Vootopia
by ubernoner

Summary

Look between the cracks of society, listen over the din of the crowd there is a world you never imagined just beyond your senses, if you know where to find it.

Notes

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I put a Spell on you!

Judy sat on her bed, slumped against the back wall. “I messed up tonight... -sniffle- I lost another...” Clutched in her paws was a framed picture of her and Nick at his Academy graduation. Her cellphone sat next to her; it’s continuous ringing falling on deaf ears, once her text had been sent. She couldn’t fathom how it had all gotten out of hand, couldn’t for the life of her remember the chain of events that led to Nick sleeping with that vixen. The home wrecker’s herbal perfume, scent, whatever, was still clinging to her room. Nick betrayed her, betrayed their relationship, but that was no excuse to...

She clutched her head and wept as the jumbled memories swirled around her: the sense of devastation at finding Nick in bed with another female, the odd musky, herbal scent that seemed to be everywhere, his weak, nebulous protests as she stormed down to her car, and the soul crushing thump when she slammed it into reverse. Everything after was a blur. She couldn’t even remember getting home. Judy thought how this would look to her peers; she had fled the scene after running over her own partner.

The week had started out so good: they’d been assigned to a drug trafficking case being handled by Vice Squad, asked for by name by Sgt. Daschel. By Wednesday, they had traced several shipments of ‘Blue no. 9’, a new designer date-rape drug derived from Nighthowlers, to a club deep in the Rainforest District called ‘Zandor’s Palace’. The raid, which Nick and Judy participated in, netted dozens of kilos of Blue no. 9. There was no indication yet where it was coming from, but that was just a matter of time.

Time she had taken from Nick, in a fit of jealous rage. She’d never get to hear his laugh again, never feel his arms around her in the morning. All his tomorrows were gone, and it was her fault. She walked over to her nightstand and pulled out her back-up carry. The dainty Auroch PA22 had saved hers and Nick’s lives at least once during the last three years. Now, it was going to allow her to see Nick again, one last time. “I love you Nick.” She closed her eyes, pulled the slide, and set the barrel against her head.

A sudden rattling distracted her, as her front door was thrown open to reveal what had to be an impossible apparition. On instinct, she leveled the pistol on the form in front of her, her heart aching with regret and joy that Nick’s ghost would be the one to usher her to the Great Beyond.

“Carrots? Honey? What are you doing? Your mother called me saying you sent some kind of cryptic apology text, then refused to answer your phone.” Nick cautiously advanced towards his friend, his partner, his better half, who currently had her backup pistol leveled on him. He did his best to take in the whole environment: tear stains on her face, the way her paws shook, the odd herbal smell he had encountered once or twice in the bad old days. A memory tugged at him, but he had more important matters to deal with right now, like making sure Judy didn’t punch his or her own ticket.
Judy stood still for a moment. Her judge, her escort across the River Styx wanted an accounting of her sins? Very well. “I’m, -sniff- I’m ending it. I killed you, and I can’t live with myself so I’m ending it!” Her vision watered and she began to sink to the floor. “I caught you in bed with HER, so I stormed out. You tried to stop me from leaving but I... I ran you over.” She started sobbing openly. “No matter what you did, you didn’t deserve to die.”

Nick had managed to cross the room and was kneeling in front of her. “Neither do you, Judy.” He gently took her paws in his, and carefully pressed the de-cocking lever on the pistol. Judy stared at their paws for a moment before looking up at Nick. “That’s right, honey-bun, I’m right here. You didn’t run me over, though you did nearly shoot me.” He gave a weak smirk as Judy let go of her pistol and clutched him in desperation and wept in relief.

Nick shifted his grip so he could pick his doe up off the floor, then carried her into the hall. Once they were out of the cloying stench of whatever was in her room, he called into the precinct. “Clawhauser, it’s Nick.”

“Oh hi Nick! What ya doing? I thought you and Judy were given some time off after the Club raid earlier today?” The reception cheetah was as perky as ever.

“Oh, we were, but something’s come up: someone broke into Car... Officer Hopps’ apartment and left something behind. I need Uni’s over here with a sniffer: Rooter or Wolford preferably.” Nick could almost hear Benjamin switch gears.

“On it. Officer Rooter is across town right now, but Wolford should be there in 10. I’ll have another unit of Patrolmammals there in three to secure the scene.”

Nick sagged in relief. “Thanks Benj.” He hung up and resumed hugging his distraught bunny while rocking her back and forth. Once he was sure she was calm and asleep, he let his mind wander to the stray memory he’d been ignoring; the memory of a polar bear enforcer for Mister Big stumbling into the mansion, his lips and eyes crudely sewn shut, reeking of swamp mud and pungent herbs while he attacked his fellow Made Mammals with alarming accuracy. He remembered a parchment pulled from the dead bear’s mouth detailing the attack, including who would die and in what order. He remembered being sent to the Rainforest District, to find Mama Shanti, Queen of the Bayou, to try to sue for peace between the two crime lords. He remembered the price that was asked for, that he should betray Big’s trust or there would only be war in the streets.

Mama Shanti was furious when his betrayal came, not in theft or death, but in a simple, disrespectful rug sewn from her own sisters fur; but the price was paid, and peace resumed. Most
of all, Nick remembered the Voodoo Queen’s warning: should he ever cross the Caplata again, she would take everything he loved from him. That didn’t matter to him then, as he’d had nothing to take. Now, he had everything to lose, and he was NOT giving up without a fight.

Nick heard a police car pull up outside. When he heard the voices of the responding officers coming up the stairs, he started to worry. The fact that it was Officers Prance Davis and Nathan Quillion coming up made him wonder if there might have been some power left in whatever cursed charm was in Judy’s apartment. The black tail deer and razorback boar duo had been in the Academy class behind Nick, and had never seemed to accept that he was sincere in his Oath of Service. They also seemed dismissive of Hopps in general, though they had the presence of mind not to say as much in earshot of other officers. Given how his day had gone so far, he was ill inclined to believe it was just dumb luck that they would be the two closest Patrolmammals.

He set Judy down gently, stood up and set his phone to record. The two came up the stairs almost shoulder to shoulder. Once they laid eyes on Nick, they strutted over without a glance at Judy. “Should have rutting known it.” Davis sneered around the toothpick he seemed to endlessly knaw on while Quillion snorted a short laugh. “What, you finally break the unit mascot? I know it’s all she’s good for, but show some Goddamn self restraint you filthy fluff chaser.”

Both officers demeanor soured when Wilde simply quirked an eyebrow at them. Nathan squealed in irritation as he grabbed Nick by his collar and lifted him up to eye level. “You think this is funny Pelt?! We’re onto you! We’re gonna make sure you get pinned for this, even if we have to...”

“Even if you have to what, Officer Quillion?” Nick could only grin as Sgt. Phillip Eilerson and Officer Daniel Wolford ascended the stairs behind the two Patrol Mammals. Nathan turned and stared for a moment, still holding Nick by his collar. “Officer Quillion, I would strongly suggest you cease mammal handling Officer Wilde before I put you and your partner on report for Conduct Unbecoming and Simple Assault. Now.” Phillip never lost the sombre, almost lazy tone in his voice, but the fire in his hourglass eyes burned into the two junior officers. Nick was set down with a thump as Davis and Quillion snapped to attention.

“I believe what I heard you two saying, was ‘... even if we have to head downstairs and act as crowd control.’ Isn’t that correct?” The patrol duo nervously nodded their heads at the Sergeant’s statement. “Then what are you still doing up here?” The two junior officers scurried out of Eilerson’s line of sight. The pronghorn Sgt. turned to Nick. “Anything you want to report, officer?”

Nick sat down and gathered Judy into his arms again. “Nothing that hasn’t been reported before to Capt. Joziah Quillion in IA.” Nick felt some small comfort at the looks of frustration on Phillip and Daniel’s muzzles; the current head of IA had, to date, blocked any action against his nephew.

Officer Wolford squared his shoulders and took out a notepad. “Well then, down to business.
What can you tell us about the break-in?”

“Nothing directly, I came over when Judy’s mom, Bonnie, called me. She said Judy sent her a real cryptic note about doing something ‘unforgivable’, and how she was sorry but she was going to ‘make it right’. When I opened the door, she...” Nick hesitated, knowing many officers wouldn’t want anyone to know if they had tried to commit suicide. He pinched his eyes closed and held her just a little tighter; if they were going to get through this, she’d need to be cleared for duty, and that meant she needed to get eval ed by Psych. They would also need clear evidence of wrongdoing, which they wouldn’t have if he glossed over what happened. Letting out a breath, he continued. “When I opened the door, she had her back up pressed to her temple. She was shocked to see me; she seemed to think she had run me over, and couldn’t deal with it. Her piece and her phone are still in the apartment.”

Both senior officers looked alarmed at that. Hopps was considered an emotional rock: an unassailable fortress of positivity, so the idea that she would commit suicide was almost anathema. Eilerson picked up the questioning. “You said this was a break in. How is this related?”

Nick looked up. “There was, is an odd smell. I’ve smelled it before.” Nick dug deep to sell the hustle; nobody would investigate a Voodoo curse, but he knew the physical evidence was there, so if he phrased it right... “While I was still working the other side I ran afoul of a self styled ‘Voodoo Queen’ that called herself Mama Shanti: big hog-nosed skunk, blind in her right eye. She ran all the drug trade in the RFD until she died last year.”

Wolford had already started nosing into Judy’s apartment while Eilerson looked skeptically at Nick. “You think this, Mama Shanty put a curse on Judy from the grave?”

“No sir, but Judy and I did hit a club in her old territory earlier today, and someone seems to be running a boom drug business there. It’s likely whoever took over for Mama Shanti is trying to scare us off.”

“With Voodoo Magic?”

Nick leaned back slightly as Judy snuggled deeper into his arms. “Doctors have proven that Voodoo Jambies are a real thing: dope a mammal up on a cocktail of drugs and set dressing, and you can convince them of anything.” He absently petted her ears when she squirmed slightly. “Whatever that stink is in her apartment, I’ve smelled it before. Put the right mixture of herbs and psychotropics in a bag, then hide it in someone’s home; wait for them to fall asleep, then start telling them what you want them to think.”
Wolford came out of Judy’s apartment holding a small pouch at arms length while covering his nose. A second set of evidence bags had Judy’s phone and pistol in them. “Found it; bunch of herbs, some I don’t know, and feces. I don’t smell Wilde on it, but we should get it back to the lab to rule him out. I’ll get Tweedledee and Tweedledum up here to dust...”

Eierson cut him off with a wave of his hoof. “I don’t want those two anywhere near this scene. Zoo-Adam 15 to dispatch.” Phillip keyed his radio.

“Go ahead Adam 15.”

“Dispatch, we need Criminalistics and an ambulance to 1313 Warren Dr.”

“Copy Adam 15, Criminalistics and Medical are 12 minutes out.” Clawhauser’s voice sounded on the verge of breaking.

“Nick.” Wolford knelt next to the distraught fox after putting the pouch in an evidence bag. “I know you and Hopps are, close.” Nick snorted at the larger canid, causing Daniel to grin. “Not judging here, but when the EMT’s arrive, try not to bite them when they take Judy to the hospital. They’re just doing their jobs.”

“So am I.” Nick bared his fangs slightly as his tail curled around his doe.
Strange Magic

Chapter Summary

Our heroes recover from the attack.

Judy squinted her eyes tightly; even closed, the light in the room was just too bright. Her left arm hurt, like she’d been stuck with something, and there was some kind of annoying -beep- sound she couldn’t tune out any more. Turning her head slightly, she peeked her eyes open and saw Nick slumped in a chair, his tongue sticking out slightly from between his canines. It was one of those silly ‘Nick’ things she saw so infrequently that always made her giggle. Just as he started to stir, a jumble of conflicting memories made her scowl in frustration, then gasp in panic at what she had nearly done.

That brought Nick fully awake. “Hey hey hey; it’s okay. You’re at St. Francis Hospital for observation.”

She focused fully on him. “Nick, what happened? What did I do?!“ She reached out to him to reassure herself that at least one of the sets of memories was false.

Nick took her paw and began gently rubbing it with his thumb. “Well; you, me and Sgt. Daschle busted a dance club that was a front for moving Blue No. 9, then the Chief gave us off till second shift on Saturday. You were pretty beat, so we agreed to home-alone time, rather than fun-at-home time. Four hours later I got a call from your mom saying you had sent her, ‘a very scary text’ which she forwarded. I rushed over, and...”

Judy saw the pain and fear in her fox’s eyes. “And I was ready to kill myself until you came in and saved me.” She tugged his paw, and he all but flopped his head into her lap. “I’m so sorry for putting you through that Nick. I’ll,” she swallowed and shivered slightly, “...I’ll understand if you want to end this, to end us.”

Nick all but lurched out of her lap. “Where is this coming from? First you think I’d ever cheat on you, and now you think I’d leave after nearly losing you?” Judy looked away and tried to pull her paw back, but Nick simply sat on the bed with her. “Judy,” once she was looking at him, he started stroking her forehead, “I spent 20 years in a dark place of my own making, when you jumped into my life and hop-kicked me back into the light, and not by accident. I told you, if we lived a hundred lifetimes together I wouldn’t be able to repay you, but I’d do my damndest to try in this life if you’d let me.”
Judy looked down again. “I know, I know; you’ll think it’s dumb.”

“No it’s not!” He grasped her face and gently turned her to him. “It nearly cost me everything, so I think it’s anything but dumb. Please, tell me what’s going on so we can fix this.”

She took a shuddering breath, and nodded. He let go of her face and took up her paw again while smiling in encouragement. “I, I’ve always been a ‘stand-out’ bunny. For bunnies, that’s not a good thing: standing out gets you noticed, and a lot of bunnies still feel that getting noticed is basically a death sentence. So bunnies shun the standouts, even if they’re family. There are whole generations back at the warren that won’t talk to me. My parents do their best, but they still haven’t stopped hoping I’ll get my fill of adventure and come home.

“It’s been the same when I dated. Bucks would be interested at first, until they realised I was serious about being a cop. I don’t know whether it was intimidation, or just more of not wanting to be with a standout, but once they figured me out, it wasn’t a week until it was over. By the next week, they’d have moved on, and I was alone again.” Nick moved so he could sit beside her and let her lean on him. She sniffled and nuzzled into him. “I just always felt so, ugly and cheapened afterwards: as if the only use anyone saw in me was as a kitten factory, but I wasn’t even good enough for that!” Nick began licking the top of her head as she cried.

Once she had calmed down some, she continued. “Aside from those first couple of days, you’ve always supported me. I guess, I felt if I wasn’t good enough for rabbits, then what use was I?” She looked up at him. “I don’t know if you really, really know how empowering it was when you said ‘yes’ to being with me, even if I was just a bunny.”

“I’m going to have to push the pause button right there Judy.” Nick tapped her on the nose. “I know about crippling social expectations, you know that; but I don’t ever want to hear you say you’re, ‘just a bunny’ ever again!” Nick pulled her into a protective hug. “You are many things, but you are not, ‘just a bunny’! You are a force to be reckoned with, once you find your traction. You were halfway there with the missing mammals, despite my dragging you down; and every time I was about to give up, you not only pushed through, you came out on top. The only person you’ve ever really doubted was yourself; you even found the time to redeem an emotionally broken garbage fox like OW!”

Nick rubbed his ribs where Judy had elbowed him. “If I’m not allowed to call myself ‘just a bunny’, then I’d better not ever hear you call yourself a ‘garbage fox’ again! I didn’t ask you to be with me cause I wanted a ‘fixer-upper’. You’re the first mammal in years who treated me like, me; like I was, was...”

“Like I was worthy.” Nick and Judy remained motionless for a time. “I know. I didn’t say yes because you’re a bunny, or because I feel grateful and need to repay you. I said yes because I love
you, and because I’m a better ME when I’m with you.” He pulled her into a tight hug. “And for a moment today, I thought I’d lost you and that terrifies me.”

Judy gratefully burrowed into his embrace. “I know all that. I know we don’t say it, but I know it. That’s why I thought it was dumb. I don’t know why I could ever think otherwise.”

“It was probably the Gris-Gris (Gree-Gree) talking.” Nick tensed and grimaced as soon as he said it.

Judy looked up. “The what?”

After the heart-to-heart they had just had, Nick couldn’t try to blow it off; but he knew Judy was a good Lutheran doe, so ‘Voodoo’ was out of the question. “Someone broke into your apartment, either before we got off shift, or after you zonked out, and left a present called a Gris-Gris. They’re packed with ‘magic’ herbs and mess with your mind. I’m guessing someone from earlier today didn’t like getting their pee-pee spanked and decided you needed to pay.”

Judy quirked her head to the side. “That seems a little out there Nick.”

“Yeah, well the RFD used to belong to the Voodoo cults until around 50 years ago. The Vodun and Caplatas still run pretty big chunks, including the crime there. Until last year, that was the ‘Voodoo Queen of the Bayou Mama Shanti.”

“History much mister mystery fox? Is that why you’re wearing this?” Judy tugged on a string round Nick’s neck to reveal a silver pendant with a blue stylized eye in the middle.

Nick chuckled and tucked the pendant back in his shirt. “Yeah yeah, call me a superstitious old fox; too many years on the street I guess. I’ll tell you about it sometime, but right now I need to get back to the Precinct.” Nick extracted himself from his doe and stood up. “I convinced Bogo to give me some time to make sure you were okay, but he wants a report on what I saw and did, and I think he also wants to know how I knew about the Gris-Gris.” He leaned in and kissed Judy on the lips. “Stay here, get better, then get ready to hit the ground running; no one messes with us and gets away with it.”

