Trials and Tribulations: A Story From Zootopia

by carlwilkersonwrites

Summary

Nick and Judy have long since settled in as ZPD officers, but nothing stays the same for long. Careers develop, crimes occur, and feelings blossom in the mammal metropolis of Zootopia.
Downtown Zootopia, Tuesday, 1810

The police cruiser slammed to a halt inches before entering the intersection. The driver of the vehicle, Officer Judy Hopps, winced as she imagined the possible headlines: "Rabbit Road Rage Kills Family of Four", or maybe "Callous Cop Carelessly Crushes Critters". She immediately resolved to pay closer attention for the rest of her shift.

She didn't have much time to mentally berate herself, however. As soon as the cruiser stopped, her partner, Nick, turned to her and spoke with a voice dripping with sarcasm. "You're a menace!" he exclaimed. Judy rolled her eyes and gave Nick her best glare and returned fire. "Fine, then you can drive. But do try your best not to murder any more fire hydrants." Nick clapped his hand to his chest in mock outrage. "You wound me! Besides, I seem to vividly remember a certain cotton-tailed partner of mine swearing to never discuss the fire hydrant incident." Judy's glare melted into an impish grin. "You brought it upon yourself, Nick. I am a menace, remember?"

Nick could only laugh along with Judy at the exchange. Their banter was an essential part of the job, and it had become routine in the year that they had spent on patrol together. But something was bothering Judy - she was trying her best to mask her thoughts, but Nick knew her better than anyone and could tell when something was amiss.

"Alright Carrots, you got me. Serious talk now - what's on your mind? You've been off all day, what gives?" Judy sighed and glanced at the intersection light - still red. Her sharp violet eyes shot next to the radio seated in the dashboard of the cruiser - it remained silent. With no escape from Nick's inquiry, she slowly started exhaling the jumble of thoughts that had been rattling around in her head since the morning. "Well, it's this thing... two things, technically. There have been some rumblings; I guess the chain of command is shaking up a bit. Some brass are retiring, so positions are opening up... including a Patrol Sergeant slot." Nick's eyes widened and an eager smile split across his face. "Alright, so what's the second half?"

The light finally turned green and Judy accelerated cautiously through the intersection before responding. "This is what I'm really interested in. Rumor has it that there are open positions in the Detective Division, but nothing has been posted yet. Right now I'm not sure which one I'd rather go for, or if I want to apply at all." As she finished speaking, Judy felt a weight lift from her shoulders - she hadn't noticed how preoccupied she had been with her thoughts. She stole a sidelong glance at Nick. "What do you think?"
Nick paused and absentmindedly scratched his neck as he stared through the windshield. "Car in front of us has expired tags. Want to stop him?" Judy glanced at her watch and grimaced. "Fifteen minutes left on shift. If we go over, you're buying me lunch all next week." Nick gave her a cocky grin and flipped the cruiser's lights on. The car in front of them, a small hatchback, began to pull over. Judy thumbed her radio and spoke clearly into her shoulder. "One-Adam-Six, Nine-Sixty at Story and Maple". She paused for a moment, and heard Clawhauser's voice ring through her radio. "Copy One-Adam-Six".

Nick, meanwhile, began to type the hatchback's plate number into the car's computer. "4... G... F... I think you should go for it, by the way. You'd make a great detective, or a great Sergeant. I guess it just depends on whether you'd rather solve crime in a suit, or torture patrol officers." A dry chuckle escaped Judy. "Well when you put it like that... I am leaning towards being a detective, though. I like the idea of really getting into the grit of cases like we did with the Night Howlers. Patrol just isn't the same ballgame." Nick nodded in agreement.

The computer beeped. "Record is squeaky clean", said Nick. "Warning?" "Warning", Judy wearily replied. Both cars finally came to a stop, and the two officers exited in tandem, as they had hundreds - perhaps thousands - of times before. Both fox and bunny had long since mastered the fear that grips every cop on traffic stops - after all, there's never any telling who was behind the wheel, or what could happen if the encounter were to go south. But the trust that Nick and Judy had developed throughout the year was far stronger than the fear. Even without looking, each knew exactly where the other was and how the stop would play out. It was a bizarre, yet comforting dance - and neither Nick nor Judy would abide a different partner.

The officers rolled into the ZPD lot exactly one minute before the end of the shift. As Judy guided the car into the subterranean parking bay, she gave Nick a quick grin. "I could totally have made us late, by the way. I didn't HAVE to run that last yellow light. Enjoy basking in my mercy." Nick scoffed. "I don't buy it. I'm still not entirely convinced you can tell time. Or read. Do they even have books in Bunnyburrow?" Judy's answer came in the form of a swift (but gentle) punch to Nick's left arm. "Ooooh, assaulting an officer. Does your form of mercy always come in the form of felonies? Or do you do misdemeanors too?" A second, slightly harder punch was Judy's response as she navigated the cruiser into an empty parking space. "Don't question my methods, Nick. They're too complex for you to understand, and I wouldn't want you to strain something by thinking too hard." The officers exited the car and loped toward the garage elevator - Nick fished out his pass key and carded them in. He hit the button for the ground floor and the elevator lurched as it began to rise.

"So now that we've stopped this horrible prey on predator violence -" he was interrupted as Judy punched him for a third time - "any thoughts? How long do you have to make up your mind?" The question immediately sobered Judy, who let out a deep sigh. "I don't know, a couple of weeks, maybe? There's never much notice for these things." She paused, and continued on quietly. "I don't want to accept a position that means losing you as a partner." Silence filled the elevator, which was momentarily penetrated by a high-pitched *DING* as the doors opened to the lobby. The ever-corpulent Clawhauser glimpsed his friends from his desk, and waved enthusiastically with a grin on his face that quickly dissolved into confusion as Nick closed the elevator doors.
As soon as the doors shut, Nick turned to Judy and began to speak, all traces of sarcasm now gone from his voice. "Judy, if you want to do it, just do it. Don't feel that you have to stick around on the bottom of the totem pole for me." Judy looked back up at Nick, and lost her train of thought. She had seen Nick drop his sardonic veneer on a number of occasions, but it never ceased to surprise her when she saw the real warmth behind his banter and cynicism. It was her favorite part of Nick - that pure compassion, that pure caring.

Though she'd rather drop dead than tell him that.

Just then, an idea came to Judy. "Okay then, what about this? Take the detective exam with me. If we both get tapped, we stay partners. If one or neither of us gets it, we stay in patrol. We stick together, no matter what." Nick paused, and then smiled. "I go where you go", he proclaimed, and opened the doors. "Ladies first", he said with a sweeping gesture towards the lobby. Judy pattered past him and headed towards the women's locker room as Nick slunk towards the men's.

Clawhauser watched silently, completely mystified.
Chapter Two - Breakfast

Nick's Apartment, The Next Thursday, 0800

The speaker of Nick's phone exploded in a fiery inferno of a thousand screeching banshees in mid-orgasm.

He violently flung himself up and grasped wildly for his phone - after several heart-pounding seconds, he finally managed to kill the alarm. He flopped back down and lay prostrate for several minutes before reaching for his phone again. He slowly tapped out a text message.

Carrots, the next time you change my alarm to a Gazelle song I swear to God I will go savage and eat you.

The reply came shortly.

LOL

Breakfast? Want to go over the detective apps with you. Thinking Pancake House.

Nick’s mood, soured prematurely by his phone’s recent all-out assault on his ears (and musical sensibilities), immediately brightened. He relished any time he was able to spend with Judy off the clock, even if they were only talking about work. He just felt… bored when she wasn’t around. He quickly tapped out a response:

Sounds great! Meet you in 30.

Nick hauled himself out of bed and lumbered towards the bathroom. His apartment was cozy and warmly decorated - it was a step down size-wise from his previous loft in the Rainforest District, but it was a five minute walk from the station, which meant that he could wake up twenty minutes before his shift and still be on time. When he explained his logic to Judy she rolled her eyes and called it laziness, but Nick preferred the term "tactical leasing".
Nick showered quickly and brushed his teeth while standing in front of a body-size hair dryer (expensive, but a time-saver - especially for mammals with thick fur). He emerged from the bathroom and opened his closet, eventually selecting a gaudy yellow Hawaiian shirt that clashed horrifically with his shiny red coat. He examined himself in the mirror, thinking of how much it would annoy Judy. He smiled and headed for the door.

The Overlook Pancake House fell into that strange breed of restaurant that was somehow wildly successful, but seemingly always empty. Everything about the place (including the employees) seemed worn and a little tattered, but perfectly functional. As he slouched through the door, Nick saw that Judy had already snagged their regular table. She looked up as Nick approached and winced. "You look like a tropical nightmare. I'm just going to pretend I don't know you." She raised her menu to hide Nick from her view. The garishly clad fox sidled into the remaining chair and winked at her. "Come on, I wear the exact same uniform four days a week. I've got to cut loose occasionally." Judy shook her head in mock hopelessness. "You're a lost cause, Wilde." "Takes one to know one, Carrots."

The two shared a warm glance, which was interrupted when a large stack of pancakes was flung unceremoniously onto the table by a neurotic-looking ocelot. “Thanks, Jeremy!” said Judy brightly. The ocelot only nodded and jerkily made his way to the back of the house. Nick’s eyes followed the feline’s twitchy path for a moment before zeroing in on his partner. The rabbit was clad in an aquamarine blouse, which blended pleasantly with her grey fur and purple eyes. Her gorgeous, perfect purple eyes.

“Nick, are you listening to a word I’m saying?” Judy asked irritably.

Nick’s snap back to reality was almost audible. “Of course I am. But why don’t you say it again, just in case”, he said innocently. Judy, disarmed by Nick’s unusual tone, faltered for a second before mentally retracing her steps.

“Okay, here’s the deal: it looks like there are going to be four open Detective positions in our division, which is great news for us, because it increases our odds. The downside is that, based on purely anecdotal evidence, there appear to be at least fifteen officers gunning for those spots.” Nick waved a paw dismissively. “Yeah, sure. But none of them solved the Night Howler case and jailed two mayors at the same time.” Judy shot him with a disapproving glace, but he continued. “No, seriously! That case is going to bump us both to the top of the table. That plus our stellar records on patrol” - Judy glowed at that particular remark - “put us squarely in the category of ‘badass’. All we have to do is pass the test and we’re in.”

As Nick continued to wax eloquent about the success of their partnership, Judy began to relax. The whole ordeal had been stressing her out, but just being with Nick was calming her down. Nick’s
endless confidence (which all too often bordered on cockiness) was simply contagious - the more optimistic Nick grew about their chances, the more possible their goal seemed.

Judy began to zone out slightly as Nick’s monologue grew increasingly ridiculous. She loved the way he could take a stressful situation and turn it into one big joke. She also loved the way he casually let his body droop when he segued into talking big. It had driven her crazy, at first - his seeming lack of care. But in reality, it was his way of showing pride. He simply oozed confidence, and it worked well for him as an officer - it somehow immediately set suspects at ease. Judy took her eyes away from Nick’s and let them drift downwards. God, his shirt was horrible. He probably did that just to drive her nuts. Her eyes came to rest on the tuft of cream-colored fur poking out from his collar - it looked an awful lot like the soft fur of her own tail, and wondered if it felt the same. It must be nice, to be that soft and fluffy all over…

“…and all I’m saying is that we should have had a building named after us. Or a bathroom, at least. Maybe a urinal? I like the sound of ‘The P. Wilde Dedicatory Urinal’.” That was it. Judy finally collapsed into an uncontrollable heap of giggles.

Nick sank back into his chair feeling particularly pleased with himself. Reducing Judy to wild laughter was one of his simple joys in life, and it was task that he pursued almost constantly - especially when they spent time together outside of work. As Judy slowly regained her self control, Nick cast a hungry eye on the untouched stack of pancakes on the table. “We should probably start in on these before they get too cold. What’d you order?” Judy’s breathing finally slowed down to a normal pace, and she peered at the plate. “Uhhh… banana pancakes. Never tried them, but I’m looking forward to it.”

The conversation stalled from there - both parties were too busy eating to continue talking. As the food in front of them slowly vanished, Judy and Nick resumed talking in between mouthfuls. Judy was the first to break the silence. “Okay, I’m moving into my new place Friday afternoon, so it’ll take me at least a day to get settled in. If you want, you can swing by Saturday and we can spend the day studying for the exam, which is Monday morning at ZPD.” Nick thought for a moment, and swallowed. “Yeah, that works for me. I’ll probably come over around noon, I have some errands to run in the morning.”

