in mind, which you can find in the book “Disney Zootopia: The Essential Guide” as well as on the “Zootopia Wiki” homepage, on the “Hopps Family” entry. It shows a small part of the Hopps family, and I couldn’t help noticing that there are two bucks in the picture who’re basically towering over the rest. While it is common for children to be taller than their parents (I’m some four to five inches taller than my parents have been), I tend to think they are a bit too tall. Those two bucks are easily eight to ten inches taller than everybody else. Which is a bit much when talking about taller children.

But then I remembered one of my fellow students in school. His parents both stood in at less than six feet, but at age 14, he was reaching 6’9” and change. Nobody knew why, until they found the tumor. He had surgery, and his permanent growth came to an end. Which is fortunate, because acromegaly, this is how having said tumor is called, is a very serious condition, responsible not only for most of the tallest men in history (those mentioned in the Guinness Book of Records), but also for their early demises. Treatment through hormone therapy or removal through surgery are the only options to allow those suffering from acromegaly to survive. Nasty stuff, this!
The “Pschyrembel,” that’s the correct name, is indeed a clinical dictionary, created by Willibald Pschyrembel, and quite famous in Germany. I was working at a home for the aged once, and I was told to buy one. And while I admit not understanding most of what’s written in the book, it has given me quite a lot of insight into medical terms and health issues.

I have three tasks for you today: The first one is to find the character from the Disney movie “Tarzan” from 1999. Shouldn’t be too difficult …

There also are two small quotes in here. I came across the first one in the computer game “Starcraft II - Wings of Liberty,” published by Blizzard Entertainment in 2010. In case you have difficulties finding it, it was uttered by Tychus Findlay. And no, I’m not talking about the “just like old times” line; that one crops up way too often in movies and books.

The second one is taken from one of the songs of the movie “Little Shop of Horrors” by Frank Oz, published by Warner Bros. in 1986. It’s slightly altered, but finding it shouldn’t be too difficult. But if finding it gives you trouble, it’s in one of the songs sung by Seymour Krelborn (played by Rick Moranis).

And that’s it for today! Thanks for reading, and please, send me your reviews!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

And here’s the next chapter of “Wound” for your reading pleasure!

Thanks to everyone following me and this story thus far. And thanks to GhostWolf88, niraD, HawkTooth, thehellion115, and Joe, for sending comments and criticism. Speaking of criticism, if you re-read chapter seven, you may notice that I made a few subtle changes, following a suggestion from HawkTooth. Many thanks for that! Never let it be said that I don’t listen to my critics!

While we’re on the subject, if you come across something you just can’t agree with, I’m asking you to tell me about it, so that we can discuss it. Believe me, I’m more than willing to make changes to my story if you think I made a mistake - I want this and all my other stories to be as good as I can make them, and helpful suggestions are always appreciated! Many thanks in advance!

And speaking of HawkTooth, he managed to find the character from the Disney movie “Tarzan” I hid in the last chapter. It was, of course, the homeroom teacher, Mr. Tantor. Who probably is an elephant, although I never really bothered creating a character there, because it’s highly unlikely he’ll make a return at a later stage. Kudos for finding him, HawkTooth! (theghellion115 also mentioned the Tarzan character. Yup, way too easy, I agree! But there are so many quotes which are still missing, you know ...)

Chapter Ten

The Best Mammal for the Job

(Today’s motto song can be found both within the chapter as well as in the author’s notes towards the end. I just don’t want to ruin the suspense! ;-))

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Office of the Chief of Police, City Center, Zootopia

Adrian Bogo looked at his laptop’s display, heaving a heavy sigh. The screen showed a somewhat lengthy list of names, four of which had been crossed out. “Leodore Lionheart, Dawn Bellwether, Robert Aries, Matilda Swinton,” he read aloud. The pointer was hovering over a fifth name. “Cameron Caballus - are you the next one to go?”

He shook his head. When had he become so fed up with the situation that he had started talking to himself?

With Swinton’s resignation, the appalling condition of the City Council had become even more obvious. Instead of 51 councilmammals, the City Council had been reduced to 48 members. And given the fact that three of those were under investigation and would probably face prosecution before long, it wasn’t too hazardous a guess to say that their numbers would dwindle further.

Much worse that this, however, was the fact that after Aries had been arrested and Swinton had resigned, the Council seemed to have been shocked into inactivity. Which was bad, because with
civil unrest threatening to erupt amongst the population, decisions were needed - decisions that would help defuse the situation.

Then again, the last decisions made by the City Council had all but ameliorated the situation.

Bogo couldn’t shake the feeling that maybe re-elections would be the best way to go.

Suddenly, his telephone rang. He closed his laptop’s lid and picked up the phone from the desktop to answer it.

“Uhm, Officer Caballus here. You have a phone call, sir.”

Bogo rolled his eyes. “You know, Caballus, why don’t you just patch ‘em through? If I don’t want to talk to the mammal, I can disconnect myself.”

“Uh, yes, but … I don’t want to … make mistakes.”

Not for the first time, Bogo asked himself how such an indecisive, insecure mammal had managed to pass the ZPA with good enough grades to make it to Precinct One. Then again, she had never asked to be the dispatcher; she had in fact been personally reassigned by Bellwether - Bogo didn’t even know why -, and it was evident even to the most casual observer that she disliked the situation intensely, maybe even more so than Clawhauser. “Okay, who is it?”

“Uhm, my father, sir.”

Bogo said up straighter. “Well, patch him through!”

“Of course!”

A few seconds later, Bogo heard someone clear his throat. “Hello? Is this you, Chief Bogo?”

“Yes, it’s me, Mr. Caballus. Good morning!”

“Yes, yes, good morning!” The voice Bogo heard came as quite the surprise to Bogo. He had met Caballus twice before, and both times, he had spoken in an unctuous tone similar to that of Robert Aries. Now, however, Caballus spoke fast, his style of speech was hectic, as if his brain was working too fast for his mouth to keep up. And if there still was an unctuous tone to his voice, Bogo failed to hear it. “I just called to ask you one question.”

“Which is?”

“Officer Hopps said that Leodore Lionheart has been duped by Dawn Bellwether. Is that true?”

Bogo made a frown. “Well, yes, we have a recording of Bellwether saying something to that effect. I think her exact words were that she framed Lionheart.”

“Aha. Do you think Lionheart is innocent?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Is Lionheart innocent or not?”

“Uhm, excuse me, sir, but what exactly do you want from me? I’m the Chief of Police, not a judge or a jury.”

“I’m asking you to be neither.”
“Sorry, that’s not for me to decide! I’m a police officer, nothing more, nothing less. A crime is brought to my attention, I start investigating. When my investigations show that someone has perpetrated a crime, I arrest that someone. If my investigations show that the mammal is innocent, there will be no arrest. At one point I merely close a case, usually after the suspect is either cleared of all charges or convicted. That’s the point where my job ends. Whether a mammal is innocent or not, that’s for judges to decide. And even if I’m mistaken, it merely means I didn’t do my job properly and need to do better the next time. At no point in all of this does my personal opinion come into play.”

“Alright, Mr. Bogo, let’s forget you’re a police officer for a second. Do you think Lionheart is innocent?”

Bogo leaned back in his chair. When he had met Caballus for the first time, at a charity ball for homeless children in Zootopia, his first impression had been that the horse was the epitome of *nouveau riche*, a filthy rich mammal whose morale sense hadn’t kept up with the constant growth of his bank account. Arrogant, patronizing, disparaging towards everybody - talking to him had felt like talking to a school bully.

That had in fact been the attribute Bogo had mentally assigned to him: *Cameron Caballus, Chief Bully of the City Council*.

Somehow the bully part of his character didn’t seem to want to manifest itself at the moment.

“Innocent?” Bogo said finally. “Certainly not. After all, he did falsely imprison those predators.”

“Yes, but he was coerced.”

“Maybe so, still, a crime is a crime.”

*“With the knowledge we have today, every lawyer would claim extenuating circumstances.”*  

Bogo shrugged, although Caballus wouldn’t be able to see it. “Probably, but like I said, that’s for judges to decide, not for me.”

“He’s your friend, right?”

Bogo sighed. “Congratulations for finding out that one. Yes, he’s one of my oldest friends.”

“And you’re okay with him being in prison?”

Bogo snorted. “Listen, Caballus, Leodore simply is the last in line of several mammals I befriended over the course of the years, only to have to arrest them later. They broke laws, I arrested them. Period. I simply serve the law. It simply doesn’t matter if I’m a friend of the criminal or not.”

“I applaud your integrity.” Caballus made a pause. “Seeing that he is your friend, and forgetting for the moment that you are a police officer with such high moral standards, do you think he should be pardoned?”

“Excuse me?”

“Or would it be wrong to order the release of someone who’s guilty of a major crime?”

Bogo stared at the phone in his hoof in disbelief before speaking into it again. “What did you just say?”
Caballus heaved a sigh. "As the Mayor, even if I only am the acting one, it’s one of my prerogatives to grant pardons. I can easily overrule any judge, any jury, any district attorney, any police officer. Especially if the other councilmammals agree with me."

"Which they don’t."

"Which they haven’t. But, you know, things might change."

Bogo made a pause, trying to wrap his head around what was just transpiring.

"What in the name of all that’s holy has gotten into him?"

"Excuse me, Caballus, but why are you telling me this? If you can overrule each and every one of us, why don’t you just do so and be done with it?"

"Because I want to make the right decision, not just the next best one."

Bogo stared at the phone again. The Cameron Caballus he’d known previously would just have made a decision which would have made sure profit for himself was highest. If others had to suffer due to his decision, he couldn’t have cared less.

When had Caballus started to want to make the right decisions?

Sensing an opportunity, he said: "Yes, speaking of making the right decision, is there any possibility for me to finally have a full roster of officers again? Don’t you think this farce has gone on long enough?"

There was a short pause on the other end of the line. "You know I voted against Bellwether, don’t you?"

"I do, and a fat lot of use you were!"

Bogo could virtually hear Caballus lift an eyebrow. "Are you trying to antagonize me, Chief?"

"Why, yes, I am! Over the course of the last few weeks, you and your cronies have made my life a living hell! Tell me, how am I supposed to uphold the law, when all the City Council did for me was putting obstacles in my way? It’s as if the Council doesn’t want the law to be upheld!"

"Is this why you arrested three Mayors? Is that why Merino, Brooks, and Hirvi are under investigation? Is that why you try your hardest to destroy the City Council?"

"You know perfectly well why we arrested Lionheart, Bellwether, and Aries. And you also know that we have evidence suggesting that Merino, Brooks, and Hirvi were in league with Bellwether, something we’re taking a closer look at as we speak. I’m merely doing my job. I don’t need to try and destroy the City Council, it’s doing the job all on its own. It’s not my fault it’s full of corrupt, opportunistic, power-hungry mammals."

There was silence on the other end of the line, then Caballus finally sighed. "I’ll do what I can to give you your officers back. Thank you for your time, Chief!" With that, he disconnected.

Bogo stared at the telephone with a frown. What the heck had that all been about?

It suddenly occurred to Bogo that he had probably found a similarity between Officer Caballus and her father.

It seemed that under the veneer of being a bully, Cameron Caballus was just as insecure as his
With slow movements, Leodore Lionheart closed the book, looking at the naked wall straight ahead.

_I don’t believe this! It is true! It really is true!_

He looked down at the book again. As former judge, he would have preferred the real McCoy, the proper legal text, but all the prison’s library had been able to offer him was a book called “Zootopian Laws Explained,” which dealt with the subject matter in a distinctly popular-scientific way. Far beneath his usual standards, but like they say, beggars can’t be choosers.

At least the book had served its purpose - it had told Lionheart that the information he had found in another book was indeed accurate.

“What a story!” he said aloud.

Had somebody known? Had Bellwether known? Pretty unlikely. If she had, she would probably have declared a state of emergency. But she hadn’t, and this in turn meant ...

Suddenly, there was a loud knock against the bars separating Lionheart from the rest of the world. He looked up from the book he was still holding in his paws. One of the guards, an elephant Lionheart only knew as Roger, was standing in front of his cell, having just rapped the bars with his nightstick. “You got a visitor,” Roger said.

“Really?” Lionheart got up from his chair while dropping the book on the table, next to a significantly smaller one. “Who is it? My wife?”

Roger shook his head. “Not quite.”

“What do you mean, not quite?”

Roger merely grinned at him while opening the cell door. Lionheart shook his head and left his cell, walking down the corridor.

Two minutes later, he was sitting in the visiting area in a cubicle, behind bullet-proof glass. And the mammal sitting on the other side was among the last ones he’d expected to see here. He picked up the receiver and said, without any sort of greeting: “Did you come here to gloat, Cameron?”

Cameron Caballus gave him a rather strained looking smile. “And a good day to you, too, Leodore.”

Lionheart wasn’t in the mood for nice, joyful banter. “Spare me the pleasantries! What do you want? We both know this is not a goodwill visit.”

As members of the same political party, Lionheart and Caballus were on first-name terms, but that didn’t mean they were on friendly ones. To say that Lionheart considered the horse to be utterly corrupt and utterly useless was an understatement. While Lionheart had tried to use his influence to do everything in his power to improve life for every citizen of Zootopia, Caballus only seemed to be interested in watching his wealth increase. They had clashed on numerous occasions, particularly during those moments when Lionheart had been forced, yet again, to convince
Caballus to do what was best for everyone involved. Egotistical to a fault, Caballus had usually failed to see the big picture, so working with him had often felt like pulling teeth without anesthesia.

“You’re right, it isn’t. I just wanted to talk to you, Acting Mayor to ex-Mayor.”

Lionheart guffawed. “Acting Mayor? Who in their right mind made you the Acting Mayor?”

If Caballus felt offended by his deliberately tactless approach, he hid it very well. “Didn’t you hear the news? Bob Aries was arrested for ordering attacks on predators.”

“Yeah, I know. But what …”

“And Swinton stepped down yesterday.”

“Yes, I know that one, too. So what?”

“Well, I was the next in line.”

“I thought that … oh, right, Pardalis and Murinus were forced into retirement.”

“They were. Meaning I was climbing up the ranks.”

Lionheart leant back, not bothering to hide his contempt. “So they’re basically putting a fox in charge of the henhouse.”

To his surprise, Caballus didn’t seem to be annoyed by his derogatory statement. “Interesting choice of words, Leodore. You know it was a fox who helped Officer Hopps solve the Savage Predators case?”

“I do, yes.”

“And you also know he applied for the ZPA?”

Lionheart sighed. “Why do you keep telling me things I already know?”

“Because I don’t know if you know them or not. Did you also know that the chances of this fox becoming a police officer are virtually zero?”

Lionheart frowned. “No, I didn’t. Why?”

“You know my youngest daughter works at the ZPD?” Lionheart nodded. “Well, she told me that this fox has spent most of his life being a con-mammal. Chief Bogo told her, and the fox himself admitted to it later.”

Lionheart considered this for a moment. “So he has a criminal record.”

“As far as I know. Which would make impossible for the ZPD to accept him into their ranks.”

Lionheart shrugged. “So what? You pardon him, everything’s fine.”

“Yes, I could certainly do that. However, I …” Caballus hesitated visibly. “You know why I ran for office?”

Lionheart shrugged. “To be honest, I have no idea.” He couldn’t help adding: “I have a suspicion, though.”
Caballus closed his eyes. “To protect my company, right?”

Lionheart’s jaw dropped. “Uhm, yes, the thought had crossed my mind.”

His eyes still closed, Caballus said, very matter-of-factly: “And you would be right.”

Lionheart just stared at him in complete and utter disbelief. Never, not in a million years, would he have expected Caballus to admit to it.

Caballus opened his eyes again and continued, still very matter-of-factly. “You probably know that my parents were very poor.” Lionheart nodded. “They had to work their bottoms off to make sure my education was paid for. My dad ruined his health over it. I never wanted to experience this poverty ever again. So when I started my construction company with the huge help of the Lemming Brothers Bank, I started working my bottom off, too. And I got lucky. There were plans to expand the Palm Hotel, and in a bidding war, I managed to come out on top. And ever since that fateful day, money kept rolling in from all directions.” He sighed. “You know what the worst thing about having lots of money is, when you started with nothing but the clothes on your back?”

“The fear of losing it again?” It surprised Lionheart just how croaky his own voice sounded.

Caballus nodded. “You get paranoid. You start thinking that everybody around you is trying to take your earnings away from you. This is why I ran for office, plain as that. I wanted to be on the forefront, making sure no new tax laws would be imposed, no rules and regulations would be passed that could diminish my wealth.

“And it worked. I started with nothing, now Furbes lists me as the seventh-richest mammal in Zootopia.”

Slowly coming out of his stupor, Lionheart wanted to give him a mock applause, but he somehow had the feeling that this would be very inappropriate at this stage. “Why are you telling me this?”

Caballus ignored the question, simply continuing: “I ran for office, but I always made sure never to be in any position of importance, because in the end, I didn’t care about Zootopia at all. All I cared about was my finances. Sure, I was a member of the finance committee, of the city development committee, and I held several other posts over the years. But I never, ever, tried to climb the ranks. I never wanted to be a Mayor. You know why?”

“No, but I guess you’re going to tell me.”

“I am. I never wanted to be a Mayor, because I would have been forced to think about other mammals, about their well-being, not just about mine. I would have had to take care. I would have had to work for somebody else, not for me. This is why I hid behind you, behind Dawn, behind Bob, behind Tilda, behind Franklin, behind Zack.

“I would never have guessed that we would start playing the ‘Ten Little Foxes’ song. And then there were five, four, three, two, one.” He made a pause. “And then there’s me. The last guy you’d want to have as your Mayor.”

“You could step down, you know,” Lionheart said silently.

“And then what? More chaos? More indecisiveness?” Caballus gave a grunt. “Ever since you were arrested, Zootopia slowly, but surely, fell into complete disarray. Right now, we are this close,” he indicated a tiny gap with his fingers, “to all-out anarchy. There is a permanent protest rally camped out in front of City Hall. They’ve been peaceful so far, but it won’t stay like that for long, I’m afraid. Not unless the City Council steps up and does the things that need to be done.”
“So do them!” Lionheart said. “You’re the guy in charge! Force through all those motions that could restore peace and order!”

Caballus guffawed. “Me? The most ill-fitting guy you can possibly imagine! I’m not the guy to run this city, and you know it!”

Again, Lionheart stared at him in disbelief. Caballus had always stricken him as power-hungry, as someone eager to take up the baton. Seemed like he had been mistaken.

“How this city needs,” Caballus said, “is someone who just has this one goal to do what is best for the city. The mammals who took office after you were arrested, they all lacked that exact same quality. Each and every one of them.” He leaned back in his chair. “We need the best mammal for the job, not just the next one in line.”

Lionheart cleared his throat. “You know what they say? A fault confessed is half redressed. You know of your faults and shortcomings. Work against them, and you can become a great Mayor.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I do, yes.”

“Why, thank you, but …”

Caballus made a pause so long, Lionheart finally said: “But what?”

Caballus heaved a sigh, and suddenly, he looked much older than he actually was. “When Tilda Swinton stepped down yesterday, when she told me that I would be in charge from now on, my first impulse was to run away and hide until the nightmare was over. I never wanted to be Mayor, much less become it through having all other guys in front of me removed from office, not through being elected into office.

“But then, the first mammals started congratulating me. The other councilmammals. The DA. Several reporters. Even some guys I came across on the streets, people I had never met before. You cannot imagine what this did for my self-esteem. By the time I came home, by the time my wife congratulated me on becoming the Mayor, I was walking on clouds. I was happy! I was the happiest mammal on the planet. Me, the pipsqueak, suddenly Citizen Number One! I was more than elated.

“And then my youngest son, who had not congratulated me, asked me one simple question.”

“Which was?”

Caballus lowered his head. “He asked me if I would turn into a monster now.”

“Excuse me?”

Caballus looked up again, locking eyes with Lionheart. “Those were his words. ‘Dad, are you going to turn into a monster now?’”

“Sorry, but what’s that supposed to mean?”

“That’s what I asked him. Instead of telling me, he got out his iPawd and played a song to me. It’s from a band called Megadeer. Ever heard of them?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”
“I thought so. I have no idea what the song is called, but it starts with these words: ‘You take a mortal mammal and put him in control. Watch him become a god. Watch people’s heads a-roll.’”

Lionheart gasped. “This … sounds ugly.”

“Doesn’t it?” He made a pause. “Tell me, do you remember what Dawn Bellwether was like when she became a councilmammal? You already were on the Council, weren’t you?”

“I was.” Lionheart thought about it for a moment. “Young. Sweet. Helpful. Naïve. A bit too innocent for the job. Slightly bumbling, but who isn’t during his or her first term.”

“Would you ever have guessed she’d turn into the master manipulator? Would you ever have guessed she’d become so power-hungry, she would have sold her own grandmother to gain power?”

“I wouldn’t.” Lionheart made a pause. “Are you suggesting …”

“Is it inevitable, Leodore? Do we all turn into monsters, once we come to power?”

Lionheart looked at Caballus, examining him. There was a distinctively distraught look on the horse. “I sure hope not.”

Caballus looked at Lionheart. “But when looking at Bellwether, at Aries, the evidence is there.”

Lionheart hesitated, then he nodded. “It certainly seems that way.”

“Bellwether started following her own agenda, turning into some sort of wannabe-dictator along the way. Aries began stopping at nothing to make sure his vision of safety and security would come to fruition, a vision in which predators had no place at all. Tilda Swinton simply was in way over her head. The same goes for most councilmammals I’ve met over the years.”

Caballus made a pause. “In all these years, I came across only one mammal on the council who had become a councilmammal to do good, to help the citizens of Zootopia. Someone who was remarkably selfless, someone who was even willing to go to prison to do the right thing, to protect the city from itself.” He pointed at Lionheart. “I’m looking at him right now.”

Lionheart shrugged. “I did my very best, but, you know, at the end of the day, I also wanted to protect my job.”

“Officer Hopps suggested otherwise.”

“I know. She depicted me as some sort of knight in shining white armor. I wasn’t. I merely knew that once the fact that all those mammals turning savage were predators would leak to the public, that mammals would ask for my head. A lion as Mayor, during a time when predators started turning savage to the left and the right - no, I merely wanted to keep my job, to stay in power.”

“Yet you put your career on the line to defuse the situation, to make sure that civil unrest wouldn’t manifest itself.” Caballus sighed. “And seeing what happened afterwards, it was a good call. You cannot imagine the chaos I’ve seen over the course of the last few days.” Now he snorted. “And the worst thing about this is, the ZPD’s almost powerless, seeing that their number of personnel is so low. The suspended officers need to be reinstated at once. Law and order need to be restored. We need to make sure all predators within the city limits of Zootopia, maybe even beyond, are safe and sound again. We need to make sure that Zootopia really is the place were anyone can be anything.” He leaned forward, fixing his gaze on Lionheart. “And by we, I mean you.”
Lionheart snorted. “Hello? You know why I’m here?”

“Just this morning, I gave Chief Bogo a call. He confirmed what Hopps told the public during the press conference: Dawn framed you.”

“So what?”

“Well, if you were coerced into falsely imprisoning all those predators, it would make a big difference, don’t you think?”

“Hardly. In the end, a crime is a crime.”

“That’s what Bogo told me, too. You two really are remarkably similar.”

Lionheart sighed. “Adrian’s one of my oldest friends. Of course we agree on most things.”

“Well, the DA, for one, seems to think that once it is proven in court that Dawn coerced you, your sentence would surely be greatly diminished. Maybe you’d even be cleared of all charges.”

“You talked to him, too?”

“On my way here, yes.”

Lionheart snorted. “Do you really think it would make a difference? Do you really think that, even if I were to be exonerated, the citizens of Zootopia would be willing to support me ever again?”

“You’d be surprised, but I tend to think so, yes.”

That gave Lionheart pause. “You do?”

Caballus gave him a mirthless smile. “You know, before I came here, I was talking to several other councilmammals. By my count, the number of councilmammals who would openly support you is sitting at almost 40 mammals. Just imagine: You have all the Republicans, all the members of the Green Party, behind you. The only guys openly against you or leaning towards undecided are members of our own party, Leodore.”

He made an encompassing gesture. “It’s the same with the mammals on the streets. I was talking to some of them when I left City Hall. Most seem to think along the lines of Officer Hopps. Zootopia never had it better than when you were in office. Of course, there are a few dimwits who’d like to condemn you to hell for what you did, but I tend to think that the vast majority of citizens would love to see you become the Mayor again.”

Lionheart looked at him, a strange feeling in his chest. “Is that why you came here, to boost my morale?”

“No. I came here to ask you one thing.”

He took a piece of paper out of the inner pocket of his suit. Holding it up, he said: “If I use this, would you be willing and able to return to the City Council? Would you be willing and able to take up the baton again? Would you be willing and able to become the Mayor again, the Mayor this city so sorely needs?”

“Is this …”

“Yes, it’s an official pardon, signed by me, by Lawrence Castor, and by Andrew Horner. I use this, you go free, and all your crimes will be forgotten. And if you’re willing to return, I’m going to
make sure you’ll have the votes to once again become the Mayor.”

“This … is sudden.”

“I know. But desperate times call for desperate measures.” Caballus sighed. “Listen, Leodore, we’ve never exactly been on friendly terms. I know you don’t like me all that much, but that’s okay - my own son’s afraid of me, which is way worse. I’m only doing this because it’s the right thing to do. I’m not doing this for you, I’m doing this for Zootopia. So, what do you say?”

Lionheart thought about this for almost one minute. Finally he said: “You’d be my Assistant Mayor.”

“Yes.”

“You know that there’s a lot of work that needs to be done?”

“I do. Oh yes, I do.”

“The first thing probably is to call for re-elections. Right now, the City Council is in shambles. We need the balance between prey and predators re-established. We need to rid the Council of all mammals who were only following their very own agenda. And the easiest way to achieve all this is through calling for re-election.”

“I wholeheartedly agree. But how do you want to achieve this?”

Thinking back to the books lying on the table in his cell, Lionheart put on a smile for what felt like the first time in weeks. “Don’t worry, I have a plan.”

“So you’re in?”

“I’m in.”

Now Caballus returned the smile. “And you cannot imagine how glad I am hearing you say this.” He got up. “I need to talk to the warden. When you’re done, please come to the City Hall at once. We’ve got a lot of work to do, and quickly!”

“We certainly have.” Lionheart hesitated. “Thank you, Cameron!”

Caballus nodded. “You’re very welcome, Leodore.”

You take a mortal man and put him in control. Watch him become a god. Watch people’s heads a-roll.

Megadeth: “Symphony of Destruction” (Written by Dave Mustaine, from the album “Countdown to Extinction,” Capitol Records, 1992)

Yes, of course, Megadeer is Megadeth! The front man’s name, by the way, is Dave Mustelid. Thought you ought to know. ;-) “Symphony of Destruction” seems to have been written for exactly this occasion. I simply love the song. (Oh, and by the way: “Aguante Megadeth!” ;))

“Ten Little Foxes” is my version of the infamous “Ten Little Injuns” song by Septimus Winner, now considered pejorative, and rightly so. Its German version is little better. It’s called “Zehn kleine Negerlein,” which literally translates to “Ten Little Niggers.” I never
liked the song very much, to be honest, even as a child. I’m German, I’m Caucasian, and I pretty much look like the epitome of an Aryan, reasonably tall, reasonably well-built, with blonde hair (okay, dark blonde and slowly turning gray). But one of my best friends, who, sadly, died some twelve years ago, was from Egypt. I’m friends with a family that fled from Afghanistan and another one that fled from Iraq. One of my friends in school was from Syria. I’m on friendly terms with several Turkish people. I have friends and acquaintances from Italy and Spain. Not to mention my readers, which seem to come from all over the planet. Hell, my wife is half-Ukrainian! I probably am the only pure-bred German amongst all my friends, and I couldn’t care less. To me, race has never meant anything. Skin color has never meant anything. To be honest, I even envy black people! They can stand quite a lot of UV light, whereas I’m pretty much the “keep out of direct sunlight” kind of guy. I get sunburned easily, and I never, ever managed to get a nice tan.

In my world, there’s no place for racial prejudice. And no place for stupid songs like that. I merely used it because it fit the context that well. And that’s all that needs to be said about this.

As usual, I probably hid several quotes in this chapter, but I didn’t actively try and do it. If you come across one, you’ll receive a honorific mention in the next chapter.

And that’s another chapter done! Thanks for reading, and please, send me your comments!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

I’m quite busy with quite a lot of different things at the moment, so I’m not able to update this story as regularly as I hoped for. Terribly sorry, but I simply wasn’t able to go any faster!

One of the reasons for the current slow pace, apart from the workload I have to deal with in my private and professional life, is one that bothered me for several years. Or rather, my wife has bothered me for years. Which sounds much worse than it actually is. She is, on the whole, a very supportive being and has therefore always supported this hobby of mine, even though she didn’t comprehend it. The reason why she didn’t simply is that while she knows a bit of English, she’s nowhere near proficient enough to really understand English on the level that I do. She simply isn’t capable of understanding my stories. So she has asked me for years to translate my stories into German.

And a few days ago, on a whim, I started translating the first chapter of “Wound” so that she can finally understand, can finally see with her own eyes what all the fuzz is about. Which is quite complicated, let me tell you. As every person who translates texts from one language into another will be able to tell you, translating often means rewriting the text. A lot of concepts don’t transfer all that well into different languages - several things even can’t be translated at all, and you rather need to rewrite them. And although it may come as a surprise to some of you, my stories have always been English ones - at no point in the creative process did German even enter into it. There simply is no German version, so I need to create one myself.

At this stage, I’ll probably leave it at that, just translate my stories for her reading pleasure. But I can imagine a scenario where I will post the translated chapters on AO3 as well. What do you think? Should I do it?

As usual, I wanna thank everyone who honored me by reading this story and subscribing to it. Particular shouts go out to J Shute Norway, GhostWolf88, Treerat, niraD, BrutusDeagon, Slyly1993, SrCheese, and Laura for sending their comments my way! Thanks a bundle, everyone!

Nothing new on the quotes front, apart from a teensy little thingy: J Shute Norway pointed out to me that the line “Spare me the pleasantries” in the last chapter was inspired by Darth Vader’s arrival at the Death Star in “Star Wars - Return of the Jedi.” But while Vader indeed tells Moff Jerjerrod that he “may dispense with the pleasantries” (great line, by the way), I really wasn’t thinking of it when I wrote the sentence. I happen to have heard similar sentences quite often over the course of the years, so I simply thought it was a quite witty way to tell somebody that you don’t care about his attempt at beginning a conversation. Sorry, J, but no Brownie points this time!
**Tabula Rasa**

*I’m gonna change history, enlighten the world, teach them how to see through my eyes.*


---

**Office of the District Attorney, “Herbert C. Hoofer Office” Building, City Center, Zootopia**

Andrew Horner signed the last piece of paper with a flourish and placed it on top of a sizeable stack of similar papers. And he shook his horned head while doing so.

“Eleven arrest warrants for three councilmammals, one lawyer, one magistrate judge, and six juvenile delinquents, plus four search warrants - will this ever stop?”

Adrian Bogo shrugged. “It’ll stop when we have brought every mammal involved in Bellwether’s nefarious schemes to justice.” He pointed at the pieces of paper. “And right now, I can’t shake the feeling of having barely scratched the surface.”

“I hope not. This needs to end, and soon.”

“My sentiments exactly.”

Horner looked at the stack again. “You’ve never been one for half measures, eh?”

“I’m merely doing my job, Horner.”

“Ruin the City Council in the process.”

Bogo snorted. “I’m telling you what I told the Acting Mayor just this morning: I don’t need to try and destroy the City Council, it’s doing the job all on its own.”

“You talked to Caballus?”

“Indeed.”

“What did he want?”

“He asked me if I thought Lionheart was innocent.”

“Interesting. And what did you tell him?”

Bogo gave him a somewhat mirthless grin. “Someone who falsely imprisons fifteen mammals isn’t exactly innocent in my book.”

“You know, I quite agree with you. But that didn’t hinder Caballus from pardoning Lionheart.”

Bogo’s jaw dropped. “He did what?”

Horner leaned back, folding his hooves behind his head, obviously enjoying the fact that he had caught Bogo on the wrong hoof for a change. “Yes. Caballus was here, some two hours ago. Probably directly after your conversation. He presented me with a pardon, and to make it foolproof, he asked me to sign it. He’d signed it already, along with the acting Assistant Mayor.”
“You signed it?”

“I did.”

“Why?”

“Because Officer Hopps was perfectly right. This city doesn’t need the next Mayor in line, it needs the best one it can get. And Lionheart was without a shadow of a doubt the best Mayor Zootopia had in decades.” He made a pause. “Yes, he was one of the reasons why I was appointed as district attorney, but that’s not the reason I’m saying this. I’m merely saying this because it’s true. A lot of work needs to be done before we can say that Zootopia’s truly is the place where anyone can be anything. And Lionheart’s the only one who can get the job done. Don’t you agree?”

“Hang on a minute! Caballus may have pardoned him, but that doesn’t mean he’s reinstated as Mayor automatically.”

“Certainly not, but if I understood Caballus correctly, that’s his goal.”

“To reinstate Lionheart.”

“It seems that way, yes.”

“And you’re okay with it?”

“I am.”

Bogo narrowed his eyes to slits. “Less than two days ago, you flatly refused to sign a search warrant against a company run by a councilmammal. Now you grant me everything I ask you for without hesitation, and you even allow yourself to be involved in something which some mammals, especially those opposed to Lionheart, may at least call questionable. Why the sudden change of heart?”

Horner gave a small smile. “Let’s just say you convinced me. You were so very right, Chief. I was so interested in keeping my job, I forgot to do my job. That was a real eye-opener for me.”

Bogo nodded. “I’m glad to see that even this despicable affair led to something good.”

“I will certainly not fall into the same trap again. I may be appointed by the City Council, but if the members of said council turn out to be criminals, I have work to do.” He made a pause. “So, don’t you think Lionheart’s the best mammal for the job?” Upon seeing Bogo hesitate, he added: “I know he’s your friend, Caballus told me as much. But right now, I’m not asking the friend, nor am I asking the Chief. I’m asking the Zootopian citizen.”

Bogo nodded slowly. “Yes, I agree.”

Horner’s smile became wider. “Even though he forced through several decisions you didn’t approve of.”

Bogo frowned. “What do you mean?”

“The Mammal Inclusion Initiative, for one. I seem to recall you ranting about it in this very office.”

Now it was Bogo’s turn to smile. “I did, didn’t I? I was so convinced that this was nothing more than a very bad idea. In my mind, no small mammal, regardless of species, would ever be able to become a police officer, much less a good one.”
“Especially if it is a meek, tiny, cute bunny.”

“You could say that.”

“And then this cute bunny proves you wrong.”

“She did.”

“She won’t be the last one joining the ZPD, you know.”

“Of course she won’t. After having set such an example, I’m pretty sure that more will follow her lead. And to be honest, at this stage, I’m even looking forward to it. Thinking that no small mammal could ever become a police officer was little more than prejudice on my side, all things considered. You had your eye opener, I had mine. I won’t make the same mistake again. A mammal is a mammal, whether it’s big or small. What counts is what they’re capable of doing, and that has nothing to do with size. Hopps is small, but capable. Should have realized this much earlier.”

“They won’t all be as capable as she is.”

“Probably not, but so are a lot of bigger mammals. After all, she and her fox friend solved a case my best officers hadn’t been able to crack.”

“Yes, the fox.” Horner looked down at the stack of papers. “You still want the pardon?”

“I think he deserves it.”

Horner nodded. “Well, you should probably ask your old friend.”

“You really think Caballus manages to get him reinstated?”

Horner shrugged. “No idea. But that’ll be a rhetorical question before long.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s Caballus’s long-term goal to have re-elections.”

“For which he needs to dissolve the City Council, and for this he needs a two-thirds majority. And I don’t…”

Horner raised his hoof. “Which he has.”

“You’re kidding!”

“I’m not. Apparently, his political opponents, the Republicans, plus the Green Party have joined forces with him. The fun thing is, his only real opposition stems from his very own party, the Democrats. Still, Caballus reckons he has more than 80 percent of the City Council behind him.”

“How did he manage to do that?”

“No idea, but I guess a lot of the councilmammals seem to be just as fed up with the current state of affairs as he is. Everybody who’s watched the City Council over the course of the last few weeks will have to admit that it’s close to being completely dysfunctional.”

Bogo snorted. “If it has ever been functional in the first place.”
“You don’t like politicians much, do you, Bogo?”

“What gave me away?”

Horner grinned. “Let’s just call it a hunch.” He pointed at the stack of papers. “I guess you have some work to do.”

“That I have.” Bogo picked up the pieces of paper. “Thanks again, Horner.”

Horner nodded. “By the way, if you want to arrest the councilmammals right away, I suggest you go to City Hall. Caballus has summoned an extraordinary session of the City Council.”

Bogo shrugged. “Why am I not surprised? In other words, I arrest them there, in front of TV cameras, the political impact will be devastating.”

“Even more than it is anyway.”

Bogo allowed himself a sinister-looking smile. “All the better. I guess that’s exactly what Caballus wants.”

“At this stage, you’re probably right. He wants the City Council on the verge of total collapse, so that even the most blind mammal will see that re-elections are the only sensible path to walk.”

Bogo shrugged. “Assuming, of course, that this will lead to an improvement.”

“Only time will tell.”

Bogo nodded. “That it will. Well, have a nice day, Horner.”

“You too, Bogo.”

---

**City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia**

“Ah, Chief Bogo.” The tiny guinea pig standing in front of the receptionist’s desk greeted Bogo and the officers accompanying him with a smile. “My name’s Marta Aperea. Welcome to City Hall. We’ve been expecting you. Would you please follow me?”

Bogo looked down at her with a frown. “What do you mean, you’ve been expecting me?”

Apera looked around as if wanting to make sure nobody was able to overhear them. “Well, I was told that you would probably make an appearance here, and probably in full force at that.”

“Who told you?”

“Cameron Caballus. The Acting Mayor. I’m his personal secretary.” If she was proud that her boss had become the Acting Mayor, her voice gave no indication, to the contrary - she sounded more like she didn’t approve.

Bogo looked over his shoulder to the other officers, all of which who were returning his stare with expressions of bewilderment. “Do you know why we’re here?” he asked Aperea in a somewhat lower voice.

“If I may haphazard a guess, sir, it’s probably to arrest someone.” Aperea’s voice had lowered to barely more than a whisper.
Bogo folded his arms. “What would give you that idea?”

“Well, the fact that you came here with no less than five police officers, for one.” She made a pause. “But also the fact that councilmammals Merino, Brooks, and Hirvi are under investigation.”

“I wasn’t aware that this was common knowledge.”

“It isn’t, Chief, trust me. But Cameron knows, and what he knows, I know. Comes with being his right hoof, sir.”

“Ah. He’s here?”

“He is. Please, follow me.” She took off with surprising swiftness, given her tiny stature, and Bogo and the other police officers hurried to follow her. After a few seconds, it became obvious that their destination was the Mayor’s office.

Bogo stepped up to Aperea, matching her speed. “I was told the Council’s in session.”

“Not yet, but the councilmammals are arriving as we speak. The meeting will start in about twenty minutes. Plenty of time to come up with a plan.”

“A plan? What plan?”

“You’ll see.” She pressed a button on the wall which opened the large door leading into the outer office of the Mayor’s office.

Bogo turned towards Higgins, who had accompanied him. “You’ll wait here. This shouldn’t take long.”

“Of course, sir.”