...
Nick rapped once on the door. “Enter.”

Once in the Chief’s office and the door closed behind him, Nick stood at parade rest. “Officer Wilde, reporting as ordered sir.”

Bogo looked up wearily from his desk. “How is it that every time I give you two an order, it becomes a thing that taxes the precincts overtime budget? Don’t answer that!” The Cape Buffalo preempted whatever the fox officer had been about to say. “Normally I’d address matters in order of importance, but as each thing I want to talk to you about carries equal weight, we’ll talk about them in order of things I can directly affect.

“First, I had a rather distressing conversation with Sgt. Eilerson about the conduct of two of my officers, as well as the opinions of a third regarding our internal justice system. Ah ah,” Bogo held up a hoof, “...I am not unfamiliar with this particular issue. I could say there are political considerations, but frankly, I don’t care.” The Chief quirked an eyebrow when Nick snorted. “Anyway, whether or not anything comes of it, ALL officer misconduct is to be reported. If sufficient evidence is amassed, it could be used to justify bypassing IA and taking the matter up with the Commissioner and the Council Ethics Sub-committee. Failure to report such misconduct out of a desire to, ‘not rock the boat’, promotes both a poor work ethic, and poor ethic in general. I have no use for cowards or bigots in my precinct. Am I clear, Officer?”

When Nick nodded, the Chief continued. “Now it may surprise you to know this Wilde, but I am a police officer, and trained to spot details about people; details like how your preferred method of getting Mammals of Interest to talk is to dangle a proverbial rope in front of them, then wait to see if they use it as a life line or a noose. So, do you have anything to share with me regarding the interactions you may recently have had with Officers Davis and Quillion?”

Even three year into the force, and Nick was still surprised at the support he received from some of his peers. That said, he could never pass up a chance to tease, especially when he was stressed. “Yes sir, but I’ll need a dongle.”

Chief Bogo didn’t wait a beat. “As you know, I have a 12 year old calf, so it stands to reason that I would have a dongle. However I very much doubt that it will fit your tiny port.”

Both remained motionless for a moment until Nick huffed in defeat. “Not even a smirk sir? You don’t need a line of greeting cards, you need a slot on SNL.”

While remaining stoic on the outside, Bogo internally sagged in relief at Nick’s attempt at humor. He had seen officers broken by lesser incidents than this, and he knew full well how close Nick
and Judy were to one another. He gestured with his hoof. “Just unlock the phone and open the file, Wilde, then hand it up here.” Bogo steepled his hooves once the phone was hooked to his computer to download the audio file. “Second: how is Hopps doing, really?”

Nick sagged and climbed into the chair near the door. “Rough, sir. This isn’t really in her nature, so it’s shaken her. She’s focused though. Expect her to want to be on the investigation; I sure do.”

“Yes, about that.” Bogo pulled an evidence bag from the top drawer from his desk and set it down between them. The moment Nick saw it was the bag from Judy’s apartment, he grasped the pendant under his shirt. “First, this is not a Gris-Gris.” Bogo brandished the bag in the evidence pouch, then took a small pouch from his shirt as well as a small bottle of rum from the shelf behind him. “This, is a Gris-Gris. They are talismans for protection and favor of the Lwa (Loa)” As he said this, he wet one of his hooves with the rum and allowed a drop to fall into the pouch before returning it to his pocket.

“What was left in Officers Hopps’ apartment is called an Ouanga (O-anga) Bag, and a rather nasty one at that. I think you can guess what they are for. I’m not surprised or offended that you could get the two mixed up. I am surprised that you could diagnose the cause of Hopps’ condition by her behavior and a simple smell. Normally I would accept that you believe what you told Eilerson and Wolford, except Phil didn’t quite buy your story, and no one who thought that chemistry was the cause would be clutching a talisman at the sight of it.” Bogo nodded to Nick.

Nick was dumbstruck at the revelation about his superior. “Are, are you a...”

“A Hougan (HO-gan)? A Priest of Bondye? No, there are very few Lwa that I get along with; almost as few as people I get along with, so a spiritual calling was not in my path. That doesn’t mean I don’t believe or practice, and it certainly doesn’t mean I can’t tell when some Bokur is trying to cast a spell on one of my officers. Which brings me to my third point. You also recognize what has actually happened, and have managed to put enough spin on it to others that they are willing to accept an impossible proposition - curses are real and those who cast them a real threat, in terms that stretch, but don’t break scientific reason. Luckily for us,” the Chief lifted the evidence bag to his eye, “…whatever sorcerer put this together used a shortcut, and included a crushed Nighthowler blossom; likely both for it’s more esoteric properties and its link to you and Hopps. That gives us a legal in, since Nighthowlers are now officially a controlled botanical.”

Bogo set the evidence bag back in his desk drawer. “Nick, I’m going to ask something of you that could mean the end of my career if anyone found out.”

Nick sat up straight, as the Chief had never used his given name before. “Whatever you need sir!”
Bogo snorted. “You say that now. I need you and Hopps to engage in a Witch Hunt.” Nick’s ears lay back at that. “Officially, you are being placed on this case due to the likelihood of continuous, active targeting, as well as the ‘culturally esoteric nature’ of the group we are pursuing, and Hopps’ familiarity with the Nighthowler plant. Unofficially, you are the only officer in this precinct who is likely to take the real threat posed seriously. You’re both basically on your own here.”

Nick thought for a second. “Not necessarily sir; I might know a guy.” He smirked when Bogo muttered under his breath, ‘Of course you do,’ “Alright sir. They’re not going to stop coming for me and Hopps just because we managed to block one attack. One condition though, sir.”

The Cape Buffalo snorted. “And that is, Officer?”

“You get to explain all this to her.” Nick might not be able to get a chuckle or a smirk out of the Chief, but he considered it a victory to watch him blanche at the thought of having to explain their case to the diminutive officer.
It was two weeks before Judy was psychologically cleared for duty. In that time she had taken the second week to go home and visit her parents’ farm. Nick had been invited as well, but could only stay the weekend. He used the intervening time to gather every bit of information he could about the Ouanga Bag; from what it was made of, to the exact proportions of its contents. He was able to spin it to his coworkers as ‘building a profile’. It wasn’t even a lie, even if there wasn’t a National Law Enforcement Database registry of known warlocks and trademarks.

When Judy came back to the city, Nick treated her to a spa day at the Mystic Springs during one of their ‘acclimation days’ where she wouldn’t have to strip down or see all of Yax. She suspected something might be up, but it wasn’t enough of a concern to make her refuse a day of pampering. When she headed in for her first night shift back, she was ready to face anything the world had to throw at her.

Nick stood outside their joint cubicle as Judy slowly walked out of Bogo’s office. “Doin okay there Fluff?”

She slowly looked up at him, her mouth slightly agape. “You are not going to believe what the Chief just told me.”

He smirked and shook his head. “Oh no, I could believe it.” She started at that. “Come on partner. We need to get to Happytown and check in with an old friend.” Nick glanced at Judy once they
were in the cruiser and heading out. “Just to recap so we’re on the same page; what did the Chief
tell you? Bullet points’ll do.”

She looked sidelong at her partner, then crossed her arms and frowned. “Point one: we’re on the
case, despite being targeted by our as yet unknown suspect. Point two: that wasn’t a chemical
reaction I had that caused me to think I had killed you and nearly kill myself. Point three: trust you
to know how best to move forward with the investigation.”

He nodded, which only made her frown deepen. “Alright. First, we’re going to Laugh with Crows.”
Judy sputtered slightly, causing Nick to chuckle. “Michael Laugh with Crows is, well he’s a
wizard.”

“Pull off on Fleece Ave. We’re going to the hospital to get you checked out.”

“Nothin doin, Honeybun. Bogo said trust me, so trust me.”

“I trust you with my life but this is absurd, Nick! Who believes in magic anymore?”

Nick turned down Pack Street and pulled to the side of the road. “Who believes that someone can
wave their paws over a glass of grape juice and use it to remove sin?”

“Now you wait one carrot pickin minute, buster! That’s my...”

“You’re religious belief as passed down to you by your family for generations, just like Bogo and
just like Laugh with Crows.” Judy closed her jaw hard enough for Nick to wince. “Remember this
is Zootopia: anyone can be anything, so you’re going to run into people who don’t believe the
same way you do, but still believe as vehemently. The, Bokur I think is what Bogo said, certainly
believes, and that alone makes them dangerous. They can justify anything they want through
righteous fervor, and they definitely have the knowhow to make it work.”

“We’re not talking divine transubstantiation or the laying on of hands Nick, we’re talking about
curses and evil spirits! If this, any of it, was real then why don’t we hear about it more? Why don’t
we see it?”

Nick pulled back into the road and continued on. “Because we don’t want to. Because the world is
scary enough without otherworldly powers we have no control over getting directly involved, and
because it sticks to the fringes of society: the ultra rich, who can literally afford to be crazy, and the
 crushingly poor who have nothing else to turn to. Everybody else has means to get what they need,
 as long as they keep out of the fringes. We’re here.” Nick pulled into the lot in front of a turn-of-the-century Brown-Stone with a sign out front that advertised, “Michael LwC Investigations, PI, CID”.

She turned to her partner as she started to unbuckle. “A bounty hunter Nick, really?”

“Hey, there are parts of Happytown beat-cops just don’t go. Michael and Mandy here are as close
to police support as some of these mammals get.” Nick walked up to the front door and rang the
bell that was hung there. Judy gave him yet another arch look as she walked up. He shrugged his
shoulders. “I’ll let him explain it.”

The door opened to reveal a statuesque vixen in flannel and jeans that was easily a head taller than
Nick. Judy felt a sudden rush of jealousy which she quickly stomped down. This was made all the
more difficult as the vixen beamed at Nick. “Little Red! Oh it’s so good to see you! And this is
Judy I take it? Mandy Malin.” She thrust her paw out to the diminutive rabbit.

Judy grasped the appendage by reflex. “That’s right; Judy Hopps, ZPD.”

“Well Nicky, I know from your call that you really wanted to see Mikey, but he’s on a case down
by the old warehouse district near Oxbow Wharf.” She leaned in putting a paw to her muzzle
conspiratorially. “Between you and me, I think this one is a little more than he can handle by
himself, if you know what I mean. I’d be there with him, but I have to wait on this call, and with
Mikey...” Judy wondered at the knowing look that passed between the two foxes.

“Absolutely Mandy. We’ll head out and check up on him right away.” Nick smirked and gave a
two finger salute before turning and heading for the cruiser.

Once Judy caught up and was back in the car, she looked at Nick with barely hidden fear and
jealousy. “What, may I ask, was that?”

Nick started towards the old shipping district. “That, dear Carrots, is what three hot meals a day
every day while growing up can do for a fox. Granted, Mandy’s about the tallest vixen you’ll ever
meet, but still, growing up on the streets didn’t do me any favors. And you can stop grinding your
teeth; in case you didn’t notice, she’s very much, a taken vixen.”
At that moment, Judy wanted nothing more than to scoop Nick up and take him from the city that seemed to want nothing more than to destroy him. “I’m sorry Nick.”

“It’s okay Fluff, I knew the after effects of that, Ouija Bag or whatever...”

“No Nick; I keep thinking of you in terms of my life, a happy home with loving family and enough to eat and no one hating me because I was born different than them, and, and I’m so sorry that I can’t do anything to...” She hadn’t even noticed that Nick had pulled over again until she was pulled out of her seat into a bone crushing hug.

“You do more than you know, every day when you get up and work beside me. I wasn’t kidding about the whole ‘being a better ME when I’m around you’ thing. No one but mom has ever given me that.” He pulled her back and looked into her eyes. “Ready to go make the world a better place, even if it is weirder than you thought?”

She couldn’t even talk around how wide she was smiling at that moment, so she simply hummed and nodded.

...

Nick and Judy had parked the cruiser just outside of the Oxbow Warf district on the border of Happytown and the Rain Forest District, and called in their location. Judy did her best to distract herself from her growing unease as they moved through the now abandoned shipping warehouses. “Soo, you said Michael was a wizard; are we talking ‘Harry Munich Files’ wizard or ‘Harry Trotter’ type?”

Nick snorted, then sneezed. “More like, ‘how did you get that guy to sell you a Brownstone for that little’ or a, ‘a swarm of bees came out of nowhere and went after just that one guy’ kind of wizard. Don’t ask me how he does what he does, but I can only explain it in terms of magic. He originally offered me a job.”

For all Nick trusted Judy, he was often sparing with his life story, and Judy always loved to learn more. “Really? Doing what?”

“Banking, taxes, anything dealing with modern computers. I once saw him look crossly at a cell phone in a mammals hoof and it just caught fire, and this was before they started using Lithium batteries.”
Judy shot a sceptical look to her friend. “Alright, so why didn’t you take the job.”

“I did, for about six months; then I had to quit.”

“What? Why?”

“Cause I wanted him to succeed.” Nick thought he hid the pain of the memory well, of his friend struggling to make a profit while banks rejected his business because of his association with Nick. Then he felt Judy’s paw in his. He closed his eyes and relaxed, then continued their exploration of the warehouses. “Anyway, that’s when he met Mandy: she had a job at Western Savings and Trust, but she hated it, and Mike was over the moon for her as soon as he set eyes on her. Took me twelve years to...”

There was a low droning sound coming from one of the nearby buildings before all the windows blew out. Nick went to call it in when he noticed his radio had died. “Judy, check your kit!” The rabbit paused in her dash to notice that, like Nick, all her electronics were dead.

She looked to Nick just before one of the service doors of the warehouse flew open and a coyote in a trench coat came running out on all fours. “Do not want!” Judy was about to ask what he meant when the side of the warehouse was smashed open and a massive elephantine creature wreathed in fire with two trunks and four tusks came thundering out. “Do Not Want!”

Nick and Judy stood agog at the monstrosity bearing down on them. There was no possible way for something like...

“Run you idiots!” The two police officers were jolted out of their fuege as the coyote grabbed them when he ran past. The three bolted with the enraged creature following close behind. As they ran, Judy saw the latran reach into his coat and throw something behind them. He gave a sharp whistle and snapped his digits, and there was a sudden bright flash behind them followed by a tremendous roar. As Nick and Judy were dragged into a nearby building, she saw the creature rubbing its eyes. The three sagged against the walls of the small office trailer and heaved breaths.

“What, is that?!” Judy gasped out.

“Brahma Ganesh.” The coyote wheezed out while rifling through his pockets.
Judy gaped for a moment. “What?!”

“Brahma Ganesh! Did I stutter?”

“Mike!” Nick snapped with bared teeth.

The coyote jolted for a moment and looked at the two mammals with him. “Ah, cheese Nick. I forget you’d be lookin for me. You, ah, kinda caught me at a bad time. Sorry Miss, uh, Officer Hopper?”

“Hopps.” Judy glared at Mike. “Officer Judy Hopps. Are you trying to tell me you came out here looking for, what, a Hindu god?!”

“What, Mr. Devadas? No, his wife thought he was cheating on her. She hired me to get evidence so she could file for a divorce without setting off the terms of the prenup. This’ll certainly make the annulment go through. Aha!” He pulled out a set of street chalk, an orienteering compass and a slide rule. “Look, I wouldn’t ask this normally, but I need Mr. Devadas back in the building he came out of, just not right away. If I’d have known what was going on here ahead of time, I’d have brought Mandy along. Can you two keep him distracted for about five minutes?”

“How the hell do you expect us to keep that thing occupied?” Nick looked incredulous.

“Just tell him who you are Nick.” Judy groused. “You say you know everybody, and about half of everyone you know seems out to kill you.” She stood up and flexed her feet. “We’re not going to stop to check the time, so how will we know when to lead it back?”

“Oh, so you really do know Nick!” The coyote snarked as he stood up. “When I’m ready, he’ll come all on his ownsies; just keep out of his way when that happens. I promise, full disclosure when we aren’t being hunted by a mammalian sock puppet.”

Everyone nodded and slowly made their way outside. The monster that was Mr. Devadas was rooting nearby. Nick closed his eyes and took a calming breath, then stepped out. “Hey there Mr. Ganesh. Do I owe you money?” The possessed mammal turned and laid eyes on Nick, then bellowed in rage and charged. As the two mammals shot past the building, Mike ran for the warehouse as Judy headed to where they had parked the cruiser.
Nick was starting to tire when the beast was struck in the side by a wailing black and white car. He rushed up to help Judy out of the now totaled cruiser. As they were backing away, Judy stared at the carnage. “Do you think your friend will be upset if we broke his demi-god before he could ‘work his magic’?"

Nick smiled down at her and was about to respond when the cruiser rolled to the side to reveal a bruised Ganesh, missing one tusk. “We’re sorry?!” They both bolted as the behemoth started to chase them again. Suddenly, the creature stopped. It looked back at the original warehouse and howled in renewed rage and charged back, with Nick and Judy desperately trying to keep up. They had fallen several seconds behind when the creature entered the warehouse. There was a flash of light and a crack like thunder as every street light within several blocks went out.

Once they had made it inside, they saw Mike standing in the back of a candle filled area. Slowly fading lines crisscrossed the floor where a normal bull Indian Elephant lay almost unmoving save for his gasping. Dominating the middle of the space was a grotesque altar made from the severed heads of mammals, their final moments of terror and agony forever etched on their faces.