Nick flagged down Jeremy for the check. The shifty Ocelot returned with the small bit of paper, his eyes darting nervously from Judy to Nick and back again. “I’ve got this one”, said Judy as she placed a few bills on the table. “Thank you, Jeremy”, she said sweetly to the waiter. Jeremy just nodded and scooped up the money before skittering away again. Nick once again kept an eye on the Ocelot. “I’m telling you Carrots, that guy is shifty.” “Oh shush”, Judy replied. “He’s just shy, and you’re just paranoid.” Nick only grunted in response, and they both rose to leave.

They reached the door, and Judy turned to Nick. “I’ll see you Saturday then”, she said brightly. Nick smiled softly. “Looking forward to it, Carrots.” They hugged - for just a second or so too long - and
broke apart to tackle the rest of their day.
Chapter Three - Scholars

Judy’s Apartment, Saturday, Noon-ish

Nick double-checked the apartment number on his phone, then knocked on the door. He heard the pitter-patter of tiny feet rushing towards him, and then the door opened inward, revealing Judy. “Nick!” she exclaimed. “Come on in!”

Nick followed her through a narrow corridor that opened into a brightly lit living room. Judy had finished moving in, and appeared to have had a field day decorating her new apartment. A wide, black Lawson-style sofa took up space in the middle of the room, facing a rather large flat-screen television. A number of very comfortable-looking chairs and beanbags were scattered throughout the living room, a look that suggested the designer was used to having lots of bunnies needing a place to sit.

“Nice digs, Carrots!” Nick said appreciatively. “You really went all out on the furniture, huh?” He plopped down on the roomy sofa. Judy sat down delicately next to him. “Thanks! I mean… I’ve been sitting on almost two year’s worth of salary and I don’t spend a whole lot, so I kind of splurged on the sofa. And the bed. And the television.” Nick looked up and gave Judy a toothy grin. “Looks like it was money well splurged.” Nick propped himself up on his elbows. “Okay, so what exactly do we need to know going into this test? I know a ton of it is going to be situationals and example cases, but is there anything more specific we should be looking at?” Judy frowned, but her ears remained pointed skyward, as often happened when she was thinking. “Well, none of the current detectives are talking. But I was able to borrow this from a detective in the Third Precinct that swears it helped him on the exam.”

Judy rose from the couch and padded into the kitchen, when a heap of books lay haphazardly on a rickety dining table. She inspected them briefly, the extracted a large tome that was almost half her size. Nick was there in an instant to grab it for her, and looked at the title. “A Rookie’s Guide to Modern Detective Work?” he recited dryly. “Well, this sounds like a truly energetic read. Absolutely groundbreaking.” Judy sighed. “Nick, it’ll help. Besides, this isn’t really new stuff to either of us. Plenty of study and memorization at the academy, and four weeks isn’t even close to six months.” Nick sighed heavily. “Fine Carrots, you win this round. But one of these days we’re going to do the fun kind of studying. The kind that involves music and drinks.” Judy grinned playfully. “Who said this wasn’t going to involve music and drinks?” “Hold up!” blurted Nick. “I get to choose the soundtrack. After that crap you pulled with my phone, I don’t trust your musical tastes anymore.” Judy nodded solemnly in acceptance.
The afternoon and evening seemed to melt away in a haze of buzzed laughter. The two aspiring detectives would make excellent progress for about fifteen minutes before their well-intended study session degenerated into recollections of past calls and outlandish impersonations of other ZPD officers. Eventually, as their energy began to diminish (along with Judy’s admittedly formidable supply of alcohol), the two partners found themselves drowsily dozing on opposite ends of the couch as they drifted towards sleep.

Nick was the first to wake up. He cracked open his eyes, but quickly shut them - the sunlight pouring through the windows was a poor mix with his hangover. He attempted to lift his left paw to check his watch, but for some reason he wasn’t able to move his arm. He looked down and his breath caught in his throat.

At some point during the night, he and Judy had become entwined on the couch. She lay face down, perpendicular across his torso, pinning his left arm, and her arms were wrapped around his tail. Nick’s heart thumped in his chest - he and Judy had always respected each other’s personal space, but this went far beyond any unspoken limitations they had set for themselves. As much as he enjoyed this unintentional snuggle session, Nick knew he had to extricate himself before Judy woke up and things got uncomfortable.

He had just started to wiggle his left arm free when Judy let out a loud snore and rolled off of the couch and onto the floor. She woke up on impact, and her first impression was a shocked (yet snickering) Nick. Judy narrowed her eyes, and her words were venom. “You help me up. Right. Now.” Still snickering (though more out of relief than anything else), Nick clasped Judy’s forearms and pulled her to her feet. “See?” said Nick. “I can occasionally be a gentleman.” Judy let out a harsh bark of laughter. “Yeah, under duress, maybe! I need some water. We both need some water.”

As Judy busied herself with the glasses, Nick thanked every deity he could think of for Judy’s tumble. “Perfect.” He thought to himself. “That ended fine. Nothing is weird. Everything is okay. We’re good!” Judy handed him a glass of cold water, which he downed in seconds. “Sorry, by the way”, remarked Judy. Nick blinked. “Sorry for what, Carrots?” Judy shook her head and sheepishly continued “I generally try not to fall asleep on people, if I can help it.”

It wasn’t often that Judy saw Nick completely discombobulated, but when she did, she committed those precious few moments to her permanent memory - and this episode was going right into the vault. The first (and last) time she’d seen that face on Nick was right after she enlisted the help of Mr. Big in their first case together. A smile spread widely across her face. “You make a pretty great pillow, you know.”

Nick quickly regained a modicum of composure, but he was still thrown for a loop and was trying his best to recover. “Well, foxes are known for that, you know. In addition to being incredibly handsome and charming as a species.”
“Oh God.” Thought Nick. “Stereotyping yourself AND unintentionally flirting. Smooth. Now how do I end this without being weird?”

“Oh God.” Thought Judy. “I must have really embarrassed him. I’m a jerk. Great. Now how do I end this without being weird?”

They both attempted to speak at the same time, but interrupted each other. Then it happened again.

And then Nick blurted out something that he didn’t mean to say aloud at all.

“It was really nice.”

His words hung in the air like a blimp in the Rainforest District. Judy and Nick were trying their hardest not to look each other in the eye, until Judy gathered all of her considerable willpower and raised her head.

“It really was.”

The silence was deafening, and it seemed like the room was shrinking, shrinking into an impossibly small space with only enough room for the two of them…

The ring of Judy’s cell phone split the tension open like an explosion.

“Oh thank God.” thought the pair simultaneously.

Judy glanced at the screen - it was Clawhauser. Judy swiped to answer, cleared her throat, and in her most professional voice greeted her friend.

“Hey Benjamin, what’s up?”

“Hey Judy! Minor problem down at the station. We had a minor mix-up in the evidence lockers. Three different cases have been mixed up and they’re not sure which evidence baggies belong to which case… Bogo wants you down here with Delgato and Stevens to identity everything, since you
were all booked that evidence. I know it’s your day off, but Bogo authorized OT. So…”

“So it’s mandatory stacks of cash. Got it.”

Judy sighed inwardly. She’d seen this happen once before with only two cases, and everything took four hours to sort out. It was going to be a long Saturday if there was a lot of evidence.

“I’ll be down there in about 45 minutes, okay Ben?”

“10-4. Try to put a rush on it, Bogo is… combustible today.”

“Good to know. Thanks Ben.”

“Welcome. Bye!”

“Bye.”

Judy hung up and glanced at Nick. The tension had completely evaporated - it was time for work. Time to be professionals.

“I’m heading down”, said Judy imperiously. Feel free to help yourself to whatever you can find in the fridge, and don’t feel shy about grabbing a shower. Just lock the door on your way out. She tossed him a spare key as she bustled out the door. “I’ll see you Monday morning, Nick!” The door slammed shut.

“Yeah.” Murmured Nick to himself. “See you Monday.”
Nick leaned closer towards Clawhauser.

“It was really awkward. There was just this huge silence, and then you saved the day with that phone call. And that’s pretty much what happened”, concluded Nick. Benjamin Clawhauser, captivated by Nick’s story, shook his head, sending sprinkles flying across his desk. “From what you’re telling me, it sounds like I shouldn’t have called. It sounds like I interrupted something.” Clawhauser’s dulcet voice was tinged with guilt.

“Trust me”, intoned Nick. “It was weird.” Clawhauser smiled mischievously. “Only because you let it be weird. You two obviously feel the same way about each other. And, to be honest, the entire department has been expecting you and Judy to get together for ages. As a matter of fact, there may or may not be a betting pool."

A bemused expression crossed over Nick’s face. “You’re telling me that there’s a betting pool… and I’m not a part of it!” Nick’s mock outrage caused a pair of sheep officers across the atrium to turn their heads and stare for a moment.

Clawhauser’s voice took on a conspiratory tone. “No can do, Nick. That’d be insider trading.” The cheetah glanced upwards and boomed out a welcoming “Hello!” to Judy Hopps, who has just crossed the threshold of the front door.

“Hey Nick, hey Ben!” she called out brightly. As she reached Clawhauser’s desk, the perky rabbit turned to Nick. “We should probably get changed soon, the test starts in a half hour.” Clawhauser let out a small squeal. “Oh, I’m proctoring that! Just between the three of us” – Clawhauser’s voice lowered by a few decibels – “there are twenty officers taking the exam today. Twenty! For four spots!”

Nick and Judy glanced at each other, and were both relieved that there was no awkwardness in the air between them. They both looked back to the tubby cat behind the desk and Nick winked. “Well, it’s nice to have some good competition. I’d hate for this to be too easy.”

Judy elbowed him in the leg. “Nick, be nice. C’mon, let’s go get changed and meet at the briefing room.”

Fifteen minutes later, Nick and Judy were standing on opposite sides of the hallway outside of the main briefing room, affectionately known as the bullpen to members of the force. “You know”, said Judy, “I’m glad we got together on Saturday. It was nice to refresh on some of that old info.”

Nick nodded. “Mmmmm.” But every time he thought about Saturday, all he could think of was how
it felt for Judy to be peacefully curled up with him on the couch. He shook himself out of his reverie – it was time to focus.

Clawhauser came plodding down the hallway. “Hey you two – I forgot to mention, they changed the testing room to Conference Room B, on the other side of the atrium.” Nick looked between Judy and Benjamin. “Aha. So that’s why we’re the only people here.” Judy let out a short chuckle. “Nice work, Detective Wilde!” Nick gave Judy a playful shove, and the bunny felt her stomach swoop – a feeling that had nothing to do with nervousness about the test.

The trio made their way to Conference Room B and entered. The room was the mirror image of the main bullpen, but was extremely handy when the precinct was busy, or when a special event was taking place (like a Detective’s Exam). Save for Nick and Judy, the room was filled almost entirely with massive predators like lions, tigers, and bears. “Oh my!”, blurted Clawhauser. “I’m running late! I’ve got to go grab the test forms, be right back!” He waddled off, whistling a jaunty tune. Nick and Judy glanced at each other, and then sat down together in the second row of tables. Quiet conversation filled the room as the assorted officers began to grow anxious.

The chatter in the room immediately died as the officers heard the foreboding thunder of Chief Bogo’s footsteps approaching from down the hall. They all stood as Bogo entered the room, and sat back down at a wave from the Chief. Bogo adjusted his glasses and glanced down at a paper on his podium, then back to the aspiring officers. “Thank you all for applying for the Detective positions. As you well know, there are twenty of you and only four available slots, which means that in one week, sixteen of you are going to be very disappointed. How sad.” The officers chuckled - they were senior enough by now to appreciate Bogo’s trademark gruffness. Bogo cleared his throat and continued. “I want you all to keep in mind that much more than these test results are taken into account when deciding who will be promoted to Detective. Your records will be closely scrutinized, and your watch commanders will also have input on the decision. Good detective work takes skill, guile, and good fair judgment. My expectation is for you lot to make this an extremely difficult decision.” Bogo looked up from his notes and gave a rare smile to the room. “Good luck, officers. Clawhauser?”

The cheetah had reappeared at the door, breathless. He held thick reams of paper in his arms, which he deftly distributed among the applicants as Bogo stomped out of the room and returned to his office. After Clawhauser had handed out the last packet, he took Bogo’s place behind the lectern. “Okay, everyone”, he said in his effeminate tenor, “you have exactly one hour to complete the exam. If you finish early, place it face down on the table and leave the room.” The rotund cheetah glanced up at the clock on the far end of the room. “You may start… now.”