Bogo gave him a smirk. “And try to look inconspicuous.”

Higgins looked at the other officers. Bogo had opted to take the biggest mammals with him that he could find, the elephants Pennington and Trunkaby and the rhinos McHorn and Rhinowitz. Along with Higgins and himself, they were representing the bulk of Precinct One, literally. “I guess it’s to late for that, Chief,” the hippo said, his facial expression matching that of his superior officer. Bogo merely nodded and followed the guinea pig inside the office.

Aperea walked up to the desk, climbed up a set of stairs leading to its top and sat down on a chair conveniently placed on the desktop. “You may enter at your convenience, sir. Like I said, we’ve been expecting you.”

“Thank you,” Bogo managed to say before stepping over to the door leading to the Mayor’s office. Knocking twice, he waited for someone to answer him. A resounding “Come in!” followed immediately, and he entered the room.

And stood rooted to the spot.


“Leo!” Bogo stared at his old friend as if he’d seen a ghost.

The lion was standing next to the massive desk, which was about the only piece of furniture in the entire room. After Lionheart had been removed from office, all his personal items - the mahogany office table, the side table, the mini-bar, the two filing cabinets and several pictures and
mementoes - had been removed as well, leaving the room bare of anything which could have left
the impression that a living, breathing mammal was working here. Bellwether had only added a
few plants and a distinctly less elegant office table to the room, but hadn’t put any additional
furniture into it - she had even left the walls bare, so the places where pictures had hung were still
visible, due to the slightly faded wallpaper around the corresponding spots. And her successors
hadn’t remained in office long enough to add any personal touches to the room. Bogo had been in
this room countless times, usually to deliver his weekly report, informing the Mayor of all
important proceedings within Precinct One, so he had noticed, with some sadness, the gradual
decline in welcoming-ness.

But today, he simply had no eye for all of this. He was only staring at Lionheart.

Caballus, who was sitting behind the desk, looked at Bogo with a smile and said in a mocking
tone: “Greetings, Chief. I take it you know each other?”

“What are you doing here?” Bogo blurted out.

It was Caballus who answered the question. “Well,” he said while looking at Lionheart, “Leodore
and I had a little chat, and he agrees with me, Zootopia is in severe need of change. A change
which I cannot trigger, seeing that everybody seems to perceive me as somebody who only follows
his own agenda.” His eyes came to rest at Bogo, who was trying his hardest to not let his surprise
show. “Admit it, Chief, even you think that I merely became a councilmammal to protect what’s
mine, right?” After a tiny pause, he said very matter-of-factly: “And rightly so, I might add.”

At this, Bogo finally failed to keep his jaw from dropping. He had never expected Caballus to
admit to something like this, and in such a blunt manner at that. When he didn’t reply, Caballus
continued: “The point is, I simply won’t be able to convince everybody to support me. And I need
to. I need, we need every ally we can get … Anyway, I assume you came here to arrest somebody.”

Slowly, Bogo came out of his stupor. “That’s right. I have arrest warrants for Isabella Merino,
Jonathan Hirvi, and Maya Brooks.”

“You found proof?”

“Tons of it. After Officer Fleecewood gave us a thorough confessional, Detective Ramington
followed suit. Along with the evidence found at Aries Security, we have enough to put them
behind bars for a long time.”

“They were all in cahoots?” Lionheart asked.

Bogo looked at the lion again. “Seems like it. We found evidence of at least two conspiratorial
meeting of Bellwether, Aries, and several other mammals, including Brooks, Merino, and Hirvi.
Ramington and Fleecewood were also present, that’s why we know it’s true. And Aries was dumb
enough to keep a note concerning the meeting on his own laptop computer. They had tried to delete
the data, but our IT department was able to retrieve it.”

Lionheart snorted. “Great! Just great! From this day forth, the citizens of Zootopia will know
where to not make their cross on their ballot card. Some fine party we have there, Cameron!”

Caballus shrugged. “Neither your fault nor mine. But maybe we should focus our attention on
ridding our party of everybody thinking along the lines of Bellwether and her cronies.”

“You think?” Lionheart snorted again. “Assuming we can find the source of their evil-doing and
eradicate it at its core.”
“Maybe the Chief and his officers can help.”

Bogo looked at Caballus with a frown. “Just what’s that supposed to mean, Caballus? And why did you call me your ally?” He folded his massive arms. “I hope you don’t expect me to meddle in politics. You know my answer if you do.”

Caballus shook his head. “I would never ask you to. I’m simply asking you to do your job.”

“Which is? Arrest criminals?”

“Exactly. We need your help to convince everyone that re-elections are the only smart way to go.”

“Hang on a minute! The DA told me you had the necessary votes.”

Caballus made a face. “Not exactly.”

“What?”

“Very simple. Our party, the Democrats, still hold the majority. And until we can take out the trash within our own party, there’s no way we can overrule our own party members. And I simply don’t know at this stage if I have enough councilmammals of our own party on my side. I managed to convince the leaders of both the Republicans and the Green Party to join forces with me and go for re-elections, still we may very well be short of the mark.”

He pointed at Lionheart. “Which is where Leodore comes in. I know for a fact that he’ll have the votes, once I’m nominating him as the old and new Mayor. And along with you arresting three more councilmammals from our ranks, the other ones may be rattled enough to fall in line.”

“How many votes do you need?”

“Well, let’s see. After you arrested Bellwether and Aries took over without somebody taking the seat he abandoned, the council consisted of exactly 50 mammals. After he was arrested and Swinton stepped down, the number dwindled to 48, including the Acting Mayor. And when you now arrest Brooks, Hirvi, and Merino, we’re down to 45 councilmammals. Add Leodore, makes 46. Two thirds of 46 makes 30 point six repeating, so we need 31 votes for a two-thirds majority which allows us to dissolve the City Council to clear the way for re-elections. The Republicans and the Green Party hold 18 seats, plus Leodore and me, makes 20. So we need to convince at least eleven members of our own party to fall in line with us.” He shrugged. “As you can see, this may be quite a tall order. Or it may be a dead cinch. I just don’t know for sure at this stage. So, any help we can get is much appreciated.”

Bogo nodded. “Let me guess, the session you summoned, it’s public, right?”

Lionheart gave him a grin. “Of course it is. TV cameras and reporters are already here in droves. Cameron even asked the leaders of the protest rally to show the session on the view screens in front of City Hall.”

Bogo gave his old friend a smirk. “You’ve never met a camera you didn’t like, eh, Leo?”

Lionheart guffawed. “Sometimes it seems like it, doesn’t it?”

Bogo looked at Caballus and became serious again. “So you’ll open the session, and I’ll come in with my officers to make three very public arrests.”

Caballus nodded. “That’s the idea, yes. But I would like you to wait until I’ve managed to get
Leodore reinstated. Like I said, should be no problem at all.”

“Why?”

“Because it is my belief that he is the right mammal for the job. If I ask for re-elections, everyone will probably just think that I’m following my very own agenda, just like all those mammals who walked in Leodore’s pawsteps. But seeing the very mammal who went to prison to protect Zootopia from itself, seeing this very mammal back in office, using said office immediately to give the citizens the chance to vote him out of it again - this should make sure the public’s on our side. Which might be very important in the upcoming weeks and months. For if we don’t win today, if we can’t convince enough of our own Democrats within the City Council that re-elections are a must-do, public pressure might just do the trick.”

Lionheart pointed at the stack of papers Bogo held in his hoof. “And if you arrest three more councilmammals under the very eyes of the people, it will come as a shock to everyone involved.”

“Which is when he,” Caballus pointed at Lionheart, “comes in and delivers one of his infamous speeches, using your arrests as leverage to ask for re-elections to weed out corruption and wrong-doing in the City Council. If we’re lucky, this might just be the thing we need.”

Bogo looked from one mammal to the other. “Whose idea was this?”

Lionheart pointed at Caballus. “Most of it was his idea.”

“But using the public as leverage was yours,” Caballus countered.

“Of course! You can’t win elections without having the citizens behind you. You need to think strategically, Cameron. Just imagine you’re a simple councilmammal, nobody who is in any position of real importance, nobody who stands out, and all you’re interested in is keeping your seat on the City Council. Now, we have a public session, so every citizen of Zootopia can see what’s cooking, live and in color. Would you really vote against the citizens who are dying for change? Who are dying to rid the City Council of corruption? Who want nothing but peace, a city under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all? When each and everybody in Zootopia can see what you’re doing?”

Caballus nodded. “It might just be your ruin if you do.”

“That’s the idea, yes.” Lionheart looked at Bogo. “So, you’re in, or what?”

Bogo took his time answering the question, looking from Lionheart to Caballus and back. Something about their plan sounded distinctly off.

For one, their new-found camaraderie felt a bit weird. Back when Lionheart was the Mayor, he and Bogo had often discussed political proceedings with each other, mostly the actions of certain councilmammals or lack thereof. And during those conversations, Lionheart had often, and quite explicitly, called Caballus “utterly useless.” Even to the common citizen, it was an open secret that Lionheart, the former judge, and Caballus, the entrepreneur, commonly were at odds with each other. It had just shown way too often in the manner they had treated each other, in the manner they had talked about each other in the presence of other mammals. Even now, despite acting in obvious and probably even honest concert, despite treating each other with cordiality, there still was some lingering hostility to be found in their respective looks, in their respective stances. They still didn’t like each other all that much, but they were obviously willing to bury the hatchet, simply because they felt it was necessary.
A notion Bogo wholeheartedly agreed with, which is why it wasn’t all that surprising to him to see them on the same side now - it needed to be done, plain and simple. It felt just a bit weird, but not uncomfortably so.

But there was something else going on here, something completely different, something that had Bogo utterly baffled.

Bogo and Lionheart knew each other for more than thirty years, and during most of that long time, they had been so close, the innocent bystander had often been unable to tell where one mammal ended and the other one began. Bogo was honest enough with himself to know that his ability at reading mammals was pretty lackluster, in part due to his bad eyesight, but he had never been in any doubt when it came to guessing what his friend thought at any given moment.

And right now, he was certain that his old friend was not telling the whole story. Something was on the lion’s mind, something only Bogo was able to see, while Caballus probably wasn’t even aware of it. It felt as if Lionheart was deliberately withholding information from Caballus. As if he had knowledge Caballus didn’t have, knowledge he could use as leverage at some point.

But at what point? And to what purpose?

And when looking at their plan from a strategic point of view, it all sounded pretty far-fetched, pretty half-baked, pretty daring. They were dealing with quite a lot of unanswered questions, a lot of wild guesses, a lot of what-ifs. Not exactly what Bogo considered to be a healthy basis for what they wanted to achieve.

Particularly given the stakes.

Bogo was certain that Caballus was well aware of this - it showed in his mannerisms. If this had been a poker game, he left the impression of being someone who had just realized he didn’t have the best of cards and was now forced to try his luck at bluffing.

Lionheart, on the other hoof, looked and felt far more confident than Bogo would have felt at this stage. As if he knew his poker hand was completely unbeatable.

Why? What did Lionheart know that Caballus didn’t?

Bogo had no idea, and he had the feeling that if he would ask Lionheart about it right now, he would receive a noncommittal answer at best.

To Bogo, it all felt like a gamble with a lot of variables.

Suddenly, a tiny thought had crept into the back of his mind, a really good one.

*If this really is a gamble, if this really is a game, maybe it’ll give me the leverage I need!*  

*Maybe it’ll give me the police officers I need!*  

Trying his hardest to school his expression into one of casual indifference, he merely shrugged. “All I want is to make three arrests. I honestly don’t care if I make them in front of the eyes of the public or in some back room, and I also don’t care when I do them exactly. All I care about is to leave this building with three criminals in tow. If you want me to wait, that’s fine with me, as long as I get my shot. So yes, you can count me in.”

Lionheart smiled and placed his paw on Bogo’s shoulder. “I knew you’d play along.”
Bogo carefully hid the grin that threatened to show on his face. *He has no clue! Good! Maybe I am a better actor than I thought.* He took a deep breath. “You know, I’m surprised, Leo.”

Lionheart’s smile vanished in an instant. “What do you mean?”

“Well, I was the guy who arrested you, still …”

“Oh, come on!” Lionheart snorted. “First of all, I wasn’t arrested by you, I was arrested by Officer Hopps. You only put the pawcuffs on me, seeing as she wouldn’t have been able to do it. Second, the two of you were perfectly justified to arrest me. I broke the law, plain as that, and I had to bear the consequences. So no, I don’t hold it against you. No hard feelings.” He offered his paw to Bogo. “Friends?”

Bogo looked at the paw, then he looked at Lionheart’s face.

And next thing he knew, the two embraced each other in a way that suspiciously looked like an all-out grapple in a wrestling match.

Which was exactly when the intercom on the desk gave a little beep. “Uh, sir?”

Caballus reached out and pressed a button. “What is it, Marta?”

“I just wanted to inform you that the last councilmammals have arrived. They’re all sitting in the Council Chamber, awaiting your arrival.”

“Thanks. We’re on our way.” Caballus got up from his chair and looked at both mammals who were slowly disengaging. “You heard her?”

“Of course,” Lionheart said. Looking at Bogo, he added: “Ready to change history?”

Bogo shrugged. “You know me, I was born ready.”

Lionheart gave him a grin. “Alright, Showtime!”

“Wait a minute,” Caballus said. “We need to talk about the other topic first.”

“Which other topic?” Bogo asked.

Lionheart cleared his throat. “Cameron told me that this fox, this, uhm, Mr. Wilde has applied for the ZPA under the Mammal Inclusion Initiative.”

“He has. So?”

“He also told me that he was a con-mammal.”

Bogo sighed. “That he was.”

“With a criminal record?”

“Technically no, but if someone takes a closer look at his extensive personal file, he might come to the conclusion that he’s at least guilty of felony tax evasion. The rest of his actions seems to be somewhat shady, but no real reason for concern. He has covered his tracks extraordinarily well.”

“Felony tax evasion, eh?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact, Hopps told me that she had coerced Wilde into helping her by
threatening to arrest him for that exact same reason.”

“Which would hinder him from becoming a police officer.”

“With certainty. Which is why I have asked Andrew Horner for a pardon already.”

“You did?”

“Yes.” Bogo made a pause. “Without Mr. Wilde, we wouldn’t be standing here.”

“Yes, he certainly helped Officer Hopps …”

“That’s not what I mean. Without him alerting us of the crimes of Robert Aries, the ram wouldn’t be in custody. He was the one who made Officer Fleecewood confess to his crimes, in turn alerting us of the involvement of councilmammals Brooks, Hirvi, and Merino. He managed to do what even Major Mastiff wasn’t able to, and the Major is without the shadow of a doubt the finest investigator, the finest interrogator, the ZPD has at this very moment. He was the one identifying the son of Tilda Swinton as the culprit behind the savage murder of a young, innocent lynx girl. Wilde did all this without proper training, just by using his street smarts, his vast knowledge of Zootopia and its citizens, and his intuition. He’s spent most of his life on the dark side of Zootopia, which gives him a knowledge most officers sorely lack. Using this to our advantage - he could become one of our greatest assets.”

“Assuming, of course, he passes the Academy.”

“I’m convinced that he’ll be able to do it with distinction. And when he does, he could become an outstanding police officer.”

Lionheart nodded, visibly impressed. “That’s certainly high praise, coming from you, Adrian.”

Bogo shrugged. “I’m merely stating the facts. And for the record, Major Mastiff agrees with me.”

“Will the ZPA accept him?”

“Probably yes. I have no real saying in this matter, but I know several instructors at the ZPA on a personal basis. Besides, I’m the Chief of Precinct One, so my word carries some weight. Plus, Mastiff’s on first name terms with virtually every instructor, so he may very well be even more influential. And the two of us do want to see Wilde join Precinct One.”

“So it all hinges on him receiving a pardon?”

“It does.”

Caballus snorted while starting to walk towards the huge office door. The other two mammals followed him. “Felony tax evasion? I can probably pay his tax debt out of my petty cash deposit.” Upon seeing Bogo look at him, he shrugged. “I’m a billionaire after all.”

“You would do that?”

“If it would make sure he can become a police officer, I would. If he would really mean such a capable addition to your roster, I would.”

“Which would make a pardon …”

“No, no, no,” Lionheart said as they entered the outer office. “Let’s make it foolproof. Let’s give him the pardon he deserves.”
Caballus nodded. “Plus I’ll pay his tax debt. That should cover all our bases.”

“Not all of them.” Lionheart made a pause. “There still seem to be quite a lot of what-ifs involved. A pardon is useless if the ZPA doesn’t accept him.”

Bogo grunted. “Yes, but do you want to force their hooves and paws?”

To Bogo’s surprise, Lionheart grinned while following Caballus out of the outer office. The five police officers waiting outside stood at attention immediately. Out of the corner of an eye, Bogo saw that Higgins’s eyes widened upon seeing the lion, who said: “I do, actually.”

“How?”

“Where are they right now?”

“Who?”

“Officer Hopps and Mr. Wilde.”

Bogo made a frown. “I have no idea. At home, I…”

“No, they’re not, sir,” someone said. Bogo turned around to look at the mammal who had said these words. Officer Pennington looked down at him, grabbing her trunk with both hooves in obvious embarrassment at having interrupted her superior. “I’m sorry, sir!”

Bogo allowed himself a curt nod. “At ease, Pennington. It’s alright. What did you just say?”

“Uhm, I saw them today. Twice actually, once on my way to work, once as we were entering this building, sir. They are among the mammals protesting in front of City Hall.”

“Not at home?” Bogo rolled his eyes. After he had specifically ordered Hopps to stay at home, she was rambling about the city. *When will this bunny ever learn to listen and follow orders?*

“No, obviously not. Nick, ehm, Mr. Wilde was pushing Officer Hopps around.”

“Pushing her around?”

“Yes. She was sitting in a wheelchair. Quite a big one actually, considering her size.”

“Could you fetch them?” Lionheart asked.

Pennington nodded. “Of course, sir.”

Bogo raised an eyebrow. “You’re sure you can find a tiny rabbit and an only slightly taller fox among the tens of thousands of mammals?”

To his surprise, Pennington grinned. “Do you expect more than one rabbit sitting in a wolf-sized wheelchair being there, particularly one being pushed around by a red fox? I already spotted them twice, I’ll be able to spot them again with ease.”

“Then do it,” Lionheart said. “Please find the two of them and ask them to come here as they are.”

Pennington looked at Bogo, who nodded. Flashing a salute, the elephant turned around and left the lobby with huge strides.

Bogo looked at Lionheart. “Just why do you want them to come here?”
And the plan is … revealed in the next chapters! Yeah, I know, I’m mean!

I’ve been looking at the corresponding scene within the movie several times, but all I can see in the Mayor’s office while Bellwether was in charge was the desk they were sitting at, plus several plants. There was absolutely nothing there in terms of furniture, pictures, or some such nonsense. Maybe there is, but I didn’t see it.

I spent quite a lot of time getting all the political intricacies of this chapter in order. In case you disagree with some of the concepts I developed in here, feel free to tell me! You know where to find me! (And yes, I even made a rough outline telling me just how many seats which party holds. For the record: After a landslide victory with 62 percent of the votes, the Democrats hold 32 seats. The Republicans managed to win 27 percent of the votes, so they hold 14 seats. And the 9 percent of the votes the Green Party managed to gain mean that they hold four seats. The remaining 2 percent of the votes were wasted on minor parties that, obviously, didn’t clear the 5-percent-clause. Add it up, it makes 50 seats.)

Today’s task: Find the character from the Mass Effect series. Shouldn’t be too hard …

And yeah, I couldn’t help messing with the Pledge of Allegiance! If this offends you, hey, I’m German - the Pledge of Allegiance means nothing to me. (That’s not ignorance, it’s just a fact. Or do you particularly cherish “Das Lied der Deutschen,” our national anthem?) Besides, like Oscar Wilde once said: “I can resist everything except temptation.”

Thanks for reading, and, please, send me your comments in droves!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Old-Fashioned Gun Law

Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

I actually don’t have all that much to say at the moment. I still have a truckload of things to do, so updates will probably be quite slow. (Yes, Hayato, I know, and I’m sorry, but I’m simply not able to go any faster!)

On a side note, following a suggestion made to me by several people, both on AO3 as well as on Discord, I have indeed published the first German chapter of “Wound” on AO3. My wife still hasn’t read it - a new school year is about to begin, and she’s incredibly busy at the moment. But before you start lamenting the fact that this will mean updates for this story are going to be even slower, they won’t. The English stories will always take precedence, so I will only add a few more lines to the translated version when I don’t have anything better to do.

Thanks to GhostWolf88, Treerat (laughing my behind off here!), HawkTooth, tweiler18, niraD, Thehellion115, Zach, Slyly1993, and Hayato for commenting on this story on AO3. On top of that, Combat Engineer aka Harbinger (who sent a comment for the German version of “Wound”), JKnight97, Cimar of Turalis WildeHopps, and Ansem sent comments on Discord. Bowing down in gratitude, I am! (Yoda rears his ugly head again!)

No more quotes have been found. What a pity! The deadline is approaching fast, you know ...

The chapter’s title stems from the very same song which gives this chapter its motto.

__________________________________________________________

Chapter Twelve

Old-Fashioned Gun Law

So I got my handgun and I blew him away. That critter was a bad guy, I had to make him pay.

Queen: “Put Out the Fire” (Written by Brian May, from the album “Hot Space,” EMI Elektra, 1982)

__________________________________________________________

Austin J. Robin Plaza, In Front of City Hall, City Center, Zootopia

“I got another one!” Nick was in his element. “What’s yellow and can’t swim?”

“A lemon?” The female leopard cub standing next to Nick eyed him with an eager expression on her face. Her mother, exceptionally tall even for a leopardess, looked down at her cub, smiling.

“No, a tennis ball!” said a pig while filling Judy’s mug with more carrot juice.

“I don’t think so,” Judy said with a nod towards the pig. “Thanks again. No, a tennis ball can swim.”

“It can float,” an ocelot countered. “Swimming is something else entirely. Or do you consider a ‘dead mammal float’ swimming?”

Judy rolled her eyes. “I’m still pretty sure that ain’t it.” She looked at Nick expectantly.
Nick shook his head. “Another guess? Anyone?” Upon seeing that everyone around them shook his or her head, he said with a grin: “An excavator.”

Loud laughter erupted all around them. Even Judy couldn’t help grinning while sipping her juice.

Less than 24 hours ago, she wouldn’t have imagined being here, among thousands of other mammals. When her brother Billy had suggested joining the protestors camped out in front of City Hall, she had flatly refused his notion. Much to her chagrin, he had simply ignored her and taken her with him. And there had been nothing she could have done about it. Her injured leg meant she was unable to walk without crutches, so escaping her predicament was out of the question.

And then, the perceived predicament had presented her with the biggest surprise of her life.

After the disastrous first press conference, she had been convinced that most mammals she would come across would treat her with scorn. Particularly after meeting the parents of the late lynx girl, she had been under no misconception: She was, in all probability, one of the most hated mammals in all of Zootopia. Being pushed around by Billy in an oversized wheelchair with an ever-growing sense of impending doom, she had braced herself to be vilified, to be verbally abused, maybe even to be attacked.

She would never have guessed, not in a million years, that she would be treated with respect and cordiality.

Sure, some of the mammals present at the protest had treated her with superior disdain, but the vast majority of mammals she had come across had shown no resentment whatsoever, to the contrary. After little more than half an hour, she had been offered cookies, vegetables, a plate of hot veggie soup, cups of coffee and tea and similar things. She had received countless pats on her shoulders, hundreds of get-well wishes and words of encouragement. On top of that, she had been presented with no less than four invitations for a private dinner, and a buck, obviously quite well-off and not exactly bad-looking, had shamelessly tried to woo her. Not that she was eager to date any buck, well-off or otherwise, any time soon, not with her job being Priority Number One. To her surprise, he had taken her polite refusal in stride. Perhaps, Billy had mused, the buck had thought that she would be way out of his league anyway.

Which had brought him a swift punch to the upper arm.

Nobody she had spoken to had held the first press conference against her. “You’ve been thrown into the proverbial pool of sharks,” an elderly porcupine had told her. “No way you were able to get out of this unscathed.”

That had been the general consensus among those she had spoken to. While some had blamed her inexperience in dealing with public speeches and the press, most had stated that she had simply been at the wrong place at the wrong time, with no real chance to do the right thing, to find the right words to prevent the damage she had caused. And her second press conference had been called magnificent by most mammals, “a masterpiece,” as the porcupine had stated.

And since she and Nick had solved the Savage Predators case, she was generally lauded as a hero.

She had enjoyed herself so much, when Nick had visited her this morning, she had suggested going back to the protest rally. And he had agreed on the spot. No surprise there - when he had gone there the day before, it had probably been, Judy thought, the first time in years, if not in his entire life, that he had been treated with respect and even admiration by virtually everyone for having helped her to solve the Savage Predators case. And he had obviously enjoyed the situation, the attention of everyone around, to the fullest.
On top of that, he had an audience listening with rapt attention to his lame attempts at jokes and puns.

“And you know why it can’t swim?” he asked.

“No idea,” the pig said, putting the bottle of carrot juice back into his rucksack, one of several bottles he had brought with him. He had been very generous in offering some of it to all mammals around, and almost everybody had accepted, with the exception of Nick, who had stated that he didn’t like the taste of carrots all that much. “Could it be because it’s too heavy?” he added with a grin.

“No, it can’t swim because it only has one arm.”

Now even Judy, who had heard similar jokes countless times, couldn’t help laughing out loud.

Nick looked at her with a grin, obviously pleased that his qualities as an entertainer were so well received. “Got another one: What’s white and disrupts breakfast?”

Unfortunately for him, she had heard that one before. “An avalanche.”

Yet again, they were surrounded by loud laughter. The group of mammals around them couldn’t have been more diverse. Predators and prey standing together, side by side, in peace and harmony, enjoying bad puns and silly jokes.

It was as if past events, the solving of the Savage Predators case, had done away with a lot of prejudices and outright hostility.

Judy wasn’t that naïve, not anymore; it wouldn’t last, it couldn’t last, not in the long run.

But right here, right now, the world was at peace.

And she was at peace with the world.

“Oh, you knew that one?” Nick gave her a smirk. “And what’s black and sits on a tree?”

“No idea. A blackbird?”

“No. A voyeur after a forest fire.”

Amid peals of laughter, Judy managed to say: “Watch your tongue! There are children around!”

Nick was undeterred. “And what’s red and sits under a tree?”

Before Judy was able to try and guess what he could mean, she heard a rather high-pitched voice: “That’s his buddy - he’s still smoldering.” This time, the laughter around them was absolutely uproarious. Looking around, her eyes found the leopard cub, and she stared at her in amazement. Meanwhile, the leopardess had put her paw over her eyes in obvious embarrassment.

Nick let out a guffaw. “A mammal after my own heart!” He walked over and took the cub in an embrace. Despite being so much younger, the cub was almost as tall as he was, and visibly flustered after this very public display of affection.

Fortunately for her, another new arrival caught everyone’s attention. This one was an elephant, a female one, wearing a police uniform. With her enormous size, she was parting the throng around them with ease, or rather, everybody was most eager to get out of her way.
Nick had seen her coming, of course, and greeted her with a smile. “Well, I’ll be darned! If that isn’t the one and only Trunks!”

Francine Pennington returned the smile. “Hello, you two.”

“Francine?” Judy looked up at her, craning her neck. “What are you doing here?”

Pennington knelt down, which didn’t make much of a difference - she was still towering over the two of them. “I was ordered to find you and take you with me.”

“Well, you found us,” Nick said with a grin. “Speaking of which, how did you do it? It’s not that we stand out, and there are at least, oh, I don’t know, fifty-thousand mammals here.”

“Eighty-five thousand, according to the guys organizing this” Pennington corrected him. “But just how many foxes are here, pushing a wheelchair with a rabbit sitting in around? Finding you was easy. You do stand out, sort of.”

“And when you wanna find someone, being so tall certainly helps,” the pig said. “Carrot juice?”

Pennington shook her massive head. “You could say that. And no, I’m good, thanks.” She looked around. “Found new friends?”

Judy groaned and pointed at Nick. “You have no idea. He’s been, ahem, ‘entertaining’ them with lame puns.” She emphasized her words by doing air quotes.

“Ah. What do a choirmaster and a condom have in common?”

Judy groaned again. “For realsies?”

Nick paused, then he gave Pennington a smile. “I actually have no idea. Never heard that one before.”

“Really? It’s sooo old.” Judy shook her head.

Pennington looked at her. “You know it?”

“Yes, but I’m not saying it! There are kits and cubs around!”

“So what?” Nick said, pointing at the leopard cub. “She goes to Elementary School, so she probably knows more lewd jokes than the three of us combined.” He looked at the cub, who beamed at him, while the leopardess looked down, closed her eyes and shook her head, obviously wishing herself to be at a very different place, far away from her own cub who was causing her so much embarrassment. “Do you know it?” he asked the cub.

She nodded. “It’s safer to have one, but it’s more fun without.”

Everybody erupted, once again, into laughter. “Bingo!” Pennington said, showing the girl the thumbs-up. Once the laughter had died down, she looked around. “Nice little party you have found yourselves here.”

Nick nodded. “It’s peaceful, yes. Makes for a nice change.”

“Yes, but for how long?” another voice said. Everybody turned around to see a tall and rather muscular lion approaching them. He was dressed entirely in black, including a long black leatherette coat. Given the fact that the weather was fine, with temperatures in the low eighties, he looked strangely out of place amidst all the mammals wearing short-sleeved shirts, short pants, or
light dresses.

Pennington groaned. “Freddie, why do you always have to be such a wet blanket?”

Frederick Delgato shrugged. “Loss of job tends to do that to a mammal.”

Judy felt embarrassed in an instant. Yet another one of the countless victims of the catastrophe called press conference. “Hi, Delgato.”

Delgato nodded. “Hopps.” His voice was flat, void of emotions. If he was harboring a grudge against Judy, he managed to not let it show.

Hopps fidgeted in her wheelchair. “What did you mean, when …”

With a sigh, Delgato sat down on the floor, tailor-fashion. “For the last couple of weeks, Hopps, the City Council has done nothing to improve the lives of predators, while granting prey all the improvements in the world. If they don’t change this, and soon, law enforcement has a real problem on its paws.”

With a chilling suddenness, the cheerful atmosphere around them evaporated completely.

“Wait a second!” the ocelot said. “Nobody of us is going to riot.”

Delgato visibly sized the ocelot up. “I wasn’t judging you; I’m in no position to do it, after all. You just stand here, peacefully, among other peaceful protestors, two of which are police officers. So it’s safe to assume that all you want is fair treatment of predators, and like most mammals here, you want to fight for this in a peaceful manner. Problem is, there are predators who think differently.”

Nick looked at Judy first, then he turned towards Delgato. “What do you mean?”

Delgato looked over his shoulder towards an alley leading away from the plaza. “Yesterday evening, we were down there, me, Fangmeyer, and Grizzoli. We had met here and had spent most of the day here, when Grizzoli thought he had seen several young predators, one tiger, one jaguar, and one black panther, loitering about near the stage, acting suspiciously. They walked over to that alley over there, so we followed.” He sighed again. “And found out that they were carrying heat. The tiger was packing a Smith & Weasel 629 firing .44 magnum bullets, while the black panther was armed with a MAC-10 with .45 ACP bullets inside.”

“Those are guns, right?” the leopardess asked. “Real firearms, I mean.”

“They are indeed. Quite dangerous ones in fact.”

“Wait a minute! Aren’t firearms illegal?”

Delgato snorted. “They are, but only in theory. You can still get them, if you know where to look.”

Pennington nodded. “The internet, or rather the darknet, is full of websites where you can probably find everything your greedy or violent heart desires.”

“Getting illegal weapons really is like shooting fish in a barrel.” Delgato made a pause. “And of all the possible idioms I could have chosen, this probably was the most ill-fitting one.” This time, nobody laughed.

“How did you manage to overcome them, if they had weapons and you hadn’t?” the pig asked.

“It wasn’t that difficult actually. Since weapons are illegal, so is weapon training. These schmucks
simply had no idea how to properly use them, so before they were able to wield them against us, Grizzoli and Fangmeyer had them subdued. The jaguar was a much bigger problem, despite packing nothing but his paws. Some idiot had taught him martial arts, so he really knew how to put said paws to good use. Fortunately, I know some martial arts as well.”

“Don’t be so modest,” Pennington said. To the other mammals around her, she added: “He has a black belt in judo, third dan.”

Nick nodded, obviously impressed. “Not bad. What did you do to him?”

Delgato shrugged. “Let’s just say he found out the hard way that when you can’t breathe, you can’t fight. Sankaku-jime, the Triangle Choke Hold. Can be brutally effective.”

“What did Chief Horny say?”

“Chief Horny?” Delgato chuckled. “That’s a new one. He actually was quite happy when we entered Precinct one, three unconscious mammals in tow.”

“Happy? Really? I was under the impression he dislikes vigilantism.”

“He does, and rightly so. But, if not for the stupid City Council, I would still be a cop. I’ve done nothing wrong. It’s not my fault that I cannot uphold the law wearing a uniform anymore. But I still do it. And Bogo is okay with it.” He cleared his throat. “Are you aware of the fact that right now, as we speak, there are more than 50 cops here, undercover in plain clothes, making sure that no riot can break out?”

Judy looked around, surprised. Nick, on the other paw, merely nodded. “Like that rhino over there?” He pointed at a mammal standing to the side, some twenty feet to the side of their position.

Delgato looked at the mammal, too, with surprise on his features. “How do you know?”

Nick shrugged. “Let’s just say I recognize a cop when I see one.”

Delgato looked him over. “Right, you’re the fox who helped Hopps. The name’s Wilde, right?”

Nick nodded. Delgato continued: “I see now what Bogo meant. He called you somebody who knows the other side exceptionally well. I assume you dwelt on the other side, right?”

Nick raised his eyebrows, probably at the lion’s peculiar choice of words. Delgato obviously didn’t want to call Nick a con-mammal into his face in public. “I did.”

Delgato smiled. “And want to become a cop. Which makes you an okay guy in my book. I don’t care what you did. I care what you’re about to do.”

Nick returned the smile. “Thanks.” The smile vanished almost instantly. “Do you know what these armed guys were about to do?”

Delgato sighed yet again. “If I understand it correctly, they were waiting for a councilmammal to come out so they could gun him or her down.”

“What?” Judy, Nick, Pennington, and several other mammals shouted.

“Yup. But then Swinton came out merely to announce her resignation. And they decided to not shoot her, to not make a martyr out of her.”

“Hang on a minute!” the pig said. “How could killing a councilmammal help us here?”
“It wouldn’t, to the contrary. And that’s the crux of the matter. The moment some morons gun down a politician, that’s the moment when the other politicians call for strict security measures. Every security force in existence would be ordered to take down the violent protests by force, regardless of the fact that there only were a pawful of idiots, while the vast majority only wanted peace. Or why do you think there are so many police officers here? We need to prevent riots, we need to find those idiots and stop them before the situation gets out of paw. The alternative is a strict curfew, and nobody wants that. You’d basically shut the whole city down completely.”

“That’s why Bogo asked you to continue doing what you did, right?” Pennington asked.

“Exactly. I may not be on the ZPD’s payroll anymore, but I swore an oath to protect this city, even from itself, if need arises. Maybe this’ll help the City Council see the need to re-instate the predator police officers.”

“Maybe I have good news on that front,” Pennington said, standing up again. “There will be an extraordinary session of the City Council soon. Which is sort of why I’m here. I was ordered to find these two,” she pointed at Nick and Judy, “and take them with me. Don’t know why, but I’m probably about to find out.”

“And you think they’re going to address these issues at this session?”

She shrugged. “No idea actually, Freddie, but given the fact that Caballus, our new Acting Mayor, has brought reinforcements, I reckon he wants to cause some major ruckus.”

“Reinforcements? What do you mean?”

“He pardoned Lionheart.”

Again, every mammal around them shouted “WHAT?”

“Lionheart?” the ocelot asked. “Thought he was in the pen.”

“Well, not anymore, obviously. It seems that Caballus sprung him.”

“Why?” Nick asked.

“I may be mistaken, but I think Caballus wants to reinstate Lionheart as the Mayor.”

Delgato nodded in obvious approval. “At this stage, this is about the smartest thing you can do. Lionheart always was hugely popular, and now that Bellwether’s schemes have been revealed, a lot of mammals in Zootopia remember how good they had it when Lionheart was Mayor. I cannot think of any other councilmammal who could bring peace to this city and reunite its citizens.”

“You’re probably right,” Nick said before looking at Pennington. “I fail to see, however, where the two of us come in.”

“Like I said, I have no idea why I was ordered to fetch you,” Pennington said. “But orders are orders. I’m awfully sorry to interrupt this little party, I really am, but we need to go now.”

“Where to?” Nick asked.

“City Hall.”

“Excuse me?” Judy said.

“Chief Bogo’s at City Hall. We all are, well, all officers Precinct One can spare.”
“Why?”

Pennington grinned. “As far as I know, we are about to make some very public arrests.”

Nick nodded. “Let me guess, Merino, Hirvi, and Brooks, right?”

“Of course. We found enough evidence to arrest them for being in cahoots with Bellwether.”

“Wow!” the ocelot exclaimed. “That’s, wait, that’s six councilmammals arrested.”

“Five, if Lionheart was released,” Nick said.

“Plus one who resigned,” the leopardess added.

“Boy oh boy, the Council sure is in tatters,” the pig said, shaking his head.

“Exactly,” Nick said. “Which is why I guess Caballus wants to have re-elections.”

“Are you sure?” the pig asked.

“Are there any alternatives, Jeff? I see none.”

Delgato snorted. “Maybe so, still I’m not sure that he’ll be able to pull that one off. But if he is, I can’t wait to see it happen.”

“Maybe we will.” Pennington looked down at Nick and Judy. “Shall we?”

“Lead the way,” Nick said, looking around. “We’ll be seeing each other, I guess.”

“Don’t forget to stop by,” the pig said. “I offer discounts for law enforcement officers.”

Judy emptied her mug and handed it over to the pig. “That’s very nice, thank you very much. This was delicious!”

“You don’t happen to have blueberry juice, too?” Nick asked.

“Of course I have!”

Nick rubbed his paws. “Splendid. We will be seeing each other, and quite often at that, I guess.” At Pennington’s gaze, he added. “Jeffrey here runs a juice shop just around the corner, on Second.”

“I know”, Pennington said. “Jeffrey’s Juice Joint. Best juice in all of Zootopia. Most cops are regulars there.”

“So it’s not all just donuts with you,” Nick said with a grin.

“Donuts?” Delgato chuckled. “Too sweet for me. Most guys actually don’t like ‘em all that much, except Clawhauser. By the way,” he looked at Pennington, “how’s the old blubberbutt?”

Pennington shrugged. “Mostly bored out of his skull. Being down at Records isn’t exactly thrilling.”

“Say hello to the guys from me, will you?”

“Of course! So, let’s get crackin’!”

Saying their farewells, Pennington walked ahead, with Nick pushing the wheelchair with Judy in it
after her. Again, Pennington parted the throng with ease, so all Nick had to do was keep up. Which wasn’t an easy task, given how large the wheelchair was.

“I never got around to ask you so far, but how on earth did you manage to get this infernal contraption?” he asked while following Pennington.

“It’s great, isn’t it?” Judy beamed at him. “Billy got it for me. Half a year ago, he had an internship at Zootopia General, at their lab, and he still has friends there. When he asked them if he could get a wheelchair, they had this one for him. It’s wolf-sized, granted, but better than being forced to sit in my room doing nothing. And when I’m able to walk again, all I need to do is return it to them, no questions asked.”