Mike slowly made his way over to them. “First lesson about magic: the more you want,” he looked hauntingly at the altar, “...the more it costs.”

The call Judy had made just before using the cruiser as a battering ram paid off, as they only waited five minutes before TUSK units from the Second and Fifth Precincts showed up, along with a criminalistics team from the First. Close on their heels were Mandy Malin in an almost stereotypical bounty hunter classic muscle car, and Chief Bogo in his official city sedan.

As the irate vixen lectured Mike for scaring her and leaving her behind, Chief Bogo walked tiredly towards his subordinates. “One, day.” He held up a hoof to forestall any comment. “You have been back on the beat together for One, Day, and this is what happens.” He gestured to the macabre scene around them.

The bull elephant was more coherent by now. “I was gonna be a living God! I’d a done it too, if it weren’t for those meddling kits and their dumb coyote!” As he said that, two of the Tusk officers were hoisting Mr. Devadas to his feet. The motion caused him to throw up, and several officers joined him as the partially digested remains of two mammals spilled onto the floor.

Nick cleared his throat while covering his snout. “In all fairness, Chief, None of us expected this.”
Judy turned away from the ghastly sight and focused on her superior. “That’s right sir. According to both Mr. Laugh with Crows and Ms. Malin, this was a routine PI snoop job.”

The vixen hmpfed. “No such thing officer; if I hadn’t been knee deep in dealing with this black hearted cabal, I’d have been right here beside him.” She punctuated by flicking Michael’s ear, even as her tail wrapped protectively around him. Everyone in the warehouse froze at the words, ‘black hearted cabal’.

Mike rubbed his tender ear. “She means the Pipefitters Union; the furnace is original to our building, and new city emission regulations have turned it into a thing.”

The assembled cops all shivered for a moment at the thought of dealing with the Unions, then turned back to their respective tasks. The Cape Buffalo snorted then refocused on his two smallest officers. “Alright. So why were you two looking for Mr. Crows.” He sent a glare to the coyote when he muttered, ‘It’s Laugh with Crows’, then glared at Nick and Judy.

Nick had by then gotten a small tube of ‘Vixen’s Vapor Rub’ and applied some to the end of his snout. “Hwa, that stings. -ahem- Mike here has very close ties to the, fringe elements in society. I was hoping to bring him on as a consultant in identifying some of the more, esoteric bits of evidence we’d collected.”

One of the Rhino officers from the second walked over. “Not until we get all this sorted out. Come on Yote,” both Judy and Mandy bristled at the slander while Mike and Nick simply shrugged, “…we’ve got your interview room all set up.”
Nick and Judy slumped outside of the Second Precinct house while waiting for Michael to finish his deposition. They themselves had only finished the process a few minutes earlier, though given the night they’d already had, they felt like they had been in there for hours rather than the actual 45 minutes. Various medium and large mammals at home on or near the water walked past the two while glancing at them with varying mixes of curiosity and alarm. Nick stared down one particularly disgusted capybara who stormed away. As the massive rodent stormed off, Nick scratched as a suddenly warm spot under his Evil Eye amulet.

Putting the angry mammal from his mind, he turned his attention to the rabbit next to him. “How you holding up, Bun?” Nick let one of his paws rest against Judy’s while they sat.

Judy leaned against him and groaned. “Humiliated; I didn’t know what to say about what happened, so I pulled the whole, ‘distraught bunny’ routine. Detective Mills bought it, but I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to show my muzzle at this station again. How about you?” She turned her head and rested her chin on his shoulder. “I’ll bet you managed to spin some kind of tale to make this all seem like it was a cult conspiracy.”

He smirked and kissed her nose. “Nope. Like the badge says, ‘Trust, Integrity, Bravery’. I told them the truth.” Judy all but jolted at his statement. “We came to Happytown to find Michael, were sent to Oxbow, encountered Mr. Devadas running amok, and helped subdue him. We had an equipment failure, so they’ll have to take our word for it.”

Judy turned her head and looked at the passing mammals. “And they’ll just accept that explanation.” There was no question in her voice.

“Pretty much. Give a mammal a plausible solution to an impossible scenario, and they’ll accept it no matter how weak the evidence.”

She shivered and snuggled closer to Nick. “I wonder how many situations I’ve just accepted. What, what about God?” Nick looked down at her in concern as she continued. “Where was God in all this, when Mr. Devadas was...”
Nick wrapped his arm around his mate and hugged her close. “If I had to guess, he was making sure we were there in time to help Michael.” He glanced up, then stood and helped Judy to her paws. “Come on, Mike’s done. Let’s get out of here so we can get to the bottom of our own mystery.”

Michael walked out of the precinct with his paws in his pockets while Mandy stalked behind him, her tail twitching in agitation. “I don’t know how or why you put up with that speciet crap, Mike. It just makes me so...OOHH!”

She was about to spin around when Michael hooked a paw through her arm and kept her moving away from the building. “Because I’ve been dealing with it since I was a pup.”

“I know, I know, ‘The Owl strikes at the noisy mammal’.” She cast one last glare at the Precinct. “It doesn’t make it right.”

“Testify, sister.” Judy gave a wane smile as she tugged on Nick’s arm. “Come on; Chief Bogo gave us a piece of evidence we need looked at, and you two are the mammals with the know-how on this sort of thing.”

... With Judy’s fears about Nick and Mandy put to rest, she was better able to appreciate the decor of Mandy and Michael’s home/office. Everything had a noir detective feel to it. The walls were festooned with memorabilia and citations, including Michael’s PI license and Mandy’s certification as a Bail Bondsman. There was a large wood-burning stove/oven which Judy’s nose told her got regular use. The kitchen had a proper icebox for food storage, and there was what looked like a modified gramophone. Glancing at the collection of records, she raised an ear when she saw the latest “Fallout Pups” album.

Mike chuckled, drawing her attention. “Just because I can’t use modern amenities, doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy modern things. There’s even an old theater in H-Town I can go and see all the summer blockbusters, a month or so after release.”

Mandy came in with two beers and two root beers. “Okay, so now that that hullabaloo is done with for the moment, what can we do for Zootopia’s finest?” She settled on the armrest of the chair Michael was in, while Nick and Judy settled into the loveseat across from them.
Nick pulled the evidence bag taken from Judy’s apartment out of his thigh pocket and set it on the coffee table. He was about to speak when Judy rested a paw on his arm. “Let me.” He gave her a raised eyebrow which earned him another wane smile. “I need to say this out loud Nick, or I’ll just keep denying it really happened.”

Everyone was focused on her now. “Two weeks ago, Nick and I took part in a series of ops including a bust at ‘Zandor’s Palace’ in the RFD.” Both Mike and Mandy sucked in a breath and glanced at the Ouanga Bag in front of them. “That night, person or persons unknown broke into my apartment, planted that, and nearly caused me to commit suicide.” She felt as if one weight had been lifted from her at the admission, only to have another fall over her. Nick draped an arm over her as she shivered slightly. “We need to know who may have made this. They’re willing to go after cops, and we really don’t have any way to respond.”

Nick took out a sheet of paper. “This is everything forensics got from the bag and its contents. We’re hoping whoever this Bokur is, has a very specific way of making and using these.”

Mike ignored the bag and took the sheet. “You’re not entirely wrong; for most workings like this, you need specific conditions, specific offerings. It’s easier with a congregation.” Judy hissed at that. “I could call it a following or a Cabal, but it amounts to the same thing. Magic lesson two: magic isn’t an innate power possessed by only the chosen few. It’s a skill, like driving or web design. You can learn it or even master it, but if you don’t have a car or a computer, it doesn’t do you any good.”

“So with this Ooga Booga Bag,” everyone snorted at Judy, “... the Buggerer...”

“Bokur.” Mike gently corrected.

“The cop-killing sonuvabitch whom I will call whatever I please because screw them!” Judy took a calming breath as Nick massaged her neck. “Sorry. The Buggerer, would have made a sacrifice, summoned something to put in the bag, then given it instructions?”

Mandy snorted slightly. “More like got the whole gang together, asked ‘pretty please with a cherry on top’ and hoped whatever answered didn’t just bend the lot of them over a barrel for ringing it up. But yeah; ceremony, sacrifice, pretty please and voila: arcane hand grenade.”

Nick furrowed his brow. “When you say ’sacrifice’, are we talking another Mr. Devadas?”
Mike shook his head. “Not likely; as I said, it’s easier with a congregation. Mr. Devadas was compensating for a lack of followers and going the brute force method. With a group, you don’t need nearly as much. Think of it like this: if one mammal knocks on your door and says they have a five dollar bill for you if you do them a favor, you’ll ignore them. If a hundred people were outside all saying the same thing, you’d probably answer the door. If one mammal came to your door offering a thousand dollars, you’d also probably answer.”

Mandy nodded. “Mr. Devadas’ mass sacrifice was the magical equivalent of waving a Publisher’s Clearing House sweepstake check. Who ever came after you, was more like an entire Bunny-Scout troop showing up with free samples.”

Judy scrunched her muzzle up. “We’re going to have to go after these mammals where they are to secure evidence of wrongdoing, and this is sounding like we’d need to take down a whole cult.”

Mike looked at her over the note again. “I’d advise against going after this mammal in their place of power unless you have no other choice.” He set the note down. “I’ll start looking into this once we clear up one little issue.”

Judy cocked her head to the side until Nick piped up while returning the evidence to his pocket. “The ZPD is willing to extend a short-term contract for civilian consultancy on the matter of this case. Mandy can come by the station tomorrow when legal and finance open up.”

Judy wanted to be incensed at the idea of negotiating for services on a case, but relented at the relieved expressions on Mike and Mandy’s muzzles. This was their livelihood, and they couldn’t afford to work for free; not with the Pipefitters looming over them, anyway.

... 

Judy sat beside Nick and Chief Bogo as Mandy Malin reviewed the terms of the contract that legal had drawn up. “... and nothing beyond the consultancy listed here? Our special licenses only grant so much in arresting powers, and the people you seem intent on going after aren’t the sort to go quietly.” Judy saw Mandy’s eyes shift between the familiar urge to rush headlong into the thick of ‘it’, and the urge to keep her partner as safe as possible.

Bogo leaned back in his seat slightly. “We will be dealing with that matter in house; we are not entirely without resources.”
Judy internally balked at the Chief’s implication. She was still reeling from last night. That hadn’t been street corner chicanery or some stage performance: Bishwa Devadas had sacrificed 18 mammals and consumed their flesh in a bid to become a living god, and had very nearly succeeded. It flew in the face of everything she had been raised to believe: the power of law over chaos, the power of God over the Devil, the power of reason over mysticism, and yet here they sat negotiating the services of a sorcerer to ID a Voodoo witch doctor that cursed her.

She jolted slightly when Nick took her paw under the table, bringing her attention back to the conversation as Mandy slid the documents back across the table. “Mike’s going to be back at the Res for the next couple of days; sweat lodge, spirit walks and such.”

Bogo nodded and glanced at his officers. “That might not be a bad idea for everyone involved.” He stood as Nick retrieved the fox sized legal documents. “It will likely take the rest of the week for this to clear finance; once that’s done, I’ll have a bonded courier run a notarized copy to your address and we can move forward on this.”

Mandy smiled and nodded then headed out the small conference room, while Nick and Judy headed back towards the admin offices to file the contract for approval by finance. They were between floors in the elevator when Nick hit the stop button. “You okay there Fluff?” Despite the teasing nickname, the worry in his eyes was plain to see.

She took a shuddering breath. “No Nick; it’s all so real, and it shouldn’t be. It shouldn’t be possible to Voodoo curse someone, but it happened, and it shouldn’t be possible to call down a Hindu god but we saw that ourselves!” She turned and clung to Nick, who kneeled down beside her. “I want to go home; I want mom and dad and my kin. I want to go back to when the scariest thing in a darkened alley was an armed drug pusher, not pagan gods and warlocks.”

Nick engulfed her in a hug which she returned full force. “I want home Nick. I’m going to request Chief let me off for a couple of days so I can go home. I’ll sit down with Father Hasse and try to wrap my head around all of this.” She looked up at her fox. “You’ll be okay too, right?”

He smirked at her. “I haven’t lasted this long, in or out of the streets without my own resources. It’s been a while since I sat down with Finnick and just talked about Old Times and Old Ways. Say hi to the old Father for me.” He helped her stand up. “Just promise to...”

“I know, I know, ‘fresh fruit pies’.” She chuckled as she straightened out her uniform and started the elevator moving again. “Blueberries are out of season, but I should be able to swing some strawberry-rhubarb streuselkuchen.”
“You are too good to me.”

“I know.” She sauntered out of the elevator. “That’s why we’re hitting the gym as soon as I get back; don’t think I didn’t see how winded you were after just five minutes of playing tag with Mr. Devadas last night.”
Do you believe in Magic?

Chapter Summary

Our intrepid heroes prepare themselves for the conflict to come.

Judy loved Bunnyburrow. Aside from her lifelong quest to become the first rabbit police officer and the attendant social awkwardness that was brought with it, the Tri-Burrows would always be summers spent playing by various spring-fed streams, autumn harvest festivals, Christmas morning by the fireplace, and the first blossoms of spring. Bunnyburrow was also a place of mysteries from her childhood; the stone foundations of the old Tuathanac farm that burned down in ‘65 with no cause and no survivors, the Hanging Oak that always had more crows than leaves, the covered bridge at Turner’s Ford that nobody crossed after sundown.

Throughout all of that there was one unifying institution: St. Dietrich Bunhoeffer Lutheran Church. Father Hasse was the head priest there, and had baptized, married or buried every Hopps for as long as Judy could remember. She had opted to drive home, wanting to visit the old German Hare before spending time with her family; she had questions that needed answering, and she wasn’t sure she could ask them if her kin were listening in.

Judy pulled into the church lot and looked at the building. It was a Mid-Century Modern affair designed to look like a stylized head of New-Cross Cabbage. She fondly remembered climbing the detached belfry on a dare from her brothers, with a promise of a weeks allowance from each if she rang all three bells; she didn’t get the chance to spend her spoils until three months later when her mother finally lifted her being grounded. She had been here not one week ago with the rest of the family, but the last few days left her staring at the building with newfound wonder and trepidation.

“Judy! I didn’t expect to see you so soon.” She was startled out of her reminiscence by the paternal old hare in a black Clerical shirt and tweed coat. “Mr. Loperty had wanted me to come visit him today, but his sons all came to visit at once so I find myself with an open schedule. I was about to head out back to tend to the garden. Would you care to join me?”

For a moment, Judy was inclined to put the coincidence from her mind. However she forced herself to consider the possibilities: William Loperty was 62 years old, and his children were all grown and moved out. There had been a feud within the family following his divorce, and old Bill was left alone. It seemed unlikely that his children would suddenly turn up to reconcile on the day Judy needed to talk to Father Hasse. The implications were both comforting, and terrifying.

They walked around the rotunda towards the church garden where Father Hasse grew the grapes
he used to make the sacramental wine, as well as the small corn and wheat crop for the Host. “The Almanac seems to point to an early frost this year, and I’m debating leaving some of the younger grapes on the vine and try for an Ice-wine.”

Judy relaxed slightly at the comfortable small talk. “I don’t suppose we’ll taste any of that at the communion table?”

“No, my dear. I think I’ll auction the lots off to raise funds for the Food Bank and the Evangelical mission.”

They arrived at the plot behind the church and looked out over the still green crop. “So, what brings Bunnyburrow’s most famous daughter home on such short notice? You aren’t glowing, so that fox of yours hasn’t proposed yet. You’re also not weeping so he hasn’t betrayed you and I know there hasn’t been a death in the family.”

Judy slowed to a stop while looking pensively at the priest. “Father, do you... do you believe in Magic?”

...

Nick sauntered into the bar wearing the finest suit he owned. It was force of habit; despite its legal status as a public house, this wasn’t an establishment you entered without both express permission and supreme confidence. The entire interior was gilt in brass and red velvet over polished red oak and mahogany from floor to ceiling and from one wall to the other. It was also entirely populated by foxes. Finnick’s booming voice could be heard coming from a corner booth near the kitchen doors. Nick put on his trademark smirk and headed over.

He was ten feet away from the booth when Finnick noticed him. “Well there’s a strange sight; looks like a fox but smells like a Pig! I know you ain’t come here lookin for trouble Nick, so are you lookin for some side action?” The skulk that was paying him court laughed; some with sycophantic giggles, some with much more malice.

Nick chuckled and shook his head. “I’m not here to beg chump-change from some dirty little sand dog.” There was a mix of titters and hisses at the insult. Nick took off his glasses and leveled a no-nonsense look at the fennec. “I’m here to speak with the **Voievodul Zootopiei** .”

All movement and sound at the booth stopped. Finnick looked at his old partner for a moment,
then snapped his claws. The booth cleared of all but Nick and Finnick as a small platter of Ostrich Mici and two glasses of brandy were set down between the two foxes.

Finnick raised his glass to Nick. “Salud!” Nick returned the gesture and the two took healthy pulls from their respective glasses. “You ain’t called on me like this since that business between Mama Shanti and Mr. Big. Speak yo mind kit.”

“Funny you should mention Mama Shanti, cause what I’m here about started about three weeks ago in her old territory.”

... 