So began a symphony of scratching pencils. Nick and Judy read the first question, glanced at each other, and broke into knowing smiles.
Chapter Five – Blue Skies

Judy’s Apartment, Saturday, 1900

It was Saturday, and Judy Hopps had been nearly sick with anticipation for the entire week. She had been trying to quell her anxiety by binge watching shows on Nutflix, but there were only so many episodes of Barks and Recreation and House of Carrots she could take before going crazy.

This led to Judy inviting Nick over to knock out the week’s paperwork. The waiting game was always easier to play with a friend.

The partners were halfway through witness statements on a drug store robbery when Judy and Nick’s phones vibrated simultaneously. Judy got to hers first, as Nick had left his on a kitchen counter. She glanced at the screen – *and saw an email from ZPD.*

Judy, her hands suddenly shaking, skimmed through the email, and without warning rocketed to her feet and began bouncing to and fro in her living room.

"Nick. NICK! I can't believe it! We made it! Nick, we're both going to be detectives!" Happiness and excitement radiated from Judy in waves every time she hit the ground. Her eyes were wide with excitement, and her ears were perked up to their maximum.

In Nick’s opinion, it was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. It occurred to him then, for the first time in his life that he could remember, Nicholas P. Wilde was speechless - so he took Judy by the shoulders, bent down, and kissed her.

It was as though time stopped. They were suspended in a bubble filled only with joy, and each other. Though it only lasted for a quick second, both could swear it lasted an eternity.

Nick broke away, but Judy hopped up onto the couch, pulled him towards her and, with a blazing look in her eyes, kissed him right back. This time, neither of them made a move to come away for a long, long while. When the moment finally came, Nick and Judy looked deep into the windows of the other’s soul. No words needed to be said – what they felt was so plainly reflected in their partner’s eyes that they both felt that had been blind so as not have seen it before.
Judy took Nick by the paw and led him wordlessly to her bedroom.
Chapter Six – Afterglow

Judy’s Apartment, Sunday, 0730

Judy Hopps had never been so happy.

She woke up bundled in Nick’s arms, with her head tucked snugly beneath his muzzle. His tail had wrapped around his nude torso and covered the upper part of her legs. She could feel the gentle rhythm of his breathing and adjusted her own to match, marveling in their oneness. She closed her eyes and smiled. Everything was perfect.

Unfortunately, she had to pee.

After carefully releasing herself from Nick’s embrace, Judy wobbled slowly towards her bathroom. Nick, awoken by the noise and movement, smirked. “Having a little trouble walking, Carrots?” Judy turned back and gave Nick a half scathing and half gratifying look, but said nothing. Nick’s smirk elongated into a voluptuous grin, and he raised his fists into the air in mock victory. “I am the Fox. I am the Legend.”

Judy snorted and resumed her trek to the bathroom. “Don’t flatter yourself, sweetheart”, she called. Nick’s ears perked up. “Oh, so I’m ‘Sweetheart’ now? That was quick.” Judy’s head popped ears-first from behind the bathroom door. “I could always go with ‘dumbass’, you know.” “Ahh”, sighed Nick in satisfaction. “That’s better. I thought you were going soft on me for a second.” Nick heard the twisting of a faucet and the sudden flow of the sink. “You would be an expert on things going soft, Nick” Judy teased. Nick lobbed a pillow at her and missed by a mile. “You wouldn’t be walking funny if that were the case”, the fox retorted. The noise of the sink ceased, and Judy emerged from the bathroom. She took a running jump and landed nimbly next to Nick on the bed.

Judy pecked Nick on the cheek, then leaned back. “We should have done this ages ago,” she mourned. “So much lost time.” Nick nodded and extended one clawed finger, tracing a gentle path through the fur on Judy’s back, causing her to shiver. “You’re right. We should have. But you know what they say, there’s no time like the present.” On his last word, Nick swept Judy up in his arms and pulled her close to him. “What I’m trying to figure out is why we never said anything to each other.”

Judy busied herself by slowly massaging the back of Nick’s neck. “I guess we didn’t want to make things weird. Which made things… weird. Talk about a self-fulfilling prophecy.” The couple kissed then, and lay together peacefully for a moment.

“Nick.”

“Hmm?”
“We smell.”

Nick had no choice but to agree. He hopped into the shower with Judy, then after they had gotten dressed he helped her strip the blankets and sheets off of her bed.

“Just stick them in the basket for now, I’ll get them in the wash a little bit later”, said Judy. Nick complied, then made his way into the kitchen. “Make you something?” he asked as Judy entered the room. “Sure” she replied. “Surprise me. You’ve been doing really good at that lately.” Nick grinned and started pulling ingredients out of the fridge.

Judy played with her phone for a minute, then addressed Nick again.

“Hey, you know what this means, right?”

Nick’s reply was muffled – his head was buried deep in the bottom of Judy’s fridge, trying to find some missing ingredient.

“What’s that, Carrots?”

Judy grinned like a manic.

“We get to tell my parents that we’re a thing now.”

Nick started and banged his head on a shelf in the fridge. He swore loudly, then straightened up.

“I’m cool with telling your mom. And your siblings. But there no way I’m breaking the news to your dad. He’s waaaay to proud of his collection of fox-repelling products. Who mounts a Taser on their living room wall?”

Judy giggled. “You know he just did that to mess with you, right? He actually likes you a lot.”

Nick was now deftly working a frying pan on the stove. “As a police officer? Yeah, sure. I can get that. But I don’t think he’s going to feel as peachy when he finds out that the darn shifty fox is screwing his daughter.”

That comment was enough to elicit a sigh from Judy. “Well, we’ll do it together then. When we’re ready.” Nick beamed at her. “That sounds perfect. In the meantime, I need to practice getting all of your siblings’ names right. I think I’ve got almost all of them memorized by now.”

Judy balked. “I don’t believe you. There’s no way you remember all two-seventy five!”

A smarmy mask appeared on Nick’s face. “Oh yeah? Watch this. Kevin, Devin, Jory, Tory, Jenny, Juliana, Hazel, Holly, Heather…”
Nick’s rhythmic gumbo of rabbit names came to a halt as he laughed at the incredulous expression on Judy’s face. “Come on, Carrots”, he said. “The Detective’s exam isn’t the only thing I studied for.”

“Apparently not”, remarked an impressed Judy. “So what are we doing with the rest of the weekend?”

Nick winked at her. “Besides each other? I have every intention of spoiling you rotten this weekend. You better believe we’re going out to eat somewhere nice. Definitely in Sahara Square. We’re detectives now, we’ve got to up our level of classiness.”

“Excuse me?” Judy appeared affronted. “I’ll have you know that I have always been classy.”

“Police officers aren’t supposed to lie, Carrots… hey now!” Nick ducked as Judy flung a beanbag at him. “You’re gonna need me alive if you want breakfast.”
Dinner

Chapter Seven – Dinner

The warm, fuzzy feeling that Judy that had been consuming Judy all day disappeared, and was shortly replaced with anxiety and sheer terror.

There really wasn’t any reason for it. Sunday had passed by in a pleasant haze of banter, hand-holding, and kissing. But somewhere in between receiving her drink and ordering appetizers, Judy had looked at Nick (who was sitting nonchalantly at the other end of the small table) and felt her stomach lurch.

She deliberately looked away and scanned the restaurant. The Shady Palm was one of the nicest restaurants in Zootopia that allowed walk-ins. It was nestled somewhere near the top of the gigantic palm-shaped skyscraper in Savannah Square. Though the building itself was a bustling destination for tourists, the Shady Palm itself managed to avoid them, catering almost exclusively to Zootopian locals.

The sun had already set, and the eatery was dark. Candles dotted the dusky dining room, adding a warm ambience and contributing just enough light for diners to see each other from across the table. The tables were close together, but far enough apart to allow prevent eavesdropping by other patrons. It was, in a word, intimate.

Just sighed inwardly. Intimate. That word simultaneously summed up the best and worst parts of her life at the moment. She looked back to Nick and laughed at a joke she had only half heard.

Today had started off as one of the best days of her life, but now she was worried. This bothered Judy – she wasn’t a worrier, and typically left that to her sweetly overbearing parents.

As much affection as she felt for Nick, she couldn’t help but start to peek outside of their metaphorical bubble. While things might seem perfect now, that fact that they were... together was going to create some ripples.

It wasn’t any one thing, but rather the gestalt of so many small yet important issues. She and Nick would be – or were? – an interspecies couple. That in itself wasn’t so uncommon, but relationships between predator and prey still carried a stigma. It was usually limited to hushed whispers and snide comments, but it was still an issue that she and Nick would have to deal with.

Then there was the fact that they were partners. Could they even work together the same way now? How could Judy look at Nick without seeing the tender expression that donned his face during lovemaking, or without feeling the press of his body against her? Even if they could shelve those feelings – for ten hours a day, four days a week – Bogo would most certainly separate them. Not out of any prejudice or dislike of relationships between officers, but Bogo was an excellent Chief. He understood that his officers had to be absolutely sharp for the entire duration of their shifts, and that couldn’t happen if they were ogling each other while trying to fight crime.
“Carrots.”

“Yes, Nick?”

“You’re about to pile drive a hole into the floor, and it’s a long way down from here.”

Her right foot had been anxiously tapping against the ground at a mile a minute. Judy forced herself to be still as Nick gave her his signature cocky grin.

“I know I’m handsome, but really now. No need to be nervous.”

Judy couldn’t help but smile and, internally, agree. She couldn’t judge Nick by typical bunny standards, but there was something about his eyes that was just… attractive. It was the same thing with his fur, and his smile, and the way he sat lazily, and a hundred other things. Nick had also managed to somehow procure a suit for the evening, insisting that it was a vital part of their new “standard of classiness” – which Judy felt was an ironic statement coming from someone whose wardrobe was comprised almost entirely of slacks and Hawaiian shirts. Judy herself had been coaxed into wearing her once-used cocktail dress. Her consternation at having to dress up was mollified somewhat by the joy she took in making Nick help her put it on.

“You’re really into the self flattery today, aren’t you?” she said with fake coyness.

Nick’s grin only got wider, and he took her paw in his.

“Well, I’ve had a pretty good day.”

Judy paused, relishing the contact, but forced herself to pull away.

“Nick, we need to talk about this.”

Nick’s smile vanished, and his heart started racing. There weren’t many phrases more stress-inducing than those that included the infamous “we need to talk.” He knew, of course, what she was going to say, because his mind was preoccupied with the same thoughts. Nick remained silent, however, so Judy took a deep breath and began.

“Nick, today has been… incredible. But it’s all happening so fast, and there’s so much that might happen… Bogo might split us up, and it’s going to be tough to do this. Especially as a rabbit and a fox…”

Nick started to respond before Judy had finished talking, his voice coming out hurried, but sincere.

“I don’t care about any of that. I can live with a transfer, because I want to keep seeing you. Like this, I mean. I know we’ve started really quick, but I want to work this out. I want to at least give it a
good shot.”

There was a pregnant silence as Nick tumbled to the end of his sentence. At some point, their paws had interlocked again, but neither party seemed to notice. Their waiter, a lithe panther, had approached with their appetizer plate but stealthily retreated when he sensed the import of their conversation.

Judy’s response was to lean over the table and kiss Nick, though it didn’t work out quite as smoothly as she had hoped. The table was slightly too tall for her to bend forward, so she had to stand slightly and awkwardly bring her face to Nick’s.

She pulled away and smiled.

The waiter, sensing that his time had come at last, deftly swept forward with his plate and placed it delicately on the table. “Your fruit platter, sir. Ma’am.” He padded silently into the darkness.

“Well”, Judy said as she plucked an apple from the plate, “I suppose now we just have to figure out whether or not we tell people.”

Nick gave a small bark of laughter.

“I vote no, for now. Let’s give this some time, figure out the waters first. Besides, I’m pretty sure Clawhauser already knows.”

Judy blanched.

“How?!”

Nick blinked and studiously ignored her question.

“...Let’s just say I have a hunch. There’s a reason he’s so big. He’s full of secrets.”

The couple spent several moments in comfortable silence as they ate. Nick spoke first.

“I’m probably going to stay at my place tonight. I’ve got to do some suit prep for tomorrow… no more uniform for this fox.” Nick sounded elated as he said it, but Judy knew how much he loved his ZPD blues. Not one officer on the force took better care of their uniform than Nick, though the condition of his uniform was often overlooked, mostly due to the addition of his aviators and his ever-present cup of coffee in his paw.

Judy nodded in agreement.

“Same, I’ve got to get my things together and finish doing laundry.”