Nick nodded. “Speaking of Billy, where is he?”

“Oh, he’s attending a lecture at Zoo U.”

“He’d going to university?”

“Yes. He wants to take a doctoral degree.”

“In biochemistry.”

“Of course.”

“He lives here?”

“Most of the time.”

“Ah. And I thought all bunnies would eschew the big city.”

Judy smiled. “Most do, yes. But Billy isn’t like your ordinary bunny.”

“Neither are you.”

Judy chuckled. “Looks like it, eh? Yup, we are the bunny trailblazers, Billy and me.”

During her last words, a murmur had begun all around them. The ears of both mammals rose, twisting towards the sound. “What’s going on?” Judy asked.

“The view screens just lit up, no idea why,” Pennington said over her shoulder.

“Oh!” Nick looked down at Judy again. “Are they going to show the Council session here?”

“Maybe.”

Nick grinned. “At least we don’t get to listen to yet another boring speech by our one and only Gazelle.”

Judy reached up to sock him in the arm. “Don’t you dare …”

“Gee, Carrots, what’s it with you and all the punching?” He rubbed his arm for emphasize. The punch hadn’t exactly been painful, but over the course of the last few days, she had punched him in the exact same spot no less than twenty-three times - he had kept count -, and he started feeling a bruise forming. Well, maybe, given a few more months, I’ll develop a nice, clean callus … “Okay, I get it, no belittling Gazelle in your presence, Fluff.”
“That’s more like it.”

City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

Chief Bogo was perusing two pieces of paper in his hoof that Higgins had fetched for him from Precinct One HQ. “That seems to be in order,” he said with a nod, handing the pieces of paper to Lionheart. “Good work, Higgins.”

“Thank you, sir,” the hippo replied.

Lionheart looked at the papers, too. Caballus was looking over his shoulder. “Judith Laverne Hopps? Who on earth calls their daughter Laverne?”

Higgins shrugged. “There are worse names. Thomas Amadeus Higgins, for example. Or Frederick Cesar Delgato. Or James Bartholomew Fangmeyer. Precinct One’s full of them.”

“And we’re going to add an even stranger one. Nicholas Piberius Wilde … what a name!” Lionheart was chuckling.

Bogo gave his old friend a rather mischievous grin. “Could you please jog my memory, what was your middle name again?”

“You know perfectly well what my middle name is, AJ,” Lionheart grumbled.

Bogo was just about to open his mouth to announce Lionheart’s middle name to the world, when someone cleared their throat - someone tiny. He looked down to see the personal secretary of Caballus, Marta Aperea. Despite his bad eyesight, even Bogo was able to make out that she looked quite impatient. “You need to get a move on,” she said. “The first councilmammals have already asked me why there’s a holdup, and I’m rapidly running out of good answers.”

Caballus nodded. “We’re all set now, just needed to wait for these papers.” He looked at Lionheart. “Like you always say, Leodore, showtime!”

“Indeed.” Both mammals walked away together, towards the huge double doors leading to the Council Chamber.

Bogo was still looking at the now closed door when Pennington arrived, with two much smaller mammals in tow. He greeted her with a nod while looking down at Hopps and Wilde. “Any troubles finding them?”

“No, sir. They were exactly where I expected them to be.” Pennington smiled. “By the way, Freddie Delgato sends his regards.”

“He’s still doing his job?”

“Of course he is, you know him, sir.”

Bogo nodded. “Good. Although I never thought I had to ask a suspended cop to help uphold the law.”

“Crazy times, these,” Wilde said deadpan. “Good morning, Chief.”

“You could say that, Wilde. Crazy times indeed. Good morning to the two of you.”

“Good morning, Chief,” Hopps said before adding: “Uhm, just what do you want from us?”
Bogo gave her a rather perfunctory smile. “Relax, Hopps. I don’t ask you to do anything. I wanted to have the two of you present for this momentous occasion.”

“So it’s true,” Wilde said. “Lionheart’s returned, and the City Council awaits demolishing.”

Bogo nodded. “Officer Pennington told you?”

“I did,” Pennington said. “Or was it a secret?”

Bogo shook his head. “It wasn’t, not that I’m aware of. In ten minutes, all of Zootopia will know that Lionheart’s back. So a few minutes of head start won’t be much of a problem.” He looked at Wilde. “And yes, you’re quite right, Wilde. Caballus has devised a scheme to rid us of this corrupt Council once and for all.”

“Those are not the words I would use, Chief.” Wilde gave him a smirk which was bordering on impertinent.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I wouldn’t call it a scheme. You know, when the bad guys scheme, it’s called a scheme. When the good guys scheme, it’s called strategy.”

Even Bogo couldn’t hide his grin at that, while Hopps chuckled. “Assuming, of course, it is the good guys who’re scheming, Nick.” She made a deliberate pause before adding: “Oh, sorry, I meant to say, who’re, ahem, developing a strategy.”

“That goes without saying, Carrots.”

Bogo cleared his throat and became serious again. “May I talk to you in private for a minute, Wilde?”

Wilde made a frown. “Of course, Chief.”

Bogo led the way towards an unoccupied spot in the lobby, well out of earshot of even the most attentive bunny ears. Before Bogo was able to say something, Wilde said silently: “This is about my application, right?”

“It is.”

“Is there a problem with it?”

Bogo shrugged. “There are several problems with it, as you know very well. One will be dealt with in a few minutes, but there are a few more speed bumps along the way.”

Wilde closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. “I’m going to be pardoned.”

Bogo nodded. “A full pardon. And Caballus even offered to pay your outstanding tax debts.”

“Really?”

“Yes. They thought that after what you did for Zootopia, you deserve it.” He made a pause. “And for the record, I agree with them.”

“Thank you, Chief. And please remind me to thank them.”

“You will have enough opportunity to do so yourself, don’t worry. Now, the other speed bumps.
When reading your file, I couldn’t help noticing that you neither have a high school diploma nor a driving license to your name.”

Wilde’s smile vanished. “Is that a problem?”

“It is. You need both to become a police officer.”

“Shit!” Wilde was visibly upset about that fact.

“You really are intent on becoming a police officer?”

“I am, sir, I very much am.”

“One hundred percent?”

“One hundred percent.”

“You know what you’re getting yourself into?”

Wilde shrugged. “Probably not to the full extent, but I guess I have a pretty good idea.”

“A good idea may not be enough. I’m under the impression, for example, that you have a certain disregard for rules.”

“I … may have that, yes.”

Bogo leaned forward, fixing his stare on Wilde. “Well, rules are usually there for a reason, and a good reason at that. The ZPD’s certainly no exception. We have a lot of rules, and they’re not flexible. Nor am I. Either obey them or you’re history. Is that clear?”

Wilde hesitated, then he looked Bogo into the eyes and nodded. “Crystal, sir.”

Bogo nodded. “That’s what I wanted to hear. Still, even with all your dedication to the cause, you need to be aware of the fact that you will have a huge mountain to climb.”

“I will climb it, sir, no matter how high it is.”

Bogo allowed himself a smile. “Commitment. I like that. Now, getting a driving license is easy. It’s actually possible to obtain it during training on the ZPA, but that’s a truckload of work on top of an already hefty workload, so you fare much better if you already have a driving license when joining the ZPA. And as far as that is concerned, well, Leodore Lionheart told me of one of his neighbors, a former racing driver who runs a driving school today, among other business ventures.”

“You don’t happen to be talking about Dale Elkhardt, sir, do you?”

“I am, actually. So you heard of him?”

“Who hasn’t?”

“Leodore is sure he can teach you how to drive.”

“That’s great, but he doesn’t need to teach me, sir. I know how to drive a car.” Upon Bogo’s look, Wilde shrugged. “I merely don’t have a driving license, but you don’t need one to learn to drive.”

Bogo hesitated, then he shrugged himself. “Whatever. You’ll receive a pardon, that should take care of that. But even if you can drive, can you drive fast? And safely at that?”
“Well, probably not as fast as The Intimidator, but what’s so difficult about driving fast? You just put the pedal to the metal.”

Bogo snorted. “And quickly find yourself running, one, out of talent, and two, out of road. Driving fast without wrecking your car and killing yourself in the process is tough, and it’s something the instructors at the ZPA take very seriously. If you can’t drive in a fast and safe way, it’s unlikely you make it to the ZPD. Maybe you’ll pass your training, but let it be known to you that to make it to Precinct One, and I assume you want that, you need to be among the Top Five in your class. Failing the driving test will make that impossible.”

Wilde nodded. “So Elkhardt will be able to teach me to drive fast and safely enough to make it into your precinct?”

“If Leodore is to be believed, he is.”

“Good.”

“Now, about the high school diploma.” Bogo made a pause. “First, you need to enroll at an Adult Education Center, where you can get the diploma. I can take care of that for you, if you like. I know one of the teachers there, and he may be able to help you in a speedy fashion.”

“That would be much appreciated, Chief.”

“I will see to it then. Now, the problem is the time frame. I’m pretty certain that you’re intelligent enough to get the diploma with ease, but you have less than three months to do it.”

“Ouch!” Wilde said. “In other words, there’s a huge workload in my immediate future.”

“That’s an understatement. You need to work your ass off here, Wilde. Expect long days of studying and few hours of sleep.”

“Oh, I will work my ass off, sir! This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me!”

“That’s the spirit! Still, you’ll probably need all the help you can get. Fortunately, Leodore thought he could help you there. The wife of Dale Elkhardt. Brenda, she’s a high school teacher. Leodore thinks she may be able to help you learn what you need to know.”

“That would be great.”

Bogo nodded, straightening himself again. “The rest is up to you, of course.”

“Thank you, sir.” Wilde hesitated. “There’s one more thing, Chief.”

“Which is?”

“Well, the ZPA, sir. I know that Major Mastiff said he wanted to make sure they’ll accept my application, but …”

Bogo gave him a grin. “Oh, I think that won’t be much of a problem.”

Nick raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“All in its proper time. Now, is there anything else?”

Wilde thought about this for a moment. “Nothing comes to mind.”
“Good. Let’s not keep your soon-to-be workmates waiting, shall we?”

Wilde chuckled. “I actually like that.”

They returned to the police officers still waiting in the middle of the lobby. Upon hearing a rather tinny voice, Bogo looked around, only to find that Higgins had brought a tablet computer with him, which was now showing the interior of the Council Chamber. “ZNN broadcasts the event live, Chief. Thought you wanted to see this.”

Bogo nodded. “Don’t we all?”

---

Yup, don’t we all? Don’t worry, next chapter, the City Council is in session!

I don’t have a middle name, by the way. They’re not as common around here as they are in America.

The things I mentioned in the second part of the chapter, during the conversation between Bogo and Nick, were meant to be the start of something I wanted to deal in the later chapters of this story. But then it dawned upon me that the fact that Nick has, so far, neither a high school diploma nor a driving license to his name is interesting, but not that important in the long run. He became a cop, so he must have managed to get both at a later time. I had originally intended to show just what a struggle this was for him. I never did, simply because it was unnecessary and quite self-indulgent - it was just something I wanted to read. So I decided to never write it down.

Now, however, I will write it down, but not in this story. Instead, I have decided that I will definitely add another story to my series, consisting of one-shots and short story arcs. As far as the chronologic order is concerned, it will take place between “Wound” and “Nightmare,” it will jump from here to there with no chronological or logical order whatsoever, and to understand “Nightmare” and, later, “Hammer,” it’s not necessary to read it. It’ll be little more than a collection of stuff I want to write - quite self-indulgent, sometimes redundant, often hilarious, sometimes serious. The name will be “Those Were the Days of Our Lives,” after the song “These Are the Days of Our Lives,” written and performed by Queen, published on the album “Innuendo” by Parlophone/Hollywood in 1991.

And just so you know, it’ll be something I’ll work on whenever I have time and am in the proper mood. Since it’s not necessary for the other stories, those will still take precedence. So after all is said and done, I will probably finish “Days” only after having dealt with “Hammer.”

Isn’t it crazy? No matter how many jokes you may know, one day somebody invariably comes along and tells you one you haven’t heard before, while everyone else around you just rolls their eyes upon hearing such an old pun. I know oodles of jokes, yet I learn a new one every day.

As a bonus, my current favorite one goes like this:

You sit on it, you sleep in it, you brush your teeth with it. What is it?

No idea? Really!
Come on, it’s simple!

Shall I tell you?

Okay!

Here goes ...

Chair, bed, toothbrush!

What? You really though I was thinking of something else? ;-) 

On a less bright note, the possible riot prevented by the undercover cops, well, that is me taking a page out of history books again. Back in 1989, months before the Berlin Wall fell and Germany was about to be re-united, the so-called “Montagsdemonstrationen (Monday Demonstrations) had slowly, but surely, spread over all of East Germany. (If you don’t know what I’m talking about, look it up! I was just turning 18 around that time, and the events had me glued to the TV screen or radio. Fascinating stuff!) The thing most people in West Germany, where I was born and living, feared was the outbreak of riots. And while the East German security forces did arrest several protestors, even resorting to using force to do it, on the whole, nothing much happened. The political leaders, overwhelmed by the sheer number of protestors, shied away from using excessive force under the eye of the other nations watching the proceedings, and the protestors themselves, they wanted a revolution, but they wanted it to be peaceful. “Keine Gewalt!” (No Violence!) was one of the slogans they shouted back then, along with the famous “Wir sind das Volk!” (We are the people!) chant.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the German re-unification are one of the rare examples in history of the people overthrowing an oppressive government through peaceful means. I was told of a small number of similar incidents by me faithful readers back when I first published this chapter, but when looking at the way the respective administrations deal with the public protests in Russia and Hong Kong at this very moment, I’m afraid the number of truly peaceful protests won’t get much bigger in a hurry.

The mammal named Dale Elkhardt is, of course, a bow towards “No. 3,” Dale Earnhardt, The Intimidator, The Man in Black, winner of no less than seven NASCAR Winston Cup trophies. I still remember where I was when I heard of his untimely death. February 18, 2001 has to be regarded as one of the blackest days in motorsports history, along with the “Black Weekend” at Imola from April 29 to May 1, 1994, when Roland Ratzenberger and Ayrton Senna died. Since I admired Earnhardt till the cows come home, I took the liberty of letting him reach his retirement age in perfect health. May God rest his soul! And those of Ayrton Senna, Roland Ratzenberger and all other sports performers who died much too early.

Brenda Gee was the second wife of Dale Earnhardt and mother of Dale Earnhardt Jr., hence the name of the high school teacher.

Oh, and by the way, the sentence said by Nick about scheming and strategy was given to me by my faithful reader Robert Escher, back on Fanfiction.net, and he even permitted me to make use of it in this chapter. Again, many thanks for that, Robert! (The original quote given by him was: “When the good guys scheme I believe it is called 'strategy'.”
There’s a quote hidden in this chapter, taken from the movie “Top Gun,” directed by Tony Scott and published by Paramount Pictures in 1986. I guess you won’t have many problems finding it.

Thanks for reading, and, as usual, comments are very much appreciated!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

This marks the beginning of the end for the City Council!

It’s sort of a reprise of chapters two and three, where I jumped to and fro between different locations. And just like those chapters, this and the next two chapters are just enormous! Consider yourself warned...

Thanks for following this story thus far, and kudos go out to GhostWolf88 and Hayato for sending comments! Always appreciated!

You’ll meet quite a lot of new original characters in this chapter, but most aren’t all that important. A select few of them may crop up again in “Hammer,” but that’s undecided as of yet. I just need to mention two of them here. The first one's importance can be reduced to his name, but there is one OC in here who will become pretty important along the road. These two characters were suggested to me by two of my faithful readers. In the author’s notes at the end of this chapter, I’ll give credit where credit is due.

I’m still waiting for somebody to find more quotes, you know!

---

Dangerous Mammals

I am your pain, and I know you can’t take me.


---

City Hall, Council Chamber, City Center, Zootopia

This is exactly what I wanted.

Trying his hardest to hide his smile, Cameron Caballus surveyed the scene in front of him. Or rather, the complete and utter chaos, the amount of which came as somewhat of a surprise to him.

He had, of course, been certain that the reappearance of Leodore Lionheart in City Hall would cause quite a lot of raised eyebrows. But he had assumed, maybe a bit rashly, that after his tentative questioning, asking other councilmammals about Lionheart and their possible support for him as the old and new Mayor, the other councilmammals would at least have been somewhat prepared for the sight of the lion.

He couldn’t have been more mistaken.

It seemed that nobody had really expected that Caballus would turn rhetoric into action. This was the only possible explanation Caballus could think of when watching the scene unfolding before his eyes. Virtually every mammal present had left their seats. He heard hundreds of shouted questions, countless shaken heads, saw several incredulous stares. Some mammals clapped their
paws or hooves in obvious approval, while others seemed to be quite vocal in voicing their displeasure. Someone even screamed at the top of their voice.

It looked and felt like an all-out riot.

The atmosphere was so tumultuous that Caballus’s attempt to get a feeling for the overall atmosphere in the huge room was futile. He simply had no idea whether Lionheart was met with open arms or open hostility. It was just too noisy, too chaotic. The citizens of Zootopia had certainly never seen the City Council in an uproar such as this one.

And the TV cameras were recording all of this.

It was, Caballus mused as he was sitting down on the chair at the head of the long table, exactly what he could have hoped for. The Council was in utter shambles, and nothing could have shouted this fact out to the world more clearly then the complete mayhem in front of him.

And all of Zootopia was seeing this.

The stage was set for some major changes.

The question was, had the opinions of the councilmammals, their attitude towards Lionheart, changed, or were they still willing to support Caballus in his attempt to reinstate Lionheart?

Or had they simply lied into his face?

Only one way to find out.

Well, here goes!

Zootopia News Network Headquarters, TV Studio Four, City Center, Zootopia

“I cannot recall ever having seen the City Council as a whole in such a state of confusion before.” The voice of Michael Rougeau filled the studio, accompanying the pictures recorded by the cameras inside the City Hall’s Council Chamber. “It’s difficult to make out opinions at the moment, but it’s safe to say the appearance of former Mayor Leodore Lionheart created some major stir among the councilmammals.”

“Do you have any idea why Lionheart is there?” Fabienne Growley asked. Peter Moosebridge looked at his co-presenter with a smile. Having the culprit behind the savage predator cases revealed, having the culprit behind the attacks on her, personally, revealed, had done wonders for her equilibrium. She was all business, her manner of speech succinct and precise, “Has he been pardoned. And if so, by whom? Acting Mayor Caballus? Or the whole Council?”

“That’s indeed the question,” Rougeau said. The camera switched over, showing an elderly wolverine with a microphone in his paw, standing in front of City Hall, looking into the camera. “One of the numerous questions everyone here is asking themselves. There has been no press release prior to this session, so right now, I am looking at an extraordinary number of stunned looks.” He made a pause and added: “And I’m probably wearing one of them on my face.”

Moosebridge didn’t even attempt to hide his amusement. “You do, but that’s perfectly understandable,” he said with a chuckle. “I guess it can safely be said that nobody here expected this.”

“Although there were hints,” Rougeau countered. “After the arrest of Dawn Bellwether, Officer
Judy Hopps stated that the charges against Leodore Lionheart had been fabricated. And among the protestors that are still surrounding City Hall, there is an ever-increasing number of mammals asking for the pardon and reinstatement of Lionheart as Mayor of Zootopia. And they’re not the only ones. The leader of the Republican Party and Speaker of the City Council, Liu Shumeng, told me only yesterday that he was even, and I quote, ‘longing for the days when Lionheart was still in office,’ quote end.”

“That is surprising,” Growley said. “Although it needs to be said that both Liu and Lionheart have always gotten along quite well.”

“Well, for Liu, what’s the alternative? The Democratic Party rules the City Council by a huge margin. Even though Dawn Bellwether and Robert Aries were arrested and Matilda Swinton resigned, their party still has an advantage of 30 seats to 14 over his Republican Party. And even if the Republicans should join forces with the Green Party, which they have never done in the past, and probably never will, they’re still down by a margin of twelve seats. Liu Shumeng is well-advised to stay on good terms with the Democrats.”

“But even going so far as to promote the return of one of their greatest political adversaries?”

“Liu has never spoken ill of Lionheart. And as for Lionheart himself, he seems to hold Liu in high esteem. After all, Lionheart was the one who convinced his Democrats to vote Liu into office as Speaker of the City Council, despite Liu’s party being in the minority by such a hard margin.”

“A move which surprised a lot of mammals back then,” Moosebridge said.

“Indeed, but it was a smart one. Even before Leodore Lionheart and his Democratic Party came to power, Liu Shumeng had been Speaker of the City Council. He is without the shadow of a doubt one of the most respected councilmammals in history. With nine terms of office under his belt, nobody has more experience. During his almost thirty years on this council, he has worked both as leader of the majority as well as leader of the minority, and during that time he has always been considered a mammal of great integrity. Even when Lionheart achieved such landslide victories during the last two elections, nobody questioned Liu Shumeng and his position. It certainly was a concession to the Republicans, giving them the illusion of having power and influence when they have, in fact, only very little. But it also was a bow to a well-respected, seasoned councilmammal who has always been the voice of reason, even in troubling times. Lionheart has often stated that he considered Liu to be the best mammal for the job, and so far, nobody has contradicted him. As a matter of fact, most political analysts consider him to be the only reason why the City Council hasn’t broken apart over the course of the last few days.”

“But it sure seems to be on the verge of collapse now,” Growley stated.

“I guess that depends on what happens next, on why Lionheart is here.” Rougeau looked to the side, obviously at a monitor standing next to the camera. “I see now that Acting Mayor Cameron Caballus has taken his place next to Liu. I think the session is about to begin. Back to you! For ZNN, I’m Michael Rougeau, live from City Hall, Zootopia.”

“Thanks, Michael.” Growley looked at Moosebridge. “I must admit that I’m feeling quite excited about this.”

Moosebridge nodded. Surprisingly enough, Growley’s very public outburst a few days ago hadn’t hurt her reputation at all. Most commentators had even gone so far and laud her for making her opinion known in such a spectacular fashion. She had obviously decided to continue playing that paw, and Moosebridge had no problems playing along. “I guess you’re not the only citizen of Zootopia who is excited right now. We are now switching over to the Council Chamber of City
Hall, where the City Council is staging an extraordinary session. For ZNN, I’m Peter Moosebridge.”

“And I’m Fabienne Growley. Stay tuned!”

“Aaaannnddd … we’re off the air,” Patrick Mephitis said. “Good job!”

“Should we stay here?” Growley asked.

Mephitis nodded. “You better. We don’t know how long the session’s going to take. I’m sending Larry for a deli run. You want anything?”

Moosebridge chuckled. “As long as I have enough coffee, I’m good.”

“Me too, Pat. But thanks anyway,” Growley said and got up. “Let’s fire up the old brewer.”

______________________________________________________________

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Records Department, City Center, Zootopia

There was a loud beep, and the intercom came to life with its usual hiss of static. “Clawhauser, this is Mastiff, do you copy?”

Clawhauser suppressed a yawn and pressed the appropriate button. “Yes, Clawhauser at Records here, what can I do for you?”

“Could you please find the file for one, uhm, Duke Weselton for …”

“The name’s Weaselton, Major. Duke Weaselton”

A short pause followed. “You know him?”

Clawhauser rolled his eyes. “Everybody knows the Duke of Bootleg.”

“Ah. Anyway, could you please find his file for me? I need to look into a possible direct connection between him and Bellwether. We know he had a business relationship with this ram chemist, Doug Ramses, but maybe there’s more to it than meets the eye.”

“You, sir? You’re investigating the Bellwether case?”

Mastiff snorted. “Parts of it, yes. For reasons unbeknownst to me, the DA decided to charge Bellwether with several cases of attempted murder, among other things. Of course stuff like that ends up on my desk.”

“As if there wasn’t enough for you to do already,” Clawhauser said, getting up. “I’ll be at your office in a few minutes.”

“Don’t sweat it, Ben. Go easy on that leg of yours, you hear me?”

Clawhauser shook his head, although Mastiff wasn’t able to see it. “My leg’s fine, Uncle Massie. Has been for ten years in fact.”

“Even so, there’s no need for you to overexert yourself. It’s perfectly okay if you just drop it at your old hunting grounds. I’ll pick it up from there. It’s not like this needs to be done immediately.”

Clawhauser hid his sigh of relief. There was a very good reason why the mammals from the Homicide Squad were commonly, and even somewhat affectionately, called “Homies” within the
ZPD. For most intents and purposes, their leader, Major Mastiff, ran them like a big family. They were a tightly knit group, teams of twos and threes who had the reputation of working together exceptionally well. Becoming a member of the group wasn’t easy, but once you were “in,” you were surrounded by mammals who would willingly sacrifice everything to help you. Being a good team player was a basic prerequisite for becoming a member of Homicide Squad.

Another basic prerequisite, somewhat more dubious than the other one though, was that you needed to be okay with having a workplace placed in the back of beyond. The whole Homicide Squad was situated in the most remote corner of the huge building, far removed from the usual hustle and bustle, with Mastiff’s office sitting dead-center. When asked about it, Mastiff usually stated that he didn’t like noise and frantic activity.

Which in turn meant that every journey to Mastiff’s office felt like a veritable round-the-world trip.

“Thanks. I’m on my way.” He released the button and walked over to one of the filing cabinets. Now, after he had established a perfect alphabetical/chronological order, it took him less than three seconds to find the file Mastiff had requested. With a last sigh - and a donut downed quite quickly - he left his office to walk over to the elevator.

It was only after he had left the elevator that he was noticing something extremely peculiar.

He was the only mammal in sight.

The whole building seemed to be deserted. There were none of the usual officers loitering about in the hallways, trying to look busy while basically killing time. There were no other officers who actually were busy doing their duties. There were no freshly arrested criminals, no civilians who came there on one errand or another, no pressmammals molesting everyone they could lay their paws on in their quest for answers.

He looked at his wristwatch in irritation. Almost high noon. Certainly not the most busy of times in Zootopia - in most families, lunch would be served shortly -, yet to meet and see nobody, that was unheard of.

Predictably, when Clawhauser reached the receptionist’s desk, the mammal he met there looked bored out of her brains.

“Hey, what’s up, Chris?” he said instead of a greeting. “Where is everyone?”

Christine Caballus greeted him with a smile. Despite the fact that both of them belonged to the in-house staff, being restricted to office work, the interactions between Caballus and Clawhauser could have been counted on one paw in the past. As a former beat cop, Clawhauser still felt close to all the current beat cops, a lot closer than he felt to the mammals working in office jobs at Precinct One. He knew all of them, of course - came with being the first face you saw when entering the building. And while he certainly was on friendly terms with virtually everyone working at Precinct One, there simply were mammals he didn’t know all that well.

Caballus had been one of them. This had changed, however, when someone in City Council had decided that it would be a bad idea if a cheetah was the one welcoming you when entering Precinct One. When Clawhauser had met Caballus for the first time after being reassigned to the Records Department, he had resented her with every fiber of his being. This feeling evaporated fast, however, when he learned that she was just as annoyed about the reassignment than he was. She belonged in Records, he belonged in Dispatch and Reception, plain as that. They simply were fellows in suffering. Holding any of this against her would have been grossly unfair, so he had started to treat her like every other mammal. And she had responded in kind. After a few weeks of
shared misery, they had even become friends, sort of. “Beats me, Ben. I mean, the Chief has gone to City Hall, and he’s taken Higgins, McHorn, Rhinowitz, Pennington and Trunkaby with him.”

“Going for size?”

“Seems like it And Sergeant Hamada is teaming up with some guys from Precinct Four to arrest the other teenagers who mauled the lynx girl. Plus we have a few other guys to bust. Plus there still is this protest rally in front of City Hall. I guess most guys are simply busy.” She pointed at the file. “On some errand?”

“Yup. Uncle Massie wanted to have this file here.”

“Uncle Massie?”

“Uh, yeah, sorry, I meant Major Mastiff.”

“You call the Major Uncle Massie?”

Clawhauser shrugged. “Why not? When we’re between ourselves, I sometimes call the Chief AJ. He was my first commanding officer back then, leading the SWAT team I became a member of when joining the ZPD. I met Major Mastiff on my very first day here, I got to help him a few times, he liked me, we were on first-name terms pretty quickly, and at one point I simply started calling him Uncle Massie, like most officers in Homicide Squad do. And he was okay with it. End of story.”

Caballus gave a grin. “I keep forgetting that you’ve more than a dozen years of service under your belt. I know Bogo only as the Chief.”

“Well, he was a Captain when I joined.”

She looked at the file. “Weaselton? What has he done this time?”

“Well, we know he stole the Night Howler bulbs for Doug Ramses, but they’re looking into possible connections between him and Bellwether.”

“Direct connections?”

“Looks like it.”

“Do you believe it?”

Clawhauser snorted. “Not for one second. Weaselton wouldn’t recognize a good scam if it bit him in the face. He isn’t smart enough to be involved in any sort of grand scheming beyond simple theft and bootlegging. Bellwether and Ramses were probably just looking for someone to steal the Night Howler bulbs for them, and he was fortunate enough to be at the right place at the right time. Still,” he raised the file, “the Major’s right, it deserves being looked into, if only to rule out any further hitches.”

Suddenly a male voice piped up behind Clawhauser. “That’s the thinking, Ben.” Clawhauser turned around to find Mastiff standing in front of him, the infamous lopsided grin on his disfigured face. “The Chief and I don’t believe it either, but you know what they say about failure to take precautions, don’t you?”

Clawhauser smiled while handing him the file. “They’re the fastest way to get into really big trouble, sir.”
“Damn right.”

Upon Caballus’s incredulous stare, Clawhauser said silently: “He told me this, on one of my first days on the force.”

“And it’s true,” Mastiff pointed at his eye patch. “If I had bothered to check for any hippos on the loose when we entered the warehouse, I would still enjoy the pleasure of having binocular vision.” He then pointed at Clawhauser’s left leg. “If you had made sure the tiger was really out, you would still be a beat cop.”

Clawhauser sighed. “Yeah, I know, but what’s done is done.”

“That it is, but we can still learn from our mistakes. And who knows,” he looked down at the file in his paws, “maybe we’ll come up with a new lead.”

“That’s … rather doubtful,” Caballus found herself saying.

“You know Weselton?”

“Uh, the name’s Weaselton, sir,” Caballus said.

Mastiff smiled. “I know, but I couldn’t care less.”

“Hang on a minute, you know him?” Clawhauser said.

Mastiff gave him a grin. “What was it you said? Everybody knows the Duke of Bootleg. As a matter of fact, I came across him more often than I like to remember.”

Clawhauser shook his head. “I thought you didn’t know him.”

“Just because I didn’t know his real name? I know his real name. I just prefer to call him Weselton on purpose.”

“Even to his face?” Caballus asked.

“Especially to his face. Nothing gets a rise out of that little idiot faster than calling him Weselton.” Mastiff pointed at the laptop standing next to Caballus, turned off and closed at the moment. “You know, I’m surprised. I would have thought you’d be watching what’s going on at City Hall right now.”

Clawhauser made a frown. “What do you mean?”

“You don’t know? That’s surprising. I thought every mammal in Zootopia …” He made a pause and an encompassing gesture. “You know why there’s nobody here today?”

Caballus looked around. “No, but we were asking ourselves …”

Mastiff pointed at the laptop again. “Log on to the ZNN homepage. They’re bound to have a livestream.”

“A livestream of what?” Clawhauser asked.

“You know where the Chief went this morning?”

“Uhm, City Hall, right?”
“Bingo! ‘Cause that’s where the action is today. I guess most citizens of Zootopia are glued to their TV sets right now.”

“Excuse me, sir, but I cannot watch TV while on duty,” Caballus said.

Mastiff gave her a sardonic smile. “And who’s going to rat on you? Ben here? Believe me, you do want to see this, badly.”

“Sorry, I can’t. I won’t risk my job for …”

Mastiff sighed. “Fine. I’m ordering you to watch the ZNN livestream now, Officer. If someone complains about it, Clawhauser’s your witness that you’re under orders. Let them come to me. Not that anyone will give a damn anyway.”

Caballus looked at Clawhauser, who nodded. She slowly opened her laptop and logged onto the ZNN’s website. Finding the livestream, she gave a scowl. “A council session? Are you shitting me?” She looked at Mastiff. “Ah, oh, sorry, sir!”

Mastiff gave her a smile. “At ease, Officer. Yes, a council session. Watch closely!”

“What do you mean?”

“Look who’s presiding.”

“Well, there’s Liu and … wait a second … is that my dad?”

“What? You didn’t know?” Mastiff asked.

“Know what?”

“Your father’s the current Acting Mayor.”

Caballus stared at him in obvious incredulity. “Sorry, but are you trying to pull my leg, sir?”

Mastiff chuckled. “I wouldn’t think of it.”

Caballus opened her mouth to speak, but remained silent when the presiding panda stood up and rang a small bell. “Order!” he shouted with his sonorous basso voice. “The Council will come to order!”

While they were waiting for the councilmammals to settle down, Clawhauser asked: “And you really didn’t know?”

Caballus shook her head. “Since I moved in with my boyfriend, my dad and I hardly see each other anymore. It’s usually phone calls. He called me a few days ago, but back then, Aries still was Acting Mayor.”

“Well, you are a bit behind the time.”

“I know, but … my dad?” She snorted. “Last guy you want to have as your Mayor.”

“That doesn’t sound like you hold your father in a high esteem,” Mastiff said softly.

“Oh, I do! He always was a great dad to me. But I cannot say I like him too much when he’s acting all … council-ish.”
Clawhauser grinned. “Council-ish?”

Caballus shrugged. “Whenever he’s doing council business, he changes. I can’t even put my digit on it, but somehow … I don’t know. Whenever he puts on his ‘politician’s face,’ as he calls it, it just feels … wrong.”

During her last sentences, the councilmammals had indeed become quiet and sat down on their respective chairs. The panda looked around and said: “The City Council of Zootopia is in session. Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemammals, for coming here on such a short notice. Seeing that we seem to be complete, I hereby declare that we have the quorum. Now, I have been asked by our current Acting Mayor, Cameron Caballus, to invite you to this extraordinary session. Although I have to admit,” he looked at Caballus with a grin, “I have no idea why. Some of you have asked me about today’s agenda. Well, we have none. Which is why I am giving the floor to Acting Mayor Caballus now. I guess he’ll be able to explain it.”

“I am, Mr. Speaker,” Cameron Caballus said at once and stood up while the panda sat down again. “Thank you, Shumeng. And I also want to thank each and every one of you for coming here. I didn’t have enough time to write an agenda, but we have a lot of things on our agenda. I suggest we’re making it up as we go. So, without further ado, let’s get to it.”

He made a pause, looking around. Finally staring into the camera, he said: “When I first ran for office, I desperately wanted to gain a seat in this hallowed building. So I invested a lot of money, a lot of time and a lot of effort on my candidacy. And it worked. I got the necessary votes, I became a councilmammal. Thanks to the citizens of Zootopia, to whom I am very much indebted.” He affected a slight bow.

His daughter groaned. “And yet again, he’s brown-nosing the people! Way to go, Daddy!”

Her father continued: “Did I ever entertain ideas of becoming more, of maybe even try my luck and aim for mayoralty one day? No, no, not really. I was content with where I was. I even became complacent. Never again did I invest nearly as much money, time, and effort into my campaigns. I didn’t need to. After one term of office, I was so well-established that I climbed very high on the list of candidates. Me holding a seat in the City Council, that was always a given, regardless of the outcome of the respective elections. I was content, I was happy. 

“And then I got sloppy.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Clawhauser said.

“When it came to deciding who’d be the next Mayor,” Cameron Caballus continued, “I ended up seventh in line, behind Leodore Lionheart, Dawn Bellwether, Robert Aries, Matilda Swinton, Franklin Pardalis, and Zachary Murinus. Never before had I been that high on the list of possible successors. That was a source of some concern for me. After a while, however, I realized just how unlikely it was for me to ever become Mayor. Just how likely is it for six councilmammals to step down?

He sighed. “Famous last words. Well, here I am, the Acting Mayor of Zootopia!”

He made a tiny pause and continued so softly that you had to strain your ears to hear him. “I never wanted to become the Mayor. I never wanted the responsibility, I never wanted the workload, I never …”

He made yet another pause, shook his head and continued: “I’m an entrepreneur, I run a construction company. And at the end of the day, that is what defines me, not the fact that I’m a
councilmammal. Being one is, in a manner of speaking, a hobby of mine. Running my company, that has always been more important to me. And before you admonish me for that attitude, are you any different?

“Ask yourself one question: Is being a councilmammal more important than your family? Than your job? I doubt it. There are few things more important than your wife and children. There are few things more important than the job which pays the bills. You need to survive, your family needs to survive. You need to support yourself. Most citizens of Zootopia consider their jobs to be of utmost importance, and I’m certainly no exception. And I’m pretty sure most of you think along the same lines.

“And now, the big moral question: Is this the right attitude?” He made a pause. “No, it isn’t! Of course it isn’t! We were elected into office because the citizens of Zootopia put their faith, their trust in us. They expect us to do what is in our power to help them, to support them, to make sure that they can live in peace, harmony, health, and prosperity.

“And boy! Have we failed!

“I guess I’m revealing no secret when I say that Zootopia is in turmoil. You’ve all seen the protestors camped out in front of City Hall. Their number is growing constantly. And I cannot blame them. Because for several days,” he made another pause, and suddenly his voice became stern, “for several days, we have failed to do what the citizens of Zootopia desperately want us to do, and spectacularly at that. We failed to do what is in our power to restore peace and order in this city. The people out there have expectations, and they have every right to have these expectations, and we have failed so utterly, so miserably, at fulfilling these expectations.

“We betrayed their trust! We deceived their hopes! We betrayed their confidence!”

Surprisingly enough, his statement was met with stony silence.

Thomas Cowam Children’s Hospital, Station IV, Sahara Square, Zootopia

“This tastes like cardboard,” the young aardwolf lying in the bed said with a pout.

Despite herself, Rebecca Katanga-Lionheart had to smile at that one. “Are you trying to tell me that you know what cardboard tastes like?”

The aardwolf grinned. “Uh, no.”

Rebecca found herself returning the grin. After having fought down leukemia, Tyler Cristata was on his long, slow way to recovery, with an arduous struggle still ahead of him. Yet, even the most exhausting radiation and chemical therapies had done nothing to dampen his spirit. Rebecca had quickly found out that she liked him, and she had the distinct impression that the feeling was mutual. Seeing him was one of the few bright spots in days of toil and darkness.

One of the very few bright spots.

While picking up the food tray, Rebecca looked up at the TV screen. To her surprise, it didn’t show one of the dreadful music videos the boy was so fond of. Instead it showed the rather austere interior of City Hall’s Council Chamber. There obviously was a meeting in session, with a tall horse standing at the front of the table, in the middle of a speech. Rebecca had never cared much for the City Council, and after her husband had been arrested, her willingness to be concerned with what he had been dealing with had evaporated completely. Still she knew most councilmammals by
sight. And she also remembered what her husband thought of the horse.

Great! Another one of those dense, egotistical, narcissistic bullies. Just what this city needs!

With a suppressed sigh, she said: “What’s wrong with you, Tyler? I thought you’d be watching one of those horrible shows like Headhunter’s Ball.”

“Headbanger’s Ball,” Tyler corrected her. “And I would, but that’s all they show, on all available channels.”

She made a frown. “Really? Why?”

“No idea. I muted the blasted thing. I never liked politicians much.”