The hall reverberated with a primal drum beat as mammals, large and small writhed in an ancient dance. The rhythm crescendoed as the sacrificial bird was slain. The Hougan called upon the Lwa to bless the congregation amidst songs older than written language. When the service ended, the head priest, a female Jackal with piercing yellow eyes, walked over to Bogo. “Walk with me Idris.”

The two mammals made their way to a small cistern the Jackal used to clean her paws. “You have a troubled look about you. You’ve also been better about feeding your Gris-Gris, which tells me you’re scared. Don’t look at me like that boy: I tame fiercer beasts than you twice a day, so out with it.” She turned to face him. “What has the mighty Chief Idris Bogo running to church this day?”

Were she any other animal besides his own kin, he might have been insulted by the disrespect. Instead, he huffed and squatted down. “Two weeks ago, a Bokur attacked one of my officers, in her home, with an Ouanga Bag.”

... 

The old hare considered the doe in front of him. “You were always such a pragmatic kit, and not really given to hyperbole; so focused on your goal of being the first Zootopian Police rabbit. What brought this on?”

Judy fidgeted for moment, then looked at Father Hasse. “Something happened two weeks ago, and something else happened last night. When I came home the first time, it was because someone cursed me.” She waited a moment for a reaction from the old priest. When he simply looked at her,
she pressed on. “Last night I, I saw a mammal turn themselves into a pagan god. He devoured 18 innocent mammals and became something vile and... Father I don’t know what to do! I don’t know what to think about all this!” She was crying while looking at the hare. “Nick knows about all of this and I think he’s bothered by it but it’s not impossible to him. How is this possible?!”

Father Hasse guided her over to one of the benches near a gardening shed and sat her down. “Child, you may speak to me without consequence. Tell me what has happened.”

Judy told him everything.

... 

Finnick steepled his paws as Nick finished his tale. “The Chief sent me and Judy ‘home’ while Mike gets purified. After that business on the RFD border, I’m thinking my luck might not be up to snuff.” He pulled the ‘Evil-Eye’ amulet out of his shirt. Both were slightly alarmed at the dulled hues and small crack in the stone. “I need one of the Chovihani to craft something with a bit more oomph than this. I also need the rest of our people on alert. Whoever’s taken over for Mama, they don’t seem to care about collateral damage.”

Finnick leaned back. “That’s a bit of a tall order, but I’ll see what the old vixens can cook up. Can’t do anything for your străin iepur; Judy ain’t Romani, and nothin I can do about that.”

Nick nodded and looked at the table. “I know, you can’t afford to take sides as it would put the community in the crossfire. She’s heading home to get, I don’t know, a blessing I guess? Her eyes are open, so when this mammal tries something again she’ll see it coming at least.”

The fennec snorted a laugh. “I almost pity the fool that tries something with that doe then; you and her done racked up quite the record of powerful mammals brought low.” He picked up his nearly empty brandy glass and considered it. “You remember that piece of advice ol’ Auntie Vixen used to give?”

“Keep out of my blackberry patch or I’ll tear your tail off and flog you through the streets with it!” Both foxes laughed for a moment, and Nick picked up his glass. “You mean about how power is useless unless it’s wielded?”

“Yeah, that one. Magic like you been seein lately is a tool, like a gun; no more, no less. And just like a gun, what makes it dangerous is the mammal using it.” He raised his glass to Nick who
returned the gesture. “You watch yo self out there, tovarăš. Whoever’s comin after you two is gonna start getting desperate, and ain’t nothin more dangerous than a desperate mammal with a gun.”

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“Wilde seems confident about the connection to Mamma Shanti’s old cabal.” Idris stared into the growing cloud of tobacco smoke coming from the Hougan Jackal, within which shifted almost-forms and symmetrical shapes. Idris fidgeted uncomfortably; it was one thing to believe and have faith, but it was entirely a different matter to see magic at work in front of him. “However much of a snarky pest he can be, Nick’s intuition is generally spot on. That tells me either the old witch isn’t dead, or her apprentice is taking a more active role in the Bayou Gangs. Either way my officers, to say nothing of the city, are at risk.”

“This is tricky business boy. The police can’t take a Bokur in their own territory, and I’ll not risk my congregation in a gang war.” The jackal drew in a breath, held it in for a second, then blasted it out in a single cough. The cloud imploded in on itself in the shape of a cross with a walking stick beside it, the Veve of Papa Legba, before fading away. She considered the fading image, then turned to Bogo “That said, I’ll not leave you at this crossroads, left to the wiles of some sorcerer and their malign Lwa. Give me time, and I’ll work up a pact with Papa Legba; when the time comes, you take the Ju-Ju to this pretenders camp and I don’t care if Baron Samedi himself is standing in front of you, you and yours will come to no harm.”

Bogo seemed to deflate in relief as the oppressive sense of others passed with the cloud. “Thank you Mama Cherise.”

The Hougan waved him off. “Keep your thanks, just bring your family by more than once a season. The Lwa aren’t doctors and faith isn’t like oil changes; they don’t do regular visits and they don’t care about excuses. You know what’s at stake.”

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Judy and Father Hasse had sat in silence for a minute after she had finished her story. She was about to stand when he spoke. “I had a friend when I was going through seminary named Joseph Scharff. He was a pine marten from Bruges, fairly average as far as pine martens go. He went on a Missionary assignment to Korea for three months. He came back pounds lighter and snow-white. He refused to speak about what he saw there but immediately sought out a mentor from the Evangelical Synod who was one of the foremost authorities on demonic possession. Father Scharff has since taken over for him.”
“That’s where your donations to the Evangelical Mission go, isn’t it?” The elder hare started for a moment as Judy continued. “No, it’s not hidden knowledge Father. I’m training to be a detective, so deductive reasoning is kind of a big deal for me.”

He chuckled slightly. “Lord Christ bless you child.” He paused for a moment, then continued when Judy didn’t react. “You’re right, of course. And well it is he’s in country right now looking into something in Pawstin Texas. I’ll get in contact with him tonight. He might have a better idea of what can and should be done. In the meantime,” he stood up and offered a paw to Judy to do the same, “… you should head on home to your family. Will you be here for Sunday Mass?” He smiled when she nodded. “Good. I should have something worked out by then. Remember to place your trust in God; grace comes from Jesus Christ alone. All else is the falsehood of the deceiver.”

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Nick sat alone in his apartment with a wistful grin on his snout after ending his call to Bunnyburrow. Judy wasn’t due back until Monday at the earliest so he’d had to make due with Muzzle timing while her family flitted in and out of the background. Their endless teasing and ‘hints’ asking when he would officially become a member of the family were almost as much a balm to his soul as hearing Judy’s voice. She seemed lighter to him whenever she was back at the warren. Every time he thought about that, he reviewed what he’d need to do to move to the Tri-Burrows; he’d already made friends with one of the Municipal Police Lieutenants, as well as two County Mounties and half a dozen real-estate agents in the area. If it ever came down to it, he could move at a moments notice.

He was startled by a rapid knock at his door. He switched on the app for the two cameras looking at his door and saw a Swift Fox kit nervously holding a small package. When he opened the door the kit simply handed the package to him. “Doamna Bătrân sends her regards.” With that, the kit dashed off to whatever other mischief the old vixen had given him to do.

Once the door was closed and locked, he opened the small box. Nestled inside was a cross as tall as his manual paw from heel to claw tip. It was woven from what his nose told him was a single twig of Yew, with an Evil Eye that looked to somehow be a single piece of Meerschaum, Turquoise and Onyx. His fur stood on end simply holding it. Taking his own Evil Eye out of his shirt, he fed its chain through one of the loops on the back of this new talisman and put them back on. He thought to his and Finnick’s conversation about power and sincerely hoped he’d never need to pull this trigger.

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Idris lounged on his couch with his wife and calf while they watched “Floatzen” for the umpteenth time. His daughter giggled and sang along with the trolls as they extolled Sven as a ‘Fixer-Upper’.
These simple home moments were so few and far between that he wondered how Uhuru put up with him sometimes. He had been prepared to bluster their going to services this morning, but his wife was almost giddy with the prospect of ‘seeing everyone again’. Mama Cherise’s smug look as his family joyfully reconnected with the congregation could have come straight from Wilde.

The Hougan’s demeanor was decidedly less positive, but no less intense when she pawed a small pouch crafted from gator-skin. Her orders to feed it daily, “...with one drop of yer blood...” weighed heavily on him. His reverie was broken when his calf jumped up and rushed off to get a glass of juice. His resolve firmed as he pulled his wife a little closer; whatever he had to endure to protect his family, at home or in Blue, he would do. To Protect and Serve.

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Judy swirled through the crowd at collation after the service. The weather was holding with an Indian Summer and the skies were clear so the green outside the church was covered in rabbits dressed in their Sunday best. There was an illogical twinge of frustration as she remembered her trials of being a ‘stand out’ youth. A simple shake of her head was all that was needed to remind herself that everyone here, no matter how ostentatious their dress, is still not standing out.

What she felt less charitable about were the aside glances and backhanded compliments being directed to the visiting Priest: “Father Hasse is certainly pushing the, ‘Love thine neighbor’ adage to the limit today with that Ferret.” or “Well it’s so nice to see an Ermine rising above themselves like that.” They hid their discomfort with distance and graceful greetings, not wanting to seem prejudiced in front of Father Hasse or his guest. Judy knew the truth though as she was just as disturbed by the pale Pine Marten. They weren’t just disturbed because Father Scharff was a predator; he was an Exorcist and everyone could sense it, even if they didn’t want to admit it.

She squared her shoulders and tossed back her cup of raspberry sun-tea as if it were a shot of liquid courage and walked over to the two priests. Once the Fathers turned to her she extended her paw to the elderly mustelid. “Judy Hopps, it’s a pleasure to meet you Father Scharff.”

She felt a jolt run through her when he grasped her paw and stared into her eyes. She suddenly felt small and very heavy, as if a great burden rested on her shoulders. The sensation passed the moment he relinquished her paw. “My apologies child, but with the nature of your troubles as Lucius has communicated them to me I had to know the measure of your soul.” She caught a hint of green in his paw before turning to head inside. “If you would follow me?” Though phrased as a request, Judy knew in her heart that the command was more than implicit.

Once inside the sacristy, Father Scharff and Father Hasse turned to face her. She considered them for a moment before speaking. “What was that in your paw Father?”
The Pine Marten smirked slightly then held out his paw for her to see. A tarnished coin bearing the likeness of a wolf’s head with a crown of olive leaves rested there. “It is called ‘The Burden of Judas’. There are only 29 others like it in the world, and there will never be any more.” Judy pondered for a moment then gasped in alarm and crossed herself.

Father Hasse huffed out a chuckle at her reaction. “I told you she’d figure it out; she’s a sharp one.”

“That she is.” Father Scharff put the ancient coin back in his pocket and continued. “The weight of sin is born by the soul so the truly iniquitous are prone to ignoring it; this makes that weight felt by the flesh. In the days of the Catholic Inquisition, mammals would be judged and executed by placing one of these on their chest, then asked to sit up. Stories are told of sinful Lions and Aurochs being crushed under the weight of their sins. I can attest to this as fact.” Judy felt almost lightheaded at the prospect having touched so ancient, powerful and terrible an instrument. “Now then, as my colleague explained it you have a problem with a Bokur?”

Judy got her heart under control and met the Pine Marten’s eyes. “Yes, though we are going to deal with the matter internally.” Joseph scowled slightly at that. “I do understand the dangers involved, or at least I understand how out of our depth we are, but we still have to try.”

The scowl never left his muzzle, but it was no longer directed towards her. “With beasts and the bizarre you can afford to be more direct; there are certain universal rules that can be applied. With Cults and Cabals however, there is the mammal element to consider as well. The Fey, even Demons, are bound by the laws of their nature. Mammals are unique in nature in our ability to shun our instincts and nature, and that means those who wield power from beyond are able and prone to, novel applications. It’s why those that dwell beyond are so enraptured by us and seek our servitude; we can do as they never could, and we can be used to commit atrocities they could only dream of.”

“My Chief is a voodoo practitioner and Nick knows a wizard...” Even as she said it, Judy felt a sudden surge of fear; would Father Scharff judge her for the company she kept? Father Hasse seemed to have accepted her and Nick’s involvement, but would she be asked to choose between her family and faith, or her calling and her mate?

Father Hasse seemed to sense her conflict and laid a paw on her shoulder and spoke softly. “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungry, and ye gave me bread: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee
drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” She looked at him through tears she hadn’t even realized she was shedding. “I’ve always prefered the Gospel of Mark over John; the latter may have more poetry to it, but the former has never been used to justify harming or excluding anyone.”

Father Scharff huffed slightly. “While I theologically agree with my more scholarly friend, I would still caution against casual association with those who seek power beyond the Lord Christ. The adage, ‘Power Corrupts’ is not merely idle words.” He looked thoughtfully at something only he could see. “Still, as the bard says, ‘There are more things under Heaven and Earth than even your philosophy has imagined’.” He reached into a drawer beside him and pulled something out then walked towards her.

She looked at the simple medallion shaped like a small ZPD Badge he had placed into her paw. On one side was the image of a winged lion with a spear, while on the other was a short inscription: ‘St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle’. There was the faintest tingling in her spine as she held it. She looked at the snow white priest with slight trepidation.

He nodded after a moment. “Yes, that has more than just the image. I would advise against testing it against the more mundane threats you face; St. Michael has no patience for the foolish, but it will do more against attacks by malign spirits than an Anti-Stab vest.” He continued as she but the medallion on. “Trust in the Lord, not just for protection, but that you are where and with whom you need to be.” She gave a small smile at that as she thought to herself, ‘Not yet, but by tomorrow morning I will be.’
Magical Mystery Tour

Chapter Summary

Nick and Judy begin their pursuit of the Voodoo gangs, as well as confronting some issues closer to home.

Judy walked into the precinct Monday afternoon for her shift with a new sense of purpose. Despite wanting to rush back on the Sunday express, Nick convinced her to relax with her family and take the morning commuter run into Zootopia. She had to admit, the hot breakfast at home before hitting the train did wonders for her mood. Now she was back, and she and Nick were going to buckle down and crack this bizarre case like an egg, just as soon as they got together with Mandy and Mike.

She just needed to meet her fox for shift brief and they could get to work.

“Come on mam, you gotta tell us what she’s like in bed!”

Right after she killed Ralph Fangmeyer and stuffed his remains in an office trash can. She kept her serene expression on her muzzle as she silently approached the bull pen. Half a dozen officers were clustered around her and Nick’s chair.

She could almost taste the snark coming off of Nick. “And why, precisely, do I ‘gotta’? I thought you were in a relationship? Do you need more advice?” There was a round of chuckles and hissing.

The grey wolf straightened up at that. “Oh, you gonna turn it on me? You been sittin on this for a year mam, and with all the time off, consoling her in her time of need?” Judy was sorely tempted to climb him like a rock-wall and show him who needed consoling. “Inquiring minds want to know. Besides, it’s the ‘Bro-Code’: Bros before Does!”

Judy almost wanted to laugh at such a childish idea. She saw Officers Snarlov and Anderson shake their heads in shame at that, at which they noticed Judy standing behind the gaggle. Nadine Fangmeyer and Francine Trunkaby, who had equally disgusted looks at the spectacle before them, glanced over when the other two started slightly. Judy held a digit to her lips and assumed a relaxed parade rest, and waited for Nick to strike.
“Well, when you put it like that...” Judy honestly wondered how the males around him couldn’t sense the smug coming off the fox. Maybe it was just how well they knew each other, but to her it was like the pressure before a thunderstorm. “There is this one thing she really likes; like, ‘drives her Wilde’ likes.” His audience all leaned in, while the peanut-gallery looked at Judy in alarm. She kept her serene smile and held up a paw for patience. “She really enjoys when I,” he paused for effect and his court all leaned in with their tails wagging frantically, “...don’t talk about what we do behind closed doors.”

All the tails froze for a moment then groaned as Francine and Nadine both barked out a laugh. Leo Johnson shot a wounded look at the tigress, only to freeze in panic as he finally saw Judy standing there. Nick cheerily continued. “You could always ask her; I’m sure she’d happily take you down to the ring in the gym and give you a first paw demo of that, ‘Bunny Stamina’ you’re so desperate to learn about. What about it Judy?” The assembled males froze stock still. “Apparently, ‘inquiring minds want to know’ about your endurance and stamina.”

“An excellent idea, Wilde.” Bogo had entered the Bullpen un-noticed by everyone. Ralph Fangmeyer in particular snapped to a panicked Parade Rest as his eyes darted to the one ton mammal who had seemingly snuck up on a pack of apex predators. “Fitness qualls are coming up, and small mammal takedowns have always been a weak point in our training.” The various mammals balked and tried to express their desire not to face Hopps in the ring while rushing back to their seats.

The only mammals not enjoying the floor show were Prance Davis and Nathan Quillion along the back wall. Whatever they were whispering to each other while sneering in Nick’s direction was hushed with a scowl by Nathan when he noticed Judy at the door. Judy had heard from Danny Wolfard, and eventually from Nick about the near altercation with the two junior officers. She did her best to ignore the two most of the time, but she was truly entertaining the thought of, ‘what if the Chief goes for alternate fitness qualls and I can go a few rounds with those two?’ She hopped into the seat next to Nick. He sensed her agitation and gave her paw a quick squeeze under the table before settling in for the brief.