All tension had dissipated, and that magical warm fuzziness had returned to Judy. Everything was
going to be fine.
ZPD – Bogo’s Office – 0830

Even after all of her time spent in the ZPD, Judy always felt as though Bogo was looking at her through a magnifying glass. He also had a disconcerting ability to give off the impression that he could read your mind.

The meeting itself started off well enough. As they crossed the threshold into Bogo’s office, he had shaken both Nick and Judy’s paws (or at least shaken them as well as he could – his hands were as big as Judy’s head) and guided them to the two seats in front of his desk, which were affectionately referred to within the ZPD as “The Danger Zone”.

Bogo sat, then cleared his throat.

“Congratulations to both of you. I’m sure you must both be very excited about the results.”

Judy beamed. Nick sat limply in an uncaffeinated stupor.

“I’m sure you both know Captain Jorgenson. He’s running the Detective Bureau, so you’ll be reporting to him now. Your locker assignments will remain the same.”

The massive buffalo shuffled the papers in front of him with surprising dexterity.

“That’s it. Leave me alone. You’re his problem now.”

The two newly-minted detectives left Bogo’s office, and headed to the south side of the building, where the Detective Bureau was located. Judy motored along with an almost literal skip to her step.

“That went great! I can’t wait to get started. Where do you think Jorgensen will put us? My bet is on Narcotics. Or Vice!”

Nick couldn’t help but smile at his partner’s enthusiasm.

“I don’t know how well we’d do with undercover or infiltration work, Carrots. We’re probably the most easily-recognizable cops in this city” he drawled. “Besides”, he continued, “nobody would ever believe that a cute little bunny would want to buy meth off of them. You’re all too hyper in the first place.”

Judy shot Nick a playful glare and gave him a half-hearted shove.

“Be careful Wilde. I’m dangerous.”
The duo finally arrived at the Bureau. It looked no different than the rest of the department – the similarity of everything made the gargantuan building seem like an endless maze, but Nick and Judy had long since learned to navigate it. The door was nondescript, save for a small black 76 etched into its midpoint.

Nick opened the door and ushered his partner through.

“Prey before beauty”, he said with a smirk.

Judy’s witty reply was lost in her throat as she took in the room – or rooms, rather. The open door led into a long hallway, which splintered into nearly twenty smaller rooms. At the very end – perhaps two hundred feet away – there was a very comfortable looking living area with a number of couches, a television, and a small open kitchen.

It was quiet, but alive. Murmurs drifted over the soft shuffling of paper, and was occasionally punctuated by a laugh.

Judy was suddenly overcome with nervousness. Her first instinct was to reach for Nick’s hand, but she knew she couldn’t do that here – so she settled for just looking at him.

The fox stood tall but slightly slouched, regarding the hallway with a half-lidded semi-disinterest. Judy felt a sudden calm overtake her, and her nerves settled immediately. They were going to do this together, and it was going to be fine.

Nick started down the hallway.

“C’mon, Carrots. Let’s go find the Captain.”

Judy hurried after him, glancing through the windows of the offices they passed. Small brass nameplates adorned the rooms – there were some names she recognized, but most were unfamiliar to her. Detectives and patrol officers rarely interacted once cases were handed up to the Bureau.

They finally reached the end of the hallway, and turned to face the final door on the right. The nameplate was weathered with age, and read simply:

**CAPT. JORGENSON.**

Judy knocked.

“Come in!”

Jorgenson was a lithe black panther whose age revealed itself in streaks of grey throughout his coat. He had not let himself go to seed, however. Much like Bogo, he was all muscle and, if he wanted to, could go on patrol and be just as effective as he had been twenty years ago. His eyes were a rich amber, and exuded warmth.

He had been sitting behind his expansive mahogany desk, but leapt to his feet as Judy and Nick entered, offering them brief pawshakes before they all seated themselves.
The trio sat in silence as Jorgenson shifted through Nick and Judy’s brief (but expansive) service records. After several moments, he glanced up towards his newest detectives.

“I’m assigning you two to Narcotics. You have relevant experience with the Night Howler case, and it’ll keep you in the action. I wouldn’t want to stick Bogo’s favorite officers behind a desk forever.”

Jorgenson was greeted by a pair of raised eyebrows, and he chuckled.

“Oh, the Chief loves you guys. Though I’m going to take a wild shot in the dark here and assume he hasn’t smothered you with affection.”

“…not quite”, said Nick.

Jorgenson smiled lightly.

“If you’re still here, it means he likes you. I’ll have a case file ready for you in an hour or so. In the meantime, get to your office and settle in. You’re in room 6. It’s the third door on the left from the entrance. It’s a bit… bare right now, but you can start bringing in sundries this week.”

He paused, then smiled broadly.

“Welcome to the Bureau.”

Jorgenson rose and opened the door, which Nick and Judy took as their cue to leave. The Captain spoke once more as they crossed the threshold.

“Oh, stick this on your door.” He handed Nick a small wooden case. Nick opened it to reveal a gleaming new nameplate bearing the words WILDE/HOPPS.

When Jorgenson had described their new office as “bare”, he hadn’t been exaggerating. Not counting the fox and the rabbit, the office only had three occupants: a large desk (though not nearly as impressive as Jorgenson’s), a rather deep closet, and a decaying swivel chair languishing behind the desk. The carpet was aged and faded, but the paint on the walls was fresh. Most importantly, the A/C seemed to work perfectly.

Judy and Nick loved it.

Nick immediately claimed the chair.

“This is totally mine. It was meant to be, it’s perfectly fox-sized.”
Judy, as she had done thousands of times in response to Nick, rolled her eyes.

“That’s fine! I imagine you’ll be doing a lot of sitting, while the more talented and better-looking half of this team solves the crimes.”

Nick gave a theatrical groan and collapsed onto the desk in a fake, dramatic death.

“That’s cruel! I imagine you’ll be doing a lot of sitting, while the more talented and better-looking half of this team solves the crimes.”

He rolled over until he was spread-eagled, face-up across the desk.

Judy strode to the window facing the hallway and pulled the blinds shut. She turned to Nick, and winked.

“I’ve always wanted to resurrect someone.”
Chapter Nine - The New Normal

Judy’s Apartment - Two Weeks Later - Saturday - 0530

Judy had been awake for nearly ten minutes, but she was surrounded by warm fox and didn’t want to move. She rolled over to face Nick and studied his sleeping face.

Objectively speaking, Nick was handsome. Perhaps not by bunny standards, but in Judy’s book he was the most striking fox in Zootopia. There were angles to his features that simply didn’t appear in the typical roundness of rabbits - it made him look intelligent and sharp. This was contrasted heavily by Nick’s current state - his mouth was wide open and his tongue lolled off to the side. Judy giggled softly. Cute fox.

Then there was his smell. Judy had tried not to notice it before (in the name of professionalism), but she was always subconsciously aware of it. It was difficult for her to describe, but it was earthen, warm, and a tad spicy. In millennia past, that scent would have terrified her - but now it just excited and reassured her.

It seemed like nothing big had really changed. The humor was the same. They ate together and worked together, just as they did before. But so many little things had evolved in the strangest and most magical ways.

They would be cuddling and watching T.V. when Nick would suddenly exclaim “Burrito!” and wrap his arms, legs, and tail around Judy, leaving only her head free.

Judy would pseudo-romantically try to feed Nick with a spoon, but then pull a bait-and-switch and kiss him instead. She usually dropped the spoon.

Nick had developed an odd habit of opening doors for Judy. Though chivalry had always annoyed her slightly (she was an adult rabbit and could open her own doors, thank you very much), she didn’t mind Nick doing it.

Nick was a gentlefox, though he would never admit it. And he was a good boyfriend.

“Boyfriend” Judy thought.

It was a label she had never thought she might use for Nick. Again, in the name of professionalism, she had buried her feelings for him deep, deep down - but being able to explore them with Nick was incredible.

They had started off fast. Maybe too fast - though it didn’t seem like much of a problem. Through some unspoken agreement, she and Nick had both tapped on the breaks a little. Most of their personal time spent together was as it had been before, but now with overlapping personal space and much more casual intimacy.

Judy had been in relationships before, but none of them had felt like this. Not even the few that had gotten physical. There was always a layer of insecurity and awkwardness in those previous encounters, but there was none of that with Nick. Judy could say whatever was on her mind to Nick.
and (after a short bout of sarcastic teasing), he would take her seriously.

For all of their constant innuendo, the couple had only slept together once. It hadn’t been mentioned, but it wasn’t an uncomfortable subject - the time just hadn’t seemed right to move further in that direction. Judy, for one, wanted to figure out exactly what they were before they ripped their clothes off again (though truth be told, she was greatly looking forward to it).

Judy sighed and let the thoughts drift away. For now, she was happy to enjoy Nick’s company. And to tickle him mercilessly until he got up and started making breakfast.

Nearly an hour later, Nick stood guard over the oven as two tofu omelettes sizzled in a large pan. Judy was sitting on the couch, absorbed in her endlessly-growing email inbox. Nick gave a critical look at the omelettes - not done yet. He called over to Judy -

“Carrots, I’m starting to think you only want me for my amazing cooking skills. When are you going to make me breakfast?”

Judy’s eyes remained on her phone as she replied.

“Trust me, you don’t want me to cook for you unless you’re looking to use up some of your sick days. Every time I’ve cooked, it’s been a disaster.”

Nick was incredulous.

“You’re telling me that with nearly three hundred family members you never learned how to cook?”

Judy smiled.

“There were so many of us that I never needed to! There were always at least a couple aspiring chefs in the house.” She finally broke away from her phone and walked over to Nick. “Who taught you how to cook? Mom? Dad?”

Nick’s attention was focused once again on the stove.

“My mom. She taught me pretty much everything I know” - Nick paused for a brief moment - “well, all the good stuff, anyway. How to cook, how to clean. Never met my dad.”

Judy was hit by a pang of sympathy. She let her paw drift to Nick’s forearm and rest there lightly.

“I’m sorry, Nick.”

Nick’s handsome features distorted in a rueful smile.

“I’m not. It made me grow up. It built character. And besides” - Judy noticed that his smile was now genuine - “if I didn’t grow up in a broken home, I never would have met you!” He leaned down and kissed her, before straightening up to examine his handiwork.

“Ah! They’re done. Grab a couple plates, would you?”

Judy obliged. As she rooted through a cabinet looking for clean dishes, her thoughts remained firmly
fixed on Nick’s family.

Everything Nick had told her about his mother had been overwhelmingly positive. Judy has slowly developed a mental image of Mariel Wilde, and though it probably wasn’t terribly realistic (most foxes, as far as Judy was aware, did not have wings or halos), she felt that she wasn’t that far off.

Judy had never met Mariel. Whenever she got onto the topic, Nick always managed to smoothly change the subject, and Judy let it go, aware that there were parts of Nick’s childhood that he wasn’t enthusiastic about discussing. For instance, he had brought up his muzzling incident once and only once.

Though Judy was understanding for the most part, it didn’t seem quite fair. He had, after all, met her parents. Though he hadn’t been to Bunnyburrow, he always managed to visit with Judy’s parents whenever they made the long trek into the city. Though Stu and Bonnie Hopps had been skeptical initially (some habits take a long time to break, even if one is earnest about breaking them), Nick had inevitably won them over with his genuine heart and vulpine charm.

It was something she’d just have to talk to Nick about. But later - breakfast was about to happen, and Judy wasn’t about to miss out on Nick’s cooking.
A Stirring

Chapter Notes

By far the longest chapter in this story! I'm glad people have been enjoying it so far.

This chapter marks a major turning point. The first nine chapters or so are what I would consider the first act of this story - they were a good way to get a feeling for the characters and maneuver things around. We're taking a trip into mystery town now with the second act. Nick and Judy have a big case, but it may just go a lot deeper than Bunnyburrow (and I swear to God it's not a rehash of the movie's plot).

From here on out, the story is going to start earning that "Mature" rating (nothing crazy, but expect some sex, some graphic violence, language, and lots of drugs.

From now on Chapters are going to be much longer (at least as long as this one). Updates are going to take a little longer, but there'll be more (and hopefully better) story for you on the other side.

Thank you for reading!

Chapter Ten – A Stirring

ZPD – Nick and Judy’s Office – Monday - 1100

Over the last two weeks, the dingy office that Nick and Judy inherited had been transformed into a strange and comfortable fusion of a rabbit burrow and a fox den. Some of the small pillows from Judy’s apartment had mysteriously migrated into the office, and Nick had somehow managed to smuggle a lounge chair all the way through the ZPD and into the back corner of the office.