This time, Rebecca sighed. “You and me both, Tyler.”

“Really?” Tyler pushed himself up from the bed, with some difficulty. “Wasn’t your hubby the Mayor?”

This elicited another sigh. “He was, but that doesn’t mean I like those people very much.”

“He’s there, you know.”

The boy made this comment in such a casual tone, it took Rebecca a few seconds to fully realize what he had said. She turned around as quickly as the tray she was still carrying allowed for. “What was that?”

Tyler pointed at the screen. “Your husband is there, in the background. There, next to the door.”

Rebecca took a closer look. And sure enough, a tall, rather muscular lion was standing in the background, paws folded behind his back, wearing a blue three-piece suit. Even on the rather tiny screen, he was instantly recognizable. “What the heck …”

“You wanna hear this?” the boy asked.

“Uh, yes, please,” Rebecca said silently.

The boy pressed a button on the remote, and immediately, the voice of Cameron Caballus filled the room. “… their hopes! We betrayed their confidence!”

Rebecca made a frown. She had heard the horse speak much too often for her liking, but he had never sounded that harsh, that stern before, not even remotely. And as he continued speaking, his voice became more harsh by the second.

“We were, and still are, much too interested in keeping our jobs, in maintaining the status quo, maybe even the status quo ante, a return to the time before Zootopia started to go to hell. Well, too late for that. Dawn Bellwether and her criminal thugs saw to that.”

Several people raised their voices at that, but Caballus continued regardless. “Yes, I’m calling her a criminal, because she is. She deserves to rot in the deepest dungeon for what she did. She is the single reason for Zootopia to sink into almost complete chaos. She had a plan, a plan so devious that I still shudder thinking about it.”

He made a pause and lowered his head. “And the worst thing about it is, I helped her put that plan into motion. I supported her by voting for every single one of her outrageous motions, going against my very own convictions. I have, in a manner of speaking, negated everything I did in this
very building in the last fifteen years or so. She played me for a sucker, and I have only my own stupidity to blame for that.” After another pause, he raised his head again. “Well, this ends right now!”

He pointed at the door, where Rebecca’s husband was still standing, unmoving. “When I asked every one of you whether you’d support the return of Leodore Lionheart into office, many of you obviously thought that I was just fooling around. I’m not, to the contrary. I’ve never been this serious before.

“After Bellwether was arrested, ZPD’s Officer Judy Hopps alluded to the possibility of Leodore Lionheart being innocent, of him being duped by Bellwether. Well, I thought at first, what does she know? She’s just a bunny, the first graduate of Lionheart’s Mammal Inclusion Initiative, a rookie cop, way too young and way too naïve.

“But as each and everyone of you should know, first impressions can be deceiving.

“Just this morning, I gave Chief Adrian Bogo of ZPD’s Precinct One a call, asking him whether it was true, whether Lionheart was innocent. And after some reluctance, he told me that Bellwether had indeed given a confession boiling down to that possibility. Everything Officer Hopps had said was the truth, and she and Mister Nicholas Wilde risked their lives to learn said truth. After having been told that, I paid the District Attorney, Andrew Horner, a visit. He granted me a quick glimpse into the investigation file against Dawn Bellwether. And as it turns out, there’s every indication that Leodore Lionheart is …”

He made a lengthy pause, and Rebecca found out to her dismay that breathing had just become quite difficult.

“… well, I guess innocent’s too strong a word. He did falsely imprison the savage predators, and he frankly admitted to it. But it’s a fact, proven by preliminary evidence and several witness statements, that he had been coerced, that Dawn Bellwether forced his paws. Extenuating circumstances, if you ask me.”

He took a deep breath. “Be that as it may, it doesn’t matter anyway. As of this morning, Leodore Lionheart is a free mammal again. I have executed my right as Acting Mayor of Zootopia to grant him a full pardon. As far as I’m concerned, Leodore Lionheart did nothing wrong, and should your opinion differ, you can keep your opinion to yourself, because I don’t care about it!”

Rebecca closed her eyes, and it was only then that she noticed that tears were running down her face, wetting her fur. She felt a small paw being placed on her arm and opened her eyes again to look into the face of Tyler showing nothing but compassion.

---

**ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Forensic Laboratory, Conference Room, City Center, Zootopia**

“So, let’s recap. Where do we stand?” Doctor Armando Peralta sat down at the head of the long table. Being a giraffe, he still towered over all the other mammals who had joined him in his quest to find a cure for the Nighthowler serum. His gaze went over the other mammals and finally came to rest on Madge Badger. “Honey?”

She took a deep breath. Despite being a scientist of renown, she still felt quite insignificant next to all these legends of scientific research. At least nobody held her involvement in the Missing Mammals case against her. To the contrary, she had been treated with respect and courtesy, so much courtesy that she was on first-name terms with each and every one of them by now. “Well,
your initial instinct turned out to be correct, Armando. Epinephrine’s a big factor. Among other things, the poison kicks the adrenal glands into overdrive, so the body’s inundated with adrenaline. Endorphin levels are through the roof, too.”

Peralta nodded while pouring himself a cup of tea. “So the victim feels little to no pain, and the physical strength increases massively.”

“Plus the fight-or-flight instinct overpowers everything else.”

“Yes, but why do they fight and not flee?” Doctor Charles Afer, an aardvark who was working at a pharmaceutical company, looked at her. “I mean, this otter who was poisoned, he attacked a jaguar of all mammals, an animal several times his size and weight. Even under the influence of something which makes you super-strong and alert, you’d think twice before doing something like that.”

“So why do they do it?” Peralta asked. “Hallucinations?”

“Most certainly, but I have no idea how this is achieved.” This came from Professor Eleonore Mitis, an ocelot and teacher at Zootopia University. “We can rule out most psychedelic drugs, because they all work only for a very short period of time. You need to, in a manner of speaking, refresh the dosage on a regular basic. For example, the most common psychedelic drug, LSD, has a half-life of about three-and-a-half hours, so after little more than half a day, the effect is all but gone. And unlike adrenaline and endorphin, which are produced by the body itself, none of the commonly known psychedelic drugs are synthesized within the body or can be produced by it directly. On top of that, most psychedelic drugs lead to severe side effects like fatigue or muscle weakness, and our victims are all but weak. And most drugs induce euphoria, not outright aggressiveness.”

“Well, this is where this infamous Nighthowler plant comes in, I guess,” Badger said.

“Certainly, but even there we run into a snatch. My research assistant told me that they are, in effect, very similar to LSD, especially in terms of their half-life. One of his uncles ate one of the flowers, but he recovered within less than one day. Our victims still are under the influence of the drug, some of them almost half a year after being drugged. How? Whoever created the serum, he must be a genius, because I have no idea how he managed to make the effect permanent.”

“Are you sure that the effect is permanent?” Peralta asked.

“That seems to be the case, yes,” Afer said. “Otherwise we would have seen at least a diminished effect, and the savage mammals are just as savage today as they were when they were first drugged.”

“What about multiplication? Officer Hopps suggested that just the vast amount of Nighthowlers in the serum is causing the effects’ longevity.”

“It’s not that simple. In most drugs, increasing the dosage merely means the drug becomes more dangerous, maybe even lethal. If the dosage is too high, if it’s increased by a factor of several dozen, as Hopps claimed, you get no effect, you get instant exitus.”

“That’s all just guesswork,” Mitis said. “Nobody knows exactly, because nobody dealing with Nighthowlers even goes near the stuff.”

“How do you know?” Badger asked.

“My assistant told me, and he should know, seeing that he’s from Bunnyburrow. He grew up on a
“Ah. He’s a bunny?” Afer asked.

“A very astute observation,” Mitis said with a chuckle.

“So we need to extract the original essence of Nighthowlers from the complete serum,” Peralta said. “Where do we stand there?”

Gerard Gusteau, a mouse and owner of a health care company, made a frown. “Not good. Like Eleonore said, whoever did this is a genius. We’re talking about at least 300, maybe close to 400 different components, all of which need to be identified. We don’t even know which one of the numerous ingredients is the essence of *Midnicampum holicithias*, or whether there are several components from the flower in the serum.”

“In other words, we need the real McCoy.”

“So to speak, yes.”

Peralta looked at Mitis. “Well?”

Mitis shrugged. “You probably won’t believe it, but you won’t find a single Nighthowler in Zootopia. All you’ll find are bulbs, and those are removed from the shelves as we speak, courtesy of the public health authorities. And the bulbs won’t help us anyway, seeing that it takes at least three months for the flowers to have grown enough for us to be able to extract anything useful from them.”

“That’s too long. We need results sooner than that. Chief Bogo’s really breathing down my neck here, and rightly so. This needs to be solved as quickly as possible.”

“My sentiments exactly. Which is why I sent my research assistant home today to fetch me some fully-grown Nighthowler plants from his family farm. As a matter of fact, I’m expecting his return any minute now.”

“Good thinking!” Peralta looked around. “Anything else?”

“Well,” Badger began, “I have isolated the components which kick the adrenal glands into top gear. Now I need to find out if the effect is reversible.”

“Are we talking permanent effect here?” Mitis asked.

It was Afer to answer. “We have seen little so far to support the reverse. Even now, weeks, even months after being infected, the adrenaline levels still are dangerously high. So high in fact that it’s a miracle no victim has suffered a heart attack or a stroke so far.”

“Permanent damage to the glands?” Peralta asked.

Gusteau shook his head. “Preferably not.”

“Organically, the adrenal glands are fine. All victims are, in fact, in a remarkably good shape,” Mitis said.

“What do you mean?” Peralta asked.

“Well, one of the first victims, a polar bear, was slightly, ahem, horizontally challenged when he was poisoned.”
“Horizontally challenged?”

Mitis gave the giraffe a grin. “Let’s not mince words here, he was fat. Class II obesity. I was talking to his wife the other day. She told me that he had something of a sweet tooth and knew physical exercise only from hearsay. Since he came here, he has eaten nothing but fish. He simply refused to eat anything else. I tried to give him some iced cupcakes - he just walked past them. Which is all he does, walk to and fro. None of the mammals seem to be able to sit still. When they’re not asleep, they’re moving.”

“They need to get rid of all the excess energy,” Afer suggested. “After all, all the adrenaline keeps their bodies in a constant state of high alertness.”

“Probably. Be that as it may, our polar bear has, so far, lost almost 120 pounds of weight and is in the shape of his life.”

Peralta gave a low whistle and looked down at his substantial tummy. “Maybe I should let you poison me with that stuff.” That elicited a small laughter.

Which died pretty quickly when the door to the conference room opened, and a bunny walked in. And Badger had to look twice.

The buck easily was the tallest rabbit she had ever seen, certainly taller than she was herself. Apart from that, he was remarkably unremarkable. His fur was a light brown, his eyes likewise, and his face completely ordinary.

Mitis gave the buck a smile. “Ah, Billy, right on time!” She looked around. “Ladies and Gentlemanmammals, meet William Hopps, my research assistant. He’s currently working on his dissertation. I’m his dissertation supervisor.”

Peralta nodded. “Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hopps.”

The rabbit smiled, showing his buck teeth, and Badger couldn’t help noticing a sizeable gap between them. Acromegaly, she thought. Never knew it could hit rabbits, too. “It’s an honor, Doctor Peralta,” the rabbit said. “But please, call me Billy. Everyone does.”

“Of course, Billy. You have something for us?”

“I do, yes,” Billy answered. “My dad sends his regards. Two dozens of his finest Midnicampum holicithias.” With that, he placed two open wooden boxes on the tabletop.

“Much appreciated. Let him send the bill my way.” Mitis gave him a wink. “What took you so long?”

Billy shrugged. “Well, apart from the fact that it took me some time to get used to your car, Eleonore, it was an absolute pandemonium out there when I left. I’ve never seen streets that crowded, not even in Bunnyburrow during Carrot Festival.”

“Only when you left?” Peralta asked.

“Well, most citizens of Zootopia will probably be glued to their TV sets by now.”

“Why?”

“The City Council is in session, and most TV stations are broadcasting live.”
“How do you know?” Mitis asked.

“Heard it on the radio. The last thing I heard was that Leodore Lionheart was there, too.”

Badger stared at him with her mouth open in shock. “Lionheart walks free?”

Billy looked at her with a frown, then his features softened. “You’re Doctor Madge Badger, right?”

“I am.”

“It’s an honor, Doctor Badger. Haven’t I seen you at Zootopia General Hospital during my internship there?”

She turned her face into a scowl. “I was actually leading the lab there, until Lionheart asked me to help him deal with the savage predators. And a certain bunny and a fox put an end to that, as you probably know.”

Billy chuckled. “That bunny’s my younger sister.”

“Really?”

“Really. We’re from the same litter actually. I’m the oldest of five, Judy was third.”

“It really is a small world,” Afer said.

His last words were almost drowned out by a loud, cheerful ditty which suddenly filled the conference room. Everybody looked at Gusteau, who had jumped onto the table, walked over to the remote control, which was every bit as big as he was, and turned the TV set on, which was situated in a corner. Switching channels simply by stepping onto the appropriate buttons, he had soon found ZNN, and the TV set showed a horse standing at the head of a round table, obviously giving a speech.

When everybody kept looking at Gusteau, the mouse shrugged. “What? You don’t want to see this?”

“Oh, we do, Jerry,” Peralta said. “We sure do.”

“... executed my right as Acting Mayor of Zootopia to grant him a full pardon,” the horse said. Badger had to rack her brains to remember the name of the mammal, Cameron Caballus. An entrepreneur, one of the numerous councilmammals who had only been campaigning to protect their livelihood. “As far as I’m concerned, Leodore Lionheart did nothing wrong, and should your opinion differ, you can keep your opinion to yourself, because I don’t care about it!”

Caballus made a pause, looking around. “Of course, that’s only half of the story. The other half is this: Some five years ago, a landslide victory brought Leodore Lionheart his first term of office, as you probably remember. He won almost 70 percent of the votes of the citizens of Zootopia. And his approval polls have never shown figures lower than 60 percent. Last year, he was re-elected, and he won with no less than 72 percent of the votes.” He looked over at Lionheart and gave him a somewhat mocking smile. “For reasons inexplicable to me, the citizens of Zootopia like him.”

He turned back towards the camera, and his features became stern again. “That was a joke, of course. I know the reasons, and they are good. Leodore Lionheart was the first Mayor in a very long time who had made it his goal to ensure that every citizen of Zootopia received the same opportunities, regardless of species, gender, or background. ‘Anyone can be anything,’ the mantra first coined by the founding fathers of Zootopia, was his mantra, it was the code he lived by. All his
predecessors, they had their very own agendas, and while following them, they lost sight of the citizens, they lost sight of the fact that it was their goddamn job to make sure that Zootopia and everyone in it could flourish. Lionheart never lost sight of this goal, and this is why he was met with such approval.

“Needless to say, a mammal like this was a thorn in the eye of a power-hungry sheep named Dawn Bellwether, which is why he had to go. Turn predators savage, force his paws, make sure to assign all the blame to him, and just like that,” he snapped his digits, “he’s removed from office.” He made a pause, and his face turned into a scowl. “And we all played along like the biggest bunch of suckers.

“Well, like they say, it’s never too late to rectify a mistake. I am filing a motion now, to be decided here, today. As of right now, I am no longer the Acting Mayor of Zootopia. I’m stepping down to make way for a mammal who has proven, over and over again, that the sake of Zootopia and its citizens, their well-being, was top priority. Unlike most of us, who seem to have forgotten this fact. I am calling for a new election. This city needs a new Mayor, preferably the old one. I am hereby nominating Leodore Lionheart. And I’m not doing this because he is a fellow party member - I couldn’t care less if he was a Republican or a member of the Green Party. I’m not doing this because I like him - we have actually never gotten along all that well, and I guess that’ll never change. No, I’m doing this because he is the right, the only mammal for the job, the only true alternative. And if you agree with me, I strongly suggest you vote for him, too. Thank you.” Caballus sat down again.

“Wow!” Gusteau said. “That really came out of left field.”

Badger looked at the screen, completely dumbfounded.

Lionheart had told her about the mess his life was, about the debts, about his dubious future, about the hardship his wife had to endure.

Badger had gotten her shot at redemption.

She just hoped he would receive his.

---

City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

“Alright,” Bogo said. “We’re going in.”

“Wait a minute, sir!” Higgins said immediately. “We were told to wait until Lionheart’s reelected!”

“If he is reelected. There probably are several mammals in there who’re opposed to Lionheart, and Merino, Hirvi, and Brooks certainly are three of them. Do you honestly think they will vote for Lionheart? If we remove them, it’ll be an asset.”

That thought gave Higgins pause. “You’re right, Chief.”

“Of course I am.” Bogo turned towards Judy and Nick. “You wait here,” he said.

“For what?” Nick asked.

“Somebody will pick you up, Wilde.” With that, Bogo turned away and strode towards the huge door leading into the Council Chamber, with his five massive officers in tow.

Nick looked at Judy. “Can’t wait to see this.”
“Do you have any idea what Bogo wants us for?” Judy asked.

“Not a clue, Carrots. We just have to wait and see.”

They watched Bogo pound against the door with his enormous fist. It was opened almost immediately, and he and the officers entered. They had hardly left the lobby when Nick said with a chuckle: “Not one for subtlety, eh?”

“At his size, would you?” Judy grinned.

“Probably not.”

Both looked down at the tablet computer, seeing that the camera had zoomed towards the door, showing the six towering police officers standing just inside the council chamber.

Upon their entrance, Caballus had gotten up again. “Excuse me, Chief Bogo, is there a problem?”

“Yes, there is. There are three criminals in this room, criminals I’d like to arrest.”

“No beating about the bush, that’s for sure,” Nick said.

Even to Judy and Nick, who both knew that Caballus was in the know, his display of astonishment looked utterly convincing. “What? Now? Here?”

Liu Shumeng had gotten up, too. “Excuse me, Chief Bogo, but you can’t just walk in here to …”

Bogo interrupted him ruthlessly: “I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker, but when you look at the law, you’ll find out that I can. It is my job to arrest criminals, and since there is no such thing as diplomatic immunity in this city, not for councilmammals at least, which is a good thing in my opinion, there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

“But we’re in session!” Caballus shouted.

“Do you honestly think I give a damn, Mayor? Every minute a criminal walks free is a wasted minute to me. And we have given enough evidence to the DA for him to approve of the arrests. As a matter of fact, I have three signed arrest warrants.” He held up a bunch of papers.

“You can’t do this!”

Bogo gave a chuckle. “I’d like to see you try and stop me, Caballus!” Without further ado, he gave some orders to his officers, who walked into the room to collect three mammals from the folds of the councilmammals, one black sheep, one dorcas gazelle and one camel. While they did so, Bogo shouted: “Councilmammals Isabella Merino, Maya Brooks, and Doctor Jonathan Hirvi, you are under arrest for conspiring to overthrow Zootopia, for falsifying official documents, and an assortment of other crimes which will be given to you in full detail after we’ve taken you to Precinct One. You have the right to remain silent.”

“Really impressive,” Judy said. “Going for maximum impact.”

“Of course,” Nick said. “Anything less won’t be enough right now. If there still was anyone out there believing just for one second that this whole City Council isn’t utterly corrupt and useless, I guess their believes just got shattered.”

Judy shook her head. “Most mammals out there have lost their faith in the City Council months ago. You heard them, too.”
“I did, and you’re probably right.”

They watched in silence as Bogo finished reading the three arrested mammals their rights. The very same silence which, surprisingly enough, had befallen the other councilmammals. For almost two minutes, Bogo’s enormous voice was the only sound they could make out. His sudden appearance and actions seemed to have shocked everybody around into a stupor.

The only other mammal voicing his opinion was Caballus. “This is highly irregular!” he said after Bogo was done.

“To the contrary, Caballus. I’m in full accordance with the law, unlike Merino, Brooks, and Hirvi.” He said a few words to Higgins, who in turn gave some orders to the other officers, who walked towards the door immediately. A few seconds later, Pennington, Trunkaby, McHorn and Rhinowitz were walking past Judy and Nick, their prisoners in tow. The three (former) councilmammals hardly spared them a look, only the sheep gave them somewhat of a stink eye. They ignored her and turned their attention back to the screen.

Bogo and Higgins were still standing near the table, a fact which visibly unnerved a lot of mammals. “Is there anything else, Chief?” Caballus asked and added with quite a lot of annoyance in his voice: “Can’t you see we’re busy?”

Bogo nodded. “Of course there is something else, and you know it, Caballus.”

---

**Austin J. Robin Plaza, In Front of City Hall, City Center, Zootopia**

After having worked for the ZPD for more than a decade, wearing many hats, Frederick Delgato was proud to say that he had developed something of a sixth sense when it came to spotting troublemakers. Which is why he pushed his way past a group of smaller mammals with considerable haste.

Because he had seen a mammal who just screamed trouble.

Trying to act inconspicuous, he approached the small mammal, every fiber on alert. If this was going to get ugly, he needed to be in tip-top shape.

At first glance, the mammal didn’t look overly remarkable. Like many mammals on the plaza, he wore shades to protect against the glaring sun. His jacket appeared to come from military stock - it was a flight jacket made out of brown leatherette with some military insignia on both the front and the back. He wore it over a white tank top. Blue jeans and military boots completed the picture. A sizeable black rucksack was sitting on the ground next to him, obviously belonging to him. Delgato decided that he was probably looking at a soldier. Or rather an ex-soldier, given the mammal’s rather unkempt appearance.

An ex-soldier with a lot of fighting experience. His posture alone ruled out all other possible explanations. Like a coiled spring, he looked insanely alert. He was quite muscular, if the bulges barely concealed by his jacket were any indication, and his relaxed-looking stance may have fooled most mammals, but as a trained martial artist, Delgato instinctively recognized it as the posture of a seasoned fighter, someone expecting an attack, fully prepared to repel it.

A mammal like this, an ex-soldier with fighting experience, out to look for trouble could mean a lot of trouble for him.

Delgato paused, thinking.
Am I letting my prejudices get the better of me here?

The mammal in question was a fox, an arctic fox in his summer morph, to be more precise.

And foxes are, as everybody knew, sneaky and untrustworthy.

Then again, it was a fox who had helped turn things around in Zootopia.

Should I give him the benefit of the doubt?

He had just closed the gap to the arctic fox to less than six feet when the latter made the decision for him. Still looking at the huge view screen which showed Acting Mayor Caballus giving a speech, the fox said: “Relax, copper. I don’t go looking for trouble.”

Delgato stopped in his stride. How on earth …

The fox continued: “Trouble usually finds me.”

“Who are you?” Delgato asked.

Still not looking at him, the fox chuckled. “What, you don’t wanna know how I was able to tell that you are a cop?”

Delgato stepped next to the fox, not looking at him either, turning his gaze towards the view screen instead. A casual observer may not have guessed that they were in the process of having a conversation. “One, I’m not a cop anymore.”

“Oh! How comes?”

“Bellwether saw to that.” Delgato couldn’t help growling.

“I see. And two?”

Delgato shrugged. “I just presumed that you are the kind of mammal who knew a cop when they saw one.”

Again, the fox gave a chuckle. “That sounds like something a friend of mine could have said.”

“A friend of yours?”

“Yep. I don’t think you know him, he’s a red fox.”

Delgato frowned, and his thoughts went back to the red fox he had met a few minutes earlier. He had said something very similar to him. “Are we talking about Nick Wilde?”

Now the fox turned towards the lion for the first time. “So you do know my friend. I’m impressed.”

“Well, most of Zootopia knows him, I guess, what with helping to arrest Bellwether.”

“You’re probably right.” The fox made a pause, returning his gaze to the view screen. “You’re looking for guys looking for trouble.” It was a statement, not a question.

Delgato, however, decided not to relent that easily. “What would give you that idea?”

“The fact that you spotted a tiny fox wearing military garb amongst the thousands of mammals, for
Delgato leaned back a bit to look at the insignia on the back of the foxes’ jacket. On closer inspection, it turned out to be a company insignia. It showed an overturned anchor over wavy lines in front of two crossed rifles. Complete with the laurel wreath encircling the logo and horns adorning the circle, it almost looked like the face of a predator with buffalo horns, with the anchor’s arms providing eyebrows, while the rifles provided the eyes through their butts and long, sinister-looking fangs through their barrels.

“Royal Nagerian Armed Forces, Naval Infantry, first regiment, second battalion, first company, nicknamed Horned Head,” the fox said silently.

“You’re a marine?”

“Ex-marine.”

“You saw combat, I guess.”

“Quite a lot of it. Little more than three years of service. One tour in Cowait, two in Aafurnistan.”

Delgato gave a low whistle. “Bet that brought you a lot of honors.”

The fox gave a guffaw. “It brought me a dishonorable discharge.”

Delgato blinked. “What?”

The fox shrugged. “Let’s just say my term of service didn’t end on a high note.”

“What happened?”

The fox looked up at the much taller lion again. “Don’t you have more important things to do than to badger me with questions about my past?”

“I don’t know. Right now, you are the most interesting thing around.”

“Are you sure?”

Delgato frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Two tigers, ten o’clock. At least one of them is armed, with a shotgun, if I may haphazard a guess. If the other guy has a gun, too, it must be pretty small.”

Delgato looked up in surprise. Looking in the indicated direction, he spotted two tigers wearing long black coats, a rarity in this kind of fine weather.

And his sixth sense fired up immediately. “Uh oh!”

“My sentiments exactly. You wanna take them down?”

Delgato gave a hiss. “Not an option. I don’t see their weapons, so right now, I cannot accuse them of illicit behavior.”

The fox responded with a guffaw. “A cop’s response. Fortunately, there’s more than one way to skin a cat.” He looked up at Delgato with a grin. “Sorry, old military slang. Most of our enemies in Aafurnistan were felines. No disrespect intended.”
“None taken.”

At this very moment, the tigers took off, walking towards the fringes of the crowd, in the general direction of an office building. “Shit!” Delgato said. “I think they spotted us.”

“Sure they did. I’m following them.” He slung the rucksack over his shoulder. “You wanna join me?”

Delgato hesitated, then he shrugged. “Hell, why not? It’s not like I have anything better to do right now.”

The foxes’ gaze swept over their immediate vicinity. “Your three buddies over there can deal with everything else. Come on.” He took off at a brisk pace, astonishingly fast for such a small mammal.

Delgato looked around in surprise, detecting the indicated three police officers standing nearby, neither of whom he had spotted before, then he hastened to follow him. “These tigers, do you know them?”

“No, but I know their kind. You know their kind, too, right?”

Delgato nodded fiercely. “Just arrested three of those jerks yesterday.”

“I thought you were given the boot.”

“I was, but since there are so few police officers left in Zootopia right now, Chief Bogo was more than happy when I volunteered to keep a weather eye open out here.”

The fox nodded. “This Chief of yours, he sounds like a very smart mammal.”

“That he is.” Delgato looked down at the fox. “You haven’t told me your name.”

The fox shrugged. “It doesn’t matter what my name is.”

“Oh, I think it does.”

With a grin, the fox countered: “What, so you can check whether I have a criminal record?”

Delgato rolled his eyes. “You have given me no reason so far, apart from dressing like a Tom-Goose-Wannabe riding his motorbike next to a jet plane taking off.”

The fox just stared at him. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Come on! You must have seen the movie, too! Everyone has. Tom Goose plays this hotshot young pilot causing trouble at a military …”

The fox interrupted him. “I don’t watch movies.”

“You don’t?”

“No. Movies are boring. Haven’t watched a movie in years.”

Delgato gave a smile. “Then you must have watched the wrong movies.”

“If you say so, copper.”
They reached the edge of the crowd and walked over to the building. Before they were able to reach it, Delgato heard two voices, engrossed in a rather heated discussion. “… on! It was just a lion, you know! I can deal with a lion, no problem!”

“Yeah, but what if it was a cop? I’m sure he was!”

“Relax, Simon! Calm down, take a cookie!”

“Take a cookie?” A short pause. “Yes, of course! That’s all right, then! Sit down! Have a scone! Make yourself at home.” Another pause. “You KLUTZ! If this is a cop, there sure are more of them! What if he has backup? What do we do then?”

“Calm down, for fuck’s sake! After what Bellwether did to the ZPD, do you think they kept a lion in their ranks?”

Delgato looked down at the fox, only to find to his surprise that the mammal was in the process of undressing. “What are you doing?” he hissed.

“What does it look like to you?” the fox whispered.

“You wanna confront them in the buff?”

The fox snorted. “Don’t be silly!” He had sat down the rucksack and was quickly pulling out pieces of clothing. “Why don’t you go ahead? I’ll be with you shortly.”

“Go ahead? To do what?”

“I don’t know! Talk to them! Entertain them! Sing a song, you know!” With a grin, he added: “Just give a mammal his privacy.”

“You’re out in the open, on the side of a public road!”

The fox just grinned at him. “You really need to work on your sense of humor. Now, go!”

He had uttered the last words with such an air of command that Delgato found himself proceeding towards the edge of the building before he even realized that he did. Shrugging internally, he walked around the corner …

Only to look directly down the barrel of a Mooseberg 590.

He looked up at the tiger holding the pump-action gun, cursing under his breath.

The mammal was tall, significantly taller than Delgato. And he was shaking like a leaf, so bad in fact that the gun trembled in his paws. “See, I told you!” he shouted at his partner.

The other tiger dipped into one pocket of his coat to produce a small, but nasty-looking pawgun of a type that even the weapon aficionado Delgato had never seen before. Unlike his partner, he seemed to be very calm and confident. A combination which could spell disaster for Delgato. He was a bit smaller than his partner, but probably much more dangerous.

Not liking the odds very much, Delgato decided to just start talking. What else could he do, facing a 12 gauge shotgun? “What’s this supposed to be?” he asked, trying his hardest to remain calm. Despite the fact that firearms were illegal in Zootopia, he had stood on the wrong side of a gun several times before, but it simply wasn’t something you get used to that easily. He wasn’t as terrified anymore as he had been when he had first been threatened with a gun, but he certainly
didn’t feel comfortable.

The smaller tiger guffawed, pointing his gun at Delgato, too. “Are you kidding, flatfoot? We hate cops!”

Delgato managed to give a snort while trying to figure out how to get out of this alive. “So you think I’m one?”

“Of course you are!”

Delgato hid his grin carefully. *Maybe there is a way. Just play along! Buy the fox some time!* For a second, he wondered when he had begun to think of the fox as a trustworthy ally, given the fact that he had told Delgato to go ahead, right into this mess. And *especially* given the fact that he had no idea how a tiny arctic fox, even a former marine, might be able to help him here. Banishing the thought, he shook his head. “I’m not. Not anymore. A corrupt sheep saw to that.”

“But you were a cop. And cops are always bad for business. Even ex-cops. Who probably run for the fuzz whenever someone wants to do something interesting.”

It took Delgato little effort to appear furious, seeing that he still was very angry about the way he had been treated by the council of a city he had sworn to protect. “Maybe, but given the fact that the shitheads at the ZPD still refuse to employ predators, I am disinclined to acquiesce to their requests.” When both gave him a stare of incomprehension, he added: “Means no. I won’t run for them.

“Then why are you following us?”

Without missing a beat, Delgato said: “Because I saw a sneaky fox following you here, and I thought you might need some help. By the way, where …”

Suddenly another voice piped up: “Is that what you think of foxes, copper? That’s not a very nice thing to say.”

Both tigers whipped around immediately, searching for the source of that voice. “Who are you?” the tiger with the shotgun shouted. All of a sudden, both tigers seemed to have forgotten about Delgato completely. “I’m warning you - I’m armed.”

The bodiless voice gave a chuckle. “Why don’t you take your shotgun, shine it up real nice, turn that sumbitch sideways and stick it straight up your candy ass?”

Both tigers froze. “What?” the taller one said.

The bodiless voice continued as if the tiger hadn’t spoken. “In case you don’t know what’s going to happen next, I’ll break it down for you: I’m gonna stick your heads so far up your asses you’re gonna have to cut holes in your nipples to see.”

“Shit!” the smaller tiger said. “That’s Arctic Fire!”

“I thought he was dead!” The other tiger seemed to be terrified. Neither of them were caring about Delgato anymore, as if he wasn’t even there.

With a sigh, the lion straightened himself, preparing for battle …

A flash of black and brown, a thud, a gasp …
Astonished, Delgato looked down at the tiger with the shotgun, only that the weapon was lying on the ground now, disregarded and forgotten. The tiger himself stood bent over double, clutching his stomach in obvious pain. But only for a second.

A well-placed *choku-tsuki* to his jaw by a brown paw encased in a black grappling glove saw to that.

Upon seeing his partner fall down to the ground, senseless, the other tiger cursed, lifting his paw to aim his gun at the fox who had just appeared out of thin air.

An fox clad completely in black. A black short-sleeved hoodie, the hood pulled over the head, black cargo pants. Even his muzzle was hidden behind a piece of black cloth. He was carrying a black rucksack on his back.

The tiger never got a chance to pull the trigger. Before Delgato even had time to blink, the fox had delivered a quick *deashi harai*, a paw sweep which yanked the legs out from under the tiger. With a yelp of surprise, the tiger fell to the ground like a chopped-down tree. The fox was back on his paws in less than a second, jumped up into the air and directly onto the tiger’s chest. Three blisteringly fast open-palm strikes, and the tiger went limp.

Delgato stared down at the fox in complete and utter disbelief. “You are Arctic Fire?”

He had heard the name before, of course. Most police officers had.

Back when he had been stationed at Precinct Five, in Tundratown, the grapevine had been humming about an enforcer who had purportedly been working for one of the crime lords living there. And just like nobody had known who his employer had been - Roberto Orso, Mr. Big and Don Guiseppe Pantera had been considered to be the most likely candidates -, nobody had known the mammal himself. All everybody had known was the name of Arctic Fire. Not even his species had ever been identified exactly.

That was mainly because nobody had ever been able to get more than a glimpse at the mammal before crumbling down in an unconscious heap.

“Arctic Fire’s moving so fast, he can knock out his own shadow.”

Delgato had no idea who had said this first, but somehow, it had stuck.

Amongst cops and criminals, the mammal had been a legend.

Apart from a few exceptions - businessmammals of more than shady reputation mostly -, his victims had invariably been well-known con-mammals, thieves, thugs, and other criminals. Which is why most police officers had considered it to be an internal matter of the criminal community, which in turn was why most cops hadn’t been too eager to look at the situation more closely. Nobody had ever filed charges against the mammal, so no police officer had wanted to waste time and resources on trying to find a mammal who was notoriously hard to even spot.

But everybody had had his very own speculations.

He had been an arctic mammal, that one had been obvious. But nobody had ever guessed it could have been an arctic fox. Nobody *could* ever have guessed. Delgato had secretly assumed him to be wolf-sized at least, an arctic wolf or a northern timber wolf maybe. Never, not in a million years, would he have guessed that the bane of criminals was an arctic fox who wasn’t even exceptionally big or tall.
Then, some two years ago, he had disappeared without a trace.

Most had assumed that he had died.

Obviously not.

“I really need to shake off the rust,” the fox said, obviously deciding to ignore what Delgato had said, and pulled the cloth down from over his muzzle.

“What do you mean?” Delgato asked.

The fox turned towards him. “If not for the mask, the last guy may have recognized me. I’m getting slow.”

*If that was slow, I would have loved to see you in your prime.* Delgato folded his arms over his chest. “I would recognize you.”

“So what?”

“Aggravated battery in concomitance with grievous bodily harm. At least three years jail time, probably more. *Certainly* more, since you would probably be considered a repeat offender.”

To his chagrin, the fox merely smiled. “And of course you have solid proof for your claims, haven’t you?”

Delgato took a deep breath, then he sighed. “Thanks for saving my ass here. And sorry for calling you sneaky.”

“You’re welcome. And it’s okay, I *am* sneaky.” He proceeded to take off the hoodie and cargo pants again, pulling his blue jeans and jacket from out of his rucksack. “I may be wrong, but I seem to recall seeing the smaller one in front of the Midnight Express, working as a bouncer. You know the place?” He was referring to a honky-tonk bar in Happytown, infamous for frequent brawls and drug trafficking.

“Of course! I’ve been down to that hellhole more often than I can remember. What about the other one?”

The fox snorted. “No idea. They’re probably related, they look remarkably similar. In any case, he’s just as big a fuckwit as the other guy is.”

“You have any idea what they wanted?”

“Does it matter? They were armed, they were threatening you. Enough to put them in the can, I wager.” He put on the blue jeans again.

“What’s with the disguise?”

The fox sighed. “Let’s just say that only very few people ever saw the face behind the mask, and I intend to keep it that way.”

Delgato frowned. “You’re on the run? Is that why you had it with you?”

The fox hesitated, then he nodded. “I am. As a matter of fact, I usually don’t go out in public at all. Today was an exception. I thought, among all those other mammals, I might be safe.”

“From whom?”
“None of your business. Just someone who’s very angry at me, someone who knows what my face looks like, so I have to lay low and sing small.” He had put on his leather jacket again and was in the process of stuffing the black clothes back into the rucksack. Nothing about his looks suggested that he was the same guy who had laid waste to such a huge number of mammals. To the untrained eye, he looked positively harmless. Only his stance, his movements, betrayed the warrior to the seasoned martial artist.

“Someone powerful enough to take even you down?”

“I tend to think so, yes.”

“So what you did here could ruin your day, right?”

The fox shot him a look. “Not if you can keep your trap shut about this.” He put on his aviator shades, hiding his bright eyes behind them.

Delgato hesitated, then he nodded. “I think you deserve it, seeing what you did here.” He pointed at the unconscious tigers. “What about them?”

The fox snorted. “Do you really think they will talk? Especially when put behind bars?”

Delgato had to agree with the fox. “Probably not.”

The fox slung the rucksack over his shoulder again. “So if you’ll excuse me, I need to make myself scarce.” He turned away.

“Wait!” Delgato said. “You can’t leave me here like this! I need your statement first!”

“Ah! So there is a sense of humor in you!” the fox said mockingly. Turning around again, he said with a stern voice: “No dice, copper!”

“You don’t need to give me your name. I can call you an anonymous informer, and nobody will ask any questions.”

“I’m not cooperating with the fuzz.”

Delgato looked down at the tigers. “I guess you just did.”

The fox gave a growl. “I have taken down two armed jerks who were up to no good. You being a cop has nothing to do with it.”

“If you feel this strongly about police officers, why did you help me? And don’t tell me you wanted to take down two armed villains just for the fun of it.”

The fox paused. “You think I’m a villain, right?”

“The thought had crossed my mind. I mean, you are Arctic Fire! You’ve been working for a crime lord, you’ve beaten at least 140 mammals to a pulp!”

“So you automatically consider me the bad guy, right?” The fox straightened himself. “Wrong. Contrary to what you might think, I was a law-abiding citizen once.”

“What happened?”

The fox shrugged. “Life just had the unfortunate habit of throwing boulders in my path.”
“Is this why you became an enforcer?”

The fox turned away again. “If you think you can make me tell you the story of my life, this conversation is over.”

“And what should I tell Bogo?”

The fox stopped to look over his shoulder, grinning. “Come on! A lion well-versed in martial arts can take down two tigers, even when they’re armed.” He gave him a two-digits-salute and walked towards the corner.

“Hey! Could you at least tell a police officer about this?”

Again, the fox paused, this time without turning back. Delgato added: “I neither have pawcuffs nor a walkie-talkie with me, not even a cell phone.”

“No cell phone?”

Delgato shrugged. “I’m old-school. When I talk to other mammals, I prefer the conversation to be face-to-face.”

“Will do, copper.” With that, the fox disappeared from view.