“So two quick related points to add to the docket before we begin: you are all grown mammals, and professionals at that. What I walked into could be construed as sexual harassment by a casual observer. If I hear, or hear about anything like this again, not only will I enforce the ‘Hopps Fitness Option’, I will also schedule every officer and office mammal in the Precinct for mandatory sexual harassment training. Am I clear?” All the levity of the earlier conversation evaporated into tense silence. “Good. Assignments: Fangmeyers,...”

Once the room was cleared of all other patrolmammals, Bogo set his papers down and focused on Nick and Judy. “I am serious about the harassment training, Hopps. I know you, as well as Officers Trunkaby and Fangmeyer are more than capable of holding your own against, ‘the Boys’, but that doesn’t make this sort of thing acceptable.” Both Nick and Judy nodded to the Cape Buffalo but remained silent.
After a moment, the Chief continued. “Legal and Finance finished up the contract for Ms. Malin and Mr. Laugh-with-Crows at close of business Friday, and a courier returned their signed, notarized copy earlier today. You two are heading down to our new experts to see what they know about this, ‘Ouanga Bag’ situation so we can get these Bocour off the streets. I don’t need to tell you two what could happen if something like this becomes a precedent.” The two small officers stood in their chair and saluted Bogo before going down to evidence to pick up the Ouanga Bag and head off to Happytown.

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Nick and Judy’s visit to Mike and Mandy was significantly shorter and more mundane than they had originally expected. Once Mike sat down with the separate contents and the bag they came in, he and Mandy sifted through the items with tweezers and a magnifying glass. “We’re lucky this was made for someone roughly your size.” Mike absently opined while scrutinizing a dessicated Nighthowler blossom. “If we were dealing with some Hoodoo cult out of Ewerope, we could be trying to work with a Poppet sized for a field mouse.”

Nick glanced at his partner who was rapt while watching the two PI’s work. “Um, a what?”

Mandy glanced at him while turning the bag itself inside out. “A Voodoo Doll.” She huffed indulgently when Mike snorted. “They actually have nothing to do with Voodoo, but tell generations of pop-culture gluttons that. Honey, could you pass the jeweler’s loop?” Both Nick and Judy grinned at each other at the casual endearment. They focused back on the esoteric pair when Mandy handed the bag and monocle back to Mike. “Take a look at this stitching. Is this Star?”

Mike dusted his paws off and took the proffered items. After a few moments examination he nodded. “Yup, this is Star’s work alright.” He set the evidence and tool down. “The rest of this is too muddled together to get anything, but the bag itself was made by Lisa Star. She’s a star-nosed mole, works the New-Age craft show circuit selling ‘power amulets’ and whatnot. A few ‘Magic’ shops...” Mike flinched and snorted when Mandy elbowed him lightly for air-quoting, “…New-Age Boutiques if you like, carry her stuff.”

Judy lightly elbowed Nick when he chuckled at the interplay. She shook her head and looked at the two PI’s. “So what can we expect from Lisa?”

Mike sighed and leaned back. “A true believer with no actual understanding of what she believes.” He turned to Mandy when she sent him an arched look. “No I’m not going to be nice about this. Someone has weaponized her skill and naivete and used it to attack a friend. Look at this.” He
handed Judy the bag and jeweler’s loop. “You see all those little green and gold dots on the sides of the bag?”

Judy squinted through the magnifier. “They look like, letters?” She handed the monocle and bag to Nick.

Mike nodded. “I don’t know enough about Voodoo magic to translate, but I know sigils when I see them.”

Nick handed the items back to Mike. “It looks like the little squiggles are woven in to draw a bigger squiggle. The criminalistics report says the bag has silver and gold thread. I’m guessing that is what the squiggles are?”

Mike put everything back in the bag. “Sigils, and yes to both.”

Judy perked up for a moment then slumped. “I’m guessing checking corrosion rates on the silver thread won’t do us much good because ‘magic’.”

Mike looked thoughtful for a moment. “That actually might not be a bad idea.” Even Mandy looked slightly surprised at the statement. “Silver and gold are great conductors for magic, or maybe a semiconductor in silver’s case. They’re both pretty impermeable to magic’s more destructive side effects. It’s why legends about silvered mirrors and silver bullets are so popular; they work.” He gestured to the bag. “If the silver thread is corroded, then it’s more than likely environmental, not arcane and you should be able to date when the bag was made.”

Nick and Judy paused and looked at each other, then the doe looked at their hosts. “This seems, really complex. We were only on the case for a week before the attack, and the craftmanship we’re talking about would take months.”

Mandy nodded. “Yup; which means somebody had this ready and waiting. One of you two really pissed somebody off.”

Nick and Judy headed back to the precinct. “So, Mr. ‘I know everybody’, do you know this Lisa Star?” Judy’s tone was mildly teasing.
Nick smirked at Judy’s snark. “Alack and alas, I know not this lass.” He grinned as Judy snorted a laugh. “I do know the type though. If she’s following the New Age Craft-Faire and Flea-Market circuits, she’ll probably live in a camper or camper van; and these New-Agey types are distrustful of ol’ ‘Big-Brother’, so she’ll be off the grid as much as possible while still owning a car.”

Judy hummed at her mate’s assessment. “I doubt she owns it. We’ve got a lot of assistive technology for mammals, but self driving cars for blind mammals isn’t one of them.” Nick looked about to comment, then just nodded. “We have a few Yenealtean rabbit families in the Tri-Burrows.” She caught the confused look on Nick’s muzzle. “It means ‘New-Old Rabbit’. It’s our version of Neo-Pagans. Most live at the Hazel Commune on Watership Downs; can’t really live the ‘Yenny’ burrow lifestyle in the watershed valley or you’ll be flooded out twice a year.”

Nick arched an eyebrow. “And the point of this intriguing segue is?”

Judy pulled their cruiser into the precinct motor pool. “Because first, Lisa still makes it to the shows to sell her wares; that means someone is driving her to and from. Second, it would also mean someone’s on paw when Lisa needs to travel; that means community, since as you said she’s likely off the grid and won’t have a cell phone. Rather than a camper, I think she lives in a multi-species burrowing commune: somewhere high and dry, but not arid.”

“You know this how?”

Judy shrugged. “Every rabbit tries their paw at digging their own burrow at some point, so it helps to know where you can and can’t burrow.”

Judy was about to leave the car when the doors locked. She turned to see Nicks nearly joyful muzzle. “And where, pray tell, did future Super-Trooper Judy Hopps ‘try her paw’?”

Judy resigned herself to the teasing she would receive. She had complete confidence that not only would Nick not try to hurt her with what he learned, but she was likely to learn something equally silly within a month. “On the banks of Blackberry Creek, so I know this commune,”

Nick held up a digit. “Hypothetical commune, Officer Hopps. Let’s not fall into the trap of inductive reasoning, no matter how sound the theory.”

Judy nodded. “Hypothetical commune, wouldn’t be in the RFD or Sahara Square, and Little
Rodentia is anything *but* ‘off the grid’.

Nick groaned slightly as he unlocked the doors. “Which realistically leaves Alpine Ridge and the Meadowlands. Not to make a Mountain out of a Molehill, but this is literally looking for a Molehill in the Mountains.”

“Scree doesn’t make for stable burrows either, so really just the Meadowlands. But yeah, that’s still a lot of ground to cover. Why don’t you take that stuff down to Criminalistics and see if Harry can get us some photos of the bag we can blow up. I’ll head up to the Chief’s office and fill him in.”

Nick gave her a Scout Salute and headed off. Judy headed up to Bogo’s office and was immediately called in. She made sure the door was closed and climbed into the seat across the desk from the buffalo. “Alright officer, what do we have?”

“Some new details about the bag that Officer Wilde is looking into, and a name for who made it, if not who ordered it, sir.” Judy pulled a small note pad from a belt pouch. “According to Mike and Mandy, the bag was made by a Star-nosed mole named Lisa Star. She apparently works the craft-show circuit specializing in New-Age fare: dream-catchers, amulets and whatnot.” She looked up at her boss. “She also sells to New-Age shops here in the city, but the bag looks to be a custom piece so I doubt we’ll track our attacker that way. Neither one thinks there was malicious intent on her part.”

“Are we going to need any, special precautions, in pursuing this angle?” Bogo tapped his breast pocket.

Judy shook her head and frowned slightly. “Not any more than we’d need to deal with any other political fringe group. Mike described her as a ‘Quixotic true believer’: she’s convinced she has special power, but she’s really just a craft artist.”

Bogo leaned back. “Alight. First, don’t discard the ‘shop’ angle just yet. Word of mouth must have gotten out somehow and a store owner with a business license is less likely to claim ACLU protected status when a cop comes knocking. I’ll have Fangmeyer coordinate the Uni’s to sniff around the craft fairs and flea markets; she’s bucking for Sgt., and this should be a good test. I’ll send her to you once I’ve informed her.” He sat forward and started typing. “In the meantime, I want you and Wilde to pull up everything you can find on this Ms. Star. Forward the pertinent information to Nadine, and keep me updated. Dismissed.”

Judy saluted and headed for her’s and Nick’s cubicle. Once she had the computer searching city records and Zoogle for ‘Lisa Star’, she began cleaning up and sanitizing her notes for other officers.
to review. She was halfway finished when she received a text from Nick which caused her to giggle.

Harry & Harriet’s hairy Harrold baby pictures: HALP!

Her mirth was cut short by a quick knock on the cubicle wall. “Am I interrupting, Hopps?”

Judy looked up to see Nadine Fangmeyer smirking at her over the partition. “No, Nick’s just stuck in the AV lab with Harry.”

The tigress ‘Ah’ed and nodded knowingly. “Chief said I was supposed to come talk to you about this Voodoo case?”

Judy nodded then got the pillow Nick had stashed under the third desk in their cubicle so large mammals could have a place to sit. “Nick’s friend has tentatively ID’d the maker of the bag itself as one Lisa Star.” She turned to her computer and opened the sanitized note file so Nadine could read over her shoulder. “I have a few more things to enter then I’ll send you my notes. I’m still looking for public info on Ms. Star to see if she has an address.”

“Nah, you and Nick have more important things to work on than data-mining. I’ll put Jennings on that; he’s still on light duty after getting those Bot Fly larvae removed.” Both officers shivered slightly. “Anyway I’ll get my minions on this and keep you updated.”

Nick walked into the cubicle. “You have minions? I want minions!”

“You have to grow up first Nick.” Judy teased as she finished her notes and sent them to Nadine.

Nick pouted while stamping his paws. “But I don’t wanna wait that long.”

Nadine levered herself off of the desk. “And on that note, I’m outta here; I have my own kittens to deal with, so I’ll leave this one to you, Hopps. Do you have anywhere in particular you want me to send my boys?”

Judy grumbled under her breath. “I have a few suggestions after their antics earlier.” She took a
calming breath and squeezed Nick’s paw when he set it on her shoulder. “Once Jennings gets a picture, have them focus on any craft fairs or flea markets away from city center. Star’s a mammal of Interest, but not a suspect yet so…”

“I’ll pass the word: kit-gloves and no strong-arm tactics.” The tigress nodded to the two and headed out.

Once alone, Nick handed Judy a pair of 8”x11” glossy photos. “The digital Hi-DPI camera was giving them fits, so Harry took an old fashioned celluloid. I was waiting for him to develop these. He’s having Nattalie and her Lab-Rats…” He put his paws up in defense at her look. “That’s what they call themselves! Anyway, they’re checking the corrosion on the silver thread to see if they can date when the bag was made, so that’ll take time. I was about to head to the Chief’s office to see if a picture of the bag messes up his printer. Wanna come?”

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Officers Davis and Quillion sat in their idling cruiser with the windows down. They were parked outside a Community Center in Little Amazonia advertising “Arbor-Day Crafts Faire”. “This is beyond ridiculous.” Nathan Quillion all but lolled in his seat while looking anywhere but the Community Center as herds of Hipster mammals milled around, their cell phones at the ready for selfies or to post on InstaGrowl about how chic they were.

“I don’t know,” Prance Davis leered at at passing doe, “...we might have to investigate a littAH!” He flinched back when the water deer doe turned and flashed a fanged grin at him. “Nope, you’re right; this is another pointless exercise in pandering to the city’s Police Mascot and her pet fox.” He snatched the 8”x8” glossy photo of a mole in a sarong from the Mobile Data Terminal. “Why the hell did Fangmeyer send us out here? There are a ton of better things for us to do than run down a dirt digging worm eater on the word of some two-bit PI’s in Happytown. And why was she put in charge anyway?”

Nathan snorted. “Cuz she’s bucking for Sergeant, and cozying up to Bogo’s Little Darlin’ is the next best way there after the underside of his desk. You and I both know that ain’t happening unless Bogo grows udders. What are you looking at?!” The boar glared down a particularly nosey capybara. He shivered and started scratching his chest at the coldly ‘predatory’ look the rodent gave him, then turned back to his fellow officer. “My uncle says the little humper probably has some kinda dirt on the Chief, and that’s why she and the Fox keep getting choice assignments.”

Prance leaned back and hissed through his teeth. “Yeah, like bossing us around as if she were a real cop.” He shook his head and snorted. “Well, we came, we didn’t see a mole, and I’m allergic to Patchouli and Skeeve so I’m not not going in there.”
Nathan nodded. “Yeah. Winthrop’s?”

“Hm, sure; but you’re buying this time. Go ahead and call it in.” Officer Davis put the cruiser in gear and pulled into traffic. Neither officer paid any attention to the capybara from earlier, nor the hog-nosed skunk he was talking to in the Mary-Dray-pink Caddy behind them.

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Prance and Nathan had expected to walk into Precinct One for a new day of police work. What they were met with were dozens of reserve officers, as well as the frustrated and often icy stares of their fellow officers, who were coming off-shift. They glanced at one another in concern and headed towards the Bullpen.

“Officer Davis, Officer Quillion.” They both paused: the voice was familiar, but the tone was alien. They looked behind them to see Ben Clawhauser giving them a cold, sideways look. “All incoming shift personnel are to go to the training theater.” With that, the normally affable cheetah turned away from them.

They were in the elevator when Prance broke the silence. “I wonder what Tubby-Tabby’s problem is.”

“Dude?!” Nathan hissed at his partner.

The Deer Buck bristled and shook his antlers. “No! P-1 is supposed to be the best of the best; that’s why we’re here, but do we get any respect? No! First we lose out on seniority to a rutting Fox and Bunny, then we have to take orders from that carpet-muncher Fangmeyer, and now we’re taking crap from the Pillsbeary Doughboy. I am sick of being judged by all these, degenerates. They want a piece of me, they can Mam-up and come at me!” He thumped his hooves against his chest just before the elevator doors opened onto the second floor. He stalked out towards the training amphitheater with Nathan sullenly following behind.

Once they entered they noted every mammal from their shift filling the stadium seating. Camille La Corça and Eric Pierce from the Mammal Resources and the Equal Opportunity offices were on the stage at the bottom. The Fallow doe looked at them. “Good, we’re all here.” Camille focused on the assembly. “Due to recent incidents, it is the decision of the EOO and MR to conduct this mandatory Anti-Harassment course. We are going to begin by showing you a short clip picked up on social media that highlights the need for circumspection and professionalism by any and all civil
servants, especially those in the public eye. Eric?” She turned to the American Porcupine next to her at the podium. Who began typing while the main projection screen lowered into place. The house lights dimmed and the naturally shaky image of a cell phone camera appeared on screen, complete with tinny audio.

“Why the hell did Fangmeyer send us out here? There are a ton of better things for us to do than run down a dirt digging worm eater on the word of some two-bit PI’s in Happytown. And why was she put in charge anyway?”

“Cuz she’s bucking for Sergeant, and cozying up to Bogo’s Little Darlin’ is the next best way there after the underside of his desk. You and I both know that ain’t happening unless Bogo grows udders. What are you looking at?!?”

The video froze on the distorted image of Quillion’s face as he glared at a passing Capybara. Prance and Nathan risked a glance around and saw almost the entire auditorium glaring at them. The only two mammals who weren’t looking at them were Nick and Judy, who seemed to be deep in a whispered conversation as Judy pointed emphatically at the screen. Prance shook in shame and growing anger at being singled out in this way, as well as the apparent disregard Nick and Judy were showing them.

Before he could turn opinion to action, Camille continued. “This is a textbook example of why I said earlier that those of us serving in the public eye need to exercise circumspection and professionalism at all times. I am not going to insult anybody’s intelligence by asking what was done wrong here. We are,” she gestured between herself and Eric, “...going to brief you on the formal regulations pertaining to scenarios like this, as well as the legal consequences attendant to them. Afterwards, I have been informed that Chief Bogo wants all field-certified officers to report to the gym.”

... 

Judy all but vibrated as she stood in the Precinct boxing ring. “We need to get this over with.” she hissed out round her mouthguard.

“Relax, Fluff.” Nick waved her over to the stool in the corner of the ring. “You sent the text to the Chief about the Capybara, and you got his response that he’s got some detectives from First Shift on overtime looking into it. We’re not alone in this. Huh, I wonder what that’s about?”

Judy looked to where Nick pointed and saw Lt. Higgins speaking in low tones to Nathan Quillion. The boar pulled out his phone and jabbed it a couple of times in frustration, then looked up in
alarm and squealed at something the Hippo said to him. He bolted for the locker room just as Prance Davis stomped out, nearly bowling his partner over.