The budding detectives had replaced the original fluorescent light bulbs with special bulbs that glowed a soft orange, casting the office in a warm, earthy glow. The process had been perilous, requiring Judy to stand on Nick’s shoulders, who in turn had stood precariously perched on the raggedy chair, which had been temporarily planted atop the desk.

The struggle had been worth it in the end, however. Nick, whose species was nocturnal by nature, no longer had to constantly wear sunglasses in order to shield his eyes from the glaring lights. Though Judy had no problem with light, she was able to appreciate the molten appearance of the new bulbs – she no longer found herself straining her vision after a long stint in the office.

The pair had started the day off slowly, finishing off paperwork from their last case: a moderately large cocaine bust that implicated several members of a Lemming Brothers branch in Little Rodentia. The scheme had been masterminded by the branch manager and a raccoon handyman named Basuro. The handyman, under the guise of fixing the building’s air conditioning unit, rigged the system so that the entire top floor (here the executives worked) would dispense cocaine along with cooled air when the temperature was set below 50 degrees. The arrangement was discovered when...
the extremely high bank manager opened his window while the system was on and showered dozens of pedestrians with snow.

The case had been relatively open and shut – Judy had masterfully been able to coax a confession out of every suspect involved. All the detectives had left to do was attend the case in court.

Just as Judy stapled together the last evidence report, the door opened just a crack, through which Captain Jorgenson’s head appeared.

“Wilde, Hopps. You done with that Lemming case?”

“Yes sir!” exclaimed Nick enthusiastically. The fox was sprawled lazily across his lounge chair, just out of view of Jorgenson.

Jorgenson smiled.

“Good. Come down to my office, I have something really fun for you two.”

The door closed silently.

Nick turned to Judy.

“Do you think he means the normal idea of fun, or the Bogo idea of fun? I don’t have Jorgenson figured out yet.”

Judy gave a small smile.

“I guess we’re about to find out. Get up!”

Nick groaned as he rose to his feet, and followed Judy into the hallway.

Both mammals blinked as they crossed the threshold – the warm glow of their office had given way to the harsh bright fluorescence of the ZPD hallways. By the time they reached Jorgenson’s office, their vision had almost returned to normal.

The Captain sat regally in his chair.

“Close the door behind you”, he commanded.

Judy let the door swing shut behind her and hopped into the chair next to Nick, looking at Jorgenson expectantly.

The panther slid a rather thin case file across the desk. Nick, being taller, grabbed it and brought it down to a level that he and Judy could both read comfortably at.

“This”, said Jorgenson heavily, “is going to be an interesting one. I have no doubt either of you remember the details of the Night Howler incident?”

Judy and Nick gave each other a quick glance, then nodded simultaneously.

“Good”, said the panther. “Because it just came back from the dead to bite us in the ass.”
Judy was confused.

"But sir, we put that to bed ages ago. Lionheart and Bellwether are still in jail, and we managed to track down everyone on Bellwether’s payroll. The lab is gone, and the mammals are gone. If there’s anything left at all, I don’t see how it has enough teeth to bite us in the... butt."

Nick snorted at Judy’s euphemism.

Jorgenson nodded.

"Normally I would agree with you, Hopps. But this case has convinced me otherwise. If you remember the wake of that case as well as I do, you’ll remember our failed damage control. Precious few people knew what Night Howlers were before those incidents. But thanks to our wonderful friends at ZNN, millions of mammals found out about the plant."

Nick nodded knowingly.

"You were worried about Bellwether copycats."

"Mm." agreed Jorgenson. "We knew that eventually someone would try again. So Bogo and the union leaned heavily on the Mayor’s office to pass emergency legislation, banning Night Howlers from Zootopia. Luckily, we were able to locate nearly all of the Night Howlers in the city. The legal ones were easy, and Bellwether seems to have had the only illegal stash that we’re aware of. Everything was either destroyed or confiscated for study. Which makes what I’m about to tell you very troubling."

The aged panther gave a weary sigh.

"There’s a new drug on the streets. The dealers are calling it ‘Blue Frost’, and it appears to be a mixture of Night Howlers and some kind of opiate. It’s not nearly as dangerous as those pellets that Bellwether was making – apparently it has a similar psychological effect as the Night Howlers. Users report a rush, feeling extremely ‘free’ as well as finding a connection with their more... basic... instincts. Fortunately, whatever it’s mixed with seems to keep them from going savage. They usually just rock back and forth and stare at the wall for three hours. But that’s not what we’re really worried about."

Judy suddenly understood.

"You’re worried that someone has stockpiled Night Howlers. If there’s that many of them somewhere..."

Nick finished her thought for her.

"It’s only a matter of time until someone a little more ideological than some drug dealers tries to get their paws on them."

Jorgenson’s white grin clashed brilliantly with his pitch-and-silver fur.

"Good to know they still promote the right people around here. I’m putting you two on this case."

Both fox and rabbit swelled with pride, and Jorgenson looked at them fondly, remembering when we
had been that young – excited and nervous about his early cases.

A moment passed and Nick spoke up.

“You said Bellwether’s grow op was the only one you knew about. Couldn’t there be another within city limits? There are a lot of places that only criminals would think of. Not that I would know anything about that.”

Jorgenson’s amber eyes locked with Nick’s.

“We don’t think so, not with the volume of frost we’re seeing. If it was coming from within city limits, we would know. There’s only one locale we can think of that can produce the amount required without raising attention.”

A light went off in Judy’s head.

“Bunnyburrow,” she said.

“Exactly.” Replied Jorgenson.

“Mendicampum Holicifius isn’t completely prohibited in Bunnyburrow. I believe it’s used as a pesticide?” He looked at Judy for confirmation, which she gave with a quick nod.

Jorgenson continued on.

“So that’s where you two are going. Hopps, you will make arrangements for you and your partner to stay with your family in Bunnyburrow. Your investigation will be under the guise of an extended vacation. Do not tell your family, Hopps. Casual clothes for the both of you, I don’t want to attract any unwanted attention. There are plenty of foxes in Bunnyburrow as well, so Wilde won’t have to worry about blending in.”

The Captain leaned forward.

“The goal is finding the Night Howlers. Once you find them, the arrest should be easy. Howlers are still a Class 3 Botanical in the Burrows, and possessing over 100 plants in one location is a felony.”

The panther leaned back in his chair and gave a lazy smile.

“Go catch me some drug dealers.”

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Judy was enthusiastic as she walked with Nick to the metro rail. Everything about this case was perfect – she got paid time off to visit her family, and she got to sink her teeth into a major case! Most of all, she was ecstatic about the amount of trust Jorgenson had placed in herself and Nick – letting them tackle a big case in their third week as detectives? Unusual, but he seemed to think they
could do it.

Judy’s head was stuck so high up in the clouds that it took several minutes before she noticed Nick’s uncharacteristic silence.

“You okay, Nick?” she asked.

Nick gave a sigh.

“Yeah Carrots, I’m fine. It’s just… I don’t know how I feel about crashing at your parent’s place. We still haven’t told them about us, and I still feel like it’s too early to bring it up to them.”

Judy’s ears slowly deflated. She had completely forgotten.

“Oh… right. Well, we don’t have to tell them yet. We can wait.”

She smiled and placed her right paw in the small of Nick’s back as they boarded their tram. It was a small, innocent gesture that wouldn’t earn them any ire from passers-by, but they both knew it meant much more than that. What was once small and unimportant was now intimate – it was strange, experiencing so many of the same things in such a different context.

The tram rumbled to a stop and Nick readied himself to exit. Nick and Judy lived on the same line, and almost always took the tram into and out of work together. Nick could have walked (thanks to his “tactical leasing”), but he enjoyed Judy’s company too much to do so.

He turned around to face Judy as he swaggered out of the tram.

“I’ll text you later, Carrots. Let me know if you want some help packing. I know you only have three outfits, so you’ll need all the help you can get.”

Judy yelled to him as the door began to slide shut in her face.

“I have four, you dumb fox!”

---

Nick was packed and ready to go within five minutes. He always travelled lightly – it was a skill one had to develop as a transient hustler.

He was able to fit everything he needed in a single backpack: a week’s worth of clothes, some toiletries, and, after careful consideration, his sidearm. Firearms were unusual in Zootopia, and roughly ten percent of ZPD officers were authorized to carry them. Nick had obtained his certification shortly after he graduated the academy at Judy’s demand. She insisted that they be certified for *everything* together. It wasn’t that Nick minded the extra work (or the pay bumps that went along with the certifications), but he had to wonder how useful some of the extra training was.

In any case, he felt more comfortable with the gun safely secured inside his pack. He might know Zootopia, but there was no telling what could happen in the Burrows with millions (maybe billions, at the rate they reproduced) of rabbits. And drugs, apparently.
Nick shouldered his backpack and headed for the door. As he did, he sent a text to Judy:

*Just leaving now. Still packing?*

The reply was almost instantaneous.

*I actually just finished. Packed some of your clothes as well. You need to start taking some of your crap home!*

Nick smiled. They both knew his crap wasn’t going anywhere. He typed back slowly as he navigated down the stairs.

*Whatever. I'll crash at your place, then we'll grab the first train out in the morning.*

---

The evening was like any other. Judy and Nick lay entwined on the couch, snuggling closely while they watched the latest Michael Bray film.

Nick watched mindlessly.

“I don’t understand why everything in this script must inevitably explode.”

The movie, of course, answered him with a loud explosion.

Judy mumbled something unintelligible and snuggled closer to him.

Nick smiled to himself and planted a tender kiss on the top of Judy’s head.

“You know, your parents are going to make us sleep in separate rooms. And who knows how long this case could go on. Days? Weeks? Months?”

Judy rolled in his arms to face Nick.

“Don’t even joke about that. If we’re there for more than a week, we’re getting a hotel and making up a week’s worth of snuggling. Besides, I’m more than capable of sneaking into my boyfriend’s room.”

Nick’s smile was as bright as a sunrise.

“So I’ve officially made ‘boyfriend’ status, then?”

Judy hadn’t even noticed that it had slipped out. She decided that cockiness was her best option.

“You’re damn right.”

*Ugh. Judy thought. That did not sound natural. At all. Now I get to look forward to being teased*
mercilessly for the rest of the night.

But Nick didn’t say anything. He just kissed her, then gently maneuvered her so that she was laying horizontally face-down across his lap.

Judy giggled.

“Dumb fox. What are you up to?”

She couldn’t see him, but she could tell from his tone that Nick was smiling.

“You’ll see.”

She started to feel his paws treading her back, massaging her sore muscles. It was heaven.

“Mmmm”, said Judy. She felt like she was melting into the couch.

At some point Nick’s paws had snuck under her shirt and continued to massage her back – but suddenly she felt something very different and gasped.

The sensation stopped immediately and Nick spoke, worried.

“Are you okay, Carrots? Didn’t that hurt? I didn’t mean to…”

Judy interrupted him.

“You do that again. Right. Now.”

The sensation retuned, and it took Judy a couple seconds to realize what it was.

Nick had extended the claws on both of his paws, and was gently raking the fur of her back. She couldn’t help but shiver against his touch. She couldn’t help but feel a sliver of guilt over the taboo nature of what was happening – but how could something bad feel so amazing? As far as she was concerned, the bigots were missing out. Judy’s mind started to wander. Was she the first rabbit to receive a claw massage from a fox? She had some Zoogling to do…

She noticed that Nick’s paws were starting to cautiously move lower. She made a soft noise of contentment to indicate her approval, and Nick continued.

Nick guided her onto her back, and leaned over her, looking into her eyes. A lone thought echoed far in the back of Judy’s mind.

What happened to our clothes? I swear we were both wearing clothes a second ago. How did he do that?

Then Nick leaned down and gave the Judy the best kiss she’d ever had in her life. It was strong, but it was sweet. It was rugged, but it was gentle. It was the kiss of a predator.

Then they pressed together and everything seemed to melt into a blur of warmth, red fur, and Nick’s wonderful scent.
She could get used to this.
Chapter Notes

Sorry this update took so long! Life has been crazy busy.

This is the last chapter before shit starts hitting the fan for Judy and Nick. Enjoy it while it lasts ;)

Chapter Eleven - Burrow

Judy’s Apartment – Tuesday – 0800

There was nothing in the world that Nick wanted more than to lay in bed forever with Judy curled up in his arms. Unfortunately, he and Judy had both overslept by almost an hour, and their train was leaving in fifteen minutes, with or without them.

Nick rose from the bed, half-carrying Judy to the bathroom with him. As he turned on the water in the shower, Judy rubbed her eyes and made an adorably sleepy noise. At any other time, Nick would have found this irresistibly attractive and smooch-worthy, but they had to go.