For one second, Delgato felt the urge to run after him, but then he shrugged. The fox had saved his bacon out there. Least he could do was keep his mouth shut about him, if that was what he wanted.

Who was the mammal he had angered so much that he was forced to go into hiding? His (probably former) employer? A former victim out for vengeance?

Emptying both the shotgun and the pistol (on closer inspection, it turned out to be a garrucha-type double-barreled weapon, although he had never seen the model before), Delgato finally sat down on the floor next to the two tigers and waited for somebody to come to his assistance.

He didn’t need to wait long. After less than a minute, a tamaraw walked around the corner. He looked very young - probably fresh from the academy. “Hello?” he said, looking down at Delgato. “Who’re you?”

Delgato got up. “Frederick Delgato, formerly of Precinct One.”

“Ah, Detective Delgato. I heard about you.” He offered his hoof. “Officer Randall Mindoro, Precinct Two.”

_Precinct Two - Rainforest District. Explains the getup._ Delgato thought. The mammal was wearing what appeared to be a slightly oversized raincoat, which made him look quite ludicrous, particularly in the current weather. “Pleased to meet you.”

Mindoro looked down at the tigers. “A tiny arctic fox told me a police officer had taken down two criminals and was asking for assistance.”

Delgato hesitated. He disliked adorning himself with borrowed plumes. Accepting the praise for having taken down two armed and dangerous criminals when he had in fact not even moved a single muscle - was this really how he wanted things to go down?

Then again, the fox didn’t want to be involved in the aftermath.

_Would he be? It’s not like I know his name, or where he went._
“I do need your help, but it wasn’t me who took them down. The tiny arctic fox you saw back there, he did all the work for me.”

Mindoro gave him a grin. “Yeah, and monkey’s might fly out of my butt.”

Delgato paused. “Have you ever heard the name Arctic Fire?”

“Arctic Fire?” Mindoro frowned. “Is that a name? Who should this be?”

He’s too young. He doesn’t know. Delgato shrugged. “Forget it. You have pawcuffs and a walkie-talkie.”

“Sure I have.”

“Okay then, I suggest you get down to work.”

“Of course, Detective.”

Delgato snorted. “I’m not a detective anymore.”

“Really? How comes?”

Delgato just stared at him. “You didn’t just say that!”

Now Mindoro was visibly confused. “What do you mean?”

Not only is he too young, he has obviously lived under a rock for the last three months.

“Hello? Bellwether? Predators being harassed and humiliated? Predator police officers suspended by the City Council? Predators being beaten up by prey? Does any of that ring a bell?”

Mindoro’s face fell. “Oh.”

Delgato shook his head. “Just do your stuff. And make sure the pawcuffs fit tightly. One of them is a bouncer at a seedy bar and probably well-versed in self-defense.”

“Not good enough to defeat you, that’s for sure.”

Delgato rolled his eyes and turned away.

You fit in really well in Precinct Two, buddy!

Most mammals who weren’t born in the rainforest or some similar humid climate disliked getting their fur wet, which is why working at the Rainforest District was notoriously unpopular among police officers. For this reason, being reassigned to Precinct Two was usually considered a demotion. The precinct purportedly consisted mostly of mammals who haven’t made it in one of the other districts, mainly because of being borderline incompetent. Rumor even had it that a sizeable portion of their duty roster was made up out of police officers who had been transferred there for disciplinary reasons.

Delgato had no idea if this was true. All he knew was that he was suddenly longing for the gruff competence of McHorn, the friendly manner of Clawhauser, even the harsh demeanor of Bogo.

And speaking of Bogo … wasn’t that his voice?

Delgato listened, hard.
“To the contrary, Caballus. I’m in full accordance with the law, unlike Merino, Brooks, and Hirvi.”

What the blazes …?

He looked over to Mindoro who, thankfully, looked competent enough to put pawcuffs on the tigers. Deciding that he didn’t need help at the moment, Delgato strained his ears. Another voice piped up, a voice he didn’t recognize: “Is there anything else, Chief? Can’t you see we’re busy?”

Bogo’s grand voice overpowered the other mammal’s voice with ease. “Of course there is something else, and you know it, Caballus.”

Wait a second, Delgato thought. Francine told us that Bogo’s at City Hall, and that the Council is in session.

Don’t tell me …

He walked over to the corner until the view screens came into view. And sure enough, they showed the enormous figure of Chief Bogo. He was obviously standing in the middle of City Hall’s Council Chamber, and he looked more than ready to raise hell. “Yesterday evening, three mammals named Frederick Delgato, Markus Grizzoli, and James Fangmeyer prevented an assassination attempt at one of you.” He pointed at the assembled councilmammals.

“What?” someone shouted.

“You heard me, councilmammal! Three criminals had decided to take the law into their own paws, taking down one of you in retaliation for what you did to predators over the course of the last months.”

“They were predators, too, I take it,” someone said and snorted. “Figures! I’m telling you, predators are dangerous …”

“I would shut my trap if I were you, Jimela! The three mammals who apprehended the criminals are predators themselves! Frederick Delgato is a lion, Markus Grizzoli a polar bear and James Fangmeyer a tiger. Who’s your dangerous mammal now?”

Bogo straightened himself to his full height, and Delgato involuntarily took a step back. He had known the Chief for years, but never before had he seen him this angry, this savage. “I am a cape buffalo,” Bogo thundered. “I eat plants! I am considered prey! And believe me, Jimela, I am the most dangerous mammal you have ever set your eyes upon!”

I don’t know, Delgato thought. Maybe a tiny arctic fox could give you a run for your money, Chief!

“These three predators you are so afraid of, they risked their lives to protect you. And you have the audacity to call them dangerous?” Bogo seemed to be beside himself with wrath. Suddenly, Delgato was more than happy to only see him over the view screen.

“Well,” a panda bear sitting near Bogo said, “would you please extend our heartfelt thanks to the three mammals?”

Bogo looked down at him. “You could do it yourself, Mister Speaker, by reinstating them.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Up until a few weeks ago, Detective Delgato, Detective Grizzoli and Officer Fangmeyer were on
Precinct One’s duty roster. Until you decided to force me to suspend them indefinitely, simply because of the fact that they happen to be predators. The three of them were among the best crime fighters on my team. And they were not the only ones I had to suspend or reassign. The same goes for all other precincts in Zootopia. All you did that day when you passed the motion to remove predator officers from the ZPD was to weaken the ZPD on the whole, and it shows.

“Every precinct in Zootopia has suffered badly. The staffing level of Precinct One, for one, is stretched to capacity, and it’s pretty much the same at Precincts Three, Five, and Seven. The number of petty crimes like theft or vandalism has risen exponentially. Particularly in the aforementioned precincts.”

“Sorry, Chief, but the figures tell a different story,” someone claimed.

“Of course they do, Webster, seeing that Bellwether planted a few moles in our precinct who have been busy falsifying reports. For example, there was a savage attack on two harmless foxes by members of Aries Security, one of the reasons why we have arrested Robert Aries. And there also was the case of the young lynx girl who was clobbered to death by the son of former councilmammal Matilda Swinton. Both cases, and numerous others, had been deleted from our official records by several police officers who were in cahoots with Bellwether. Our preliminary investigation into the matter suggests that the crime rate in Zootopia has, on the whole, risen by almost 70 percent, but most of them never came to light, courtesy of three corrupt police officers who are now awaiting trial. A very inconvenient time to thin out my duty roster. We have absolutely no mammals to spare to truly fight crime, especially given the current situation.”

“What do you mean?”

Bogo pointed at the wall. “Out there, tens of thousands of mammal are protesting against you and your lame-ass politics, against the open harassment of predators, against being vilified and threatened. And while the vast majority of them is peaceful, there is a lot of anger in the air. And all you do is sit here, sip coffee and debate endlessly whether predators are dangerous or not. In case you’re not aware of the severity of the situation, we have a stick of dynamite with a lit fuse out there! Right now, as we speak, almost one hundred mammals patrol the area, looking for troublemakers, trying their hardest to prevent the outbreak of a riot. More than half of them are police officers from Precincts One, Two, Four, Five, Seven, and Nine. But some of them are former police officers who volunteered to make sure this doesn’t get out of paw. Police officers that you forced me to suspend. They risk their lives to serve the city they have sworn to protect, receiving nothing in return. Even worse, you persistently kick them in the teeth when you should rather award them with medals!”

“What do you want from us, Chief?” the horse sitting next to the panda shouted.

“You know darn well what I want, Caballus! I want you to take back all the laws you passed because a criminal made you believe they were good, which they’re not. I want my officers back.” He folded the arms over his chest. “And I’m not leaving until you give me what I want!”

Wow! What a performance!

Somehow Delgato couldn’t help thinking that Bogo’s appearance in front of the City Council - and thus in front of all of Zootopia - had been pre-planned. His words came a bit too quickly, his thoughts too well structured. He had pondered on this, and he had pondered long and hard.

And the result was a City Council whose every member was shaking in fright because a cape buffalo had threatened them with a vicious rampage.
“It is not for you to decide what this Council does or not!” Caballus said.

“No, but I am a citizen of this city, and thus you answer to me! That’s what democracy is all about. You are voted into office, you make decisions, and afterwards you explain to me why you did it. So tell me, Caballus, why did you force me to suspend a group of police officers with unblemished reputation and outstanding performance records? I’m waiting!”

Caballus hesitated, but another mammal piped up immediately: “Well, we had a group of savage predators …”

Bogo interrupted him rudely. “That’s bullshit, Jimela, and you know it! They were only turning savage because a prey mammal, a SHEEP, decided they should. None of the victims had a criminal record. They all were, for all intents and purposes, normal guys, parents, employees, like the next guy you meet on the streets. One is a social worker, for crying out loud! None of them had a history of violence. None of them decided to turn savage. They. Were. Poisoned. Do I really need to hammer this fact into your thick skull?”

Suddenly, Delgato was reminded of where he was, because upon hearing Bogo lambast a councilmammal, a loud cheer erupted in front of the view screen. Obviously he had said what everybody out there was thinking, too.

“Do you want to antagonize me, Chief?” the mammal, a topi, said.

“No, I want you to do what needs to be done!” He turned towards Caballus. “So get a move on! I don’t have all day!”

“It’s not that easy, Chief,” Caballus said. “We have an agenda, you know.”

Bogo raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t you just tell us a few minutes ago that you were making the agenda up as you go? So, change it!”

This could get interesting, Delgato thought.

And this is where I’m stopping this for the time being. To be continued soon …

Now, the two characters. The first one is the panda Liu Shumeng. The name “Shumeng” (which translates to “dawn sprout”) was suggested to me by my faithful follower Dirtkid123, back on fanfiction.net. It’s a first name, but according to Chinese naming conventions, the last name is given first. So Liu’s the last name and Shumeng the first one. (And before you ask, no, I don’t know Mandarin or any other East Asian language.) I opted on Liu as the last name, in honor of both Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese Nobel Peace Prize laureate who died after being held in captivity as a political prisoner by the Chinese government for more than 14 years, and Liu Xiang, the Chinese athlete, Olympic champion and former world record holder over the 110 m Hurdles. And of course Liu Shumeng had to be a panda, since they’re native to China. Thanks again for allowing me to use the name, Dirtkid123!

(On a side note, I like the idea of Zootopia being some sort of melting pot for all kinds of different nationalities. Much like the U.S. of A., which basically are a country consisting of a few survivors of indigenous groups and a huge number of descendants of immigrants from several other countries all over the world, my version of Zootopia consists of mammals of all species and all nationalities, coming together in one single location to live together in peace and harmony, at the very location the first watering hole had been, ages ago. Which is why
The other character, the arctic fox going by the nickname of Arctic Fire, was suggested to me by tweiler18. He’ll feature quite heavily later, in “Hammer,” which is when he’ll receive a (real) name and a proper background story. The nice thing is, both name and background story were provided to me already - I didn’t need to strain my gray matter all that much. It was tweiler18 who developed the character in his entirety, right down to his clothing. I merely added a few bits and pieces here and there, the rest was given to me as a gift, so I could make good use of him here. Thank you very much yet again, tweiler18!

On a side note, I learned only recently that arctic foxes have a winter and a summer morph. In the wintertime, their fur is white, while in the summertime, it turns brown, with a bit of gray around the tummy. Which meant that I had to make a few changes to this chapter. So in case you’re wondering why I call Arctic Fire’s fur brown-colored, here’s why. After all, the movie, and thus this story, takes place in the summertime.

Thomas Cowam, the patron of the Children’s Hospital, is based on Thomas Coram, who created what is probably the oldest facility for children’s care in the world, the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, London, back in 1739. Just needed a bit of fursonification.

The name of the aardwolf, Tyler Cristata, is based on the scientific name of his species, *Proteles cristata*. One of my cousins succumbed to leukemia some thirty years ago, so I like to think Tyler survives the ordeal.

“Headbanger’s Ball” was by far and away my most favorite MTV show. Full stop. I’ll never understand why they cancelled it - and what they present as the show today pales in comparison to what they did in the Nineties. (On top of that, I admit that I had somewhat of a crush on Vanessa Warwick, the show’s European host. *sigh* Good days!)

One of my readers, Not_Jonas_Cliver, alerted me to the fact that I mentioned a “Sergeant Hamada” in this chapter and asked me if this was a “Big Hero 6” reference. Of course it was! I first mentioned Hamada in one of the first chapters of “Hammer to Fall,” which were written before I wrote this story. So when I wrote this one here the first time, I had already established that someone named Hamada was working at Precinct One. I had completely forgotten to account for this fact here. So, yes, Hamada is a reference to Big Hero 6, and congrats to you, Not_Jonas_Cliver, for finding that one!

Katanga, Rebecca’s maiden name, is based on the former province of the DR Congo. A subspecies of lions is named after that region.

Can you guess where I found the last name of Gerard “Jerry” Gusteau? The nod to Tom and Jerry is, of course, too obvious to even mention. Which is why I really can’t understand why I just wrote this. ;-)

There are several quotes hidden in this chapter. The first one appeared in the book “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.” Have fun finding it!

Another quote can be found in the movie “Pirates of the Caribbean.” Probably easy to find though.
Yet another quote can be found in the movie “Wayne’s World.” Not too difficult either, I wager.

Another quote came from the insanely funny and witty movie “Monty Python’s Life of Brian.” Another easy one, I guess.

When talking about Arctic Fire’s clothing (his civilian clothing, not his fighting gear), I guess you know which movie and actor I’m referring to, don’t you?

Much like Gnuganda, the country Nageria is a pun on the German word for a special kind of mammal, in this case rodents, “Nager.”

Most other names you’ll find in here are based on the scientific names of the given species, so if you’re interested, just log onto Wikipedia and search for them.

Until the next time! Thanks for reading, and would it be too much to ask for comments?

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

And now for part two of the council session. And again, this is promising to be lengthy …

Thanks to HawkTooth, Thehellion115, niraD, and Hayato for sending comments on the last chapter, and thanks to everyone for reading this story so far.

HawkTooth found the movie reference hidden in the clothing of Arctic Fire. I was, of course, alluding to the movie “Top Gun” by Tony Scott. In one particular scene I was referring to, Pete “Maverick” Mitchell (played by Tom Cruise) is riding his motorbike parallel to the runway of the airfield he’s stationed at, just as a jet plane is taking off - and he was dressed exactly like Arctic Fire is in the story. Although it needs to be said that as far as I am concerned, this is more of a coincidence. After all, tweiler18, who suggested Arctic Fire to me, told me exactly how he wanted him to be dressed, and it just so happens that he’s dressed exactly like Tom Cruise was in the movie.

I’m starting to think that the remaining quotes won’t be found in the remaining time, seeing that this story will be finished soon …

---

Chapter Fourteen

Decisions

The wind of change blows straight into the face of time, like a stormwind that will ring the freedom bell for peace of mind.

Scorpions: “Wind of Change” (Written by Klaus Meine, from the album “Crazy World,” Vertigo/Mercury, 1990)

---

City Hall, Council Chamber, City Center, Zootopia

While watching Chief Bogo wipe the floor with Gustavo Jimela, Cameron Caballus had to fight the urge to shake his head. And when Bogo finally looked at him, he was very close to shouting at him to stick to the goddamn plan.

What on Earth had motivated Bogo to deviate from their scheme? He should have appeared after Lionheart was reinstated! His sole purpose in all this should have been to rattle the Council, threatening them with arrest, if needed, thus giving Lionheart the leverage to tear this Council apart.

“So get a move on! I don’t have all day!” Bogo stared at Caballus with superior disdain.

Caballus returned the stare, trying to convey his message: What the heck are you doing, Chief???

“It’s not that easy, Chief,” he said in a desperate attempt to buy himself some more time. “We have an agenda, you know.”

It would probably have worked under every other circumstance, but right now, it didn’t. And of course Bogo had to call his bluff: “Didn’t you just tell us a few minutes ago that you were making
the agenda up as you go? So, change it!” He looked absolutely adamant.

And suddenly, Caballus understood.

They had discussed the reelection of Lionheart. They had discussed the possible dissolution of the City Council to make way for reelectors.

But neither Lionheart nor Caballus had thought of discussing the suspended predator officers. Both had simply considered it to be something they could deal with as soon as their other goals had been achieved.

Which obviously was way too long a time for Bogo. And deep down inside, Caballus even had to agree with him. The suspension of so many police officers had been one of the reasons why the overall situation of Zootopia, both for prey and especially for predators, had turned into such an outright mess. Reinstatement of the suspended officers should have been first on everyone’s agenda.

It certainly was first on Bogo’s. And since that was the case, he had now decided to take matters into his own hooves.

Caballus had thought they could simply use Bogo to achieve their goals. He hadn’t taken into account that this could very well work both ways.

Bogo wanted, no, he needed his officers back, the officers Bellwether and her cronies had forced him to suspend. And he had every right to do so, especially given the current circumstances. When Lionheart and Caballus had lured him in to help them achieve their goals, he had seen the chance to get what he wanted. And of course he had acted on it immediately.

Their plan, it didn’t matter to him at all. It had just given him the leverage to achieve his own goals.

And the public to watch the proceedings.

*If I deny him this, in front of all of Zootopia, my goose is cooked! I need to play along!*

*Just long enough to get Lionheart back into office.*

Simply by appearing ahead of time and stating his own goal on such a public stage, Bogo was forcing Caballus’s hooves.

*You are one clever buffalo, Chief!*

---

**ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia**

It was the bane of her existence.

Every time Christine Caballus was in the middle of watching an interesting movie or listening to good music, her cell phone demanded her attention right when the action became most suspenseful. Her mother in particular had a knack for calling at the worst possible moment.

Granted, it wasn’t a movie she was watching, and it wasn’t her cell phone that was beeping, but Dispatch’s radio unit, which in turn also meant it couldn’t have been her mother molesting her with overzealous parental care. But the effect was pretty much the same.
She heaved a sigh, pushed past Clawhauser, who had at some point rounded the counter to step next to her, so he was able to watch the proceedings better - something which hadn’t even properly registered with her so far -, and pressed the button. “This is Precinct One, Dispatch,” she said into the microphone attached to the radio unit. When nobody answered her call, she added: “Go ahead!”

A voice which managed to sound both eager and intimidated at the same time piped up. “Uhm, Dispatch, this is Officer Randall Mindoro of Precinct Two. I have two unconscious tigers here. I could really need some help here. I mean, I’m requesting immediate … yes, immediate assistance!”

Caballus made a frown. “What do you mean, you have two unconscious tigers?”

“Uhm, well …”

“What’s your 10-20, officer?”

“Uh, sorry, my what?”

Caballus clicked her tongue in irritation. It was obvious the mammal had never heard of proper communications procedures. Even she, who had, until a few weeks ago, never worked as dispatcher or as a beat cop, knew the ten-codes by heart, and she had always assumed that every police officer did. “What’s your location?”

“Oh. Well, yes. I can’t see the street sign from here. A street just off the Austin J. Robin Plaza. There’s a huge office block at the corner leading to the plaza itself.”

“Probably Rue Morgue,” Clawhauser suggested.

“Probably.” Mastiff nodded. “Good. Now, these two tigers. Why are they unconscious?” He looked at Caballus and made a motion for her to ask the officer the question.

Caballus nodded and said into the microphone: “Officer, why are the two tigers unconscious?”

“I guess that Detective Delgato took them down.”

Mastiff’s eyes widened. “Delgato? Is he there, too? Can you give him the radio so we can talk to him?”

“Uh, who’s there?”

Mastiff motioned for Caballus to give him the radio unit. “Officer, this is Major Adimar Mastiff, Homicide Squad, Precinct One.”

The mammal on the other end of the connection choked audibly. “Oh, er, Major! What an honor!”

Mastiff grinned at Clawhauser, who shook his head. “At ease, Officer. Where is Detective Delgato?”

“Oh, no idea, sir. He ordered me to put pawcuffs on the two tigers, and when I looked up again, he was nowhere to be seen.”

“He’s probably watching what’s happening in City Hall over the view screens,” Caballus suggested.

Mastiff nodded. “You can bet he is. Now, Officer, why don’t you calm down, take a deep breath and just start at the beginning?”
“Well, I was, er, just on my patrol on the plaza, looking for mammals who were acting conspicuously, when an arctic fox walked up to me. No idea how he knew I was a ZPD officer. Anyway, he told me that a police officer was waiting in a side street, and that the officer was in need of assistance. I walked over there and found Detective Delgato and two tigers who were both unconscious. The Detective asked me to put pawcuffs on them and call for assistance. And, uh, like I said, when I looked up again after having pawcuffed the tigers, he was gone.”

“Understood. Anything else?”

“Yes. It seems like the tigers were carrying illegal weapons, a shotgun and an ancient looking pistol.”

“Copy that. The weapons are secured?”

“They are, sir. Detective Delgato has unloaded the ammunition.”

“Excellent. You have your tranq gun with you?”

“Uh, yes, sir.”

“Good. You guard the tigers, and in case they wake up, I order you to make good use of your tranq gun. We’ll be sending assistance your way as soon as assistance is available. Which may take some time, given the fact that our staffing level is so thin. Over.”

“Uh, yeah, sir, will do.”

Mastiff grinned. “Oh, and just so you know, when you are given an order or a piece of information, you respond by saying Aye aye, sir, or Acknowledged, or Understood, or just 10-4. A simple will do won’t do. Understood?”

“Uh, yes, of course, sir?”

“What was that?”

“Oh, sorry, sir. Acknowledged, sir.”

“Good. Carry on! Over.”

“I will, sir. Mindoro over! No, out! Er, Mindoro out! O-over and out! Mindoro! Oh, damn it!”

Clawhauser looked at Mastiff with a grin as the wolf gave the radio unit back to Caballus. “You enjoyed this, didn’t you, sir?”

Mastiff shrugged. “I’m not the guy to rub rules and regulations under anyone’s snouts, but this kid’s got a hell of a lot to learn about rock and roll!” He looked at Caballus. “Is there anyone available here?”

Caballus shrugged as well. “We should just call one of the officers situated at City Hall. That’s the easiest solution. Most officers are …”

Clawhauser interrupted her. “Or we could just ask the mammals here.” He pointed at the revolving door.

Caballus looked up to see the three freshly arrested councilmammals walk through the revolving door, led - not overly gently - by Pennington, Trunkaby, Rhinowitz, and McHorn. None of them seemed to be too pleased with the arrangements - the councilmammals were upset at having been
arrested, especially under the watchful eyes of the public, the officers were angry because the
councilmammals were very vocal in expressing her displeasure at the treatment. The black sheep in
particular seemed to strain against the firm grip Rhinowitz had on her while she shouted at him:
“Believe me, when my lawyers are through with you, you will never find any work in Zootopia
ever …”

Mastiff cut her short: “Neither you nor your lawyer are in any position to decide what happens to
our officers, Merino!”

The sheep eyed him with a steely gaze. “I run the most successful clothing company in all of
Zootopia and the Tri-Burrows! I am a councilmammal! My voice is heeded all over the world!
Who are you to …”

Mastiff interrupted her again. Exposing his fangs, he growled: “I am your worst nightmare,
Merino! I am the one who puts you in the can, and there’s no lawyer who’ll be able to get you out
of there in the foreseeable future. We have enough dirt on you to get you out of circulation for a
long time!”

She snorted. “Lies and fabrications! I want to see my lawyer!”

Mastiff grinned at her. “So it’s not true that there was a conspiratorial meeting between you, Dawn
Bellwether, Robert Aries and former officers Cedric Ramington, Moses Argali, and Michael
Fleecewood?” When Merino opened her mouth, he added: “Don’t deny it! We have both the
testimonies of Ramington and Fleecewood, plus we have pictures from a surveillance camera,
proving the meeting took place. We even know what you were talking about. Tell me, how does it
feel to organize savage attacks on innocent predators?”

“It’s all fabricated,” she countered, but her voice had started to tremble.

“Somehow I can’t shake the feeling that you’ll have a hard time convincing the judge that your
claims are correct.” He looked at the officers who had brought them to Precinct One. “Take them
away! We’ll process them later. Not you, McHorn!”

While the other officers led the prisoners towards the detainment cells, McHorn stopped dead in
his tracks. “Sir?”

“You are going to the protest rally to help a friend, Brian.”

“A friend?”

Mastiff smiled at him. “Seems like Detective Delgato made a few arrests.”

McHorn’s face lit up. “Freddie? Tell him I’m on my way! Where is he?”

“We’re not too sure. Since he has no radio, he asked another officer to report in, and the mammal
wasn’t all too clear on his location. Probably Rue Morgue, but we may be mistaken.”

McHorn grinned. “How hard can it be to spot a tall lion dressed in black? Any details?”

“Seems like he managed to subdue two tigers who were packing heat.”

“Good. I’m off!” True to his word, McHorn turned around and left the building with fast, long
strides.

Mastiff looked at Caballus and Clawhauser with a benevolent smile. Caballus stared at the screen
with rapt attention, her former hesitation obviously forgotten.

Right now, Clawhauser was giving a cheer. “Yes! Give ‘em hell, Chief!”

“What’s up?” Mastiff asked. “Have I missed much?”

“I’m afraid so,” Caballus said. “Seems like the Chief wants to force the Council to reinstate the predator officers.”

Mastiff nodded. He couldn’t have agreed more.

Earlier that year, when Mastiff had turned 58, Adrian Bogo had suggested to him that maybe it would be best for the wolf to consider partial retirement. Of course he had disagreed, and emphatically at that, but when he was honest with himself, he had to admit that Bogo had a point. After more than thirty years of duty, more than forty grave injuries, four of which had been life-threatening, one lost eye, one shattered pelvis, and the early stages of arthritis in knees, hips, and shoulders, Mastiff had to agree - his final days as a cop were approaching fast. In the end, Bogo had relented, but at the same time, he had told Mastiff in no uncertain terms that he wouldn’t like to see him clock as many extra hours as he had done in the past. “It’s time for the young guns to step up to the plate,” he had told him. “You should start taking it a bit easier.”

Now, about half a year later, there was no more talk of taking it easier. To the contrary.

With their staffing level stretched to the extreme, every high-ranking police mammal, every beat cop, every member of the in-house staff, even every civilian working for the ZPD, had been doing lots and lots of extra hours. If they hadn’t, Precinct One would have collapsed long ago. Mastiff’s last vacation was all but a distant memory, and with spending so much time on the move, jumping from one catastrophe to the next, his body was giving him a lot of trouble. He was close to complete exhaustion, and pain was his constant companion.

Not that you would have seen it when watching him; the old veteran was much too experienced to let any sign of weakness show.

But Adimar Mastiff prayed to the heavens that Bogo would be successful in his quest to reinstate the predator officers.

I could really do with a day off or two!

He leaned over the counter to look at the screen himself and saw Acting Mayor Caballus straightening himself. “Excuse me for one second,” he said aloud before leaving his chair to talk to the keeper of the minutes. Conversing with him silently for a few seconds, the keeper looked at his computer, made an entry and took several notes on a slip of paper, which he gave to Caballus. The horse looked at the small piece of paper with a nod, returned to his chair and took a deep breath.

“Well, it seems I must rescind my resignation from this post for the moment. I’m hereby filing a new motion, reference number, uhm, 2016-dash-0859, to be decided today! The motion is to nullify motions,” he looked at the slip of paper again, “2016-dash-0518 and 2016-dash-0519, motions which were passed by this Council. They deal with the staff of the Zootopian Police Department, particular in regard of predators in its staff. Motion 18 asked for the immediate provisional suspension of predator officers within the ZPD, motion 19 made the suspensions permanent.”

He looked at Liu Shumeng, who got up immediately. “Thank you, Cameron. You heard Chief Bogo, he doesn’t want to wait any longer,” the panda said. “This is why I suggest we decide on this motion by acclamation.”
In the back, one councilmammal, a hamster, jumped from his chair onto the table and waved with an absurdly large red piece of cloth to solicit Liu’s attention - he needed to use both arms to do it. “Excuse me, Shumeng, but shouldn’t we discuss this first?”

“I was just about to ask exactly ...”

Bogo interrupted the panda with a snort. “You have discussed the matter back and forth several times now. Roborovski - the last time was just two days ago! Is that all you wanna do? Just talk? Out there,” he pointed at the wall, “crime is multiplying! Every police precinct, Precinct One in particular, is on the verge of collapse, while crime reigns supreme. Is this how you wanna go down in history? As the councilmammal who stepped aside and watched while Zootopia was strangled by crime? Some message you send to the mammals out there! A fine councilmammal you are, I must say!”

To Mastiff’s surprise, the councilmammal in question just dropped the piece of cloth and sat down again without a sound, looking quite stricken. “He really got them by the balls,” Christine Caballus said with a grin.

Suddenly, Liu turned towards Bogo.

“Or maybe not,” Mastiff said slowly.

City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

“With all due respect,” Liu Shumeng said, “but I disagree, Chief. We need to discuss this, at least briefly.”

Bogo looked down at him with annoyance in his eyes - and his voice: “And why is that, Liu?”

“First of all, things have changed, as you know very well, so we need to ponder the new developments. Shooting from the hip is causing more problems than it solves, and delicate matters like these require some careful consideration. You may not like it, but that’s how politics work.” He made a pause. “But on a more important note, I actually have a question for you, Chief.”

“Which is?”

“Why have you come here? Of course, you have arrested three councilmammals, and you probably had every right to do so, as much as it pains me to say that. But why have you jumped into the proverbial pool of sharks, confronting the mammals who gave you your job? Obviously not expecting an answer, Liu straightened himself. “Is it because you seem to think that it is a given that you can force us to give you what you want?” He made a pause, obviously purely for effect, because he added in an almost dangerous voice: “And if so, are you willing to bet your badge on this?”

Bogo narrowed his eyes, then he nodded and straightened himself as well, which was much more impressive in his case. “I am.”

“Wait a second, has Liu just threatened to fire Bogo?” Judy Hopps looked up at the fox standing next to her.

Nick Wilde returned the gaze with his trademark smirk. “Hot air, that’s all.”

“Are you sure?”
“Fear not, young bunny! What you see before you is little more than the beginning of the election campaign.”

“Huh?”

“I’m pretty sure everybody in there knows that reelections are unavoidable. So they switch to campaign mode. They want to discuss this only because it gives them the opportunity to agree with Bogo. Then they’ll decide on giving him everything he asks for, which makes them look good in the eyes of the public, and Bob’s your uncle.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that Robert’s your mother’s brother.”

Judy chortled. “Smartass! Come to think of it, I do have an uncle named Robert. Or was it two?”

“You don’t know?”

“Well, I have more than 200 uncles. Remembering all their names is quite the hassle.”

“Lucky you!” Nick gave her a grin. “Are all rabbit families this huge?”

“The old families living the traditional way, they are. Like my family. I can trace our ancestry back to the time of the first colonization of the Tri-Burrows. Records of the first trek reaching the area name one Thaddeus Hopps among the travelers. But most rabbits nowadays are well aware of what happens if we let our numbers go out of control again. Overpopulation means diseases and starvation. So they use all kinds of birth control, especially those not living in one of the rabbit communities. A lot of my brothers and sisters are married already, and none of them want to have more than ten kits, which is a very small number for rabbits, as you know.” She grinned. “So don’t worry, you’re quite safe from the bunny deluge.”

“Am I? Ten is not exactly a small number.”

Judy grinned. “But better than 276.” She became serious again. “You think Bogo is safe?”

“I don’t think he is, I know he is. Chief Horny may be appointed by the City Council, but his job has probably never been as safe as it is now. The last thing Blackeyes will do now is fire him. Not with half of Zootopia watching.” He made a pause. “Did you have any chance to read a newspaper lately?”

“No really. I may have seen one headline or another, but I don’t think you can call this reading. Why?”

“Well, the newspapers love the Chief right now. He’s been called ‘the last beacon of integrity’ of Zootopia. And he is. Without him, without his efforts to keep Zootopians safe, this city would have fallen into anarchy long ago. That Zootopia managed to go on as a community as long as it did, with so few police officers on duty, that’s mainly due to him. At least that what the newspapers say, and what the newspapers say, the public says.”

He pointed at the wall behind which the council chamber was situated. “And now the very same public is watching as Bogo lays waste to the City Council. They all see him arrest three more corrupt councilmammals. They all see him trying to force the paws of the councilmammals to do the right thing, to try and make Zootopia safe again, something they want, something they need. Fire him now, and you’re committing political suicide. No, Bogo’s job is as safe as it can be. They won’t dare to fire him. If they do, the mammals out there might riot.”
“You think it’s that bad?”

“Not yet, Carrots, but believe me, things can go south pretty quickly. And when they do, no councilmammal is safe. I don’t know if you’ve followed the news after quitting your job, but life in Zootopia hasn’t exactly been a picnic lately. Hadn’t it been for the combined efforts of a lot of mammals, we would have had riots long ago. There’s a lot of tension in the air. Maybe you haven’t felt it, but the people are annoyed, they are fed up with the Council, they want change, improvement. Denying them all this is like pulling the pin out of a paw grenade and hoping against hope that it won’t go Boom!

“Bogo has picked the perfect moment, the perfect circumstances for this. Not only is his job safe, he also has all the leverage in the world to give the councilmammals hell. Because if they turn down his demands, all hell might indeed break loose.” He pointed at the tiny screen, at Liu. “This is not about Bogo’s job, it’s about theirs. It’s about political survival. And they all know it. Each and every councilmammal wants to keep their seats. Do you think their chances of being reelected are that great when they turn Bogo down now?”

Judy gave him a grin. “Probably not.”

Nick nodded. “Certainly not. I’m pretty sure Bogo has planned all this. He was just waiting for the perfect moment to strike, and he found it. Whatever he may be, he is one clever mammal.”

“So what happens now?”

“Not much. Bogo will stand his ground, they will discuss the matter back and forth a bit, if only to express their support for his position. Whatever happens, in the end, Bogo will win. If he doesn’t, they can stop the session the very same moment and try to flee, try to save their hides, because the public might gun for them - maybe even literally. You heard what the lion said.”

“Which lion? Lionheart?”

“No, the one we met on the plaza. Delgato was his name, right?” Judy nodded. Nick continued: “There probably are more armed mammals out there, and you need just one of them breaking into this building for some serious bloodshed. Most mammals are peaceful, yes, but some of them are out for revenge, out for blood. The councilmammals have no choice. Bogo has presented them with a Royal Flush, and they have nothing in their paws. They will lose, Bogo will win the pot. No problem.” He pointed at the screen again. “Just look at Bogo! Does this look like a mammal who expects to lose?”

Judy grinned as she watched her superior officer, back straight, arms folded, an icy stare on his features. “He looks more likely to go on a solitary stampede.”

---

**Austin J. Robin Plaza, In Front of City Hall, City Center, Zootopia**

Bogo straightened himself to his full height, took a deep breath and seemed to massively increase in size because of it. “I am,” he said gravely.

Frederick Delgato was only dimly aware of the noise this announcement created. He knew perfectly well that the City Council was unlikely to fire Bogo at this time, not with what was at stake for the councilmammals, but that wasn’t why he didn’t pay all that much attention.

He had just seen his (former) partner and best buddy on the force.

Brian McHorn approached his friend, arms spread wide. “Freddie,” he shouted. “Raising hell as
usual?”

Delgato shrugged. “Wasn’t me this time, Bri.”

McHorn made a frown. “What do you mean? What happened anyway? Major Mastiff only told me that you managed to subdue two armed tigers.”

Delgato straightened himself. He had come to the conclusion that it wasn’t all that risky for him to mention the help of the arctic fox. Making an inviting gesture, indicating the direction of the street corner, he fell into a slow trot, with McHorn by his side. “Like I said, wasn’t me. I was alerted to the presence of two tigers, both of whom appeared to be armed. I followed them and rounded the corner, only to have a gun pointed at me. One of the tigers had a Mooseberg 590, the other one a garrucha-type pistol, but I didn’t recognize make or model.”

McHorn clicked his tongue in obvious appreciation of the weaponry involved. He and Delgato had bonded over their love for weapons, preferably projectile weapons. Not that they would have wanted to use them, but they both shared the same fascination for the technical mastership involved in their creation, despite the fact that they were invariably built with the single purpose of destroying, injuring, and killing. “How’d you manage to weasel your way out of this?”

“I didn’t. The guy who alerted me to the tigers, he did it for me. He took both tigers out.”

“Really? Who was it?”

“You are not going to believe it.”

McHorn chuckled. “Oh, you’re going to find me extremely credulous today.”

“It was an arctic fox.”

McHorn stopped dead in his tracks. “You’re right. I don’t believe you. Did he pack heat, too?”

“This guy doesn’t need guns, believe me.” He made a pause. “Did you ever come across the name Arctic Fire before?”

McHorn squinted, thinking hard. “Wait a second, wasn’t that this enforcer who … Are you trying to tell me … Arctic Fire was a fox?” He looked absolutely flabbergasted.

“I am.”

“I thought he was dead! Who is he?”

Delgato shrugged. “I don’t really know. Refused to tell me his name. I only know that he was a marine once. In the Royal Nagerian Navy. He told me so himself.”

“Awesome! He took two tigers down?”

“In less than five seconds. I wouldn’t have believed it either, hadn’t I seen it with my own eyes.”

“And what do we do about him?”

Delgato looked at his friend with a frown. “What do you mean?”

“Come on! He smacked down more than one hundred mammals! If this doesn’t qualify as aggravated battery, I don’t know what does.”
“So you want to try and arrest him.”

“Yes.” A pause. “No. Shit! I don’t know.”

“That’s exactly the point, Brian. You could certainly give yourself a pat on the shoulder if you were able to take Arctic Fire down. But firstly, I think he can take out a rhino, no problem. Secondly, I have no idea where he is or where he went. Thirdly, he saved my sorry ass out there. Fourthly, he has avoided capture for more than a decade, so it’s unlikely we’ll be able to catch him in a hurry. And fifthly, can we really pin everything on him that we think we know? Do we have any proof?”

“Probably not.”

Delgato started walking towards the street corner again, with McHorn in tow. “I thought so, too. Maybe he won’t be much of a problem in the long run. He told me he’s on the run.”

“From whom?”

“No idea. His old mob boss? Someone powerful enough to force him into hiding, in any case.”

“Must be some enemy.”

“My sentiments exactly. Best to steer clear and forget about him.”

They had reached the corner and kept walking towards the three mammals waiting there. Only that it wasn’t just three mammals anymore. The scene had obviously garnered the attention of several passers-by, and Randall Mindoro was pretty much occupied with trying to get the spectators to get a move on - with little success, apparently.

McHorn’s sheer size was much more suited for this.