Nick and Judy looked at each other curiously until they noticed Ralph Fangmeyer weaving his way over to them. Nick nodded to the wolf. “Hey Ralph, what's up with Officer Quillion?”

Fangmeyer looked back over his shoulder with uncertainty. “Apparently, Capt. Quillion had a heart attack earlier. Nate’s family has been trying to reach him, but his phone was dead.” Judy gave Nick a questioning look. Nick couldn’t muster any answer before Ralph continued. “Um, Officer Hopps; if I got on my knees right here and apologized for what I said yesterday, would you, maybe, not kick my ass?”

Nick chuckled and Judy shook her head at Fangmeyer’s pitiable look. “Sorry Officer, but the Chief’s right.” Judy stood up from her stool. “Small mammal takedowns are a blind spot in the ZPD’s training. How many times in the last year have me and Nick been called off of patrol because a ferret slipped a cordon, or a skunk took out the responding officers?” She patted the wolf’s paw. “I promise not to use excessive force, but Nick and I really need to get back on our case. You’re going to have to earn a pass in the ring.”

Nick raised his muzzle to the opposite corner. “Speaking of which, your first mammal sacrifice is here.”

Judy looked over to see Officer Davis mounting the ring with hate in his eyes. Judy’s mouthguard squeaked as she tried to chirr her teeth in excitement. Lt. Higgins walked over to the ring and gathered both mammals attention. “You know the rules: no more force than necessary, calling or a tap-out means the match is over. If I call the match, you stop. Failure in any of these cases will constitute direct disobedience and will result in an immediate disciplinary suspension. Do you understand?” When both officers nodded, he stood back from the ropes and yelled out. “Begin!”

Prance had only just turned back to Judy and taken a couple of menacing steps when she bolted out of her corner and leapt at his head. He brought up his hooves to block a kick to the snout when a sudden weight appeared on one of his antlers and yanked his head around causing him to stumble backwards. Judy dropped to the floor behind Prance while he was off balance and shoulder checked the back of one of his knees. Prance bleated in alarm as he toppled backwards, his rack tangling in the middle rope of the ring. He felt tiny feet running up his body. He grunted at her in a primal challenge, only to have her plant herself on his sternum in a classic boxing stance and deliver a textbook right-cross into his open lower jaw.

Judy was quite proud of herself for not tumbling off of Prance when he slumped unconscious against the ropes. She did hop down when the Precinct medic came over to check on Officer Davis. She turned to the assembled officers and assumed a parade rest stance. “Small mammals are almost
always faster than their larger counterparts. You need to be ready for a small to dart at you. Also, every mammal has weak points; and I’m not talking testicles or mammarys.” There was a short round of chuckles and some wincing. “The Achilles and Hamstring tendons are right at a small’s striking range. A mouse using an Exacto Knife as a polearm can bring down an elephant in this way. I know some of you don’t like them, God knows I don’t, but that’s one of the reasons we have the Nomex and Kevlar ankle wraps.”

There was a thrashing from Prance as the medic waved smelling salts under his nose. “Mrwahg! What happened?!”

There was mirthless chuckling from the assembled officers. Nick walked around the edge of the ring to stand next to Judy. “You set a new Precinct record: only eight seconds to be knocked out by the Bunny.”

Prance groggily looked around in disbelief as his fellow officers glared at him. He was standing up when Chief Bogo came in with two other officers in full field kit. “Ah, Hopps hasn’t started yet. I wouldn’t want to have to wait for you to wake up.”

“Actually Chief, she just finished with him. Ray just woke him up.” Nick nodded to the Polar Bear who was putting his supplies away.

The Cape Buffalo snorted and gave Prance an unsympathetic look. “Hmph. I would have gotten here sooner, but our admin staff were all playing catch up on their work after the mandatory training. Anyway; Officer Davis.” The deer tried to stand at attention. “Under the recommendation of the City Council Professional Ethics Sub-Committee and by order of the Commissioner of Police, you are hereby placed on disciplinary suspension pending an IA investigation for allegations of Gross Insubordination, Dereliction of Duty and Conduct Unbecoming an Officer. These officers will escort you to your locker where you will surrender your credentials and sidearm before being removed from the premises.”

Prance could only gape as the two officers helped him out of the ring. His head swiveled around, but none of the others looked back.

Once Davis was out of the gym, Bogo turned his focus on the cadre in front of him. “We are Officers of the Law; it is our sworn duty to uphold the law and to protect and serve the public of this city. As such we must be held to a higher standard of conduct. We will not have this conversation again. I don’t care what personal opinions you hold for your fellow officers or the general public, as long as you do your duty and keep those opinions to yourself. Lt. Higgins, Officer Hopps, carry on.”
Bogo sat in his office with the computer screen turned to face Nick and Judy. “I’m trying to understand what it is you expect to find in this video.” Both officers were still as they watched the entire camera phone segment of Prance and Nathan in front of the Community Center.

“There!” Judy pointed at the Capybara who had just entered the frame. “That’s the mammal that gave us the Hairy Eyeball outside Precinct three, I know it.”

Nick looked thoughtfully as the video played on. “He wasn’t giving us the Hairy Eyeball.” He held up a paw to forestall any comments, when the video became distorted for a second as Nathan glared at the nosy rodent. “He was giving us the Evil Eye. This guy’s serious bad news.” Nick subconsciously scratched his chest. “I’ll lay odds that’s when Nathan’s phone started acting up, and when Capt. Quillion started having his heart attacks. Mammals are saying what, probably two minor attacks before the big one earlier today?”

Neither Bogo nor Judy questioned how Nick had learned such private medical information. The video continued as the capybara walked out of frame until the two patrolmammals departed. “Well this adds another layer to our puzzle. Forensics got back on the time frame of the bags creation, and I’ve finally had a chance to read over the Veve that decorate the inside.” Chief Bogo pulled out the photo of the bag. “The Veve are all to various antagonistic Lwa, while what they spell out is Rena, the Fox. The bag itself is between five and seven years old, but that’s as...”

“Five and a half years old, give or take a month.” Both Bogo and Judy looked at Nick for clarification. “That would have been a couple of months after my falling out with Mr. Big and Mamma Shanti’s threat if she ever saw me again. She probably had this made immediately afterwards.” He looked at his watch. “Well, we have a timeframe, and I’m betting that a mammal who can consistently cast the Evil Eye on cops, and who lives in the RFD more than likely works with, if not for the Voodoo gangs.”

He levered away from the Chief’s desk. “We’ll head around the rest of the shops on our list tomorrow, see if anybody remembers a capybara from six years ago.” He popped his back after jumping down. “After a good night’s sleep; making Leo Johnson freak out by scurrying around inside his mane was fun, but having him ‘Stop, Drop and Roll’ to get rid of me wasn’t.”

Judy chuckled. “Alright Old Mam, we’ll head to your place; I’ll rub your back and you rub my feet.”
Prance Davis sat alone at a Hi-Top in MacNeighly’s, the only Pub-Restaurant in the city that served alcohol all day. He stared sullenly at his Irish Porridge and Stout, desperately wishing the staff would just give him a shot of Rye like he’d asked. He needed something to wipe out the humiliation of last night, the embarrassment, the memory of Hopps standing on his chest after casually tossing him around the ring and the cold look in her eyes as... he took a long pull of the midnight black beer to drive the heretical thought away; there was no way he was afraid of some trumped up kitten factory!

He wasn’t scared, he was mad. He was betrayed by his fellow brothers in blue. They didn’t raise a hoof when that rabbit cheated. She had to have; there was no other way for her to have beaten him. They didn’t speak up when that gutter-mop Wilde started giving him shit. They turned their backs on him when the chief had him marched out of the precinct like a criminal. Even Nathan had abandoned him; so what if his uncle was sick? Prance was looking at losing his job!

“Why da long face?” Prance almost jumped at the husky voice next to him. Looking over, he saw a massive skunk in a multi-colored dress seemingly made of tiny beads. “I know, I know; it’s a bad joke, but the question stands.”

Prance was mesmerized for a second as the patterns of the beads seemed to shift under the flickering lights. He shook his head and looked back at his nearly empty glass. “I’m losing my job. All I did was tell it like it is and suddenly everyone turned against me; all for some dumb rabbit and that disgusting gutter fox of hers!” He let out a grunt and finished his beer.

His new dining partner nodded her head. “Indeed, foxes be da worst. I should know. My sister and I had a run in with one six years ago; a nasty little creature working for someone in Tundra Town. We were tryin to make a deal, to make peace. That treacherous little devil betrayed my sister and humiliated me!” She spat to the side, then pulled out a flask. “I won’t be forgetting da name Nick Wilde any time soon.” She took a pull and handed it over to Prance.

He gratefully took the proffered libation. “Nick Wilde you say?” He threw back a shot and nearly gagged; the drink was sour and burned on its way down, and was exactly what he needed right now. “It sounds like we might have a common problem.”
“Really now?” the skunk quirked her ears. “Then maybe we can come to a common solution.” She and Prance shared a wicked grin.

...

Nick and Judy were in the office of “Moon’s Stones”, a new-age shop in Vole Gardens run by an albino Pika named Gloria Moon. Judy had suggested it due to its proximity to Muddy Swamp, where Zandor’s Palace was. They were both pleasantly surprised by how ‘down to Earth’ Gloria was.

“Big hog-nosed skunk, insisted everyone call her ‘Mama’? Yeah I remember. Gave me a serious case of the Heebee-Jeebees.” She shivered slightly as she passed the photo back to Judy.

“Do you remember anyone she traveled with?” Nick shuffled slightly as he tried to get comfortable in the small mammal’s office.

Gloria nervously glanced at the fox in her office, then addressed Judy. “She had a, henchmam I guess? Some kind of rodent of unusual size: mean look, head was shaped like a hammer. I should probably know what species, but with so many different types living in Downtont alone it’s hard to keep track.”

Judy bit back a comment about dismissing her partner and pressed forward. “And you directed these two to Star?”

Gloria nodded. “Yeah; they wanted specialty work, and Star usually gives me a cut of any commissions I send her way, just like I don’t charge her for displaying her ‘power-stone’ jewelry on account she sends me general traffic.”

Judy scribbled a few notes. “Do you think you could identify them if we showed you a line-up book?” When Gloria nodded again, Judy turned to Nick who brought out a small tablet with two mugshot books loaded on it: one for skunks, and one for large rodents. They left twenty minutes later with a name for their mystery capybara: Leroy Grimes.

“Ooohhh! The nerve of that little... she had no right to just disregard you like that!” Judy gave the steering wheel a thump with her fist.
“Careful there, honey; your hypocrisy is showing.” Judy jolted and looked at Nick, who gave her a wane smile. “Not everyone has had a rapid succession of near-death experiences to jar them out of speciest complacency. Gloria wasn’t openly insulting, and she was genuinely helpful. I think she may have a better overall opinion of my species after this.”

Judy’s ears flagged at the gentle rebuke. “Sure. Who knows, maybe in a decade she’ll say ‘Hi’ to you in public.”

Nick chuckled as they pulled into traffic. “Now let’s not go wishing for the moon there. Besides, we have a name now so we should head back and give Fangmeyer’s Witless Minion squad something to do.”

Judy was about to retort when the radio cracked to life. “Radio Zoo-Charlie 19, come in Zoo-Charlie 19...No answer Zoo-Charlie 19. Zoo-Charlie 19 is out of service: gone but not forgotten.”

Judy stared at the road in front of her. “Well I guess we know how Capt. Quillion’s surgery went.”

Nick nodded. “He was a good cop. His family didn’t deserve this.”

Judy looked back to the street. “Odds on it was our buddy Leroy?”

Nick snorted. “That’s a chump bet and you know it. Let’s get back to the Precinct-House so we can get to work putting him and ‘Auntie Shanti’ in prison.”

Judy scrunched her brow for a moment. “Auntie Shan...oh, ‘Mama’s’ sister.”

Nick chuckled. “Got it in one. See, you’re getting the hang of this ‘Nick-name’ game.”

Judy shook her head. “We need to get back to the Precinct so I can dope-slap you.”

Once they were at the precinct, and Nick’s punishment was administered, they dropped in on Officer Fangmeyer. “Evening Nadine!” Nick strode in like a conquering hero. “We come bearing presents; and by presents, I mean a name.”
The tigress didn’t bother looking away from her computer. “That’s ‘Officer Fangmeyer’ to you, Brushtail.” The lazy swish of her tail and the set of her ears showed there was no malice in her words.

Nick took a theatrical stance, arms akimbo. “Now how come I can’t use your first name, but you can call me by a nickname?”

“Because I’m bigger than you are, and higher on the political food chain.” Everyone in the office chuckled as Nadine finished typing and turned around. “You said you have a name for me?”

Judy nodded and handed over the e-tablet and a signed affidavit. “Miss Moon identified our capybara as Leroy Grimes.”

Nadine took the proffered items. “The name sounds familiar, so he’s likely been in and out of the system regularly. I’ll have the boys look him up. On the ‘Star’ front, Officer Lù is apparently bucking for his own promotion.” She nodded to a Chinese Musk Deer who gave a one hooved wave as he pecked at his keyboard. “He had his sister ask around the craft-faire circuit; word is, Star got real sick about a month back and hasn’t left the Stillwater Commune since. I have a couple of plain-clothes officers heading out to do a wellness check. Last mammals to see her said she had a visitor at her table who said something that really upset her.

“In other completely unrelated news, your friends over in Happytown had an accident with their new water heater.” Nick and Judy tensed up. “That said accident happened to occur right as they were dealing with an armed home invasion, and Fifth Precinct is currently chiseling the water heater and the perp out of their living room ceiling isn’t at all suspicious.” She turned to face the two smaller officers. “Oh and this next part is direct from the Chief...ahem, ‘No’.”

Both Nick and Judy began protesting when Nadine held up a paw. “He said no, you two, and I agree with him. You’re already in a close investigation; we don’t need you distracted and Second doesn’t need you two under paw. Bogo’s already gotten assurances from Capt. Nigel that if there’s anything smelling of Swamp in that case, then we bring you in. Until then,” she pointed a claw at the two, “…you stay clear of the investigation.”

She rested a paw on their small shoulders. “Head down to the breakroom and get a couple of badge shrouds and some chow. There’s enough stress to go around, don’t take any more than you need to carry.”
Not involving themselves in the case was not the same as not checking up on their friends. Once their shift ended they called Mandy’s cell number, as it was unlikely they would be in the brownstone with the water-heater embedded in the living room roof. Mike was unavailable.

“The doofus was freaking out because I got grazed by the heater on it’s way up.” Mandy huffed affectionately over the phone. “Had to apply a little pharmaceutical magic of my own to get him to calm down. His dreams’ll be weird as hell, but he’ll sleep through the night and I’ll be here in the morning so he should calm down.”

Once assured their friends were going to be okay, Nick and Judy decided to turn in. Neither was in the mood to be alone, though they were too exhausted for more than being a comforting presence for one another. They both opted to wear t-shirts, to keep their medallions from getting tangled in anything.

Judy sat naked in a dark forest. She dared not call out, as the hooting of owls could be heard in the trees. Something rustled in the underbrush. It’s coming for you. Judy whipped her head around to find the almost voice. It will eat your flesh while you beg. Judy bolted deeper into the wood. Run little rabbit! It does so enjoy the hunt! A formless terror followed after her, always just far enough away to not quite reach her. She saw a faint light through a bramble. You will find no succor in the den of the fox, little rabbit. Judy headed straight for the light in the thicket. You will find no succor there! the almost voice raged as she slipped through the thorny branches into a clearing, where moonlight shone down on a fox.

Nick was alone in a tiny fortress of briars. There were no stars visible through the forest canopy. Poor little foxy, all alone in the dark. An almost voice hissed throughout the hedge. It has abandoned you, as you always knew it would, as you always knew you deserved. Nick curled as small as he could in the middle of the clearing. It will betray you; you cannot hope to keep up with it and it knows that. A faint light began showing through the canopy, like the brightest moonlight breaking through the clouds. You cannot help it and it will not help you, betrayer! There was a rustling in the hedge. Nick all but willed the thicket to part. A shaft of moonlight shone down on a rabbit.

He/she knew her/him: they were home/comfort/laughter/safety/purpose/joy. The thicket shook as the formless one tried to force their way into the glade. He gekkered angrily and the thorns of the thicket grew long and sharp. The almost voice shrieked in rage. She thumped her paws on the ground, a warning and a challenge. A sudden wind descended, sweeping the treetops aside and bathing all the forest in white moonlight. There was a howl, a crash, swearing.

“Goddamned midget apartment!”
Nick and Judy startled awake to the sound of someone large, thumping around in his living room. Nick passed Judy her phone and taser, while he grabbed his go-to personal defense tool: a small, solid metal 500 lumen LED tactical flashlight. Judy was calling in the home invasion as he silently made his way into the living room. He found Prance Davis hunched over, his antlers having knocked one of the vanes off of his ceiling fan.

“-psst-Hey” Nick whispered. As soon as Prance turned to face the noise, Nick closed his eyes and turned the flashlight on. Davis yelled and recoiled from the sudden assault on his eyes. Nick turned the light off and darted towards the blinded deer. He kicked Prance in the ankle, and once his head was within easy reach, struck the former officer in the jaw using the flashlight as a fist pack. Prance collapsed in a heap.