The pair managed to shower, get dressed, and brush their teeth. A mad dash to the train station resulted in the partners slipping into the train just as the doors slid shut.

Nick guided Judy to a bench and they sat down together. He deftly tucked their bags under the seat.

“Hey Carrots, you told your parents that we were coming, right?”

Judy, now fully awake, nodded.

“Yeah, I called them as soon as I got home yesterday. They’re already made up a couple of rooms for us, so we shouldn’t have much to worry about when we finally get there.”

Nick was only half listening. What he really wanted to do was reach his arm around Judy and pull her a little closer, but the car was crowded.

Nick sighed inwardly. People’s reactions weren’t going to bother him – as a fox, he’d been looked down upon his whole life. Though things had changed quite a bit in the last year and a half (it turns out that being labeled as a hero and having your picture plastered everywhere was a good thing for your species), there were still plenty of mammals that distrusted foxes on principle. There were even more people that looked down upon interspecies relationships, and an even greater number of those opposed predator-prey relationships. Their justification usually contained the words “perverted” and “unnatural”, which didn’t feel quite fair to Nick. While Nick was actually quite certain the he and Judy were perverted in the normal sense, their relationship felt as natural as anything.

Nick didn’t want to drag Judy into that spotlight unless he had to. So for now, he would just sit here,
comfortably minding his own –

Nick’s train of thought derailed as he felt Judy move over and lean her body against his. He couldn’t help but smile.

Well, I guess it’s into the spotlight we go, thought Nick. He lazily wrapped an arm around Judy’s shoulders and pulled her closer.

---

The train ride was uneventful, for the most part. The odd couple attracted a few nasty looks, but they were in their own world together and mostly oblivious to any silent hostility.

The train slowed to a stop at the Bunnyburrow station. Nick and Judy hoisted their bags and headed for the exit. Nick held Judy’s hand firmly in his, guiding them both through the crowd of larger animals.

Nick navigated them both to a bench, where Judy dug her phone out of her bag.

“My parents aren’t able to meet us, so we’ll have to take a Zuber. We might have to wait a bit, service out here isn’t as fast as it is in the city.”

Again, Nick was only half listening. His thoughts had become increasingly preoccupied with Judy’s family – he had met them all before, of course, and they got along famously. But that was before he had started dating their daughter. Nick could actually see Bonnie going for it – she treated Nick like another one of her children, fussing over him and constantly insisting that Nick was underfed, sending him home with massive piles of food whenever he and Judy visited. Stu, on the other hand… Nick was pretty sure that Stu had only mounted the fox taser as a joke. But all Nick could picture in his mind’s eye was that joke becoming reality, with hundreds of angry bunnies chasing him all around the burrows with OC spray and fox tasers.

He and Judy had discussed the issue at length, and had decided not to tell her parents. It was just too early – they had only been seeing each other for a few weeks, and didn’t want to rock any boats if things went south (God forbid). Nick let Judy continue on about the revamped Bunnyburrow train station, occasionally throwing in an agreement or passive observation. He was content with just listening to her voice.

Nick’s thoughts were finally interrupted by a ping from Judy’s phone.

Her ears perked up at the noise and she brought the device to her face.

“Looks like our ride’s here! Let’s find them and get rolling.”

Nick smiled.

“Sounds great, Carrots.”
About an hour later, Nick and Judy were walking up to the front door of the Hopps burrow. Nick was about to raise his paw to knock, but Judy scoffed.

“Nick, this is technically my house. You don’t have to knock.”

Nick faked an affronted look.

“It’s polite! Where are your manners, Judith?”

Judy winced at the use of her full name.

“Judith? Are we really going to go there, Nicholas?”

Nick somehow managed to keep a straight face.

“We don’t have to if you don’t want to. Jude the Dude.”

Judy’s face registered shock, embarrassment, and then utter bemusement. Her voice escaped from her tiny in a very un-rabbit like hiss.

“Who told you that name?”

Nick’s answer was delivered with his characteristic nonchalance.

“Oh, I’ve been texting your mother. She told me the legend of Jude the Dude. She also sent me some really adorable baby pictures. And by the way, I think it’s precious that you wore your police officer costume to picture day in the third grade.”

By the time Nick had finished speaking, Judy was turned as red as her partner’s fur. She was going to have words with her mother later. Many, many words.

Nick opened the door for her.

“Prey before beauty.”

Judy rolled her eyes and walked in.

As she crossed the threshold, her sour mood completely vanished, to be replaced by comfort and a sweet nostalgia. The front door led into a downward-sloped tunnel, which continued on for about thirty feet before opening up into a large common area.

Judy’s family affectionately referred to this area as “The Lodge”. It was huge and circular, with a dozen entrances and exits leading off into other parts of the burrow. The wooden floor was haphazardly covered with mismatched throw rugs. Tables were likewise scattered around the room with no apparent order (that had confused Nick at first, until Judy explained to him that having one
The dinner table for over three hundred rabbits didn’t make very much logistical sense). The far side of the lodge served as a large kitchen. In addition to six industrial-sized refrigerators, there was an enormous freezer set into the floor. It was approximately five hundred square feet and accessed by a wooden staircase that was concealed beneath a sliding floor panel. Nick thought the same thought he always did when he saw the kitchen: business had been extremely kind to the Hopps family.

The Hopps family in question was currently swarming both Judy and Nick, extolling greetings and smothering them with questions and hugs.

From his first visit, Nick had been a smash hit with the smallest kits. The young rabbits loved for him to pick them up, and they constantly wanted to play around with Nick’s fluffy, swishing tail. The slightly older children were constantly amazed by Nick’s amateur magic tricks – the fox took a particular pleasure in pulling magic quarters out of her family’s ears, and had a seemingly endless amount of patience with the smaller children.

---

After spending the better part of the afternoon roaming around the burrow with Judy’s family, Nick was well and truly tuckered out. As he and the group of Hoppses he was travelling with once again reached the lodge, he tapped Judy on the shoulder.

“Hey Carrots, I’m pretty wiped out. You mind if I grab a nap before dinner?”

Judy nodded.

“Sure thing. I might follow suit on that one, actually. I want to be awake for food.”

She shooed away the brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews that had been following her around, and turned back to Nick.

“My mom said she made up a guest room for you. It’s in one of these far wings…”

Judy led Nick back into the labyrinth of tunnels, finally coming to a stop before a plain wooden door with a worn brass handle.

Judy’s face brightened.

“This is the one! So I’ll see you later?”

Nick smiled.

“You know it, Carrots.”

His smile then disappeared, and he glanced quickly down the hall. Not seeing anyone, he surprised Judy with a kiss.

“Sorry”, he said. “Wanted to check if the coast was clear. Don’t want to destroy any fragile bunny minds.”

Judy leaned up and kissed him on the cheek.
“It’s too late. I’ve seen everything.”

She squeezed his arm and walked away, venturing further down the hall towards her room.

Nick watched her go, and felt himself the luckiest fox in the world.

---

Nick awoke with a violent sneeze. It only took him a moment to realize why.

Judy was sitting next to him on the bed, holding his tail. As he blinked away sleepiness, she once again attempted to tickle his nose with its tip. He gently pushed her away.

“Well, you definitely win the award for ‘most inventive use of Nick’s tail’. Congratulations, I’ve never met anyone that sadistic before.”

Judy grinned and kissed his forehead.

“I’ll take that as a complement. Up and at ‘em, sleepyhead. Dinner’s ready.”

Nick immediately perked up at the mention of food, and followed Judy back to the lodge.

Carrots were a huge part of the Hopps family’s diet, but they had a bevy of other produce that was agreeable to Nick. Strawberries, plums, apples – there was plenty that Nick enjoyed. He could go a week or so without fish. Probably.

He and Judy sat alone at one of the many tables. Nick thought it strange that they were being given a wide berth by the previously enthralled kits, but then he spied Bonnie in the kitchen and it all made sense. She must have told them all to give them some space, which Nick appreciated. He loved being surrounded by so many enthusiastic rabbits, but they sapped the energy right out of him. It was nice to have a quiet moment with Judy.

Bonnie eventually caught his eye. She left one of the older children in command of the kitchen before hurrying over to the table where Nick and Judy sat. She greeted Nick with a warm hug, then gave him a quick once-over.

“Nick honey, you’re so thin! Eat up. We need to put some meat on those bones before you collapse on yourself.”

Nick managed a sheepish grin.

“Aw, thanks Bonnie. But if you keep feeding me like this, they’ll demote me and stick me behind a desk somewhere.”

Judy kicked him underneath the table. She didn’t like it when he poked fun at Clawhauser, even when it was in good fun. She loved that Cheetah.
The conversation was cut short, however. Something had caught on fire in the kitchen – black clouds of smoke billowed from one of the ovens and an acrid scent was spreading through the lodge.

Bonnie took off at a run towards the kitchen

“I’ll see you two later!” she called out over her shoulder.

---

Judy was sitting on her bed reading when someone knocked on her door.

“Come in!” She called.

The door opened and Bonnie Hopps walked in, shutting the door behind her.

Judy smiled broadly.

“Hey mom! I didn’t get a chance earlier, but I wanted to say thanks for dinner. And for letting Nick and I stay here, it’s not often we get a week off.”

Bonnie smiled as she sat down at the foot of Judy’s bed.

“It’s no problem, dear. I love having you two over, you keep the children from driving me nuts.”

Judy giggled. It was true. But her mother didn’t often make room calls – something was up.

“Mom, was there something you wanted to talk to me about?”

Bonnie nodded.

“How long have you and Nick been seeing each other?”

Judy froze. Her mind immediately went into damage control mode.

Oh god oh god oh god. There’s no way she knows. That’s impossible. Maybe it’s a joke? I know! Laugh and claim ignorance!

Judy gave a weak chuckle.

“What are you talking about, mom?”

Wow. Really convincing there, Judy.

Bonnie gave her daughter a very skeptical look. The Mom Look.

“Honey, I’m your mother. I can tell.”
Judy sighed. No way out of this one. Time to face the music.

“A few weeks. Right after we both made detective.”

Bonnie reached out and took Judy by the paw.

“Judy, I just wanted to let you know that I’m happy for the both of you.”

Judy looked up, surprised.

“So… you’re okay with this?”

Bonnie shifted slightly and looked her daughter in the eye.

“Sweetie, he loves you. It’s obvious, and to be frank I’m a little surprised that it took you two this long to figure it out.”

Judy paused and looked down.

“Well, there was a lot to think about. Interspecies relationships are already tough, but the whole predator/prey thing… it’s a whole different ballgame. We’re just trying to take it one day at a time right now.”

She looked up again, back to her mother.

“I’m just glad you’re supportive.”

Bonnie just smiled.

“Always, Judy.”

Judy smiled back.

“Mom.”

“What?”

“I want a hug.”

The two embraced. After a moment, Judy spoke up again.

“Mom?”

“Hmm?”
“Please stop showing Nick my baby pictures.”
Chapter Twelve – Pillow Talk

The Hopps Burrow – Tuesday – 2200

All things considered, Judy’s conversation with her mother had gone quite well. Bonnie was supportive, and Judy wasn’t going to be disowned for dating a fox. The baby pictures, however, were non-negotiable.

Judy sighed. You win some, you lose some.

She set her book down on her bedside table, and glanced at the clock. Most of the younger rabbits would be fast asleep by now, which meant she could talk to Nick without being interrupted. Before she left her room, Judy changed into a set of fluffy brown pajamas and a pair of matching slippers – the underground burrow was frigid at night. As well-off as the Hopps family was, even they couldn’t afford to heat the entire burrow every night.

Judy shuffled down the long corridor, finally reaching Nick’s room. She knocked twice and waited.

Nick answered the door wearing nothing but a pair of boxers. Judy looked him up and down once.

“Aren’t you cold?”

Nick shrugged.

“Thick fur, sweetheart. Come on in.”

Judy maneuvered past Nick and sat on his bed, then conjured a tablet from within her pajamas. Nick sat next to her and put an arm around her.

“Wow Carrots, we haven’t even been here one day and you’re already sneaking into my room at night? I know I’m irresistible, but this is just ridiculous.”

Judy rolled her eyes.

“We need to talk about the case, Nick. And as much as I would like to have fun” – she punctuated the word “fun” by gently squeezing the base of Nick’s tail, causing him to yip softly – “everyone in this burrow has incredible hearing, which would make things… awkward. And by the way, my mom totally knows we’re seeing each other.”

Nick’s smile vanished instantly.

“Oh God. Please tell me she’s cool with us. Am I going to wake up in the morning?”