While the rhino was busy telling nosy mammals to leave the scene immediately, Delgato looked down at the two tigers. They were still out cold, thankfully, and Mindoro had used a rather eclectic assortment of pawcuffs and cable ties to fetter them securely. At least something the tamaraw had been capable of. “Good work, Mindoro,” Delgato said.

“Thank you, sir! Had those cable ties with me, in case the pawcuffs don’t fit.” Mindoro seemed to be very pleased with himself.

Delgato nodded. “If someone would ever be able to invent ‘one-size-fits-all’ pawcuffs, our job would be much easier.”

“That’s quite the task,” McHorn added, having finally dispersed the crowd of onlookers. “Pawcuffs to fit both mice and elephants?” He looked at Mindoro questioningly.

Delgato introduced the two to each other while taking both weapons and the ammunition, stuffing the small pawgun and the ammunition in the side pockets of his coat while hiding the shotgun inside of it - no reason to cause a mass panic by carrying a non-concealed weapon around. McHorn wasted little time to pull both tigers in the upright position. Since there were still out, the only option they had was to carry the tigers to Precinct One in a firemammal’s carry. Which was easy for McHorn, but a bit more difficult for Delgato, as both tigers were bigger and thus heavier than himself. They thanked Mindoro for his assistance and were on their slow way towards Precinct One.

When reaching the plaza, Delgato took in his surroundings with a smile. The erstwhile calm and
serene scene was in the early stages of turning into some sort of celebration. After a quick look around, Delgato surmised that something was obviously taking place inside City Hall that pleased the assembled mammals to no end.

“Quite the ruckus,” McHorn commented at his side. He turned towards a lone mammal, a female zebra, standing nearby. “Excuse me, ma’am, could you please tell me what’s going on?”

The zebra turned around. “Oh, Officer! So good to see you! You made some arrests, I see?”

Delgato made a gesture as dismissive as he was able to make it with the heavy tiger slung over his shoulders. “Just some troublemakers.”

“It’s what we do at the ZPD,” McHorn added with a grin.

“Oh. Thank you all the same! The city’s a much safer place because of you. I cannot agree with your Chief more.”

“What do you mean?” McHorn asked.

“You haven’t seen it?” Delgato asked.

“I was pretty preoccupied with arresting three councilmammals, you see.”

“Ah. Bogo is just trying to force the Council to reinstate us.”

The zebra’s eyes got wide. “Are you one of the suspended police officers?”

“I am, ma’am.”

She gave a hiss. “It’s such a shame! So good to see that you still uphold the law.”

Delgato tried to shrug, but carrying the tiger made this impossible. “I swore an oath to protect this city, and that’s what I’m going to do, come hell or high water.”

“Maybe you’ll be reinstated soon.” The zebra pointed at the view screen. “A few councilmammals have already said they agree with the Chief. The panda, Liu, has said so, as did Caballus. They’re just about to commence with the voting.”

Delgato put the increasingly heavy tiger on the ground next to his feet and stretched his shoulders. “Hang on, but I need to see this.”

“Of course,” McHorn said, putting his tiger down as well.

The view screen showed Salvador Mutus, a yak and leader of the Green Party, giving his statement. “Even during the time of most severe crisis,” he said with his surprisingly high-pitched voice, “the Green Party has always been steadfast in its belief that the security of the citizens of Zootopia is of utmost concern, and we have always wholeheartedly rejected Dawn Bellwether’s notions of security, which did little to make this city safe. We have always unanimously voted against all the motions proposed by her, and we are not about to stop doing so, now that she is in prison, where she rightfully belongs. I support this new motion with all of my heart, and so does my party. Unanimously.” He sat down again to both the clapping of the councilmammals and the cheer of the mammals assembled on the plaza.

“It’s a mere formality,” the zebra said. “They all agree. You’ll be reinstated.”

“Of course they do,” McHorn said deadpan. “They all wanna be reelected.”
“You can bet,” Delgato said. “I hate all this politicizing.”

“You and me both.”

Liu Shumeng has gotten up again. “Right. Thank you, Councilmammal Mutus. Any further requests to speak?” He looked around, waiting for a few seconds. “That is not the case. So. Seeing that Chief Bogo seems to consider this an urgent affair, I again suggest we vote on this by acclamation. Or is anyone here asking for a secret ballot?” He waited again. “That is not the case.

“Well. Those in favor of passing,” he looked down at a piece of paper lying on the table in front of him, “motion 2016-dash-0859, as proposed by Acting Mayor Cameron Caballus, may raise their paws or hooves now.”

Delgato held his breath as hooves and paws were slowly raised, a few, some of them, most of them …

Was it all of them? Delgato wasn’t sure.

“Countercheck,” Liu said. “Those in favor of turning down said motion, please give me a show of paws or hooves.”

Nobody raised their limbs.

Delgato nodded as sheer, mindboggling happiness flowed through his veins like a flood of warm water.

“I observe that the yeas have it,” Liu announced. “I hereby declare that this assembly has passed motion 2016-dash-0859 unanimously.”

The cheer around Delgato following this announcement would have put most cheers heard in a football stadium to shame.

McHorn felt an enormous hoof placed on his shoulder. He looked at his friend, who returned the gaze with a wide grin. “Welcome back, Freddie! Welcome back!”

“Thanks, old buddy!” Delgato said, his throat strangely constricted.

On the screen, Liu turned towards Bogo. “I take it you are satisfied, Chief.”

Bogo nodded. “I am glad to see that justice was served.” He cleared his throat, and suddenly he shouted: “Police officers of Zootopia! I can understand if some of you will want to celebrate this victory tonight.” He gave one of his rare smiles. “I must say that I feel like celebrating myself. BUT!” He turned serious again and raised one hoof. “I expect each and every one of you to be present at roll call tomorrow morning, NO excuses! We have a lot of work to do, and I need each and every one of you at the full height of your abilities!”

“10-4, Chief,” Delgato said with a grin as he watched Bogo nod towards Liu and turn around, heading towards the exit.

Only to be stopped by Lionheart.

But Delgato didn’t see this anymore. He was looking down at the tiger he had been carrying, who was obviously slowly coming around, his gaze sweeping over his surroundings, taking in the cheering mammals. He tried uselessly to free his paws. “So you’re a pig after all,” he spat at Delgato.
Delgado crouched down next to him. “Don’t call me pig,” he snarled. “I’m a lion and an officer of the Zootopian Police Department. And you are under arrest, you son of a bitch!”

City Hall, Council Chamber, City Center, Zootopia

“You devious little bugger,” Lionheart said with a grin. “Congratulations! Never thought you’d do something like this!”

Bogo returned the grin. “I told you the exact same thing a few months ago.”

To his surprise, Lionheart merely nodded. “And you were just as right back then as I am right at this moment. I wouldn’t have thought I’d be able to imprison innocent mammals myself.”

“But you did.”

“I sure did. And you sure hustled Cameron and me good! Didn’t think you had it in you!”

“To be honest, neither did I.”

“You’d make a really good politician, I’d say!”

Bogo snorted at this assessment. “Apart from the fact that I hate politicians.”

“Come on! You saw the opportunity, you grasped it. That’s what politics is all about. See the opportunity and act on it. This was perfect!”

“If you say so.” He looked down at the pieces of paper Lionheart held in his paw.

Lionheart looked down at it, too. “They don’t suspect anything?”

“No. I can tell.”

“Good. I want them to be as surprised as the citizens will be.”

“Well, it certainly is unprecedented. But you understand that I need to do it. It’s my prerogative as the Chief.”

“Of course. I merely give you the go-ahead.”

“If you are reelected.”

Lionheart gave him a toothy grin. “Oh, I will be. After this, I’m certain of it.” He made a pause. “Not least because of you. You fought for me.”

Bogo shook his head. “I didn’t. Hopps and Wilde did. Right after we arrested Bellwether, they told me that you were the best option. And while I agreed with them, I didn’t openly support this. I can’t. Not while being the Chief of Police.”

Lionheart nodded. “I understand, AJ. But that’s okay. After all, that’s your job, isn’t it?”

“It sure is.” Bogo turned towards Higgins. “You know what you need to do now?”

“Oh, course,” the hippo said immediately. “When should I return?”

Bogo looked at Lionheart, who shrugged. “At some point in the middle of Leodore’s speech, I’d
“Use your own judgment, Higgins.”

“Yes, sir.” Higgins turned around and left the Council Chamber.

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia

Adimar Mastiff took in the scene in front of him with a smile.

The horse and the cheetah standing behind the counter were hugging each other with shouts of joy.

File in paw and whistling a happy tune, he left Caballus and Clawhauser to their little celebration, walking back to his office. He had a lot of work to do, and he didn’t need to see what would happen next. He had seen enough.

He had just witnessed the beginning of the treatment of a festering wound.

City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

Judy and Nick watched Higgins close the door leading into the Council Chamber. He turned towards them with a smile. “So. And now we wait.”

Nick raised an eyebrow. “For what?”

“For Lionheart to be reelected.”

“You think he will be?” Judy asked.

“Of course he will be, Fluff,” Nick said. “It’s the very same situation as before. In the eyes of the public, every councilmammal following after Lionheart has been perceived as corrupt or outright criminal. Lionheart’s campaign has always been about duty and integrity, and apart from his little slip-up with the missing mammals, he has always been considered to be beyond reproach. That’s why the citizens want him to be reelected, that’s why nobody in there will vote against him. They would be crazy to do so.”

“You’re into politics?” Higgins asked.

Nick grinned. “Not if I can help it. I merely know what makes mammals tick. As a hustler, you need to, and in cases like these, this knowledge is pretty useful.”

Higgins gave a chuckle. “Oh, I guess it will come in handy in other situations as well.” He made a pause. “For the record, I can’t wait to see you wearing the shield.” He pointed at the badge affixed to his uniform.

Judy grinned. “I can’t wait either.”

Nick gave a sigh. “Yes, but there’s a long and winding road ahead of me.”

“What do you mean?” Higgins asked.

“There are a few things I need to do before I will be able to join the ZPA. And even after having dealt with them, my application’s still pending. Don’t know if they’ll accept me in the first place.”

“Oh, they will. Bogo seems to be sure of it.”
“He is?”

“He is. You’ll soon know why.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just wait and see.”

“What the heck is that supposed to mean?”

Higgins merely gave him a grin.

Judy asked: “What are we waiting for?”

“For the right time, Hopps. Now, I’d like to watch this, so if you two don’t mind …”

Nick made an inviting gesture. “Be our guest.”

Standing to both sides of the wheelchair Judy was sitting in - or rather kneeling in the case of Higgins -, they watched the session commence.

The fact that Bogo hadn’t left the room while Higgins had hadn’t gone unnoticed by the mammals inside the Council Chamber. “Excuse me, is there a problem, Chief?” Liu Shumeng asked.

Bogo turned towards him and shook his head. “Just catching up with an old friend, Mr. Speaker.”

“Ah. Well.” Liu turned back towards the assembled councilmammals. “Now, back to the, ahem, ‘original’ agenda. Acting Mayor Caballus filed a motion, reference number 2016-dash-0860, asking for the reinstatement and reelection of Leodore Lionheart as both a councilmammal as well as the Mayor of Zootopia. Are there any requests to speak?”

For a few seconds, the camera panned over the table, showing councilmammals who looked at each other in obvious consternation. Finally, it was again Mutus who got up.

“First of all, let me use this opportunity to express my approval of your actions, Cameron. In the eyes of me and my fellow party members, the accusations brought up against former Mayor Lionheart have always been hugely exaggerated, so we approve of your decision to grant him a mayoral pardon. And on top of that, I also want to extend my heartfelt welcome to you, Leodore! It is good to see you in freedom again.” He looked at Lionheart, who was still standing near the door. The lion merely nodded. Mutus continued: “As for the motion you filed, Cameron, we also support it unanimously. Under Lionheart, Zootopia has flourished. Under Bellwether, it had started to wither and die …”

“Am I missing something here?” Judy asked. “Isn’t he one of Lionheart’s opponents?”

“He is, Hopps,” Higgins said. “Mutus leads the Green Party.”

“So why does he support his opponent?”

“Because he’s in full campaign mode now,” Nick said. “You need to think strategically, Carrots. Reelections are around the corner. Now, what had all the mammals conspiring with Bellwether have in common?”

“Uh, they were all prey?”

“Of course, but politically?”
“Erm, they’re Democrats?”

“Each and every one of them. And the public is well aware of the fact. Which in turn means that, even with Lionheart at the helm again, the Democrats might very well take a beating during the election.”

“They could even fall behind the Republicans,” Higgins added.

Nick shook his head. “I don’t think so. Even if they lose massively, their lead was so big a few months ago, I cannot imagine them losing that much. But they will probably lose the outright majority. So to still be able to rule the city, they will be dependant on a political partner. And what are the options there? Seeing that the only three parties standing a chance of clearing the 5-percent-clause at the moment are the Democrats, the Republicans, and the Green Party, there are only two: One, a grand coalition of Democrats and Republicans, which is always awkward and hardly ever really successful, and two, a coalition of Democrats with the Green Party. They have formed a coalition before, and it had worked out pretty well. So Mutus is gunning for governmental responsibility right now. And does he want to be a weak partner? No, he doesn’t. He wants his party to be as big and strong as possible, so he can wring concessions out of Lionheart and his Democrats. So he and his party need to score big during the elections. How do you win the votes?”

“By telling the citizens what they want to hear?” Judy said.

“Bingo!” Nick smiled. “We’ll make a politician out of you yet!”

Judy guffawed. “Thanks, but no thanks.”

“Mutus merely says what he thinks the people out there want to hear. Which, given the recent opinion polls, isn’t all that hard to guess. Most citizens of Zootopia want to turn back the clock to a time before Bellwether. They want the status quo ante, the time when Lionheart governed the city. Despite all he did, he’s still considered to be the best mammal for the job.”

“The other party leaders will take the same line,” Higgins said. “Right now, with all the anger directed at the Council, saying what the citizens want to hear is pretty much the only thing to do.”

“Lionheart will win this one, and he’ll win by a country mile.”

Thomas Cowam Children’s Hospital, Station IV, Sahara Square, Zootopia

Rebecca had sat down on Tyler’s bed, the tray completely forgotten, hoping that her pager wouldn’t demand her attention now. She watched as councilmammal after councilmammal heaped praise on her husband, with nobody saying anything against him.

Everyone seemed to support his reelection.

“He’ll win this, right?” Tyler Cristata said.

“I hope so,” Rebecca said with an almost toneless voice.

The last three months had been a living hell for her. With her husband in prison, no further income from him and three children attending either elementary or high school, Rebecca had volunteered to work double-shifts at the children’s hospital. This wasn’t only hugely demanding and exhausting for her, it was, strictly speaking, also illegal. Between the two work shifts, she had never allowed herself the mandatory ten hours of time for rest and recuperation. Unfortunately, her options were severely limited. She was already facing an enormous amount of bills to pay, and she didn’t have
enough money to do it.

With her husband back in office, however, she would again be able to reduce her workload to the half-time employment she had enjoyed prior to his arrest.

If he was reelected …

“Any more requests to speak?” Liu asked finally, after an almost painfully long ten minutes of mammals talking rubbish about her husband - she loved him dearly, but he certainly wasn’t the saint the councilmammals painted him to be. He waited for a few seconds. “That is not the case. Now, is anyone asking for a secret ballot?” Another short pause. “That is also not the case. So we can decide on this by acclamation.

“I’m asking for a show of paws or hooves. Those in favor of supporting 2016-dash-0860 may raise their paws or hooves now!”

When she saw a lot of mammals raise their limbs immediately, Rebecca closed her eyes while tears were running down her face.

Relief! Sweet, blessed relief!

Rebecca Katanga-Lionheart was weeping like a cub. She hardly felt Tyler embracing her as good as he was able to while being on a drip.

“Countercheck! If you are against the reinstatement of Leodore Lionheart, please vote now.”

Another silence. “I observe that the yeas have it. I hereby declare that this assembly has passed motion 2016-dash-0860 unanimously, with one abstention from voting.”

Rebecca opened her eyes again, looking at Tyler. “Thanks!” she said with an audible sob. The aardwolf merely responded by hugging her even tighter.

“Now, I am asking you, Leodore Lionheart: Do you accept your election?”

Rebecca looked back at the screen, at her husband, who finally stepped away from the door and towards Liu who was still standing at the head of the table. He stopped, looked around, and after a few seconds, Rebecca couldn’t shake the feeling that he was hesitating.

After almost thirty seconds, Leodore said: “Mr. Speaker, I do.”

This was exactly the moment her pager was demanding Rebecca’s attention. She disentangled from Tyler after one last hug, picked up the tray and left the room without another sound.

She looked like she’d been dragged through hell and back, and she knew it. But she couldn’t have cared less.

Right now, she was at peace with the world.

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Forensic Laboratory, Conference Room, City Center, Zootopia

“And Boom! goes the dynamite!” Charles Afer was chuckling. “That was quick!”

“They had no other options,” Gerard Gusteau observed. “The people out in front of City Hall would have demanded their heads if they hadn’t voted for Lionheart.” He looked at Badger, but
she was just staring ahead, with eyes unseeing.

*He’s back! He gets his shot at redemption!*

To her own surprise, she was glad for Lionheart - for Leodore -, and seeing him back where he belonged filled her heart with joy.

They had both done wrong, but now they had both been given the chance to right the wrongs again. Suddenly, the future didn’t look quite as dire.

“Honey?” Gusteau asked.

She snapped out of her silent reverie. “Sorry, Jerry. Must have been dozing off. Listening to politicians always tires me out.”

Armando Peralta nodded. “You could say that. Without my tea, I’d have been dozing off ages ago.” This drew a tiny chuckle from all mammals in the conference room.

Eleonore Mitis was still looking at the screen, which showed Lionheart shaking paws with virtually everyone around. “But why did he hesitate?”

“Pardon?” Peralta asked.

“Lionheart hesitated before accepting the election. Why?” She looked at Badger. Her involvement with Lionheart was well-known to all of them.

Badger shrugged. “No idea. Maybe he just wanted to increase the tension. He sure likes pushing all the buttons.”

“I don’t know,” Billy Hopps said. “Looked like some genuine hesitation to me.”

“He’s a world-class actor,” Badger said immediately. “He once told me that all politicians need to be able to play a role, and do so in the twinkling of an eye.”

“Maybe he’ll tell us,” Gusteau said. “Looks like he’s about to give a speech.”

“Oh no!” Badger said. “He’ll be boring us to death with some tale of the glory days!” Everybody laughed.

---

**City Hall, Council Chamber, City Center, Zootopia**

Adrian Bogo watched his friend walk up to the table, taking the chair Caballus had left, but he didn’t sit down. Instead, Lionheart reached into his suit coat to produce a book which looked tiny in his massive paws. Placing the book on the table in front of him, he cleared his throat.

“Mr. Speaker, dear Councilmammals, citizens of Zootopia!

“First of all, I want to thank each of you for the trust and support you are offering me. After what I did, some of it seems ill-deserved to me, but if you think that I am the right mammal to govern this city again, I certainly won’t stand in your way.” This elicited a small chuckle from the councilmammals.

“However, when you asked me, Mr. Speaker, whether I was accepting my election, I had half a mind to say No.”
Bogo nodded. He had surmised as much. Lionheart was a born rhetorician. Everything he did while under the eyes of the public, he did for a reason. Bogo was pretty certain that his hesitation, especially how long it had taken him to overcome it, had been cleverly calculated, but there were some real underlying issues the lion had with the turn of events. They knew each other long enough for Bogo to be able to tell this.

The other mammals in the room, on the other hoof, were pretty much taken by surprise when hearing this, at least the noise level increased significantly.

Despite of this, Lionheart continued, adding matter-of-factly: “That is because I do not think I am legitimized as the new Mayor of Zootopia.”

Zootopia News Network Headquarters, Cafeteria, City Center, Zootopia

Fabienne Growley straightened in her seat. “Did he really just say this?”

Like most Zootopians, the production crew of ZNN’s news service had of course been watching the proceedings taking place at City Hall, but since most of it had revolved around the usual campaigning and politicizing, and since the outcome had been clear at some point, most of them had lost their interest in the transmission long ago. Growley had just been engrossed in a conversation with Maggie Kurt, ZNN’s certified makeup wizard, when Lionheart dropped this bomb.

“It certainly seems so,” the producer, Patrick Mephitis, said.

On the screen, Lionheart plowed on: “This may sound strange, even ludicrous to you, since you, the elected City Council of Zootopia, elected me back into office. But I have a lot of reasons for thinking the way I do, which I’m going to explain to you in detail now. This will probably be lengthy, and it may sometimes seem like little more than pointless rambling. And to some mammals, much of it may not sound like the most thrilling of tales. But it’s a tale worth hearing and knowing, so I’m asking for your patience.”

He closed his eyes for a brief moment and took a deep breath.

“And so it begins” Peter Moosebridge said.

“You’re expecting something spectacular, Peter?” Growley asked.

“I expect nothing less from Lionheart.” He looked at the screen with rapt attention.

Growley decided to take the hint. When a journalistic juggernaut like Peter Moosebridge was paying attention, you’d be well advised to do so, too.

And when a journalistic juggernaut like Peter Moosebridge does so, you should do so, too! ;-) More to come soon!

When rereading this chapter, I realized that some of you might ask yourself why McHorn was able to reach Delgato that quickly. Well, I had my own hometown Brake in mind when writing this. Here, the city hall and the police department are on the same street, merely separated by a parking lot, with some 500 yards between them. Distances are certainly longer in Zootopia, given the huge buildings needed for big mammals like elephants and giraffes, yet a rhino like McHorn should still be able to reach Delgato in just a few minutes.
In case you’re curious, among the so-called “big cats,” tigers are indeed the biggest, considerably bigger than lions. Only ligers (that’s not a typo - ligers are a hybrid species, a cross between a male lion and a female tiger) can be bigger than tigers. (The counterparts, called tigons (male tiger, female lion) are significantly smaller than both parents.) Why the lion is considered to be the “king of beasts” despite only being second-largest is beyond me.

The political parties mentioned in here are, unsurprisingly, quite important in my storyline, so I better start giving a few explanations. Despite the fact that they’re named after the parties you can find in the U.S. of A., they’re based on their German counterparts, simply because I know the German political system way better than the American counterpart. We have the conservative Republicans, which are based on the “Christlich-Demokratische Union,” CDU, a liberal-conservative party leaning to the centre-right. The Democrats are based on the “Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands,” SPD, a social-democratic party leaning to the centre-left. And we have the Green party, which is based on “Bündnis 90/Die Grünen,” a party which, while also leaning towards the centre-left, has a strong focus on ecology and sustainability. Maybe the differences to the American parties of the same names aren’t that great, but they’re there. Just in case you’re asking yourself why the party members don’t act like you think they should do.

Now for the obligatory hidden quotes:

There’s a teensy little hint to an Iron Maiden song hidden in here. I’m really interested to see if you can find this one.

Another quote was taken from the game “Mass Effect 3,” specifically the hilarious “Citadel” DLC. Have fun with this one!

Yet another quote can be found in the movie “A Few Good Men” by Rob Reiner. This was just too good to leave out.

I also found a line in the poem “Wasted Youth” by Jim Steinman, as recited on the album “Bat Out of Hell II - Back Into Hell” by Meat Loaf. This one’s a bit obscure, but you should still be able to find it.

There also is a quote from the LucasArts game “Full Throttle” hidden in here.

And while we’re speaking of games: Another quote from the Eidos Interactive game “Tomb Raider: Legend” can be found somewhere in this chapter.

Have fun finding these little gems!

Next on this channel: What is Lionheart up to? And what is going to happen to Judy and Nick?

Thank you very much for reading! And sending comments my way would be really nice!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

Welcome back to the remainder of the council session, well, most of it. The council session per se is complete, but I have yet to deal with Nick and Judy. Won’t be long though ...

Before I can commence with the chapter itself, I want to give you an honest word of warning: This chapter is very heavy on both politics and history. I’ve said it numerous times before: To me, politics is in everything, and everything turns into history. As far as writing is concerned, it tends to color everything I do - I just cant think of anything without keeping the historical and political implications in mind. Believe me, I tried, but I just can’t do it.

And this chapter proves it.

To some, this may be bothersome to read, sometimes even boring. But to truly understand the intricacies involved behind the curtain - something which will be vital in “Hammer” -, it is essential that you read this chapter. If you don’t, if you think you cannot be bothered with reading stuff like that, you won’t understand much of what is going on in “Hammer.” And if I still can’t convince you to read this chapter, then I can only say that there are other interesting stories out there. So long, good bye, have a nice day, and - of course - take care!

Still here? Good.

To some of you, what you are about to read may be quite difficult to understand. I have tried to give explanations for everything in here, but in case that’s not enough, I strongly suggest to have Wikipedia on hand to read up some of the stuff I’m writing about, for instance the events which took place in Germany in early 1933. This is, in essence, a history lesson with quite a lot of politics and several twists and turns.

With that being said, on to more pleasant things!

Thanks to all those who read the story up to this point, and kudos to Hayato, Thehellion115, and HawkTooth (who provided me with some interesting pieces of information about lions) for sending their comments.

Last call on the quotes I hid in this story so far! In the author’s notes towards the end of the next - and last - chapter of this story, I’m going to reveal them all. So if you want to tell me that you found some, now’s your last chance to do so!

Chapter Fifteen

Surprise, Surprise!

Who wants a love without anger and rage? I do! Who wants a world where a kid can be safe? I do! Who wants to pray for the end of the pain, for the calm at the end of the day, where there’s not always more of the same? I do!

Anastacia feat. Sonny Sandoval: “I Do” (Written by Anastacia, Kara DioGuardi, Lukas Burton, and
City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

Three other mammals were also watching with rapt attention.

“That was some curveball he delivered,” Higgins said.

“Do you really think he isn’t legitimized?” Judy looked up at Nick.

The fox shook his head. “No idea, Carrots. I’m just as stumped as you are.”

On the screen, Lionheart opened his eyes again and began to speak.

“When the founding fathers laid the foundation this city is built on, they had a very basic set of rules in mind. Boiled down to one sentence, the set of rules merely states that in Zootopia, anyone can be anything.”

He made a pause. “As hackneyed and overused as this phrase certainly is, there was a very good reason why I used it during my campaign for this office. It is the most basic, most fundamental principle which Zootopia was built upon. And it has some very serious consequences. Consequences like: No matter what species you are, no matter what gender you are, no matter what your upbringing, your education was like, you deserve to be given the very same chances every other mammal receives.

“We all know that in reality, this is rarely the case. Even today, in this period of time so many mammals like to call enlightened, of which I yet have to see proof, there still is prejudice. There still is lack of equality. There still is open bullying. I only need to listen to a fox or a weasel and let them relate the stories of their respective lives to me, and I know that the road which lies ahead of us is long, steep, and winding. And the last few months stood testament to the fact that we are so very far from having reached that goal.

“But I always tried my utmost to make sure every mammal, every citizen of Zootopia and the surrounding boroughs, receives at least a fighting chance to become anything they want. This is why I, for example, introduced the Mammal Inclusion Initiative. Why should mammals be denied the chance to become police officers or firefighters? Just because they happen to be small? That sounds an awful lot like it’s their own fault that they are! It’s nothing but unfair, that’s what it is! And that is why I introduced the Mammal Inclusion Initiative and got you to give me the necessary votes to put it into effect.

“There also were practical reasons for this. In Little Rodentia, law enforcement and security lie in the paws of private companies that work in close conjunction with the ZPD. While this has always worked pretty well in the past, it isn’t necessarily the ideal solution, because it often leads to a massive increase in bureaucracy. You are usually forced to do things twice, which is very costly for everyone involved, in terms of money, in terms of time, and also in terms of mammalpower. So, what if we are able to establish a new ZPD precinct in Little Rodentia itself, run by small mammals who live and work there themselves? What if we were able to, for example, incorporate the private companies into the ZPD directly? Turning the private security officers into police officers?” He turned towards Bogo. “You have to admit this sounds like a smart idea, AJ.”

“It does”, Bogo said gravely. “However, seeing that the number of graduates your initiative brought into the ZPD stands at one right now, a mammal much too big to be able to work in Little Rodentia, I’d say we’re far from being able to achieve this, Leo. And speaking of Little Rodentia,
this is the first time I hear someone say that they want to incorporate their private security companies into the ZPD.”

Lionheart made a placating gesture. “My apologies. This is a recent idea of mine, but it’s one that I think is worth pursuing. Don’t you agree?”

“Oh, I agree wholeheartedly. We could do with proper law enforcement officers able to enter Little Rodentia without wrecking the place.”

Lionheart nodded. “That’s what I thought. I think we should really put some effort into this. And as far as the number of small mammals at the ZPD at this moment is concerned, you’re perfectly right, of course. Like I said, the road ahead is long, steep, and winding. But it’s a start. And it may lead to real improvement. A lot of work needs to be done, certainly, but if the right mammals give it their best, I’m convinced that we can get there.”

He turned back towards the councilmammals. “And I’m saying this despite the fact that it was the very first graduate of the Mammal Inclusion Initiative who solved the crime I had perpetrated, that it was this very first graduate who arrested me for falsely imprisoning innocent predators. I don’t deny I did it. I went to prison for a reason. I actually am with Chief Bogo in this one. I am not innocent. I don’t see myself as a victim of a scheme devised by Dawn Bellwether. I stood by what I did. I still do, because I did it for a reason which, in my opinion, is still very valid.

“Contrary of what many of you might think, I hold no grudge against Officer Judy Hopps for her actions. As far as I am concerned, she simply upheld the law, and as a former judge, I can and will never disapprove of that. She did the right thing when she arrested me. I’d rather applaud her for her actions, for her determination, for her bravery. I would like to thank her in person for the great service she rendered to this city, and I also would like to thank the mammal who helped her solve the cases, the one I was responsible for, and the one which Dawn Bellwether had instigated. Mr. Nicholas Wilde has also proven enormous bravery, trustworthiness and determination, and he is worthy of our thanks just as much as Officer Hopps is. As a matter of fact, I have sent for both of them, and I hope they will be able to join us soon, so I can indeed thank them on behalf of all citizens of Zootopia.”

Judy turned quite pale under her fur. “Oh dear! I … they … I will appear …”

Higgins looked down at the fidgeting rabbit with a grin. “Yes, you will, Hopps.”

Nick grinned at the prospect of appearing in front of all of Zootopia. The thought didn’t bother him all that much. He had never been exactly camera-shy, yet at the same time, he had always tried his hardest not to stand out too much. The better you are able to blend in, the easier it is to simply disappear without a trace. Being at the center of attention for having done something good and honorable now was still an exhilarating concept to him. No need anymore to appear small and insignificant! “So what are we waiting for?”

Higgins shrugged. “They told me to go and fetch you, but the Chief merely said that I should enter at some point during Lionheart’s speech to make it look like I had to search for you. Nobody needs to know that you’re here already, that all of this was pre-planned.”

“All of what?” Judy asked with a tremulous voice.

“You’ll find out.”

“You’re not the most helpful of mammals, you know that, Higgy-baby?” Nick said.
ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Basement, Forensic Laboratory, Conference Room, City Center, Zootopia

“I also want to thank Officer Hopps and Mr. Wilde personally for a completely different reason, a very selfish one this time,” Lionheart said. “Because as stupid as this may sound, my imprisonment caused by them finally allowed me to indulge in something I haven’t been able to do for years.”

Badger snorted. “Which was what? Getting on other mammal’s nerves?”

“Was it that bad?” Gusteau asked.

“Let me put it this way: Had there been cubs in that prison, he would have smooched them.” Deep down inside, Badger wondered why she kept lambasting Lionheart, given the fact he had never done her any harm. Maybe it was just the way she was wired.

“Always campaigning, huh?”

“You bet!”

On the screen, Lionheart looked around. “But before I can deal with that, I feel the need to address the state of this assembly, or rather, the sorry state of this assembly.”

“Finally we’re getting there,” Peralta commented.

Lionheart looked up at the assembled councilmammals, obviously at a particular one.

“Councilmammal Jimela, I must confess that I’m surprised.”

“Are we?” Afer asked.

The addressed mammal got up from his chair. “At what, Lionheart? The fact that I abstained from voting you back into office? I still consider you a criminal, and I cannot condone …”

Lionheart interrupted him. “But you supported Bellwether, right? And unless I am very much mistaken, you still do it, don’t you?”

He looked around. “For those of you who don’t know, Gustavo Jimela gave an interview to the Zootopia Tribune just yesterday, in which he claims that the accusations against Dawn Bellwether are fabricated. I came across this interview just this morning, shortly before I was able to leave the prison.”

Looking at Jimela again, he added: “In case it hasn’t reached your ears yet, Jimela, the reason why Bellwether is in custody right now, awaiting her trial, is because the ZPD has her confession on record, a confession of her crimes against predators in particular and the City of Zootopia on the whole. She basically admitted to her wrongdoings herself. Yet you still claim she’s innocent. You don’t support me because you consider me a criminal, yet you still refuse to believe that she might be a criminal, too?”

He made a lengthy pause, fixing his icy stare on Jimela, who obviously didn’t dare to say anything at this stage. “A very interesting selective perception, I must say. But that’s not why I’m surprised. To be honest, I would have been more surprised if you had voted for me. No, I’m surprised for a completely different reason.”

“Which is?”

“Why are you even here?”
The topi frowned. “I beg your pardon?”

Lionheart snorted, and his voice became caustic. “Don’t act like you don’t understand me! You know perfectly well what I’m talking about! And if not, you should go back to school and learn everything there is to know about politics, because it seems that you know nothing about the topic. Your mere presence here proves this.” He looked around. “And it also seems like you are in good company here.”

At this, several councilmammals jumped up, obviously quite incensed at being treated in such a manner.

“Honey, didn’t you just say he would have kissed cubs?” Gusteau asked with a grin. “Looks more likely he wants to punch them all in the face.”

“I hope he does!” Mitis said. “They so deserve it!”

On this, everybody agreed.

---

**ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia**

Lionheart seemed to be completely unperturbed by the sudden commotion. Pointing at a specific mammal, he shouted: “Andrej Magarac, you became the new leader of our party after Franklin Pardalis was forced to step down. Why didn’t you oppose the appointment of Gustavo Jimela?”

Magarac, a donkey, stood up as most councilmammals sat down again. “Why should I have done so? Dawn …”

Lionheart interrupted him, too. “Because by not doing so, you willfully ignored every rule there is when it comes to elections and councilmammal appointments.”

Magarac sat down again, consternation etched on his face, as Lionheart plowed on. “Gustavo Jimela joined our party six months ago, at the same time the first predators turned savage. Less than four months later, he became a councilmammal. Why? Just because Bellwether said so? She never led our party. She wasn’t involved in the creation of the list of electable candidates for the new City Council. And this list is the only thing you should have followed. Not the insinuations of a criminal sheep!

“And Jimela wasn’t the first one. When I was arrested, when Dawn Bellwether took my seat, the one vacated by her was given to Doctor Jonathan Hirvi, who is no longer among us. When Franklin Pardalis was forced out of office after having been accused of felony tax evasion, claims that have been disproven in the meantime, by the way, his seat was taken by Isabella Merino, who also is no longer among us. When Sandrine Loup-Cervier was also accused of felony tax evasion, also falsely, I might add, and forced to step down, her seat was taken by Maya Brooks. Another mammal who is no longer with us right now. And I cannot help sensing a pattern here.

“And finally, when Zachary Murinus stepped down after his three kits obviously received death threats, you, Jimela, took his seat.”

“What do you say?” McHorn asked. “Was Jimela in cahoots with Bellwether, too?” He and Delgado had arrived at Precinct One and deposited the two tigers in the detention cells, then they had decided to join the other officers at the Receptionist’s Counter to watch the proceedings in City Hall.

“Probably. Should we look a bit closer into it?” Alan Trunkaby said.
“Couldn’t hurt,” Delgato answered.

“And just like you, Jimela,” Lionheart continued, “all three mammals who replaced others had joined the Democratic Party about six months ago. None of them appeared on any list of candidates whatsoever. Which is a problem …”

“Why?” Jimela shouted and jumped up again. “This city needs the best mammals for the jobs, not just …”

“And that’s supposed to be YOU?” Lionheart interrupted him harshly. “A college dropout, 21 years of age, still living with his parents … as opposed to, say, a venerable councilmammal with more than 20 years of experience on his back and an extensive knowledge of what this city needs and what it doesn’t - something which you obviously lack. Tell me, young mammal, is there anything you can do better than Zack Murinus? Does this City Council, does this city, profit from your presence here in any way, shape, or form? You have done nothing so far. Your name doesn’t appear in any of the committees, you haven’t made your presence known in any of the sessions. As far as your contributions on the whole are concerned, an empty chair could have done the job just as well as you did. Care to explain any of that?” Lionheart waited for a few seconds, but Jimela didn’t respond. “That’s what I thought.”

“Yup, we should definitely look at the guy more closely,” Robert Rhinowitz said as they watched Jimela sit down again, very slowly and obviously very reluctantly.

City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

“I can’t help thinking Lionheart enjoys this very much,” Higgins said.

“You can bet he does,” Nick said. “This is perfect for him. He sat on the sideline for weeks, watching the City Council unravel. It wasn’t his fault, he was just an innocent bystander. But he knows what should have happened, he knows what the City Council should have done and didn’t do, and now he’s in perfect position to tear the place apart, brick by brick. I guess you would enjoy it, too.”

“Certainly.”

“You think he can get the councilmammals to vote for self-dissolution?” Judy asked.

“With ease, Carrots. He’ll do so blindfolded, with just one paw, running uphill and backwards. They will eat from the palm of his paw.”

“Sure?”

“Of course. I know what he’s talking about. There was a list of candidates for the last election. It determines which mammals may become a councilmammal. Those not high enough on the list become successors at call, taking the seats of mammals who have to leave the Council before the term of office is out. This list is valid until the next election. By filling vacated seats with mammals who’re not on the list, who joined the party only a few months ago, way after the last election, Lionheart’s party ignored the list. They really shouldn’t have.”

“Why?”

“Ever heard of the Predator-Prey-Ratio-Rule?”

“Uh, no.”
“But your mere presence here isn’t the real problem. Ask yourself one question, Jimela: Why are you the only one contradicting me right now? Look around you! Nobody in here dares to contradict me, because they know I’m right, because they know the problem I’m talking about. Unlike you. It’s very obvious that you have not the slightest idea what you’re dealing with whatsoever.” Lionheart lowered his voice. “Still you dare to call yourself one of the best mammals for the job? I strongly suggest you step down right now and go back to college, because it’s obvious that you still got a lot to learn.”

The lion straightened himself. “But I am not without a heart, Jimela, so I’ll break it down for you. The real problem is this: When I, a lion, was basically replaced by a camel, Bellwether blatantly ignored the age-old, unwritten gentlemammal’s agreement that the ratio between predator and prey mammals always has to be at least 18 to 32. With Hirvi, it changed to 17 to 33. Add to this Dawn Bellwether herself, and we had a classical stalemate - 17 carnivores versus 34 herbivores. And when such a stalemate is reached, the Mayor’s voice counts double.

“In other words, when Hirvi became a councilmammal, prey mammals suddenly had a two-third majority.

“And Dawn Bellwether made good, or rather bad use of this majority, forcing through motions that, in essence, did nothing but punish predators. This is an abomination in itself, and I’m not saying this because I’m a predator myself. This is an abomination, because it negates everything our founding fathers established centuries ago.

“This rule is the reason why the list of candidates has to be respected at all times. It’s creation in itself is a pain in the behind, because you always have to keep said rule in mind. When a predator has to leave this council for whatever reason, another predator has to take the vacant seat. You can’t just pick the next best mammal. You always need to keep the ratio between predators and prey mammals in mind.