Nick turned slightly as Judy came into the living room and flipped the switch for the overhead light. All that happened was a spark and a -pop- from the ceiling fan fixtures. She grumbled and turned on the light built into her taser. “I got ahold of the precinct; they’re sending someone over to collect, this.” She gestured at Prance with her sidearm.

Nick chuckled and faced Prance again. He saw something on the ground near the fallen deer’s manual hooves: a small, colorful bag with a drawstring closure. “Yeah, this really isn't gonna look good for-”

The rest of his words were cut off when the deer lunged forward, slamming his left antler into the fox. There was a crack as the antler broke off, dumping Nick onto the floor. Judy gave an inarticulate scream as she fired at Davis. He jerked and howled in pain, his thrashing dislodging the tines. In a panic, he dashed for the door as best he could, while Judy lunged over to Nick. She tossed the spent weapon aside and pulled her phone out to speed-dial dispatch. “Officer Hopps, badge number R1021 off duty at 1551 Lansing Way Unit B Officer down!”

She didn’t bother to stay on the phone as she reached Nick. She placed a paw near the offending antler, only for it to fall away, lifting something under the shirt with it. She lifted his torn shirt and saw a small cut on his chest, and his woven Yew amulet tightly wedged on the tip of the broken antler.

She barked out a watery laugh when Nick coughed and groaned. “That’ll learn me to never take my eyes of the perp.” He sat up with some help and looked around. He saw the new Oanga Bag sitting on the floor next to him. “Looks like Davis came back from suspension with a new friend. Let’s...”

Judy gently pushed him back onto the floor. They both cocked their ears at the sound of
approaching sirens. “Let’s let the responders do their jobs.”

Nick was taken to the hospital where he was diagnosed with three bruised ribs and a minor laceration. The doctor decided to keep him overnight for observation. Bogo arrived at the hospital and managed to convince the responding officers and medical staff that Nick should keep his medallion.

Once alone, he could only stare at his two smallest officers with tired eyes. “Prance slipped through the cordon; he’s in the wind now. Officer... Judy, with former officer Davis on the loose I don’t want you unsupervised tonight and I certainly don’t want you in the Grand Pangolin.”

Judy glanced at her boss from Nick’s bedside. “Nadine offered me some crash space until Nick’s apartment is cleared by Criminalistics, and for however long I need it after.”

Bogo let out a huff. “Good. This case is getting too close to home, and you two are becoming entirely too familiar to the staff here for my liking.”

“Not to worry, Boss Mammal,” Nick wheezed from his recumbent position, “...one taste of the hospital’s cafeteria food and my body will miraculously mend to get me away from it.” Everyone let out a relieved chuckle at Nick’s resilient humor. “Anyway, if Prance is smart, he’ll be on the first train to Canidae or Mexicow by now.”

Judy’s ears flagged slightly. “And if he’s Prance?” Her ears drooped completely at the pensive looks from Nick and Bogo.

... 

Prance arrived at Great Kapok Crossing where Camille Shanti said to meet her a little after one in the morning. He didn’t know why he had come back here after he let that rancid swamp witch trick him into breaking into Nick’s apartment. He should be on a boat to Boara-Boara, not lurking around the RFD after killing a fellow officer. He shook his head to clear his thoughts, only for him to notice the loss of his antler more clearly. He grit his teeth and grunted. He was here to get answers, and to get some payback for her tricking him, then he was in the wind.

He stormed under the massive 300’ tree, and through the alligator hide drapes, ready to prove himself once and for all. He was brought up short at the raucous and bizarre tableau in front of him: Camille sat on a throne backlit by a pair of barrel fires, while water mammals of every shape
and size writhed and danced in grotesques, often unnatural ways. He swore he saw a musk deer scuttle from one shadow to another on the roof of the cavernous Root Hall. On the far wall was the dessicated form of another hog nosed skunk, dressed in a riot of colors, framed by an upright coffin.

There was a slow, dismissive clap. “Well, well; the conquering hero returns. Don’t bother!” Camille gestured sharply with a bloody knife clutched in her paw. “Marinette-Bwa-Chech has already told me of your failure; of how you were beaten by a fox, and ran from a rabbit.” She leaned forward and spat. “Now you come here, to my place of power with vengeance in your heart.” She chuckled as she leaned back, the entire gathering mimicking her laughter exactly. “Don’t worry child, you will have your chance at revenge, just as I will have mine.”

Prance turned when she nodded behind him to find a gaunt Hippo in white body paint standing there. The water horse had a paw lifted to his parched lips. The hippo blew sharply and Prance was engulfed in a cloud of dust and pain and howling, hungering darkness.
That Old Black Magic

Chapter Summary

Precinct One and the Bayou Gangs continue to trade blows.

Despite Wilde’s claims to the contrary, the hospital held him for two additional days. During those days, Bogo had Judy pouring over various reports from different precincts regarding the history of the Bayou Gangs, as well as its known membership. They had long since ruled out the various hideouts that Nick had been familiar with, leaving it to the confidential informant network of the Fifth Precinct to keep tabs on those sites. Bogo’s efforts were an equally frustrating process of elimination, as the Hougan and Mambo of the Voodoo faith held no truck with the Bokur and Caplata that ran the Bayou.

Now, the First and Second Precincts were focusing their attention on locating Leroy Grimes. The capybara had apparently stepped into the recently vacated shoes of one of Mama Shanti’s lieutenants during the last days of her feud with Mr. Big. The aquatic rodent had been in and out of prison for half of his adult life before and since, with an alarming trend in the last few years of any witnesses who might have spoken out about him either having unfortunate accidents or sudden terminal illnesses. Checking on his residence of record turned up an oddity: city records showed the tree he was supposed to live in had been condemned and cut down ten years prior due to a Japanese Beetle infestation. Despite this, all reports from his various parole officers, as well as veteran officers sent by Bogo himself assured him the address was, “…fine, nothing to worry about.” That single phrase appeared in every such report.

Judy was rubbing stress out of her shoulder when a giant orange paw descended into her cubicle, depositing a frosted red and white drink on the desk. “One almond-milk, beet and parsnip smoothie.” Nadine Fangmeyer did her best not to screw her muzzle up. “Honestly I can’t imagine what you taste in these things.”

Judy sipped the proffered drink and hummed. “Sweet, and subtle herbal flavors is what I taste.” She glanced at her coworker. “Nick tried to get me to try some Bengali curried lentils and rice once; I couldn’t taste anything for a week after. I’ll stick to my ‘drab and boring’ bunny fare.”

The tigress twitched her whiskers in humor. “Speaking of Nick, how’s he holding up?” She lay a paw on Judy’s shoulder.

The doe huffed softly. “Glad to be out of the hospital; chief gave him today to get himself back on our sleep schedule, then he’s back at it tomorrow.” She saw the concerned look in Nadine’s eyes,
and rolled her own. “We’re both okay, I promise. Yes his getting hit by Prance scared the pellets out of me, but I trust the doctors to do their job. If they say he’s fit to work then I won’t worry, especially since a worried officer is a distracted one and I need to be on my A-game right now.”

Nadine twitched an ear in curiosity, then nodded. “Alright. So what’s your A-game told you so far?”

Judy groaned and turned back to her monitor. “That I need a distraction before I throw my computer across the room. Grimes is a freaking ghost. I can’t find any consistent location for him in the city; his address is bogus and his work record is non-existent.”

“Then look from another angle.” The tigress fully entered the cubicle, pulled out the big-mammal cushion under the spare desk and sat on the floor behind Judy. “He may not have work history, but he has trade training. He got his automotive repair licence from prison during his time in Juvie and his first few stints in the klink: work-release training in the corrections system.”

Judy pulled up the relevant data. “Alright I see that.” A few more clicks led her through the licensing bureau. “Well he hasn’t kept his certification up to date, so he’s not working for any licensed shop in the city.”

“Ah, but we do know who he works for and we know she owns a Mary-Dray Cadillac.” Fangmeyer nodded as Judy began pulling up the DMV information on the cadillac in question. “It’s passed it’s inspection every year for the last five years, and we’ve verified those shops are legit.” She saw the incredulous look on Hopps’ face. “My boys have been very busy. Check the Vin Number against Cadillac licensed shops. Mary-Dray is real particular about who works on their cars.”

Judy continued her search for five minutes. “Nothing. No body work, brake-pad replacements, not even an oil change.”

Fangmeyer leaned back. “And yet the car is in perfect working order, almost as if...”

Judy got a vicious grin on her muzzle. “As if she had a live in mechanic.” She started frantically typing as Nadine leaned forward in excitement. “Regular sales of engine gaskets for a 2000 Cadillac Coupe deVille, engine mount for a 4.6L V-8,” It was her turn to note the look on Nadine’s muzzle. “Farm girl, remember? I helped my uncle rebuild the Slant-6 on his ‘73 Dodge Darter. Anyway, if he’s running a garage, the sale of tools will likely tell us more than anything else. Aha! Three full-scale automotive repair garages set up in the last six years in the RFD, only two at licensed business locations. The third included an engine mount and hoist setup for a GM Northstar
V-8 engine and a hydraulic lift!” The screen displayed the third address, five blocks from Zandor’s Palace.

...

Nick absently gnawed on a deer antler worry stick as he sat in the passenger seat of his and Judy’s cruiser. He didn’t question where Ralph Fangmeyer had gotten the antler; they were shed often enough to not draw any peculiar looks, even if Judy had received a similar one which she had taken to grinding with a particular vehemence. They were watching a nondescript giant Mangrove on their cruiser’s mobile data terminal whose roots housed a small garage. A capybara sauntered out and started a SymWolf Classic 150 motor bike.

Nick picked up the radio. “All units be advised, target is moving northbound on Cocomongo Way.” Judy started their cruiser and pulled onto Tujunga Blvd. Nick watched Grimes’ progress and directed Judy and the other responding officer team towards the best interception point. It took 15 minutes of maneuvering to get to an ideal location. Once Leroy was boxed in, Nick and Chief Bogo got out of their respective cars to confront him.

“Leroy Grimes, you are wanted for questioning in regards to your associations with Catrice Shanti. You will be coming with us.” Bogo loomed over the smaller rodent while blocking his view of Officer Fangmeyer at the drivers wheel. Both cruisers sputtered for a moment as Leroy glared at the Chief. Nick was reaching for his tranquilizer when Bogo knelt down in front of Grimes. “Did you know that as of the current session of City Aldermem, that the Common Law Act of 1836 is still in effect? Any and all acts of sorcery or witchcraft may, at the discretion of the Chief Constabulary Officer, be construed as a ‘clear and present danger to the general public’.”

Grimes flinched back in fear from the implacable cape buffalo, right into Nick’s paws. He quickly cuffed Grimes, then put a hood over his head for good measure and loaded him into his and Judy’s cruiser. Judy glanced sideways at her partner once they were under way to Precinct One. “The Chief isn’t really going to charge him with Witchcraft, is he?”

Nick glanced in the rearview mirror. “Push comes to shove, maybe? Swineson may be about to retire, but he’s still an ADA and a hardline Methodist so he might be willing to dust off the old books, and Judge Maybeary is almost as obsessed with the letter of the law as you used to be.”

Judy grinned at the road. “Before I fell in with a nefarious fox and was seduced by his wicked and sinful ways.”

Nick chuckled. “Sure, blame the fox. Anyway, it’s more likely we’ll keep him in ‘Rolling-
Judy grimaced and Grimes shifted uncomfortably at the mention of one of the more legally dubious methods the precinct had for pressuring a detainee. “We can’t keep that up forever.”

Nick looked sympathetically at his partner. “We won’t. I’ve never heard from anyone I know on either side of the law of anyone who lasted more than a full week. Besides, that’s not up to us to decide. Bogo’s active in the case, so it’s his case now.” The rest of the ride was held in silence.

Leroy Grimes had been in holding ‘for questioning’ for a full 24 hours when Precinct One was paid a visit. Clawhauser glanced up from his phone when it started acting up and saw a mammal enter the atrium; a deer with only one antler staggered towards him. He quickly got on the intercom to the Chief. “Chief, I think Prance just entered the building, and I think he’s drunk.” He put the handset down and very clearly and loudly addressed the approaching mammal. “Prance Davis, you know you can’t be here. I’m goieee!” His lecture turned to a shriek of alarm as the deer turned his head towards the kiosk: his lips and eyes had been sewn shut.

The stitched ruminant lurched towards him with a shambling gate. Ben thought he was safe when he saw Nadine Fangmeyer and Frank McHorn rush towards the former officer. All three officers were shocked when Frank’s charge was stopped when he hit Prance as if he had tried to tackle an I-beam. The lights flickered as Davis turned his sealed head to the rhino officer. He grasped his former coworker’s horn and hurled him halfway across the tiled atrium. Nadine latched onto Prance with bared claws, only for him to begin flailing her around like a rag-doll. Other officers soon began rushing into the confrontation, at which point the rogue deer began using Nadine as a cudgel. She swiftly let go and was flung to the side in a heap.

Nick and Judy came down following the line of officers to see the devastation in the atrium. They glanced at one another and headed down. Once at the bottom of the stairs, Nick took a deep breath. “Hey Prance! Do I owe you money?” The deer shrugged off the mass of officers trying to restrain him and charged Nick.

Judy rushed over to where Frank McHorn was picking himself up as Nick played Matador with Prance. “Frank! No time to argue; Fast-ball Special!” In his groggy state, the rhino didn’t question the doe’s order. He heard a whisper of a prayer as he wound Judy near his ear: “St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle!”

Judy rolled mid flight even as Frank yelled out in alarm just in time to plant her pedal paws against
Prance’s head, her legs tensed to kick off. The rogue deer was launched into a potted plant as Judy’s momentum was arrested. She quickly rushed over to check on Nadine as Nick snarked at their opponent. “Going a little rough on the roughage there, buddy?” He saw Bogo out of the corner of his eye take in the scene, then head into the break room.

The process was repeated three more times, with Nick keeping Prance’s focus while various megas launched Judy at their former colleague. Bogo stalked up to Prance as they were winding up for round four. The deer turned to face him just in time to be halted by a headbutt. The Chief flashed out with one hoof grasping a knife, slashing the stitching across his muzzle. The emergency lights came on as the main lights shorted out. An unearthly howl erupted as the deer’s mouth opened up which drove all but one officer to their knees. Bogo raised a hoof to his own mouth and blew the mass of salt he had been clasping into Prance’s face. All was still for a moment before Prance Williams collapsed like a puppet.

The main lighting came back on and various officers rushed about trying to help their fallen comrades. Ralph Fangmeyer had to be pried away from his sister as Nadine was loaded onto a back-brace. All attention shifted to Sgt Eilerson when he gave out an alarmed bleat. He had been moving to cuff Prance when he heard and felt the deer’s arm, and then whole body shift and grind unnaturally as if every bone had been shattered.

“Leave it for the coroner, Phillip.” Bogo tiredly knelt next to the broken form of Prance Davis, then rolled the body over. “Prance has been dead for days.” All across the body were various bloodless gashes left by the attempts to stop the deer’s rampage, and a crudely stitched incision over his heart.

“Hopps, Wilde.” The two officers stepped up at their names. “Get interview seven ready as we discussed. I think it’s high time I had a chat with Mr. Grimes.”
Black Magic Woman

Chapter Summary

Nick, Judy and Chief Bogo come face-to-face with their foe.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Interview room Seven, or “Lucky Number Seven” as officers liked to call it, was a throwback concession in the event the precinct had suffered some manner of technical catastrophe. Rather than closed-circuit digital cameras, Number Seven had the stereotypical two-way mirror between the interview room and the monitoring room. On this occasion, the Hi-def digital camera was replaced by a tripod mounted 8mm Reel-to-reel camera. The room itself was decked out with emergency chemical light sticks, as no one was foolish enough to put candles or storm lanterns in a room with a perp.

Nick and Judy retrieved Leroy Grimes from holding. He was still wearing a blindfold, but they took no chances and took him to the interview room by a circuitous route, then secured him to the table in the center of the room. Once finished, they retreated to the monitoring room and waited for the Chief. They didn’t have to wait long as the cape buffalo entered the observation room. He glanced at the interview room, the observation equipment, and the officers maming it. Nick and Judy looked up at their boss and nodded. “Whatever happens in there, stay here.” At that, he left and went into the interview room.

Bogo snatched the blindfold off of Grimes’ head and settled into the seat across from him. “Leroy Grimes, we’re going to talk about your involvement in the Bayou Gangs.” Leroy locked eyes with Bogo and for a moment the lights in the room flickered, then the capybara began to shiver as Bogo grinned and began chuckling. “What makes you think that parlor trick will work any better this time than it did the last?”

The lights stopped flickering when Leroy faced away from the Chief. “I want my lawyer.” He had a surprisingly soft voice for such a hardened criminal.

Bogo leaned in with a vicious grin. “No.” Leroy jerked his head around in disbelief. “You haven’t been charged with anything, so whatever you say here can’t be used in a court of law, either to prosecute or secure a warrant.” Bogo stood up and loomed over the freshly shivering rodent. “I don’t have to provide you with anything except fresh running water and a place to relieve yourself. In fact, I think Wilde’s idea has no small amount of merit.”
He stood to his full height and looked absently at the mirror. “A press conference in an hour about how a ‘witness’ came forward after an attempt on his life by one of the Bayou gangs minions, then we just play ‘rolling-holding’ and let you out for 15 minutes every 48 hours.” He looked down at Leroy and smiled cheerily. “It will be like fly fishing for criminals,” his smile turned malicious, “with you as the insignificant bug!”