Judy laid a reassuring paw on his arm.
“Relax, slick. She’s with us all the way. We’re going to hold off on my dad, though. Give this a little more time to settle.”

She kissed Nick on the nose and his smile returned. He pulled her a little closer.

“I’ll take it. We’ll need as many people on our side as we can get.”

Judy gave a soft noise of agreement. She could spend the rest of the night leaning against Nick’s soft fur. He was so warm… but the case beckoned.

Judy counted to ten and wrenched herself away from Nick’s side.

“Okay”, she said.

“We’ve got to start narrowing down the list of possible Night Howler suppliers, and I have a pretty good idea of where to start.”

Nick nodded, looking at Judy seriously. The rabbit inspected the notes on her tablet and continued.

“We need to start narrowing things down a bit. There are over a hundred million mammals in Bunnyburrow, and I have a feeling we’re not going to be able to question all of them this week.”

Nick chuckled softly.

“Probably not, no.”

Judy soldiered on.

“So we need to look for signs that people may be growing large amounts of these plants. There are three things that I think are going to help us: the Bunnyburrow Agricultural Registry, water bills, and electricity bills.”

Judy paused and checked her notes.

“The Agricultural Registry is going to be our first stop. They keep a complete record of what every farm in the Burrows can grow, including Night Howlers. It’s also the only place you can procure Night Howler seeds, and only after filing an awful lot of paperwork. You can only purchase female plants from the registry, which is the other way they regulate growth. So even if you ended up with a ton of plants, you wouldn’t be able to breed more. You’d have to either buy more seeds or have someone from the registry pollinate your plants. We’ll see who’s bought seeds in the last year, and we can narrow down the list from there.”

Nick interjected as she took a breath.

“Come on Carrots, didn’t you see Jurassic Park? An all female population didn’t exactly work in that movie. Life finds a way.”

Judy glared at him.

“My foot will find a way into your ass if you interrupt me again.”
Nick sighed.

“Touche. Keep going.”

Judy cleared her throat.

“Once we have that list, we’ll check the utility bills. Night Howlers are a thirsty plant – they require water constantly, otherwise they’ll shrivel up and die. So we cross-reference our seed buyers and check their water bills to see if there’s been a big spike in usage recently. Lots of water means lots of plants. The last things to check are electricity bills. If I was growing large quantities of an illegal plant, I certainly wouldn’t do it out in the open – I’d do it in some sort of greenhouse, which means artificial lighting. That jacks up the electric bill by a massive amount – we’ve seen that before back in the city with people who home grow catnip and opium poppies. We can pull utility bills via ZPD. All in all, it should take us the better part of tomorrow.”

Judy flopped backwards onto the bed.

“So what do you think?”

Nick grinned and shook his head.

“I think you’re amazing, Fluff.”

Judy felt her cheeks heat up.

“Well, we knew that already. What do you think about the plan?”

Nick lowered himself until he too was laying on his back.

“It’s airtight. We’ll at least have a few suspects to visit tomorrow, and it seems like we’re heading in the right direction. We’ll have to be careful not to step on any tails, though. My gut tells me this is a lot more complicated than just a couple of farmers growing illegal plants.”

He sat back up again and maneuvered himself behind Judy, wrapping his arms around her.

“I just don’t want anything to go south, is all. Don’t want you getting hurt.”

Judy leaned into his embrace.

“Oh, I’ll be fine. I’ve got a big strong fox protecting me, what could go wrong?”

Nick chuckled.

“Famous last words, Carrots. Though I like being taller than all of our subjects for once.”

He started to knead her shoulders with his paws.

“Are massages okay? Or can your family hear that too?”

Judy grinned lazily. Nick could have been a professional masseuse, if he had been so inclined.
“Massages are great. Though if you do that claw thing again, I make no promises about staying quiet.”

Nick continued to work the knots out of her shoulders for a few quiet moments. Judy finally broke the silence.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you. Is that a common thing with foxes? The claw… stuff?”

Nick was focused on Judy’s upper back, and it took him a few seconds to answer.

“You know, I’m not really sure. To be honest, I’d never tried it before last night. I wasn’t sure if you’d like it or not.”

Judy gave a rather lewd giggle.

“Oh, I’m pretty sure I liked it. I think my entire apartment building knows I liked it, too.”

Nick let out a bark of laughter, then asked a question of his own.

“So I’ve got to know. How different is it being with a fox than with a bunny?”

Judy thought for a moment.

“Well, my experience is limited – keep in mind that I’ve only been with two bunnies and you. But it’s short and… passionate, I guess? Sex lasts about two minutes on average.”

Nick’s paws stopped treading and Judy’s mind railed in despair. When Nick spoke, his voice was incredulous.

“Two minutes? You’ve got to be kidding me. You deserve way more than two minutes.”

He kissed her neck.

“What else is different?”

Judy shifted and a blush crept into her cheeks.

“Well there’s the uh… obvious physical difference.”

Something poked her in the small of the back.

“That physical difference?” asked Nick innocently.

“That’s the one”, Judy sighed.

Judy was conflicted. On one hand, she could have another night of mind-blowing sex with Nick. On the other hand, she was in a burrow surrounded by family members and would probably wake up at least a couple of them, leading to eternal embarrassment. Why was life so cruel?
Nick had extended his claws and was raking them down her back again. She could feel the points, even though her pajamas.

*What the hell,* she thought, and pulled her top over her head.

Nick continued to sweep his claws over her, but didn’t just stay confined to her back this time. They passed over her shoulders, her chest, her belly…

Judy let out an involuntary moan and they both froze. The couple had been lost in a blissful bubble of joy, but had snapped back to reality as soon as the sound escaped Judy’s lips. They both listened hard, and heard nothing except the pounding of their own hearts. The coast was clear.

Judy’s heart sank, and she tried to suppress her urges.

*Not here,* she told herself. *Not now…*

She turned to face Nick.

“It’s just one week…” she said feebly.

Nick smiled and embraced her.

“Oh, you’re worth waiting for. Just do me a favor.”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t tease me like this.”

Judy gasped.

“You started this, Nick! Don’t put that –“

Nick interrupted her with a kiss, then whispered “Burrito!” and wrapped his extremities around her. Judy’s faced was scrunched up in consternation.

“Let me go, you dumb fox.”

Nick patted her head.

“No, Carrots. There is no escape from the Burrito of Love.”

“I hate you.”

“I know.”
Chapter End Notes

Ah, the frustration of being cock blocked/clam jammed by a massive family.

I'm considering writing an optional explicit chapter at some point. I generally don't write smut, but I'm finding it weirdly difficult to resist with these two.

That being said - the mystery kicks into high gear next chapter. Stay tuned, and thanks for reading!
The Hopps Burrow – Wednesday – 0800

For the first time in years, Nick woke up early and fully rested. He blinked in surprise. Apparently sleeping underground surrounded by hundreds of rabbits agreed with him. He rolled out of bed, performed his usual ablutions, and strolled over to the lodge to wait for Judy.

It turned out that Judy had been ready for almost a half hour, which was no surprise to Nick. The rabbit seemed incapable of sleeping in – something Nick had learned since they had started spending nights together. Thankfully, she was extremely stealthy and rarely woke him up when she got out of bed.

Nick raised a paw in greeting when he saw her.

“Hey Carrots! Ready to get rolling?”

Judy was practically bouncing with energy.

“Yup!”

They walked up the inclined tunnel towards the front door. Judy turned to Nick as the reached the exit.

“By the way, I have a surprise for you. Jorgenson arranged for us to borrow an undercover car from Highway Patrol, they dropped it off last night.”

She opened the door and pointed down the driveway. Parked on the street was a nondescript black sedan. Nick began to inspect the car as he moved closer – the proportions were just right for himself and Judy. It was a nice car, but it wouldn’t draw attention. Nick approved.

“I approve!” Nick declared. He opened the passenger door and sat down, adjusting the seat. Judy took position behind the wheel and did the same.

Once they were both settled, Judy leaned slightly towards Nick.

“You sure you don’t mind me driving, slick? I was expecting an epic battle for the steering wheel.”

Nick chuckled softly.
“As much as I would like to save the world from your terrible driving, I have no idea where anything is in Bunnyburrow. Besides, I want to take in the sights. Nothing excites me like endless fields of carrots and corn.”

Judy rolled her eyes and started the car.

“Har har.”

She slowly peeled onto the street, then pulled a U-turn. Keeping her eyes on the road, Judy began to speak.

“The Agricultural Registry is about a forty minute drive from here. I can’t see us being there more than twenty minutes, they went digital a few years ago so we’ll be able to get what we need and get out pretty quick.”

Nick nodded.

“Impressive. I see that you folks have discovered running water recently as well.”

That earned him a good-natured punch to the arm. Nick smiled. It was going to be a good day.

---

Judy was right – the detectives were able to navigate their way in an out of the Agricultural Registry in just under fifteen minutes. The building was modern, even by city standards. It was composed of elegant curves, sitting smoothly against the landscape. Were it not made of glass, it would have passed reasonable well as just another hill.

Nick and Judy had approached a bored looking hare clerk, who became considerably more energetic when the detectives conjured badges from their pockets. It was probably the most excitement he’d ever experienced on the job. The hare (whose name was Richard), let them to a terminal behind his desk and signed them into the system. After several minutes of searching, Nick and Judy printed off a list of about two hundred farmers – all of whom had purchased Night Howler seeds for use as a pesticide.

The duo thanked the clerk for his help and sauntered back to their car. The hare stared longingly after them.

Nick donned his sunglasses as he slipped into the bright sunlight.

“Okay, so we’ve got a preliminary list. Where to next?”

Judy checked something on her phone, then responded.

“BBDWP. Bunnyburrow Department of Water and Power. Luckily it’s just down the street from here – 10 minutes or so.”
Pulling utility records took a little longer. The computers were older and slower, and the clerk made several mistakes before navigating them to the right files. Eventually, however, they got the information they were looking for.

Nick and Judy spent several hours in a poorly lit office poring over utility bills and cross checking them with their list. Their effort, thankfully, seemed to bear fruit. There were two local farmers that fit their criteria – both had purchased Night Howler seeds, and both had large upticks in water and power usage in the last year.

As the couple again returned to their car, Judy walked with a skip in her step.

“You know, I think we might actually solve this case in a day. Blow our old 2-day record out of the water.”

Nick chuffed.

“Better knock on wood, Carrots. I still don’t have a good feeling about this one.”

But Judy’s enthusiasm couldn’t be dampened. They set off towards the nearest farmer, a weasel on a three-acre plot of land.

The weasel was surprised at a visit by two detectives, but was extremely polite. He took Judy and Nick on a tour of his entire property – the house, his fields, and a small, enclosed arboretum. His number of Night Howlers was correct, down to the very last leaf. It turned out that his jump in utility bills was due to his installation of the arboretum – he had used artificial lighting on the baby trees and run irrigation throughout the entire structure. Not one thing was suspicious or out of place.

At the end of his tour, Nick and Judy thanked him for his time, and left.

Judy had deflated somewhat, though she still remained optimistic.

“That still leaves the other farmer! I’m still sure we’re going to break our record. You just wait and see.”

But Nick wasn’t the one that needed convincing.

The second farmer was almost the same story. He had expanded massively in the last year – doubling his crop size along with adding a second understory to his burrow resulted in a massive water and electric bill, which he was all to happy to complain about. His Night Howlers were also all accounted for.

The sun was beginning to set by the time the detectives left his farm. Judy’s ears were droopy, and she wasn’t making conversation. Instead of heading to the driver’s seat, she sat on the passenger side and flopped against the window in defeat.

Nick gave her a long, sidelong glance. As much as he loved Judy, she wasn’t perfect. The rabbit was notoriously hard on herself – in a world where she was constantly underestimated, she had to be in order to be taken seriously. But that self-discipline came at a cost. Failure – any failure, even ones
that she was in no way responsible for – hit her right in the heart. It hurt to watch.

Nick reached out and put a paw on her shoulder, but she shrugged him off and continued to silently stare out the window.

Nick understood. Sometimes people just needed some time to think.

He stepped on the gas and started to bring them back to the Hopps Burrow.

---

It was almost twenty minutes before Judy spoke. Her voice was uncharacteristically hoarse.

“Nick, I really thought we were on the right track with this.”

Nick gave a sound of agreement.

“Me too, Carrots. It was a good plan, we just ended up on the wrong place. I think if we get back to the burrow, eat a good meal, and get a solid night’s sleep, we’ll be in a way better position to take this thing on.”

Judy made a non-committal noise.