“Yes, when looking at the census, the 18-versus-32 rule is a gross misinterpretation of the real proportions. For every predator who lives in Zootopia, we have ten prey mammals. And when I look at the surrounding boroughs, the ratios are even more lopsided. However, the rule had been established for a very good reason. It was to prevent prey from being able to subjugate predators. To change laws, you need a two-third majority, and by making sure that prey didn’t achieve this majority, this rule gave predators security. This rule is one of the reasons why Zootopia has been stable for so many decades.

“You will find similar rules in almost every community on this planet. Even in cities like Podunk, where prey outnumber predators by far more than 1000 to 1, the City Council consists of an astonishingly high number of predators. And even if there still aren’t enough predators to make sure prey don’t get the two-third majority, predator votes count double, or even thrice, I think, when matters concerning the prey-predator relationship are decided upon. At least that’s how things are in Podunk. I guess communities like Bunnyburrow have similar rules. I probably should ask Officer Hopps about it, seeing as she was born and raised in Bunnyburrow.”

“Forget it!” Judy said. “I know nothing about politics.”

Lionheart continued: “In essence, this rule isn’t much liked by anyone involved. Yes, predators try their utmost to uphold it, but meeting the quota when there are so few predator mammals running for office is always a hassle, and a lot of discussions and a lot of negotiations have to take place before a freshly elected council can be constituted.
“Of course, Dawn Bellwether changed all that.”

Judy made a frown. “Hang on! If the ratio wasn’t what it should have been, are the decisions made by this council even legal?”

“That,” Nick said, “is a really good question, Carrots.”

**City Hall, Council Chamber, City Center, Zootopia**

Adrian Bogo was feeling the first slivers of boredom. He couldn’t understand why his friend kept stating the obvious. Everybody knew Bellwether and her cronies had ignored every rule in the book, everybody knew the Council was corrupt, everybody knew that Jimela was incompetent (and probably in cahoots with Bellwether - letting one of his officers take a closer look at the mammal sounded like a good idea to him). It took him all his willpower to fight down a wide yawn.

“And as time progressed, things got worse,” Lionheart said. “Without the arrests of Brooks, Merino, and Hirvi, we would still have a two-thirds-majority of prey mammals within this council. We have only just managed to get an even balance after the arrests. We are down to 15 predators, excluding me, for the Mayor doesn’t count towards the number of councilmammals, and we have 30 herbivores. We have only just achieved a one-third predator, two-thirds prey ratio. If I was prey, the ratio would still be lopsided.

“Now, I know what many of you might think: So what? Stop whining, Lionheart! Face the truth: It’s just the way it is. You can only play the cards you’re dealt, not the ones you’d like to have. After all, no laws have been broken.”

Lionheart made a long pause and looked around.

And suddenly he smiled.

But it wasn’t a happy smile, not a smile expressing amusement. It was a mirthless, a cynical smile, like the one Bogo used when he was about to rip some unfortunate mammal’s head off, usually when said mammal had made a mistake and didn’t know about it yet.

Suddenly, Bogo felt a shiver run down his spine. It looked like he would finally find out what Lionheart had been withholding from him and Caballus. And is his grin was any indication, is was all but a nice story.

$**Uh oh!**$

Lionheart clapped his paws together. “So, after this short digression, back to the topic at paw. When you are forced to spend time in solitude, like I was, there’s only so much you can do. You can start exercising, you can turn to arts or music, or you can start reading books, which is what I did. It must have been years since I had really been able to sit down and properly read a book from cover to cover without being interrupted every five minutes. I must have read, oh, I don’t know, some fifty books. Some were my own, but some of them belonged to the prison library. It was … refreshing, cathartic even. And it was highly educational.”

He picked up the small book from the table. “During my, ahem, studies, I came across this little gem. And yes, as the cover suggests, this actually is property of the Zootopia Municipal Correctional Facility. I merely borrowed it for this occasion, and I’m going to return it once we’re done here.” With a mocking smile, he added: “I may have falsely imprisoned innocent mammals,
but I’m not a thief.” This elicited a small laughter.

“This actually is a biography of a mammal named Rosa Gardner, released shortly before her death, authorized by her herself. I guess that most of you have never heard that name before.” He looked around, obviously searching for a certain mammal. “But you certainly have, Councilmammal Hecki, right?”

The addressed mammal, a female Saharan cheetah, stood up. “Yes, I have.”

“You’re one of the teachers of my oldest son, and by the way, he holds you in very high esteem,” he made a pause and gave her a grin, “despite the fact that you belong to the wrong party.” Hecki returned the grin. Lionheart continued: “Now, Dorothy, I’m asking you as a history teacher, as a qualified expert on the subject matter: Could you please tell us who Rosa Gardner was?”

Hecki smiled. “Of course! Rosa Gardner was a history professor at Zootopia University, famous for her extensive studies into the history and nature of Nazi rule over Gnuganda. During her lifetime, she was considered to be the leading expert on anything related to Adolf Hirschler’s dictatorship, and her books remain reference works to this day. I actually met her myself during my time at Zoo U, some thirty years ago. She already was about 80 years of age back then and a professor emeritus, but she was still holding lectures every now and then.”

“How would you describe her?”

“An impressive woman, I must say. She neither looked nor acted her age. Her style was refreshing, compared to most other professors back then. And she was outstandingly intelligent and highly entertaining. The 90 minutes her lecture took seemed to be over in less than ten.”

“Did you get the opportunity to talk to her in person?”

“Only in passing. I was just one mammal out of about 400, and she simply didn’t have enough time that day.”

“What did she sound like?”

Hecki made a frown. “What do you mean?”

“Her manner of speech, her language. Was she talking with an accent, for example?”

Hecki made a pause. “Well, come to think of it, she … did sound somewhat alien. But I have no idea where …”

“Gnuganda.”

“Pardon?”

“She was born in Gnuganda.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am. She actually told me herself. My grandfather was a close friend of hers, so I met her personally when I was a cub. Besides, it’s all in this book. Anyway, thank you, Dorothy.”

Lionheart gave a slight bow while Hecki sat down again.

Bogo looked at Lionheart with raised eyebrows. He knew his friend liked his grand entrances, he loved cameras, and he was a master at prolonging his exposure to said cameras. But above all, he
loved scheming and playing.

But this was taking things to the extreme.

And when looking into the faces of all the mammals around, Bogo couldn’t help shake the feeling that everyone was as puzzled as he was.

Nobody understood the game Lionheart was playing right now.

---

**Zootopia News Network Headquarters, Cafeteria, City Center, Zootopia**

“Is there a point to this?” Maggie Kurt asked.

“If there is, I don’t see it”, Mephitis replied.

Lionheart continued: “The mammal you know as Rosa Gardner was born Rosamunde Luise Gärtner in a small village near the capital of Gnuganda, Bearlin, in 1907. Her father was a carpenter, her mother worked as a tailor, but World War I and the aftermath pretty much destroyed the family assets. On top of that, the economy wasn’t exactly flourishing back then, so her parents had to scrape together everything they could to allow their highly intelligent daughter to receive the best education you could ask for. And little Rosamunde overcame all odds. Her outstanding grades at school earned her a scholarship, which in turn allowed her to study history at the University of Peltsdam. She excelled there, too, and after just having turned 25, she handed in her habilitation dissertation, which was graded summa cum laude. She was offered a chair at the history faculty of the University of Peltsdam immediately and thus became one of the youngest professors in the history of mammalkind. That was in 1932.

“One year later, Adolf Hirschler came to power in Gnuganda. And everything changed for Rosamunde Gärtner.”

He made a pause, obviously for effect. “Because she was a cougar. And if you remember your history lessons, you know that the regime established by Adolf Hirschler and his National Socialistic Gnugandan Workers Party didn’t look too kindly on predators.

“Less than a year after having become a professor, she lost her chair again under more than dubious circumstances. First, she was falsely accused of supporting communism, and when this wasn’t enough to make sure she would lose her position, the new chancellor of the University of Peltsdam, a faithful member of the Nazi party, accused her of having been in a sexual relationship with a horse, which was considered to be highly illicit in Gnuganda at that time and would probably still be frowned upon today. The accusations were disproven almost immediately, but the damage had already been done. Rosamunde Gärtner was forced to step down. After having received several threats to her life, after most of her relatives, including her parents, had been arrested and put into concentration camps, where most of them died a gruesome death, she decided to leave her home country. After living in Nageria for three years, she finally came to Zootopia in early 1937. That also was the time she legally changed her name to Rosa Gardner.

“It took the board of trustees of Zootopia University little time to realize what a gem the tides had swept up. In early 1938, she was offered a chair at Zoo U, and she remained there for the rest of her career, highly respected, revered, adored even. Upon her retirement in 1972, one of the lecture halls at Zoo U was named after her. When she died in 1996, the whole university was in mourning for two weeks, and the chancellor decided to honor her by lying her in state in her very own lecture hall. The Gardner Park in Sahara Square is named after her, as is the Rosa-Gardner-Boulevard in Tundratown.”
“Yet despite all her popularity with the scholars, most mammals don’t remember her. On the whole, this is quite understandable, as her popularity was pretty much restricted to scholars, especially to history scholars. And even those don’t remember her greatest historical achievement, because she didn’t achieve it in the science field of history, but in the science field of law. And even there, she is all but forgotten. Even I, a former judge who had met her personally several times, didn’t know about her contributions until I read about it yesterday in this very book.” He held the book up again.

“Rosa Gardner was the instigator of what is commonly called Gardner’s Law.”

“Ever heard of this?” Growley asked.

She saw a lot of shaken heads, with one notable exception - Peter Moosebridge nodded. “I have. Hang on!” He closed his eyes, obviously thinking hard.

And suddenly he gasped.

“Oh! My! God!”

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia

“Have you ever heard of Gardner’s Law?” McHorn asked.

Delgato shook his head. “I have often driven along the Rosa-Gardner-Boulevard when I was still stationed in Tundratown, but I had no idea whom it was named after. And I certainly had no idea a law was named after her.”

“Should I zoogle it?” Caballus asked, her hooves poised over the laptop’s keyboard.

“Don’t bother!” Pennington shook her head. “I guess Lionheart will explain it anyway.”


“What did you expect?” Trunkaby said. “This is Mickiepedia, not some scientific book. Sometimes you strike pay dirt, sometimes you grasp at nothing.”

“Worth a try though,” Clawhauser said while pocketing his smartphone.

On the screen, Lionheart put the book down on the table and proceeded. “The year is 1946. World War II had just ended. An alliance of troops from several different countries, mostly from the United States of Animalia, had managed to defeat the Axis Powers led by Adolf Hirschler, Benito Moussolini, and Hideki Tanuki, among others. Peace had finally been established. And Rosa Gardner was in the middle of writing what was to become her masterpiece, the first comprehensive history and evaluation of the Third Reich of Adolf Hirschler and his Gnugandan Nazi Party. Her goals were quite high, and to achieve them, she collaborated with a lot of mammals from a lot of different fields of science. Among those was a lawyer who had just established his own law office.

“His name was Richard Lionheart Sr., My grandfather.

“The two of them put Gnugandan laws of that time under an intense scrutiny, comparing them to other sets of laws in other countries or communities. And while doing so, they made a surprising, a disturbing discovery.
“The laws, as laid down by the Gnugandan dictatorship, are pretty much identical to those you can find in, for instance, Zootopia.”

“What?” said Caballus.

“Ouch!” Delgato said.

Rhinowitz shook his head. “Bet a lot of guys in Zootopia won’t like to hear that!”

“Of course there are differences, important ones,” Lionheart continued. “The ‘Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State,’ for example, commonly called the ‘Reichstag Fire Decree,’ which allowed the Nazis to arrest anyone not in line with them, is something you won’t find anywhere else. As is the ‘Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich,’ commonly called ‘Enabling Act of 1933,’ which basically gave Adolf Hirschler absolute power. Those two laws are pretty much unique to Gnuganda, those gave Adolf Hirschler the tools to establish his dictatorial reign of terror and oppression.

“But apart from laws like that, the rules, laws, and regulations you could find in the Third Reich weren’t all that different from the ones in effect here. For example, the lack of a 5-percent-clause which led to the instability of the Gnugandan Reichstag, which in turn paved the way for Hirschler to gain power fast, was in effect in Zootopia, too. It was only in 1946 that the 5-percent clause was introduced in Zootopia, but I’m digressing.

“Rosa Gardner saw the similarities between Gnugandan and Zootopian laws, and since she had experienced the rapid deterioration of normal civil life in Gnuganda first-paw, they irked her. So she went to the City Council and told them about it. And the councilmammals, still under the impression of what had happened before and during World War II, agreed with her wholeheartedly. So on June 13, 1946, they unanimously passed a set of laws which were soon called Gardner’s Laws. A set of laws so groundbreaking, it was soon adopted by other cities and states and is by now in effect in the whole United States of Animalia.

“Now, what are these all about?”

“I guess that’s the most asked question in Zootopia now,” Pennington said.

__________________________________________________________________________

City Hall, Lobby, City Center, Zootopia

Higgins stood up. “Well, I guess now’s as good a time as any. Come on!”

He started walking towards the doors leading into the council chamber immediately, and Nick hurried to push the wheelchair with Judy sitting in it towards the door, too. Higgins knocked against the door, which was opened immediately. The three were greeted by Bogo, who had opened the door himself, nodding towards Higgins. They entered the massive chamber and …

“Ah, finally!” Lionheart said. “Ladies and Gentlemammals, please welcome Officer Judy Hopps and Mr. Nicholas Wilde!” The lion started clapping his enormous paws.

And slowly, but surely, others joined in, some of them reluctantly, but in the end, everybody rose from their seats.

Ten seconds later, the City Council of Zootopia gave Nick and Judy a standing ovation.

And Judy couldn’t help feeling they weren’t the only one in Zootopia.
For several seconds, she was quite occupied with praying for earth to open up and swallow her whole. Her droopy ears were burning with intense embarrassment, her nose began twitching furiously, and her eyes darted from here to there faster than during a tennis match between Roger Furderer and Novak Djaguakovic.

Nick, on the other paw, seemed to be in his element. “Thank you,” he shouted while waving at one of the cameras. “Thank you very much!”

“Nick!” Judy hissed.

“What, Carrots?”

“Help me! They’re all looking at me!”

Nick laughed out loud at that. “You better get used to it, Fluff. You’re a celebrity now!”

Judy starred at him, an expression of horror on her features. “Sweet cheese and crackers!”

“Officer Hopps, welcome!” Lionheart said with a benevolent smile. “How’s your leg?”

“P-pretty much better, sir,” Judy answered haltingly.

“I hope there’s no lasting harm done.”

“N-no, I should be f-fine s-soon.”

“I’m glad to hear that. And you, Mr. Wilde?”

Nick grinned. “Couldn’t be better, sir.”

“Fine. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to finish this address to the council before I’ll be able to attend to you.”

Nick made an inviting gesture. “Take your time, sir. It’s not like we have anything better to do at the moment.”

Lionheart countered with a mocking grin. “I’m glad you approve.”

Nick gave him a wink. “I do.”

To Judy’s surprise, Lionheart returned the wink, then he turned towards the council and became stern again. “Now, back to Gardner’s Law. What’s in it? Well, you won’t find any laws and rules in there that hadn’t been in effect anyway. It is, in a manner of speaking, little more than taking a few unwritten laws and turn them into written ones. Which is also the reason why virtually nobody remembers Gardner’s Laws anymore. After all, it is in essence little more than bureaucratic fuss that nobody really needs. The laws have been pretty much in effect anyway, and have been for a long time. But it actually is not that easy.”

He made a pause, and suddenly his voice became harsh: “Because one of those laws introduced by Gardner’s Law can be found in Article 13. Now, I don’t want to bore you with legalese. In plain words, Article 13 states that, regardless of the outcome of an election, regardless of the circumstances, the ratio between predators and prey mammals within the City Council of Zootopia has to be at least 18 to 32. That’s all there is to it.”

He waited a few seconds to let that sink in, then he continued, even harsher: “When I was basically replaced by a camel, Article 13 of Gardner’s Law was broken.”
A few councilmammals stood up at that point, but Lionheart continued regardless: “Some of you may say now that this isn’t much of a problem. After all, no plaintiff, no judge, right? The council worked, and nobody protested, right? Right?” He shook his head. “Wrong! Let’s take a look at Article 14. It states, and I quote: ‘Should the City Council be unable to meet the standards laid out in Article 13, it has to dissolve immediately, and a new City Council has to be elected at the earliest possible point in time.’ Quote end.”

He raised his voice over the sudden din of several mammals speaking up, and suddenly his voice became just as fierce as his posture. “What most of you seem to consider to be little more than an unwritten gentle mammal’s agreement is, in fact, THE LAW!

“I am not legitimized as the new Mayor of Zootopia because you,” he pointed at the councilmammals, “are not legitimized as a City Council! You cannot vote me into office, because everything you do right now defies Gardner’s Law! The moment Dawn Bellwether started replacing predators by prey mammals without having declared a state of emergency beforehand, which would have levered out most laws, including Gardner’s Laws, was the moment this City Council ceased to be legitimate.

“But it didn’t self-dissolve, to the contrary. It perpetuated the violation of Gardner’s Law by reducing the number of predators even further, and it still passed motions, regulations, and laws.

“Motions, regulations, and laws which are all null and void!”

A stunned silence followed this announcement as the councilmammals who had risen sat down again, consternation on their features.

Judy looked up at Nick, but the fox looked just as perplexed as she felt.

Lionheart continued: “The suspension of predator police officers, for example, was simply illegal!”

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia

At the very same moment, seven mammals shouted: “WHAT?”

Lionheart turned towards Bogo. “Adrian, I applaud your bravado, your willingness to put your career on the line to make sure this council would reinstate your predator officers. Very noble, very brave, very unnecessary. All you had to do was take this to court. You would have won, paws down.”

“You gotta be kidding!” Pennington whispered.

Bogo took a deep breath. “Why didn’t you tell me?” His voice had developed a dangerous edge.

“Because I learned about this only yesterday. Believe me, old buddy, I would have told you, but then Cameron Caballus came and pardoned me, and …”

Cameron Caballus got up. “And why didn’t you tell me?”

Lionheart gave him a grin. “What could I have achieved at that moment? You hoped I would be able to convince the Council to vote for its self-dissolution, to make way for a newly elected City Council. And I knew that I wouldn’t need to. I told you I had a plan, didn’t I?”

Caballus just stared at him, then his features softened. “You did, Leodore. You did.” He sat down again.
Andrej Magarac stood up. “Excuse me, Leodore, but do I understand this correctly: You want us to vote for the self-dissolution of this council?”

Lionheart shook his head. “No, I don’t. Articles 13 and 14 of Gardner’s Law DEMAND it!” He made a pause. “But it’s not that easy.”

“Of course it isn’t!” McHorn said with a snort.

Delgato gave a sigh. “It never is.”

“The simple truth is that right now, Zootopia needs a City Council,” Lionheart said. “Stepping down now, in the face of chaos and impending anarchy, would leave a void this city cannot afford to have. Which is why I, now, take the mantle of responsibility, acting as if the vote making me the Mayor of Zootopia again had legal validity. Which it hadn’t, but our choices are limited.

“We need to remain in office, each and every one of us, to prepare the new election. An election for a new City Council to replace this one, a Council once again approved of by the citizens of Zootopia.” He made a pause and added very matter-of-factly: “I hereby officially declare a state of emergency. Regardless of the laws that have been broken, this Council will continue to govern this city until new elections have taken place.”

He made another pause, which Magarac used to ask: “So you’re stepping down as well?”

Lionheart shook his head. “I don’t need to, seeing that I’m not legitimized anyway. Everything needs to be elected anew, the Council as well as the Mayor.”

Lionheart looked up into one of the cameras. “I will run for office again, but I can imagine many citizens of Zootopia wouldn’t want a criminal to be the Mayor. If the citizens of Zootopia vote against me, I will accept this without compunction. I will step aside and let the elected mammals do the job. But if they vote for me …”

He made yet another pause and cleared his throat.

“If the citizens of Zootopia elect me back into office, I’m going to roll up my sleeves and get to work! Because a lot of work needs to be done to repair the damage caused by Dawn Bellwether and her henchmammals. Bellwether gave this city a gashing wound, and everybody needs to give it their very best to treat this festering wound! We have to stand united against common enemies. Enemies like prejudice, like distrust, like megalomania, like subjugation of the weak and poor.

“Anyone can be anything. This mantra is the ultimate goal. And while we’re far from being there right now, while we may not be able to see it in our lifetimes, we need to give it our very best effort to at least try to achieve this.

“Then, and only then, are we legitimized to govern this city. Then, and only then, are we the right servants to this city. This city and its citizens who deserve a fair chance at trying to be anything they want to be. Each and every single one of them.”

“And speaking of being anything you want to be …” Lionheart turned towards Judy and Nick.

“Oh boy!” Clawhauser said, pressing his paws against his snout.

And yet again, I’m ending it here - the chapter was long enough already. The council session itself is done, but what about Judy and Nick? Stay tuned! The answer will be given in a few days …
Now, most things I talk about here, the historical facts in particular, can be found explained on Wikipedia. While it’s not necessary to have an intimate knowledge of everything I allude to in this chapter, it can help understanding the intricacies involved here. I tried my damndest to explain everything in such a way that every reader should be able to understand what I’m talking about. But in case you have no idea what I’m getting at, I suggest you log on to Wikipedia and find out. Or feel free to give me a shout, i.e. send me a comment, and I’ll explain my lines of thinking to you.

However, there is one tiny explanation I want to give here:

Did you recognize the character named Rosa Gardner?

“Gardner,” or rather “gardener” is an accurate translation of the German word “Gärtner.” Now, a gardener tends to a garden. The German word for this is “Garten,” to be found in words like “Kindergarten,” a garden for children.

The word “Garten” is used quite lavishly in Germany. When looking at big cities like Berlin, for example, you find the “Zoologischer Garten Berlin,” which is the biggest zoo of Berlin, the “Botanischer Garten,” and the “Tiergarten,” among others. As you can probably tell, not a single one of these can be considered gardens - they are all way too big. The Tiergarten, for example, covers an area of about 520 acres. So the translation “garden” seems quite ill-fitting.

Which is why another valid translation is more fitting here:

Park.

Or rather the plural form, parks.

And I hope you all know who Rosa Parks was.

In case you don’t, Rosa Louise Parks was a civil rights activist, most famous for the so-called Montgomery Bus Boycott. I don’t want to go into too much detail here, so I can say only this: Look her story up on Wikipedia in case you want to know the details. It’s a story that deserves to be read.

This is my homage to Rosa Parks! May God rest your soul, you brave, brave woman!

Oh, and by the way, “Bearlin” is Berlin, obviously, and “Peltsdam” is Potsdam.

Benito Moussolini obviously is the name I used for Benito Mussolini, who was Prime Minister and Duce of Italy during World War II and thus one of Hitler’s partners in crime, and Hideki Tanuki is the name I used for Hideki Tojo, a general of the Imperial Japanese Army and the Japanese Prime Minister during World War II, who was later sentenced to death for his involvement in Japanese war crimes. A tanuki is the Japanese name for the Japanese raccoon dog, Nyctereutes procyonoides viverrinus.

On top of me assigning stupid names and giving weird explanations for historical facts, I also hid a tiny quote from LucasArts’ computer game “Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight” in here. This one will probably be tough to find.
And before I forget: “Magnum p.i.,” anyone?

Thanks for reading, and please, tell me what you think of this! It took so much time and pondering, I would really like to know if you like it or not!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf
Hello, my fellow Zootopians!

So this is it, the last chapter of “How to Treat a Festering Wound!”

Thanks for reading this story, thanks for commenting on it, thanks for all the questions I was asked and all the encouragement I received. In particular, I want to thank niraD, Turjas, Hayato, and Slyly1993 for sending their comments.

The quotes game I am playing has, so far, been somewhat of a disappointment. Despite the fact that this is the second time I’m publishing this story, most of the quotes haven’t been found yet. Since this is the case, this chapter will close with a lengthy list of all the quotes I used in the creation of this story.

However, there was one reference in the last chapter which was found in basically no time at all. Turjas was the one to point out “Higgy-Baby” as a reference to the TV series “Magnum p.i.” This is how Nick called Higgins in this story. It’s how T.C. usually calls Jonathan Higgins, the majordomo of “Robin’s Nest,” the place where Thomas Magnum is living. No idea what I’m talking about? Watch the series, it’s still hugely entertaining! (My version of Thomas Higgins, the hippo from Zootopia, actually is an amalgamation of both Magnum and Higgins from the series - Magnum’s first name, and Higgins’s last one, the latter being predetermined by the movie, of course.) Congrats, Turjas, for finding that little gem!

On top of that, Hayato pointed out a reference to me I hadn’t even been properly aware of before. When I described Arctic Fire, back in chapter 13, I had Delgado think of the line “Arctic Fire’s moving so fast, he can knock out his own shadow.” Yes, this is a Lucky Luke reference, albeit one that never properly registered with me. (In case you don’t know the reference, Lucky Luke is a comic character created by the Belgian comic artist Morris (Maurice De Bevere), a cowboy and gunslinger who is described as being able to shoot faster than his shadow.) Lucky Luke was one of the comic series I grew up with, along with Asterix, so those references come easy to me. However, I often don’t realize that I make those references, since it’s usually been decades since I last read said comics. This one here is pretty much a case in point. In other words, Hayato was perfectly right, so kudos to you! That was a good one!

Before I begin, yet another word of warning: The last chapter was heavy on both politics and history, this one, at least the first part of it, is heavy on medicine. Now, I’m not a doctor, I merely worked in a home for the aged for almost two years, which gives me a solid understanding of medical terms and definitions. Everything I mention in here was found through browsing Wikipedia, and I tried to present it in a manner that everybody should be able to understand. And if I can do it, you can do it, too.

Don’t be too irritated if this chapter seems to start a bit before the events told in the previous chapter. It does. I’m re-introducing a few characters I haven’t used in a while, and I hadn’t planned to do it a few chapters ago, hence the slight temporal chaos. That’s just one of the problems you’re being faced with when you’re dealing with numerous points of view taking place at basically the same time. This story just expanded way too fast, and I hadn’t thought
all my plotlines through until a few days ago.

Let’s get started, shall we?

Chapter Sixteen

To Please Everyone …

We are screaming, screaming for vengeance. The world is a manacled place. Screaming, screaming for vengeance. The world is defiled in disgrace.


Zootopia General Hospital, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Central, Zootopia

Ever since having fallen ill, Vivian Wilde had visited Zootopia General countless times. She had spent weeks, even months in there, fighting a hopeless fight against her worst enemy, her own body. After more than eight years of enduring treatment for different kinds of cancer, Zootopia General Hospital had become her home away from home, a place she knew even better than her actual home. Which wasn’t all that surprising, given the fact that she had moved into her new home little more than half a year ago, and her new house, as posh as it was, still felt somewhat alien to her.

But despite her intimate knowledge of the hospital, she had never seen the lobby devoid of mammals.

Even the receptionist’s counter was completely deserted.

“Hello?” she said tentatively.

Immediately, an head appeared behind a door frame in the back. “Oh, sorry, didn’t hear you come in! Ah, it’s you, Vivian!” The female sika deer walked through the door and approached the counter. “Here for a new patch?”

Vivian gave the sika deer a smile. Being there as often as she was, she was on first-name terms with most nurses and staff. This particular mammal by the name of Marietta Cervo had been one of the first mammals she had met at Zootopia General when renal cancer had first befallen her. “Of course, Marietta.”

“Good.” She picked up the receiver of her phone and pressed a button. “I will call for someone to pick you up.”

“Thank you.”

Cervo nodded and spoke into the receiver. “It’s me. Someone up there to pick up Mrs. Vivian Wilde. She’s here for …” She made a pause, listening, and her eyes narrowed slowly. “Well, there must be someone …” She listened again. “Come on! You can’t all be occupied!” She waited again, then she sighed. “Yes. I’m telling her.” She closed the connection and placed the receiver down again.

“Don’t tell me, nobody there to care for me?” Vivian said softly.
Cervo shrugged. “Sorry, but it seems they’re all quite occupied. You’ll probably need to wait around a bit.” She pointed at the waiting area near the back wall.

Vivian nodded. “I don’t care. I have all the time in the world, you know.” She looked around. “Is it just me, or are we the only mammals around?”

Cervo snorted. “Oh, the hospital is full to the brim. But everybody’s watching TV right now, I guess. That’s probably why nobody has the time to come pick you up.”

“Really? Why?”

“The City Council is in session, and most channels are broadcasting live. Seems like great things are afoot.”

“Things? What kinds of things?”

“Well, for one, Lionheart has been pardoned, and it seems they want to make him the Mayor again.”

Vivian just shrugged - she had never cared for politics much, and the last weeks of open hostility against predators had only strengthened her conviction. “Who is ‘they?’”

Cervo shrugged. “The Council, I guess. I actually don’t know exactly - I haven’t been able to watch the whole session, you know.”

Vivian raised an eyebrow and said mockingly: “Damn work always keeps you from doing the really important stuff, eh?”

To her surprise, Cervo didn’t respond, merely looking past her, or rather, above her. She turned around, only to look at the knees of a rather tall mammal wearing blue jeans and a red sweatshirt.

The mammal chuckled, a deep, throaty rumble. “You’re quite right, Vivian. There’s more to life than just work. But without work, everything is nothing.”

Vivian looked up with a smile. “Fancy that! Zachary Pawson! I thought they’d fired you!”

The grizzly shrugged. “They had, but after they found the reason why predators were turning savage left, right, and center, they hastened to reinstate me. They even gave me a little bonus to recompense for my financial losses, so no harm done.”

“I’m glad to hear it. This hospital needs every good surgeon they can lay their paws on.”

Pawson gave her a sardonic smile. “Tell me about it! Lots to do, so little time.” He tilted his head. “What brings you here?”

Now Vivian shrugged. “I need a new fentanyl patch. Got my last one two days ago.”

Pawson narrowed his eyes. “It came back?”

“With a vengeance. The new radiologist told me it was a glioma, sitting about,” she pointed at her forehead, above her right eye, “here. Removing it through surgery seems to be impossible without killing me, and it doesn’t react to chemo- or radiation therapy, at least so far.”

Without another word, Pawson turned towards Cervo. “Could you please send her file to my office computer?”
Cervo nodded. “Of course. Do you want to apply the patch, too?”

“Why not? I can find one in one of the ERs, right?”

“Certainly. I’m telling them you’re on your way. Just so you know, she needs the patches releasing 50 micrograms per hour, as far as I know. Right, Vivian?”

Vivian looked at Pawson. “Uh, yes, 50 micrograms sounds about right, but, erm, you?”

Pawson guffawed. “Yes, me. I may be but a surgeon, but I like to think that I’m quite qualified to apply a fentanyl patch. I went to university for this, you know.”

Vivian had to laugh, too. “That wasn’t what I meant, Zachary!”

Pawson made an inviting gesture, and they walked towards the emergency rooms together. “I know. But my work shift actually ended one hour ago. Just had to do a little catch-up with paperwork. I was just on my way home when I saw you standing there.”

“So you’re willing to work overtime for me?”

“When someone is in need of medical assistance, I don’t mind clocking extra hours. That’s the fourth one, isn’t it?”

“It is. First a renal carcinoma, then it was the stomach carcinoma you removed, and last, but not least, the colon carcinoma.”

Pawson nodded. “And I had been so happy that it had been detected before it had metastasized.”

“Yes, but it came back twice.”

“Twice?”

“Yes, but chemotherapy was enough to finish it off for good.”

“It’s gone?”

“At least for the moment.”

“And now a glioma.” Pawson sighed. “Some guys have all the luck.”

Vivian gave a smirk. “That’s a definition of the word luck I wasn’t aware of before.”

During her last words, they had reached the emergency rooms, and Pawson went in to retrieve the patch, then they walked to his office in silence. Once there, Pawson turned on his computer before taking off the old patch from the exposed section of skin below her neck and replacing it with a fresh one. He then put the old patch and the rubber gloves into the trash can and sat down on his office chair with a sigh. “How bad is your headache?”

Vivian shrugged. “I’ve had worse. What are we doing here?”

Pawson made a few entries on his computer. “Well, I just want to have a quick look at your file. Ah, there we are. Yes, a glioblastoma. Hang on a second.” He made a few more entries. “Yes, here it is.” He swiveled the monitor to allow Vivian to have a look.

Vivian tried to read what the screen showed her, but wasn’t able to make heads or tails of it. “Sorry, but what am I looking at here exactly?”
"I read about this in a medical journal. Gliomas are notoriously difficult to cure. The problem is that in all mammals, there is a certain kind of barrier which prevents blood from entering certain parts of the brain. Which is absolutely vital, because it prevents blood-borne infections from affecting the brain. However, in your case, it’s a hindrance, because it rules out chemotherapy as a viable treatment. The effectiveness of radiation therapy is dubious as well. The biggest problem, however, is to localize the tumor correctly and in its entirety. Even the best MRT scans hardly show anything. Definitely not enough for surgeons to be able to remove the tumor. And this is where this comes in.” He pointed at the screen.

"Which is?"

"There is a new method to improve treatment of gliomas. It involves a peptide derived from the venom of a certain kind of scorpion. In the venom, it works by paralyzing the victim’s nerves. Since it works on the nervous system, it can cross the blood-brain barrier. Which in turn means it can cling onto the cancer cells."

Vivian nodded. “So the tumor cells are marked, right?”

“In layman’s terms, yes. This enables the surgeon to see them on the MRT, which in turn makes it easier to remove the tumor through surgery.”

“It works?”

“That’s the problem, they don’t know exactly, yet. This is a very new therapy. They’ve just started the clinical trials for this. Initial results look promising, but the number of test subjects is still too small to make any sort of qualified judgment.” He made a pause. “If you want, I can put you on the list of candidates.”

Vivian shook her head. “No. I won’t participate in this.”

Pawson looked at her in surprise. “Not? Vivian, this could help you survive!”

“That’s what they said before subjecting me to the last clinical trial, too.”

“You’ve been there before?”

“Yes. Three times actually. None of the trials yielded any positive results whatsoever.” She sighed. “I’m through with being a test subject, Zachary. I’m a vixen, not a guinea pig.”

Pawson made a pause. “You don’t think it could be worth it?”

Vivian sighed again. “Listen, I’ve come to terms with the fact that my days are numbered long ago. I much prefer enjoying the time I have left to being subjected to more drugs which make me feel awful without helping me whatsoever.”

Pawson merely looked at her, and Vivian returned his stare, her posture stoic, unyielding. Finally, he sighed. “Have it your way then, Vivian. I can only offer this to you.”

“And I appreciate the offer. I’m just fed up with this. All of it. I’m quite fine right now, and I prefer to keep it that way until I die.”

Pawson shut down his computer and got up from his chair. “I’m sorry. I much prefer having you around for a bit longer.”

“Me too, but that’s no longer my call to make.”
They left Pawson’s office and walked back to the receptionist’s counter, which was, again, completely deserted. Pawson looked at the empty space with a frown. “This shouldn’t happen.” He knocked on the counter with his big paw.

Immediately, Cervo walked in through the door in the back. “Yes, doctor?”

“You know you shouldn’t leave your workplace, do you?” Pawson said.

“I do, sir, but I’m just around the corner.”

“That’s not enough! Everybody can walk in here unperturbed! What if there is a patient in need of special protection? What if an assassin comes in here?”

Vivian had to smile at that. “Don’t you think you’re exaggerating a bit here, Zachary?”

“No, I’m not. We often have mammals in here who need extra protection around the clock because someone wants to see them dead. We had witness protection details, victims of gang wars, the lot.”

“There are none of those here at this time, sir,” Cervo said.

Pawson snorted. “Even so, there are rules and regulations you need to follow.”

“I know, sir, but like I said, I’m just around the corner. Besides, the council session is in its final stages.”

“What council session?”

“You don’t know?”

“Know what?”

“The City Council is in session, and most channels are broadcasting live. Right now, it seems like Lionheart wants to skin the bunch of councilmammals alive.”

“Lionheart?” Pawson echoed with a frown. “What’s Lionheart got to do with this? Isn’t he in jail?”

“He was. The Acting Mayor pardoned him. And they even made him the Mayor again!”

“Excuse me?”

Vivian nodded. “First bit of good news coming out of City Hall I’ve heard in a long time.”

Suddenly they heard someone shout: “I don’t believe it!”

Without a word, Pawson stepped around the counter, and Vivian followed him instinctively. It never even occurred to her that she wasn’t allowed to be behind the counter. Along with Cervo, they stepped through the door in the back, which opened into a staffroom. No less than four mammals wearing nurse uniforms were sitting at the table, watching the proceedings on TV. Right now, the TV showed Lionheart standing behind a table, talking to a huge cape buffalo who was standing near the door. And next to the buffalo …

Vivian gasped.

“Alright,” Pawson said aloud, “would someone mind telling me what’s going on?”

One of the nurses, a male oryx, looked up at Pawson. “Ah, Doctor! You won’t believe this!
Lionheart just told the council that everything they did over the course of the last few weeks was illegal.”

Pawson’s jaw dropped. “Everything?”

“Yup. Seems like they broke some law nobody knew of, and when they kicked predators out and replaced them with prey mammals, the council lost its legitimization. Or something like that.”

Pawson nodded. “Figures. They must have broken tons of laws, I guess.”

“Seems so.” The oryx looked at Vivian, and she suddenly came to the realization that she had no business being in the staff room.

Pawson obviously thought otherwise, as he stared the oryx down. “I got no problem with Mrs. Wilde being here. Do you?”

The oryx gave a chuckle. “At this stage? Certainly not, sir. I was just curious. Hello Vivian!” He pointed at the TV screen. “He looks a lot like you, you know.”

Vivian found herself shaking her head. “He looks a lot like his father.”

Pawson made a frown. “Who? What are you talking about?”

Vivian took a deep breath. Pointing at the TV screen with a trembling paw, she said silently: “This fox there.”

Pawson looked at the screen. “What about him?”

“He’s my son.”

Hopps Family Farm, Main Building, Kitchen, Bunnyburrow, Tri-Burrows

“What do you mean?” Bonnie Hopps said with a frown, looking at the smartphone in her paw. “How can she be on TV again?”

The tiny depiction of Billy Hopps on the screen showed a wide grin. “I’m telling you, she’s at City Hall. The Zootopian City Council is in session, and she’s there. No idea why.”

“And it’s broadcasted live on TV?”

“It is. Mayor Lionheart, the one Judy arrested, well, seems like he was released from prison. He’s the Mayor again, and he’s just dismantling the City Council of Zootopia.”

“Uh-huh. And at which point in all this does Judy come in?”

“No idea, Mom, honestly.”

Bonnie snorted. “Well, I can’t watch this! I have more than two hundred hungry mouths to feed. And in case you didn’t notice, it’s chow time! I expect your father’s arrival here any minute now.”

“Why? Where is he?”

“Where he is? Why, he’s out on the fields, taking care of harvest! It’s the season again.”

Billy laughed. “Isn’t it always? The blueberries are hardly mellow, the apples and pears demand
Bonnie sighed. “So do the carrots, and the cherries, and the … Seems like it’s always harvest season.”

“And now you know why I never wanted to become a farmer,” Billy said with a laugh.

“I seem to recall it was because you had no idea of farming whatsoever,” said another bunny, a female one, who was standing in front of the stove, stirring an enormous pot full to the brim with boiled vegetables.