Grimes balked at the towering buffalo. “You...you can’t just do this; I have rights!”

Bogo’s smile morphed into a malignant sneer as his eyes rolled back. He seemed to rise up even taller until his horns touched the roof of the room. The lights blew out, showering both mammals in sparks and shards of glass and plunging the room into the eerie green glow of the chem-lights. Bogo advanced on the interview table, though his legs didn’t seem to move. The sparks from the light fixtures caught Bogo’s shirt on fire, though he didn’t seem to notice or care as his legs collided with the table and began pushing it and Grimes towards the opposite wall.

“You dare claim protection under de law?!” Everything in the room shook as Bogo spoke. “You spit on de law daily, defile it so you and your pathetic cabal can exploit and torment, and now you try to hide behind it?!” Grimes’ chair collided with the wall and the table pressed into him. Just as he thought he was going to be crushed, Bogo slammed his hooves down onto the table, crushing it’s legs and pinning Grimes in his seat. All the while, Bogo’s blazing shirt surrounded him in a halo of flame. “You will tell me where de servant of Marinette-Bwa-Chech is now!” Bogo’s breath in Leroy’s face was agonizingly hot and smelled like a coal furnace.

Grimes had always had some power, but it had flourished under Cherice and Camille. He had seen others use magic, even witnessed the creation of a Jambee once, but none of that compared to having a raging Lwa bear down on him. Leroy wept, turned his head and pinched his eyes closed.“Great Kapok Crossing! They’re at the temple under Great Kapok Crossing!”

The searing heat and stench of coal fires faded as Bogo stood back up. The shirt which had been burning simply dropped away like so much ash. The emergency lights kicked on and for a moment, the smoke coming off of the Chief looked almost like a victorian wrought iron gate. He turned without saying a word to the terrified rodent and left. He only went as far as the observation room where he collapsed into the large chair in the back.

Nick looked on in concern as he shut down the camera and sealed the film. Judy headed over to her boss. As she came up to him, she saw a haunted look in his eyes. It was a look the felt familiar with; of losing control of a situation and being helpless to stop it. She put a paw on his knee. “Sir, are you all right?”

Bogo heaved ragged breaths for a moment. “I’ve... never... let... a Lwa... ride me... like that.” He took a few more breaths. “I should rather not do it again... but if we’re going after Camille in her
temple... I don’t think I’ll have much of a choice.”

...

Nick and Judy escorted the Chief through his various rounds of the precinct in preparation for assaulting Great Kapok Crossing. Their first visit was to the sable coroner Illya Furiakin.

“This is impossible Idris, simply impossible!” the elderly Ewekranian frantically waved his notes at the Chief while gesturing to the nearby corpse. “There is no possible way he could have caused the damage done upstairs, since our mammal here has been dead for three days!” The aged mustela began pacing his autopsy table while Bogo read the notes he had been given. “Even under the best of circumstances, Officer Davis would never have been capable of injuring Officer Fangmeyer so grievously. It makes no sense!” Dr. Furiakin slumped onto the edge of the table and stared blankly at the wall.

“You said under the best of circumstances; what about the worst?” Everyone looked at Bogo. “It says here you found ‘...substantial quantities of Nighthowler petals in Officer Davis.’”

Illya shivered for a moment, then walked over to Prance’s chest. “Yes, in a pouch,” his voice raised with every declaration, “in his chest, where his heart should have been!” He pointed emphatically at the empty cavity in the corpse.

Bogo pressed on. “But there were significant quantities present.”

The doctor stared at Bogo for a moment. “Don’t Idris; don’t ask me to do this.”

The Chief seemed to sag into himself. “I have to ask. If I don’t have probable cause that will stand up in court, such as a signed coroner’s report, then not only will Prance’s killer walk free, they will be emboldened to try again. I need your signature saying Prance died tonight with Nighthowler in him, nothing more. I have witness statements and video of Prance in the lobby, so details like ‘Time of Death’ can be glossed over.” There was pain in Bogo’s eyes as he pleaded with the sable.

Dr. Furiakin grit his jaw. “You know what I will ask.”

Bogo nodded. “I know.”
In the end, they left with the coroner’s report supporting their narrative, along with Dr. Furiakin’s letter of immediate resignation.

The next visit was to the precinct clinic. Bogo walked among the various officers who were convalescing after the altercation with Jambee Prance. McHorn and Fangmeyer were absent as they had needed significantly more treatment: Frank had been diagnosed with a concussion and a greenstick fracture of his right collarbone, while Nadine had multiple compound fractures as well as possible internal bleeding from being used to bludgeon her fellow officers.

Nick took Judy’s paw as she silently shed tears of rage at what had been done to her friends. “We’ll get them Judy. You know Bogo’s gearing up to hit the Bayous as soon as he can sell it to the commissioner. After this,” he nodded to the clinic, “I doubt he’ll have to do more then walk through the door to get permission.”

It turned out even less difficult than Nick implied, as Commissioner Hartman came into the infirmary. He looked around, then silently signalled Bogo to follow him. Fifteen minutes later, all available officers were called to the Bullpen.

There was no chanting, no thumping on desks; only silent, pained looks of mammals whose fundamental truths had been violently challenged. Every officer looked as Bogo calmly walked into the pen. “We’ve been hit.” Some officers looked almost downtrodden at the chief’s declaration. “We’ve been hit hard, and we’ve been hit where we live. Officer’s Fangmeyer and McHorn are in the hospital, and half a dozen more are in our own clinic.”

“What hit us Chief?” Every officer in the room turned to Ralph Fangmeyer. His posture was stiff and professional, but his gaze was hard as he fought the pain of seeing his sister carted off in an ambulance. “We were hit by one of our own, and the way he did it was impossible. We, I deserve to know the facts! What the hell is going on?!”

The Chief met the young wolf’s gaze with all the courage he could muster, knowing what he was about to say would realistically destroy his credibility-

“What do you want the facts, Ralph, or do you want the truth?” All eyes shifted to Nick. “I’ve got most of the facts memorized if you really want, but the truth is that the current self-styled Queen of the Bayou got to Prance Davis and twisted him into a weapon. The truth is that she’s responsible for the attack on Hopps weeks ago. The truth is that she’s spreading poison in our streets and sees us as an inconvenience and imposition on her way to power.” Nick all but glared at nothing. “And the truth is her minion folded like laundry and told the Chief where she and the gang are holed up.” He locked eyes with his fellow officer. “You still want the facts, or do you want to put this witch in an
There was a palpable tension that built as Nick spoke until every officer was almost vibrating in place. All eyes returned to the Chief, but the doubt was banished; in its place was righteous fire as the force awaited Bogo’s command.

The buffalo spared a glance and thankful nod at Nick and Judy. “Commissioner Hartman has authorized me to command a Joint-Precinct Taskforce. Ourselves, as well as elements of the Second and Fifth Precincts are going to storm Great Kapok Crossing within three hours. Officers Wilde and Hopps,” he nodded to his two smallest officers, “will be going with me through the front; they both have a history with Camille Shanti, so we will be keeping her attention on us while every SWAT and Tusk rated officer in our three precincts will close in from all sides.”

He leaned forward on his podium. “Make no mistake officers, what happened earlier is a taste of what she can bring to bear, so be cautious, remember your training, and keep faith with your fellows. If you have a moment, maybe say a prayer or two, just in case.”

Sgt. Eilerson bowed his head. “Please God, don’t let us screw up.” A raucous ‘Amen’ rang out from every officer as the precinct readied itself for war.

... 

Bogo, Nick and Judy had all ridden out to Great Kapok Crossing in the Chief’s Staff car. There was no subtlety in their arrival, as squad after squad of SWAT and TUSK carrier trucks and boats arrived just behind them. It had taken some doing, but Bogo had managed to get them to agree to maintain a one-block perimeter around the enormous tree and the four islands it straddled. Nick and Judy nervously checked their tactical gear while Bogo rocked back and forth, muttering quietly with his eyes shut.

Wildie glanced at one of the nearby police boats as several hippo and polar bear TUSK officers slipped into the water. “Are we sure this is a good idea Chief?” The cape buffalo paused while Judy looked at Nick. The todd looked meaningfully at the police special forces around them. “We know what Camille will throw at everyone; we’re protected, but the rest of the officers might as well be inflatable boxing clowns.”

Judy squared her shoulders and slammed the magazine home in her pepperball carbine. “Then we take her down, fast and hard.”
“Indeed, little ones.” Bogo’s normally clipped and precise tone was accented, and tinged with no small amount of anticipation. “Our brodders-in-blue be doin their part just as we be doin ours.” He opened the trunk of his car and pulled out a six-foot length of rebar and a riot shield. Nick saw Bogo palm a small bag into his off hoof. Pinching his eyes shut and shivering he addressed his officers in more familiar tones. “Let’s get to it officers.”

All three squared up and marched on the Giant Kapok tree. There was no opposition as they passed under the alligator-skin drapes and entered the main hall. Barrel fires burned all around, illuminating various holes in the floor leading to the swamp below. They also illuminated the dozens of mammals arrayed against them: some in gang colors with firearms, some in the rafters and eaves, and some in worse condition than Prance had been in during his attack on Precinct One. Behind them on a throne was Camille Shanti, with her mummified sister on display above her.

“I’m pretty sure your sister was laid to rest in a plot in Colt Cemetery.” Nick casually pointed at Mama Shanti’s desiccated form with his air-rifle. “That there constitutes Desecration of a Corpse; Felony offense carries, what Carrots?” he glanced at his partner.

Judy’s knuckles cracked as she tightened her grip on her carbine. “Eight years, plus an eight-thousand dollar fine.”

Nick scoffed and looked back at Camille. “Bah, you’ll easily work that off making license plates or doing prison laundry.”

The Caplata was livid but remained seated. “Disgusting! It’s a disgrace what dis city is becommin when such a low creature like you, Nicholas Wilde, is held up as an example for the citizens.” She turned a baleful gaze on the Chief. “Do you even know who this, fox is, and what he has done?”

“Yes.” The Chief’s matter-of-fact tone stalled Cammile. “I am the Chief of Police for Zootopia’s First Precinct. Do you honestly think I would just accept any random mammal off the street without knowing everything about them?” Nick was glad his ears were under his helmet and couldn’t show his concern at the certainty in the Chief’s voice. “More importantly, do you think that has any bearing on your own crimes? Drug trafficking, extorsion, the murder of Officer Prance Davis, and as Officer Wilde pointed out, at least...” Bogo paused as he counted the Jambees in the hall, “13 counts of Desecration of corpses. Camille Shanti, you are under arrest.”

Camille leaned forward and sneered. “You think so?” She gave a sharp whistle and the arrayed Jambees advanced. Before any of the three cops could react, they leapt through the holes in the floor to the bayou below. “They will be more than enough to deal with your Police Force! You are truly foolish mammals to come into my domain and challenge me.”
“I am Idris Bogo, Chief of Police.” Bogo drew out his rebar rod as the gangbangers and others advanced towards them. “This entire city is my domain!” He swung his rebar baton at one of the fire barrels and launched it into the oncoming crowd. As the mob scattered away from the fiery projectile, he Nick and Judy all rushed forward.

Bogo laughed as he approached the largest group of gangbangers. The various mammals opened up on him, but were stunned as bullets seemed to bounce off as if striking iron. Once he was upon them, each sweep of his arm sent half a dozen flying each way.

Camille was herself quick to understand as Bogo drew closer: she could feel the heat of Ogoun-Badagris coming off of the buffalo in waves. She quickly left her throne and looked around to see how the others were faring. She caught a glimpse of Police-Grey and the sound of fluttering wings as Judy leapt from Ganger to Parishioner; blows meant for her always seemed to miss by a hair’s breadth, while shots from her air-carbine always struck true. No matter what Lwa was riding one of her devotees, none seemed immune to the furious grey blur.

She looked to a third group of her mammals when an unearthly roar shook the hall. The Lwa Congo-Savanne, who was riding a black panther at the time, had turned on one of Camille’s gangs; the flash of a knife in his back showed why. All around were frantic yelling as Lwa and Gangers alike struck and shot at the ground where Nick Wilde darted between everyone’s feet. They only succeeded in harming themselves. One musk deer had taken to using his rifle as a club to try to crush the elusive fox, only for the jammed weapon to fire into the cervid’s shoulder.

One of the gang members fighting Bogo landed in a heap at Shanti’s feet, still clutching a pistol. “If nothing else, I will rid myself of you Nicholas!” She snapped her fingers and one of her Lwa servants snatched Nick in a bear hug. Camille bent down, picked up the pistol and took aim. Nick could only look on in shock as Camille aimed her gun at him. He never had the chance to cry out for help when the pistol exploded in her paw. The bullet only had enough force to pierce his captor’s hands, causing him to drop Nick. The todd took a moment to calm down, then spared a look at the wailing Caplata. When she looked at him again, he gave her a two-finger salute, then darted back into the melee.

Camille retreated to her throne and howled. All the Lwa ridden parishioners fell back around the wounded sorceress. Bogo, Judy and Nick made quick work of the remaining gangsters. They had just turned their attention to the crowd at the throne when the Jambees Camille had dispatched began climbing up through the floor. The three officers turned to face every direction. Bogo began worrying the bag in his off hoof and muttering under his breath again when Cammile shrieked at them. “How dare you come here and challenge me! I am Camille Shanti, chosen of Marinette-Bwa-Chech, And I-”

Everything stilled for a moment as a rhythmic tapping sounded from behind the throne. All the Lwa ridden mammals, as well as all the Jambees parted ways as the mummy of Mama Shanti
stepped up behind her sister, grasping a cane in one of her paws. “That is quite enough of that.” A deep voice came from the hog-nosed skunk corpse. “I would have words with this one. The rest of you, begone!” The mummy rapped her cane on the floor, and with the suddenness of a puppet whose strings were cut, every Jambee collapsed. All the Lwa fled as well, including the on riding Bogo. He slumped down and was barely caught by his two subordinates. Those of the congregation who could, fled the temple.

Camille looked with terror at the Lwa who had her in thrall. “Papa Legba! How are you here?”

The mummy snorted. “You built your temple on a river crossroads; how could I not be here?” A crooked paw gently patted Camille’s shoulder. “Oh don’t be afraid now, I have come to give you a gift.” Papa Legba bent down and plucked up a metal shard. “I am going to mark you as mine, and mine alone.” Swift as a viper, the Lwa-possessed corpse carved a mark into Camille’s forehead. Legba gently chided even as Camille screamed. “No Lwa will ever cross you, but neither will they obey you until I deem you worthy.”

The mummy stepped back and considered the four mammals in the room. “I think my work is done. I now render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.” With that, the mummy dropped to the floor. A moment later, the hall filled with yelling SWAT and TUSK officers. Nick, Judy and Bogo made their way outside to allow the responders to begin cataloguing the carnage. Once they were back at Bogo’s sedan, Nick started picking at his chest protector.

“What are you doing Nick?” Judy tiredly asked.

Nick took off one of his gloves and used his claws to pry something out of his vest. “I had an idea for an amulet Mike could make me with this bulletttthothothot!” Nick gingerly dropped the still hot lead into his gloved paw.

Bogo snorted. “You just want to carve your name in it so you can say only you have ‘a bullet with your name on it’.”

He sputtered indignantly as Judy giggled. “Come off it Nick, you know that’s exactly what you’d do.”

Nick huffed. “Doesn’t mean it’s not a good idea.”
The months following the ‘Voodoo Raid’ were a blur of procedure for Nick and Judy. For the rest of the officers who had participated, it was an event only spoken of in hushed tones, and then only after several drinks. Warrant teams at both Great Kapok Crossing and Leroy Grimes’ garage netted huge quantities of evidence, as well as clues to the whereabouts of the Bayou Gang’s drug lab. The DA had only just finished compiling the case against Camille Shanti the day before, and Nick and Judy were looking forward to any case to work on other than that.

That morning, the entire precinct was congratulating Nadine Fangmeyer’s return to duty, even if it was light duty at the moment. Bogo greeted the raucous reception as he always did. “Alright, settle down already.” Once everyone was seated, he looked over the assembly. “First item, I want to welcome back Nadine Fangmeyer, though I would remind her that she needs to be in *proper* uniform for morning brief.” The tigress looked at him in confusion. “You seem to be missing a few stripes, Sgt.” There was another surge of cheering as Nadine was hailed by her comrades.

Nick looked at the Chief in faux admiration. “Was that a pun Chief? It was! I’m so proud of you.” He wiped a fake tear from his eye as the officers settled down and chuckled.

Bogo stared at Nick for a moment. “Second item, Hopps!” There was the sound of a bunny punching a fox in the shoulder and the laughter resumed. Once everyone had calmed down again, Bogo continued. “Third item, assignments: Wolford, Snarlov…” the brief continued until Nick and Judy were the only two officers remaining.

Judy bounced in her seat. “What have you got for us chief?”

Both Nick and Judy felt some trepidation at the look on Bogo’s face. Trepidation turned to alarm as he pulled out an evidence bag: it contained a single, half burnt black candle.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to thank everyone who came along for the ride with me through this interpretation of the world of Zootopia, especially my Beta Readers LordKrauss and Ubermunchkin, and everyone who has left Kudos and comments. You are the reason I write these stories, rather than just think about them As always if you feel inspired to write because of what you have read, please do.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!