Billy laughed even harder at that. “That’s the pot calling the kettle black, Melissa!”

“At least I can cook,” Melissa fired back. “Unlike you.”

“Hey, I can cook!”

“Yeah, microwave dinner! And you scorch even that!”

“That was one time!”

“One time too many.”

“What’s going on?” another voice said. Stu Hopps entered the kitchen, wiping his paws with an enormous piece of cloth after having washed them at the sink outside the building. “Why do I hear Billy?”

Bonnie held up her smartphone. “Say hi to your oldest son!”

“Chilly Billy!” Stu smiled into the camera. “What’s cookin’?”

“Er, some sort of stew, I suppose,” Billy said with a grin. “Right, Melissa?”

Bonnie rolled her eyes. “He says that Judy’s on TV again?”

“Really? How comes?”

Billy repeated what he had told his mother. “Bottom line is, I have no idea why she’s there. Lionheart asked for them to be there, so there must be a reason.”

“Them?”

“Oh, yes, Nick is with her.”

“Who’s Nick?”

“The fox who helped her.”

Bonnie looked at Stu, who was frowning. “Judy’s together with this … fox?” the patriarch of the Hopps Family asked.

“Yeah. Why shouldn’t she be?”

“You know this Nick?” Bonnie asked.

“I do. Met him yesterday. Seems to be quite the funny guy.”
“Funny?” Stu snorted. “I keep forgetting that you value different things in mammals than I do.”

Billy narrowed his eyes, and suddenly, his voice became quite cold. “What’s that supposed to mean, Dad?”

“I mean that you are too quick to trust other mammals.”

“Only if they deserve it.”

“Ah. So you know after one short meeting that you can trust this … fox?”

Suddenly, Billy looked up, and for the first time, his parents were able to see that he wasn’t alone in the room. The head of a giraffe had appeared over Billy’s shoulder, and the mammal stared at the two rabbits as if he was looking at an interesting curio. “Excuse me for a minute,” Billy said to the giraffe, then the picture moved, indicating that Billy was walking. A door opened and closed, and suddenly, Billy’s face appeared again.

Bonnie gasped. Gone was the humorous, witty mammal who loved to grin and make other mammals laugh. He had been replaced by a mammal that Bonnie had hardly ever seen before. A seriously angry Billy was staring his father down.

“And you just happen to know that this fox cannot be trusted without even having met him or talked to him, eh?”

Stu returned the stare. “I don’t like your tone, buster!”

“Do you honestly think I like yours?” Billy fired back.

“Billy!” Bonnie shouted.

“What? It’s true! He’s talking to me like I’m a small kit! Face it, Dad! I’m a grown-up, and I certainly don’t need your help in finding out if I like a mammal or not!”

“We’re talking about a fox here!” Stu shouted.

“So what? You have a fox as a business partner.”

“That’s completely different! Gideon is …”

“Gideon was a major jerk! He says so himself! Do you remember when I had to beat some sense into him because he was trying to extort money from Belinda and Meredith? Or when he put poor Izzy Hefner in the dumpster? He even tried to beat me up when I talked to him about it!”

“But he changed his ways!”

“Yes, he did. That’s exactly the point! He was a bully, but he’s a completely different mammal now. Heck, he apologized to me because I had to beat him up! How’s that for a change? In my opinion, he deserves a chance. And you gave him that chance, and I applaud you for it. So, why him? Why not Nick? Don’t you think you should give Nick at least the benefit of the doubt? Judy likes him very much, and I can see why.”

Stu didn’t respond, so Bonnie took over. “What is this Nick like?”

“What does he do for a living?”

Billy hesitated. “You know, I don’t actually know. It never came up. I know he has sort of a checkered past, but he left all of it behind. He wants to become a cop now.”

“A checkered past?” Stu asked.

“Yeah. Much like Gideon Grey,” Billy responded. “He told me that it’s hard to make a living when everybody only perceives you as sneaky and untrustworthy.”

Bonnie looked at her husband. “He has a point.”

Billy nodded. “If you hadn’t started seeing Gideon in a different light, would you have decided that he should become your business partner? Most foxes don’t get that chance.” When Stu shot his son a look, Billy sighed. “Don’t give me that look, Dad! You know it’s the truth! Most foxes are shunned, are treated like second-class citizens, just because somebody has decided they should be. Don’t you think it’s high time to leave this line of thinking behind? To give them the chance they deserve? Nick helped Judy! He risked his life while doing it! If that’s not good enough, I don’t know what is.”

Stu hesitated, then he nodded. “You’re right, Billy. Sorry. Maybe I should get to know this Nick better before I make any sort of judgment.”

“My sentiments exactly.”

Stu clapped his paws together. “So, and what do I hear about our daughter being on TV?”

“Like I said, the City Council of Zootopia is in session. They’ve reinstated Leodore Lionheart, the lion you saw at Judy’s graduation, and he asked for Judy and Nick to be there. But right now, nobody knows why.”

“Well, let’s find out, shall we?” Stu looked at Melissa. “How long till lunch’s ready?”

“I can let it simmer for a few more minutes, it that’s what you wanna know,” Melissa replied. “It’s about as ready as it could possibly be.”

“Ten minutes?”

Melissa shrugged. “Ten minutes it is.”

“Excellent!” Without another word, Stu took off towards the cinema, Bonnie in tow.

________________________________________

ZPD Precinct One Headquarters, Lobby, Receptionist’s Counter, City Center, Zootopia

McHorn turned towards his old friend. “You know where this is heading, don’t you, Freddie?”

Delgato nodded. “Of course. Bogo’s there, the Mayor’s there, all of Zootopia is watching …”

There was a short silence, as McHorn seemed to size his partner up. “And what do you think about it?”

Delgato blinked. “What are you talking about?”

“Are you okay with Hopps …”
Delgato made a frown. “Wait a minute, are you insinuating that I might hold a grudge against her?”

“Would be understandable,” Trunkaby said. “After all, she was the one who told everyone that predators might be, what was that, ‘reverting back to their primitive, savage ways.’”

Delgato straightened himself. “But she wasn’t the one who fired me. Hopps was merely used as an excuse. Maybe she was naïve, but that’s not a crime. If it was, half of Zootopia should be sitting in jail. I have no reason to hate her because of what happened to me. It wasn’t her fault. I don’t think she even knew what she was doing back then.”

“So you’re okay with …”

Delgato snorted. “Honestly, how many of us would have done what she did? She was fully aware of the danger, yet she walked into it. This could have backfired so badly. Yet she faced it, and she overcame it. She and her fox friend. So yes, I’m okay with it.” He nodded. “Wouldn’t be surprised if she turns out to be one hell of a cop.”

“And Nick too,” Clawhauser added.

“What do you mean?”

“Nobody told you? Nick has helped us unravel the mysterious attacks on predators. Without him, we wouldn’t have been able to arrest Aries.”

“Not only that,” Pennington added. “He was the one who made Mick Fleecewood fess up.”

Delgato stared at her as if she had grown an extra trunk. “Er, what? He? A civilian?”

“Yup. The guys at the Academy could take a leaf or two out of his book. He hustled Fleecewood so good, it was almost scary.”

“And Bogo rolled with that?”

“Not at first, but Mastiff convinced him.”

“Wow!” Delgato looked back at the screen, where Lionheart had just begun to address Hopps, who was sitting in a wheelchair which was standing next to Bogo and Wilde. “I would have loved to see this!”

“Was a sight for sore eyes, that’s for sure!”

“Bogo did quite a few things over the last couple of days you wouldn’t believe,” Rhinowitz added. “He hustled the DA, he threatened an Acting Mayor, and he’s willing to let a former con-mammal become a cop.”

“So this Nick Wilde was indeed a con-mammal?” Delgato asked. “Figures.”

“You know Wilde?” McHorn asked. “You knew he was a con-mammal?”

Delgato shrugged. “Let’s say I had a suspicion. I met him about an hour ago. He seemed to have realized who I was straight away, and he pointed out another officer to me that I hadn’t even recognized before, one from a different precinct. When I asked him how he knew, he merely told me that he knew a cop when he saw one. On top of that, Bogo told me yesterday that Wilde knew the other side of the law exceptionally well. The conclusion that he probably had been a con-mammal wasn’t that difficult.
“Yes, with ‘had been’ being the operative words here, I think,” Pennington replied. “He told me that he’d been shunned and disrespected for most of his life, so he had known no other way to make ends meet. Being respected now, even by someone like Bogo of all mammals … you honestly think he would want to become a con-mammal again?”

“Probably not. I certainly wouldn’t.”

“And having a former hustler work for the ZPD …”

“There’s a lot of potential there,” Rhinowitz said.

“For what?” Caballus asked. “Major mischief?” Everybody had to laugh at that.

Clawhauser pointed at the laptop. “I guess it’s about time.”

Everybody looked at the screen, watching Lionheart talk to Hopps. He had obviously just been lauding her for her actions, for her investigative work. Now he looked up at Bogo, who was standing behind Hopps and Wilde, towering over the smaller mammals. “I actually had a little talk with Chief Bogo about this case, and we were in total agreement on what should happen. So …”

Lionheart pulled a few folded pieces of paper out of his suit’s inner pocket and handed them to Bogo. “Chief Bogo, discharge your duty!”

“With pleasure, Mayor Lionheart,” Bogo replied formally. He looked down at Wilde. “Mr. Wilde, would you please turn the wheelchair so that she faces the council?”

“Of course, sir!” Wilde said and pushed the wheelchair around. Hopps seemed to dislike the situation intensely. Her ears were droopy, and an intense blush shone through her fur.

Bogo straightened himself and cleared his throat. Reading from the first piece of paper, he shouted: “On behalf of the Zootopia Police Department, I hereby award Officer Judith Laverne Hopps the Zootopia Police Department Medal of Honor.”

“What?” Clawhauser shouted.

“The Medal of Honor?” Trunkaby shouted.

“Oh my!” Caballus said.

“Ain’t that a bit much?” Rhinowitz asked.

Inside the council chamber, the noise level had risen as well. Bogo, however, had no difficulties making himself heard whatsoever. Looking down at Hopps, who was just staring ahead, a look of complete and utter incredulity on her face, he said: “The Medal of Honor is the highest award the ZPD can bestow on one of its officers. It is awarded to those who intelligently perform individual acts of extraordinary bravery in the line of duty at imminent and personal danger to life, for acts of gallantry and valor with full knowledge of the risk involved, above and beyond the call of duty.”

He made a pause. “Needless to say, it is rather rare that the Medal of Honor is awarded. As far as I know, it has been awarded a grand total of nine times since the ZPD’s inception. And is has certainly never been awarded to a police officer with the rank of Officer, with just a few months of service under her belt. With that being said, Mayor Lionheart and I are convinced that the actions of Officer Hopps warrant this award. Her actions have exceeded everything I could have expected from her, particularly given the circumstances and the stakes.”

After yet another pause, he actually smiled. “Unfortunately, I cannot pin an award to your chest
right now. You are the first small mammal at the ZPD, and we have no awards in your size. Yet. We will certainly be able to rectify this in a few weeks.”

“She could probably hide behind one of the awards we have,” Trunkaby commented dryly.

“Would save her the pain of having to wear a bulletproof vest,” Pennington added with a grin.

“If she can even lift it, of course.”

“Wouldn’t an Exceptional Merit have sufficed?” Rhinowitz asked.

“Probably,” McHorn said.

Delgato shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“You think she deserves this?” Rhinowitz asked.

Delgato sighed. “Just imagine what could have happened! She could have died, Wilde could have died, or at least turned savage. In that case, Zootopia would have fallen into anarchy, and Bellwether would have ruled this city with an iron hoof. It takes a lot of guts to try and fight something like this. She did, they both did. They knew perfectly well what was at stake - you heard Hopps during the press conference. And their hustle against Bellwether was a thing of beauty. And we all know she wasn’t even a cop anymore at that stage, and neither was Wilde. So I tend to think she deserves this award.” He pointed at the screen. “I wouldn’t be surprised if Wilde receives one, too.”

“Bogo can’t do that!” Caballus said. “Nick’s a civilian!”

“And he did a cop’s work.”

McHorn nodded. “They did what we should have done. They did our work for us, while we were just scratching our heads without having the slightest idea of what was really going on. I think you’re right.”

“That will certainly turn some heads,” Rhinowitz said. “A fox with a Medal of Honor.”

“You know what?” Pennington said. “I think it’s about time! Foxes have always been shunned. And why? Because of all those shitty prejudices this city is full of. Foxes are sneaky. Weasels are deceitful. Elephants are clumsy. Lions are arrogant. Predators are savage. All those were the ammunition Bellwether used to her advantage. It’s high time this comes to an end!”

“It would be a start,” Delgato said, nodding.

“You think Bogo has the balls to do it?” Clawhauser asked.

McHorn guffawed. “You know what they say about the size of Bogo’s balls!”

Hopps Family Farm, Main Building, “Cinema,” Bunnyburrow, Tri-Burrows

“Cripes!” Stu sniffled. “Here it comes!”

Bonnie looked at her openly weeping husband with a smile. “Oh, Stu! You’re way too emotional.”

“I can’t help it! Our Judy!” Stu said between sobs. “And to think we never wanted her to be a cop.”
“Sometimes we just have to eat our words.”

“It’s a stroke of luck that being stubborn runs in the family, eh?” Billy said over the MuzzleTime connection.

Bonnie had to laugh at that. “And don’t you forget it!”

“I won’t. The stakes have gotten quite high now, haven’t they?”

“Looks like it. So I expect you to excel, William Stuart Hopps!”

“Yes, ma’am!”

At this very moment, the door leading into the cinema opened, and Melissa’s head appeared. “I don’t wanna rush you, but lunch’s ready! What happened?”

Bonnie turned the huge TV set off and turned towards her. “You won’t believe this!”

---

**Zootopia General Hospital, Lobby, Staff Room, Receptionist’s Counter, City Central, Zootopia**

“So he just disappeared?” Pawson looked at Vivian with incredulity.

“Just like that.” Vivian snapped her digits. “There one day, gone the next.”

“And the police?”

“Couldn’t find him. Nobody could. In the end, I convinced myself that he was dead and moved on.”

Pawson sighed. “When it rains, it pours. When did you find out he’s alive?”

“During that bunny’s first press conference. He was standing there in the background, and somehow I knew instinctively that it was him. And during the last press conference, he was introduced. It’s him, Nicholas Wilde. No doubt about that.”

“And now what?”

Vivian shrugged. “I thought he had been killed, but it seems like he left on his own accord. It seems like he wants to have nothing to do with me anymore. And if that’s the case, I’ll certainly not run after him.”

“But you don’t know.”

“I don’t, but it’s not that I’ve exactly been in hiding. He was there all the time. The bunny said he had lived in Zootopia all of his life. So he must have had tons of chances to pay me a visit. He never did. So there’s that.”

Pawson just stared at her, then his gaze turned towards the screen again. “Wonder what he did all the time.”

“No idea. But somehow I doubt he’d been helping the police all the time.”

“Why do you think so?”
“Because the bunny said she had coerced him into helping her. Doesn’t sound like he went willingly.”

“So you think he hasn’t exactly been a law-abiding citizen?”

“I would be surprised if he was.”

“Why?”

Vivian looked at Pawson, raising an eyebrow. “You do know how foxes are usually treated by society, don’t you?”

Pawson shook his head. “I do, and I hate it! Prejudice like that made me lose my job.”

“Yeah, but at least you got it back.” Vivian looked at the screen again herself, watching the bunny read the certificate with wide eyes. It seemed like she never had guessed she would be in for an award, much less the highest one the ZPD could bestow upon her.

The huge Chief of Police turned towards Nick now. “And now for you, Mr. Wilde.”

Nick looked up at the cape buffalo. “Sir?”

The Chief straightened himself. “On behalf of the Zootopia Police Department, I hereby award Mister Nicholas Piberius Wilde the Zootopia Police Department Medal of Honor.”

Vivian’s jaw dropped. “Say what?”

The cape buffalo looked down at her son. “This certainly is unprecedented. Never before in the history of the ZPD has a civilian been awarded with one of its medals, much less the highest one. However, given the fact that you helped Officer Hopps solve the Savage Predators case, and also given the fact that you provided the ZPD with invaluable assistance over the course of the last few days, assistance which enabled us to arrest several criminals, including Aries, Hirvi, Brooks, and Merino, we, that is Mayor Lionheart and me, are convinced that you deserve the award just as much as Officer Hopps does. Especially considering the fact that you formally applied for the ZPA.”

He looked at the assembled councilmammals now, who seemed to be shocked into a silent stupor. “Provided Mr. Wilde passes the Academy, of which I am certain, he will join ZPDs Precinct One in less than a year, the second small mammal to join our ranks, to become a police officer. And if his actions during the last couple of days are any indication, he will become a mammal more than worthy of wearing the shield. And this award.” He handed the certificate to Nick. “Congratulations, Mr. Wilde!”

“Wow!” Pawson exclaimed. “Never thought I’d see something like this!”

He looked down at Vivian, who was just staring at the TV set, with tears running down her face.

---

City Hall, Council Chamber, City Center, Zootopia

“Congratulations, Mr. Wilde!” Chief Bogo said, looking down at Nick with a hint of a smile. When Nick simply returned the stare, he continued, much more softly: “What? You didn’t know?”

Nick first looked at the councilmammals who had just started applauding him, then at the certificate, confirming that it was indeed the real thing - the ZPD Medal of Honor, awarded to him.
“I was quite certain you’d want to honor us, but not with this. And I don’t really know why.”

“Isn’t it obvious? No civilian has ever been awarded the Medal of Honor. So we have quite the unique situation. A civilian with the Medal of Honor applying for the ZPA?”

Nick nodded in sudden understanding. “Forcing their paws, eh, sir?”

“I’d like to see the ZPA’s administration try and reject the recipient of the Medal of Honor. They wouldn’t dare. Speaking of which, you’ll find another piece of paper underneath the certificate. One you might find useful as well.” He suddenly leaned forward, offering his enormous hoof to Nick. “Congratulations, Cadet Wilde!”

“Cadet Wilde!” Nick suddenly heard someone say behind him. “I like that!”

Having returned the pawshake, Nick turned around to look at Judy who was staring at him with a grin. She had obviously come to terms with the situation in the meantime, probably thanks to Higgins having calmed her down. “Just wait till it’s Officer Wilde, Fluff!” Nick said, assuming the most nonchalant pose he was able to do.

“Ooh, I like that even more!”

Nick looked at the second piece of paper. Bogo closed the gap and said in barely more than a whisper: “It’s a full mayoral pardon, signed by Lionheart and Caballus. And Higgins even went over to the DA to have him sign it, too, just for good measure. It’s as foolproof as we can make it.”

Nick took a deep breath. “So it’s really happening!”

“It is. If you solve your other problems.”

“Oh, I will solve them, sir! You’ve given me quite the incentive.”

“What problems are you talking about?” Judy asked.

Nick hesitated. For some strange reason, he was reluctant to tell her that he neither had a high school diploma nor a driving license to his name. “Another time, Judy. I’ll tell you, but not right now, okay?”

Judy looked at him, then she shrugged. “Fine with me. I can wait.”

---

Zootopia News Network Headquarters, TV Studio Four, City Center, Zootopia

“And you had really heard of Gardner’s Law before?” Fabienne Growley asked. She and Peter Moosebridge were sitting on their respective chairs in the news studio again, preparing themselves for the next edition of the news.

“I have,” Moosebridge said. “It was during high school. I had a teacher there. Quite the weird guy, but he sure knew his stuff. One of his subject was Political Science. He once mentioned Gardner’s Law during a rather heated discussion, saying that it was a prime example of a lex non scripta that was finally pressed into some sort of legal form with no real need for it, because it had always been in effect, even though it had never been an actual law. He explicitly called it a law that did nothing but please the bureaucrats, or, in his own words, a useless law.”

“I wouldn’t exactly call it useless.”
“Not after what happened today, that’s for sure.”

“He told you what was in it?”

“No. He just mentioned the term, and I was curious enough to look it up afterwards. Most of it really is perfectly useless, but there are some laws in there that are so obvious, it’s a miracle that nobody had realized that they had been missing before. Did you know, for example, that there was a time when everybody could have become a councilmammal, not just citizens of Zootopia?”

“Really?”

“Yes. An oversight if I ever saw one. We never had a councilmammal who hadn’t been a citizen of this city or the surrounding boroughs, yet we could have had. Not anymore, thanks to Gardner’s Law.”

“And to think that nobody knew about this!”

“Yeah, that’s the funny thing about it. So many mammals involved, and it took an imprisoned former Mayor to come across this by chance. What a story! Even I didn’t remember this, and I should have known, seeing that I once looked the stuff up.”

“This teacher of yours, he really knew his stuff, obviously.”

“He knew everything there was to know about his subjects, but he was incredibly clueless in regards of everything else. And his educational style was … weird.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, he used to say that, and I quote, ‘school is like medicine. Its taste has to be bitter, otherwise it is useless.’ Quote end.”

Growley snickered. “That’s one way to see it.”

“Not the only one, I …”

“Alright,” Mephitis shouted, interrupting him. “Get ready! We’re about to go on the air.”

Unknown

“… the peace rally in front of City Hall shows no sign of dispersing,” the wolverine reporter said before looking over his shoulder. “Although from this vantage point, it looks to evolve into some kind of celebration.” The camera panned to the side, focusing on mammals, predator and prey alike, hugging each other. Shouts of joy and elation could be heard. After a few seconds, the wolverine reappeared. “I have also received word that Gazelle will address the protestors soon.”

“Probably to announce the continuation of her world tour,” Peter Moosebridge stated.

“Yes, but there also are rumors that she will stage a special free concert in Zootopia after her tour has ended.”

“A free concert? That would be spectacular news indeed!” Fabienne Growley exclaimed.

“Said ZNN’s resident Gazelle fan,” Moosebridge added with a grin.

“Unlike other mammals here, I can at least recognize good music when I hear it!” Growley replied
without missing a beat.

Ever since her now infamous outburst, which had gone viral within minutes, the manner in which Growley and Moosebridge had presented the news had become distinctively more casual, and if public response was any indication, the public seemed to love the snow leopard and the moose all the more for it. Jocular banter between ZNN’s main newscasters had become much more common, with exchanges like these quickly having become the new norm.

The two mammals watching the presentation, however, had no appreciation for their casual approach whatsoever.

Nor had they any appreciation for the news themselves.

“Looks like we’re back at square one,” the smaller of the two mammals said before erupting in a very long and very colorful curse.

“It is even worse than that.” In contrast to the smaller mammal’s outburst, the taller mammal was speaking in a very measured tone. “They know about the serum now, and it will probably take them little time to come up with an antidote. As far as I know, Doctors Peralta, Afer, Badger, Professor Mitis, and Mr. Gusteau are working on it, and you know their respective reputations just as well as I do. I would be very surprised indeed if they do not come up with a viable antidote within weeks. Which in turn means we will not be able to use the serum again in the foreseeable future.”

“Unless you come up with an advanced version.”

The taller mammal made a face. “Which is quite unlikely. Doug Ramses is a genius. I never really understood how he managed to make the Nighthowler serum work, but he made it work. Unless I can truly understand how the different components interact with each other, any attempt to track his work is an exercise in futility.” He filled his glass again. “On top of that, the actions of Dawn Bellwether cost us dearly.”

“What do you mean?”

“We lost a lot of good, valuable soldiers to the cause. All loyal mammals she managed to get onto the roster of the ZPD and onto the seats of the City Council are in prison now.”

“There still is Jimela.”

“Who will probably join his fellows in prison very soon. Do you honestly think AJ will stop where they are right now?”

“Probably not.” A short pause. “Fuck!”

“Patience!” the taller mammal said. “It is a mere setback. We will continue our work. Maybe you should finally make good on your promises and try to enter the stage of politics.”

“And what good would that do?”

“It would provide us with an additional lever we might use in the future. Especially if I manage to come up with a new, improved version of the Nighthowler serum.”

“I thought you said you couldn’t do it.”

“I merely said it is unlikely that I could do it. But not impossible. It might very well turn out that all
it takes is time, effort, and money. Fortunately, we have enough of those.”

“So, our plan’s still alive?”

“It is, very much so.” He raised his glass. “Vengeance!”

The smaller mammal raised his glass, too, and they clinked glasses. “Vengeance!”

To be continued ...

Now where the heck did those two guys come from? Who are they? What do they want?

Well, those of you who’ve read the first chapters of “Hammer to Fall” will probably have recognized them. All those who haven’t, well …

It’s called shameless self-promotion, sweetheart!

Hooray! “Wound” is done! On to “Nightmare!”

Or maybe not!

Sorry, but before I’ll be able to continue my storyline here with “Now Your Nightmare Comes to Life,” I have to deal with something quite different first.

I have alluded to this in several of my replies to comments before: In its original version, back at fanfiction.net, “Wound” consisted of 22 chapters, so there still are six chapters missing. However, those chapters, five of which are dealing with Judy’s first days back on the beat after the events in this story, and the last one giving Arctic Fire a proper introduction, never really belonged to “Wound.” They were just something a wanted to tell, something that was dear to me. Still is dear to me, as a matter of fact.

Yet it is something that isn’t necessarily vital when it comes to understanding the plot I have developed here.

And since that’s the case, those six chapters always felt like they were quite ill-fitting, which is something I have actually been told several times. And I can only agree with those assessments. “Wound” should have ended with chapter 16 back then, and “Wound” does end with chapter 16 here.

Yet, since those chapters are so dear to me, I want you to be able to read them as well. Plus I have quite a lot of other ideas floating around in my head which I also want to see published at some point along the road.

But not as a part of this story itself.

So, here’s the deal: In a few days, I’ll start publishing a new story. It’s name will be “Those Were the Days of Our Lives,” which is actually derived from a song by the band Queen named “These Are the Days of Our Lives,” published on the album “Innuendo” in 1991 by
Parlophone. It will be a collection of one-offs, short stories, little snippets and other oddities which will add some spice to the storyline I’ve created. They will not be vital to the main storyline by any means, just add a bit of extra flavor, explaining certain stuff I took for granted while writing “Nightmare” and “Hammer” or giving some insight into plot developments which are vital within those stories. The will be no temporal continuity whatsoever - as far as the timeline is concerned, the collection will probably be an outright mess.

And it will not be the thing I put my main focus on by any stretch of the imagination. I will publish the aforementioned six chapters which used to belong to this story first, and then I will move on to overhauling “Nightmare.” And when I’m done with that, it’s on to “Hammer!”

“Days” will only receive new chapters when the mood strikes me. My main focus will always be on “Hammer to Fall.” Both “Nightmare” and “Hammer” will merely contain references to “Days” which you can read if you want some additional information and maybe a look at proceedings from a different perspective. For example, the details of Nick’s past, especially in relation to his mother, will be explained within that story collection, and it will also be the place where Zachary Pawson, M.D., will be properly introduced. But since you can understand the basic storyline quite fine without knowing all the underlying intricacies, it will never be necessary to read “Days.” Of course I’d be happy if you do, but if you think you can’t be bothered, you won’t miss out on anything as far as the basic storyline is concerned.

Just so you know, the chapter’s title is based on a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, named “Es recht zu machen jedermann, ist eine Kunst, die keiner kann,” which loosely translates to: “To please everyone is an art nobody can do.” It tells the story of a boy who wants to travel the world to learn what other people think. His father tries to dissuade him, stating that everybody has a different opinion. The son, however, remains stubborn. Finally the father relents, and so they leave with their trusty donkey, each of them walking on their own feet. First, they meet a farmer, who asks them why the donkey is walking without carrying anyone. So the father climbs onto the donkey’s back. A little while later, they meet two wanderers, who berate the group for letting the boy run while the father is riding. So they switch. Next they meet a woman, who lambasts the son for letting his father run. So both climb onto the donkey’s back. A little while later, they meet two wanderers, who berate the group for letting the boy run while the father is riding. So they switch. Next they meet a woman, who lambasts the son for letting his father run. So both climb onto the donkey’s back. The next gentleman they meet tells them that the donkey will surely collapse soon, due to being forced to carry both of them. So they dismount and in turn carry the donkey. (No idea why they think this is smart, but hey! It’s a fairy-tale!) They continue on their journey until they reach an inn. The folks sitting on the outside in front of it ridicule them for carrying a perfectly serviceable donkey, which could have carried one of them … you get the idea.

A really nice story. I grew up on stuff like that.

Fentanyl is a pain-relieve drug similar to morphine, administered to patients suffering from severe chronic pain, such as cancer patients. It is often administered through patches, as there are quite a lot of people who cannot deal with other forms of administration like swallowing or are having kidney problems. Depending on the size of the patch, it can be quite potent, and if overdosed, can even result in death! Since Vivian lost one of her kidneys - the usual method to remove a renal cell carcinoma is to remove the affected kidney -, she receives
the patches instead of morphine pills. (My mother-in-law receives those, too - that’s how I learned of their existence. She’s suffering from severe arthritis in both shoulders, and her stomach didn’t agree with the drug when taken orally.)

The therapy mentioned by Pawson, the method to fight a glioma/glioblastoma is indeed just undergoing clinical trials. It revolves around a peptide called chlorotoxin, derived from the poison of the deathstalker scorpion (*Leiurus quinquestriatus*), one of the most dangerous scorpions there is. Gliomas are notoriously difficult to see through MRT or a different kind of screening method. Chlorotoxin, in layman’s terms, clings onto the cancerous cells and paints them in a different color (just a figure of speech - there is no color involved), so they show up during an MRT screening. This in turn allows the surgeon to successfully remove the entire tumor without causing extensive damage to the surrounding brain tissue. Initial results are quite promising, as far as I know. (The things you learn through browsing Wikipedia …)

And of course Vivian is quite knowledgeable when it comes to cancer. You cannot be afflicted with such a serious condition and not learn everything there is to learn about it.

I know most of this is difficult to understand. In case you need further explanations, just let me know, okay? (Just so you know, all of this is about to become highly important in “Hammer to Fall!”)

On a more funny side note, the German word for “guinea pig” (as in test subject, not as in mammal) is “Versuchskaninchen,” test rabbit. Just one of the stranger quirks found in translation.

In case you think that the Medal of Honor is too high an award, not befitting the accomplishments of Judy and Nick, I can see your point, but I disagree nonetheless. The definition of the prerequisites for being awarded the Medal of Honor, as stated by Bogo, was taken, more or less verbatim, from the Wikipedia entry explaining the New York City Police Department Medal of Honor, which I used as a template for this. I have added the discussion between Clawhauser, Delgato, McHorn, Pennington, Trunkaby, Rhinowitz, and Caballus specifically to stress the point.

Delgato’s opinion is mine. Especially given the fact that Zootopia would pretty much not have been the same, had Judy and Nick not been successful, I’d say this warrants the highest honors the ZPD can bestow upon them. Feel free to disagree, but this is my story, and I tell it as I see fit. ;-)

Now, the quotes. And yes, this is going to be VERY lengthy! We’re talking about no less than 21 quotes here! Since it’s that many, I’m dealing with them one chapter at a time. So, here goes:

Chapter One:

The quote from “The Hunt for Red October” by John McTiernan can be found in the earlier parts, when Jeffrey Pelt, Security Advisor to the President of the United States, explains to Jack Ryan after the staff meeting: “Listen, I’m a politician, which means I’m a cheat and a liar, and when I’m not kissing babies I’m stealing their lollipops.” I just adapted it a bit to the world of Zootopia and gave it to Nick, because his rather pessimistic outlook lends itself best to conveying the sense of being fed up with politicians.
Chapter Two:

The reference to “Men in Black” by Barry Sonnenfeld is the description of ZNN’s editor-in-chief, Patrick Mephitis, as a mammal not having a sense of humor he was aware of. This is how Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones) describes himself to Beatrice, the wife of the abusive farmer who was eaten by the bug.

The line from the song “Gangsta’s Paradise” by Coolio is, of course “What’s going on in the kitchen!” used in that chapter by the rhino warden to find out what, well, is going on in the kitchen. Funny nobody found that one ...

Chapter Five:

The name of the “rather old song” I hid in that chapter is, of course, “You Ain’t Seen Nothing Yet” by Bachman-Turner Overdrive, written by Randy Bachman and published on the album “Not Fragile” by Mercury in 1974. Man, I was just turning three that year! I’m getting old!

Chapter Seven:

The allusion to the Disney movie “Frozen” is when Mastiff mentions that this probably is “the first time in forever” that someone calls him too nice into his face. Which was taken from the song “For the First Time in Forever,” composed by Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez and published on the “Frozen” soundtrack album by Walt Disney Records in 2013.

Chapter Nine:

The quote from the computer game “Starcraft II” was hidden in the utterance of Mastiff, when he says “Sweet mother of mercy!” upon hearing that Tilda Swinton was Karen Pardinus’ godmother. In the game, Tychus Findlay says the exact same thing upon seeing the destruction caused by the Queen of Blades and her Zerg.

The reference to the movie “Little Shop of Horrors” by Frank Oz can be found in the song “Skid Row (Downtown),” written by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman and published several times - I found it on the album “Little Shop of Horrors - Original Motion Picture Soundtrack,” published by Geffen in 1996. In that song, we hear Seymour Krelborn (Rick Moranis) sing at one point: “I started life as an orphan, a child of the street, here on skid row. He took me in, gave me shelter, a bed, crust of bread and a job; treats me like dirt, calls me a slob, which I am …” I used parts of that phrase to describe what happened when Finnick found Nick.

Chapter Eleven:

The character from the Mass Effect series I hid in that chapter was, of course, Maya Brooks aka Captain Channing aka Hope Lilium aka Rasa, who plays a prominent role in the “Citadel DLC” of Mass Effect 3.

Chapter Twelve:

The quote from the movie “Top Gun” by Tony Scott was uttered by Commander Mike
“Viper” Metcalf (played by Tom Skerritt), who admonishes Lieutenant Pete “Maverick” Mitchell (Tom Cruise) that “Top Gun rules of engagement are written for your safety and for that of your team. They are not flexible, nor am I. Either obey them or you are history. Is that clear?” In my story, Bogo tells Nick almost the exact same thing (sans the “Top Gun” reference, of course).

Chapter Thirteen:

The name Gerard Gusteau was inspired by the PIXAR movie “Ratatouille.” August Gusteau was the deceased chef of “Gusteau’s,” whose ghost helps Remy become a chef himself.

The line from the book “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban” by J.K. Rowling was uttered by Harry himself, when he counters Hermione’s admonishments by saying this: “I don’t go looking for trouble. Trouble usually finds me.” Arctic Fire uses the exact same words when Freddie Delgato approaches him.

The line from the movie “Pirates of the Caribbean” was this: “I am disinclined to acquiesce to your request. Means no.” Captain Hector Barbossa at his absolute best! Or worst. Can’t decide which. Cool way to counter awkward questions, Freddie!

The line from the movie “Wayne’s World” was “Yeah, and monkeys might fly out of my butt,” said by Garth Algar (Dana Carvey). It’s how Mindoro expresses his doubtfulness as to whether Arctic Fire really took down the tigers by himself.

The quote from the movie “Monty Python’s Life of Brian” is, of course, the incomparable “That’s all right, then! Sit down! Have a scone! Make yourself at home. You KLUTZ!” That’s how Reg (John Cleese) reads Brian (Graham Chapman) the riot act for leading the Roman soldiers to their hideout. I just had to give it to one of the tigers in that chapter! One of my most favorite scenes in the movie, along with almost everything else. Man, this movie’s almost too good to be true!

Chapter Fourteen:

The reference to Iron Maiden was the “Rue Morgue” I mentioned in that chapter, which was taken from the song “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” The song itself, written and composed by Steve Harris, is based on a short story with the same name by Edgar Allan Poe. Both are quite old - the story was written in 1841, and the song was first published in 1981 on Iron Maiden’s second album, “Killers.”

The quote from the computer game “Mass Effect 3” was, of course, uttered by the aforementioned Maya Brooks from the Mass Effect 3 Citadel DLC: “Brooks over! No, out! Er, Brooks out! O-over and out! Brooks! Oh, damn it!” Feels quite awkward to suddenly be forced to play with the big boys, eh, Mindoro?

The line from “Wasted Youth” by Jim Steinman is the very last one: “But you got a hell of a lot to learn about Rock and Roll!” Mastiff's right, though - Mindoro still has a hell of a lot to learn.

In the game “Full Throttle” by LucasArts, Adrian Ripburger (voiced by the always sensational Mark “Joker/Luke Skywalker” Hamill) has this to say about Malcolm Corley:
“More likely he’s boring them to death with some tale of the glory days.” Not a nice way to talk about Lionheart, Honey!

The line taken out of the computer game “Tomb Raider: Legend” by Eidos Interactive was “Oh, you’re going to find me extremely credulous today,” said by McHorn. Lara Croft says it after finishing the Kazakhstan level of the game, during the cutscene.

The line from the movie “A Few Good Men” in Chapter Fourteen was spoken by Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise - by the way, “Kaffee” is the German word for coffee, so I still think the name’s hilarious) near the end of the movie. After the infamous verbal duel between him and Colonel Nathan R. Jessup (the always sensational Jack Nicholson), Kaffee concludes with these words: “Don't call me son. I'm a lawyer, and an officer in the United States Navy. And you're under arrest, you son of a bitch!” I gave the line to Delgato to conclude the arrest of the two tigers, slightly altered of course.

Chapter Fifteen:

The quote from the computer game “Dark Forces 2: Jedi Knight” by LucasArts can be found in one of the first cutscenes, when 8T88 tells Kyle Katarn that it is “not without a heart,” which is what Lionheart says to Gustavo Jimela during his speech. And to think that 8T88 is little more than a can full of bolts and sprockets ...

And yes, I also used a quote in this chapter, but since it’s the last one of this story, it makes little sense to keep it hidden. So here it is:

The quote mentioned by Moosebridge about school and medicine was taken from a really famous German movie from 1944 called “Die Feuerzangenbowle” (“The Fire-Tongs Bowl” in English), which is sort of Germany’s “Rocky Horror Picture Show” - it has a quite dedicated cult following. Every year around Christmas, it’s shown on German TV numerous times, and every university worth its salt shows it in one of their lecture halls. And when you go there, you need an alarm clock, a flashlight, a small test tube filled with blueberry schnapps and an assortment of other oddities. The movie itself revolves around a young writer named Johann Pfeiffer (played by Heinz Rühmann) who never went to a public school; he had been taught at home. His buddies then decide that he had missed out on quite a lot, so they make him go to school. A lot of hilarious stuff ensues, including several outrageously funny pranks the students play on their teachers. Speaking of teachers, some of those that Pfeiffer comes across can only be described as weird. One in particular, Professor Crey, nicknamed “Schnauz,” (played by Erich Ponto), has to be the weirdest teacher you can possibly imagine. His credo is “Mit der Schule ist es wie mit der Medizin. Sie muss bitter schmecken, sonst nützt sie nichts.” (“School is like medicine. Its taste has to be bitter, otherwise it is useless.”) This must be one of the most famous movie quotes in Germany! You can hear it so often, it’s outright scary. Virtually every German seems to know that one! This is why I just had to use it at some point, after having translated it into English, of course.

Pheew, that’s been dealt with! Quite a lot of quotes I hid there. I had really been hoping more of them would be found. Well, too late now!

So much for “How to Treat a Festering Wound!” See you in “Now Your Nightmare Comes to Life!” And “Those Were the Days of Our Lives,” in case you wanna read that short story
collection, too! Thank you very much for reading this story, and should you be willing and able to send a comment my way, I’ll be eternally grateful!

Take care!

Jens “TheCatweazle” Ostendorf

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!