“Yeah, maybe.”

Nick sighed.

“Judy, you’re not psychic. You followed the breadcrumbs. You did what good detectives do. We both went into this knowing it wasn’t going to be as straightforward as patrol. And not everything is going to come together like it did in the first Night Howler case. We’ll just keep at it until we get it solved, and I’m going to be with you all the way. One hundred percent until we crack this.”

A reluctant smile appeared on Judy’s face.

“What did I ever do to deserve you?”

“It’s one of life’s great mysteries, fluff. Best not to question it.”

Judy snorted with laughter, then finally looked over at Nick.

“I could kiss you right now.”

“I mean, we could. But then we’d veer off the road and die.”

“You’re so romantic, Nick.”
“You bet your fluffy little butt I am.”

---

The banter continued until the couple reached the Hopps burrow. Upon arrival, Nick and Judy scarfed down some food and retired to their respective rooms. Nick decided to forgo a shower and instead collapsed on his bed, wrapping his head in a pillow. He didn’t get as down as Judy did about these things, but it was still frustrating. They had followed the most logical path – why was the solution evading them? Who were these growers? If they were growing so many plants, where were they getting the power? Where were they getting the water? Those things just didn’t magically appear, they had to come from some-

Nick sat bolt upright. He hurriedly threw on some clothes and made a beeline for Judy’s room. He didn’t bother knocking, and burst in.

“Judy! I know where we need to look next! It’s…” he was interrupted by a shriek. Judy had just exited the shower, and was clad only in a towel. Both of their faces registered absolute shock, and they both collapsed into giggles together. Judy recovered first and strode over to her partner.


Each word corresponded with a punch to Nick’s chest. After the last one, Nick wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close.

“Judy…” he whispered seductively.

She tensed up slightly in his grasp.

“…I think I just solved our case.”

Wide purple eyes looked up at Nick, then narrowed.

“How?”

Nick released the rabbit and walked over to her bed before collapsing on it.

“I figured out why whoever these people are weren’t on our short list.”

Judy dropped her towel and started to change.

“Oh yeah? Why’s that?”

Nick paused for a moment, distracted by the nude Judy. He quickly came to his senses.

“They’re not using the public utilities. They have to be drawing from a natural water source, and they’re probably using generators to power lamps. Maybe solar panels. We were thinking like city slickers – water and power aren’t just limited to the utility companies out here. We need to start thinking like country bumpkins.”
A thrown brush hit Nick on the leg.

“Ow!”

Judy ignored his pain.

“Okay, but how does that help us? How are we supposed to narrow down our suspect list?”

Nick sat up excitedly, and spoke quickly.

“Easy. We cross-reference our Night Howler buyers with property owners living near bodies of water. Lakes, rivers, whatever. That should at least get us something!”

His enthusiasm was starting to reach Judy, who was now fully-dressed (much to Nick’s disappointment).

“I like it. But how are we going to check? That sort of thing doesn’t show up on Zoople maps.”

Nick grinned.

“Again, I’ve got us covered. You ever hear of a Thomas Guide?”

Judy shook her head, and Nick began his explanation.

“It’s basically an atlas that gives you detailed explanations of streets and the buildings on them, including the names of the property owners. They’re more common in cities, but I know for a fact that there were sets made for the burrows. You can find them in literally any government building. City hall, libraries, whatever. Always there.”

Judy was impressed.

“And you know this because…?”

Nick only smiled roguishly.

“One day, darlin’, I’ll teach you all of my secrets. But until that day comes, I’d like to maintain my mystic aura.”

He walked over to Judy and took her in his arms.

“You know Carrots, it’s a real shame.”

“What is?”

“That you just put these clothes on, because for some reason I want to rip them all off.”

Judy pushed him away.
“And they say rabbits are amorous! I think that stereotype is backwards. You’re more randy than any bunny I know.”

Nick’s grin was wolfish.

“Except one. Six days.” He said with a wink.

---

The next day came quickly. By the time Judy awoke, Nick was already sitting in the lodge, poring over a dozen copies of the Thomas Guide. Judy gave him and the books a sidelong glance.

“Where did you get these?”

Nick responded without looking up.

“Library. Couple miles down the street.”

Judy inspected the spine of one of the books.

“Nick, these are reference texts. You can’t check these out.”

Nick spoke with mock surprise.

“Oh wow, really? Darn.”

Judy placed her hands on her hips and pursed her lips. She looked almost exactly like her mother did when chastising one of her errant kits.

“Nicholas Wilde, did you steal library books?”

Nick looked up, his eyes wide with innocence.

“I would never! I just… borrowed them. Without permission.”

Judy’s eyes narrowed.

“And I suppose you’re not going to tell me how you snuck a dozen reference texts out of a library in broad daylight.”

Nick grinned.

“Who said anything about broad daylight?”

Judy’s voice was now exasperated.

“Please don’t tell me you broke into the library.”

Nick looked back to the book.
“I plead the Fifth. Besides, the front door just happened to be open. How was I to know that they were closed if the door was open?”

Judy dropped it. She honestly had no idea if Nick had actually snuck into the library or if he had actually gone about procuring the books the right way. It would be just like him to invent some grand story just to drive her nuts. She sighed heavily.

“Any progress?”

Nick brightened.

“Yes, actually! I’ve been going through these for hours, and I’ve only found one person that fits the bill. He’s a Hare, Floyd Williams. He’s got a house right next to a lake, and he’s on our long list of Night Howler buyers. He plucked a book from the tack in front of him, and flipped to a page marked by a pink sticky note.

Judy leaned in to look. It was a small, simple-looking one story house with a barn illustrated far off in the distance. It wasn’t particularly striking – but, she supposed, striking was not what you wanted to be when you were hiding a massive drug operation. She sat down across from Nick.

“I think we should go check it out.”

Nick blinked.

“Right now? I’ve got at least three more of these to go through.”

Judy shook her head.

“I’ve got a really good feeling about this. Besides, it’s less than an hour away. It’ll do us good to get out of the burrow for a while.

Nick shrugged.

“Hey, fine with me. Give me a minute though, I need to grab some stuff.”

He walked back to his room and started digging through his suitcase. After a moment, he pulled out his shoulder holster. He rigged it around himself and snugly stowed his pistol. A light jacket concealed the setup entirely. He check himself briefly in the mirror before heading back to Judy.

She looked up as he approached.

“What took you so long?”

Nick pulled back the jacked slightly so that Judy could get a glimpse of the harness.

Judy shrugged.

“Okay, Rambo.”
They headed for the door.

---

They rolled to a stop in front of Floyd Williams’ property a short while later. Judy began unbuckling her seatbelt, but Nick stopped her.

“What’s up, Nick?”

“Park further down the road. Somewhere concealed. I don’t want anybody to see the car and get spooked.”

Judy nodded and drove for about a quarter mile, before pulling the car into a turnout and killing the engine.

The detectives walked back to the hare’s house. Judy thumped twice on the door.

“Mr. Williams? ZPD, we’d like to speak with you.”

There was no answer. Nick peered around the side of the house.

“Hey Carrots.”

“What?”

“There appears to be an extra barn.”

Judy looked. Nick was right – there was another building that wasn’t shown in the (relatively new) Thomas Guide.

Judy knocked again, and this time the detectives heard a scramble on the other side of the door. They heard a scrabbling sound (Nick recognized it as a number of locks being unlocked), and the door opened by a fraction of an inch. A dull green eye appeared in the crack, and a harsh, grating voice penetrated the quiet.

“What y’all want?”

Judy smiled.

“Mr. Williams, we’re here to speak to you about a case. Someone in the area is growing a large amount of Night Howlers, and we were wondering if we could ask you a couple of questions.”

There was a pause, then the hare answered.

“Sure. Just gimme a second to put some pants on.”

The door slammed.

“Charming fellow”, said Nick dryly.
Judy didn’t respond. Her ears were full attention, focused on the door. She heard something and her eyes went wide.

“He’s running!”

She sprinted around the side of the house, with Nick in hot pursuit. He wasn’t as fast as Judy (then again, neither was anyone else he had ever met), but he could hold his own. By the time he rounded the house, Judy had already pinned Williams and had him half-cuffed. The hare was spitting a constant stream of expletives, but other than that wasn’t putting up much of a struggle.

“Fuck the police! Y’all can’t just show up here and arrest me! I didn’t no nothin’!”

Nick surveyed the situation. Judy had him under control.

“Hey Hopps, I’m going to check out the area. Make sure things are safe here.”

“Fine”, Judy grunted. Leave it to Nick to make her deal with the smelly, foul-mouthed hare. Williams was still belligerent.

“You can’t do shit! Y’all need a warrant!”

Judy gritted her teeth.

Actually, we don’t. Running from detectives is considered obstruction of justice, and we’re allowed to sweep the area post-arrest. Consider that your legal education for the day.”

Nick, meanwhile, headed straight for the mystery barn. If there was anything dangerous on Williams’ property, he had a feeling it’d be here. With a great amount of effort, he managed to swing open the heavy barn doors. His eyes took a moment to adjust to the dim lighting, then opened wide with shock.

“Holy shit.”
Holy crap, over 100 kudos! This is my first ever fanfic, so this means a lot to me - thanks for reading!!! Keep the comments coming, I love to hear people's reactions to and thoughts on the story.

I'm already developing some other ideas in this world - it'll probably take place within this story, but with a few time skips after the main arc is completed (and we're still a ways away from that).

On a separate note, I seem to have a thing for ending chapters with vague sex scenes. Oops.

Chapter Notes

Chapter Fourteen – All Too Easy

Floyd Williams’ Farm – Thursday – 1142

There were thousands upon thousands of Night Howler plants in the barn – far and away more than Bellwether had been able to procure. Nick walked further into the barn, staring in awe. Nick counted two dozen rows of plants stretching back about fifty yards. The air was thick with condensation – mister hoses snaked through the building, quenching the plants. It was also quite hot – there were large sunlamps hanging above the Night Howlers ever few feet. The combined humming noise of the lamps reminded Nick strongly of a large swarm of bees.

He continued walking down one of the rows, finally reaching an open space at the back of the barn, only to be surprised once again. There were fifteen pegs driven deep into the dirt here. The pegs were large and metal – definitely old railroad pegs. Each had a thick chain attached to it, ending in an adjustable manacle not unlike the ones on Nick’s handcuffs. The fox tugged at one of the stakes, trying to lift it out of the ground to no avail. Nick looked around, and spied a large plastic crate leaning against the back wall of the barn. He pried it open and felt a wave of rage and revulsion sweep over him.

The crate was full of muzzles.

Given Nick’s history, he loathed muzzles. There were only two uses for them in Zootopia: the first was violent criminals, which Nick understood. Lots of predators still had very sharp teeth, and if a suspect was feeling particularly violent, he or she could easily main or kill an officer or a bystander. Nick typically preferred to just use cuffs. The second use of muzzles was for young, teething predator infants – though those were more along the lines of pacifiers than real muzzles, and could be easily removed by the wearer.
But these were of the former variety, and, like the one that had been forced on Nick as a child, had no place in the hands of a civilian. The fox looked again at the chained stakes, and fought a rising wave of nausea. Time to go.

He walked quickly out of the barn, blinking in the sudden light. He found his way back to Judy, who was standing over Williams, who was unconscious on the ground. Nick looked at Judy and raised an eyebrow.

“He started flailing, and I had to dose him. He was going to hurt himself, Nick.”

Nick nodded absentmindedly.

“That extra barn is full of Night Howlers. Thousands of ‘em. There’s also something really weird in the back that you’ll want to see.”

Judy nodded.

“Okay. We need to cuff this idiot to something first.”

They decided on a beam supporting the veranda on the back of the house. It was fairly sturdy and provided Williams with some shade.

Once the detectives secured the hare, Nick led Judy through the barn. When the rabbit saw the pegs, chains, and muzzles, she balked.

Nick was watching her carefully.

“What do you make of this, Carrots?”

Judy shook her head.

“I… I really don’t know, Nick.”

She looked at him, brow furrowed.

“Jorgenson and Bogo will probably have some ideas, though. Let’s call it in. It’ll be a few hours, but they’ll get people out here. Until then, we can call Highway Patrol and have them secure the scene for us.”

Nick nodded.

“Sounds good to me.”

---

The rest of the day passed by in a blur. The highway patrol officers did their job efficiently, and Bogo sent out a large team of CSIs as soon as he received the call from Nick and Judy. The detectives themselves were relived by Jorgenson and took the soonest train possible back to Zootopia. They arrived in the late afternoon, and made straight for the ZPD.
Williams had been flown to the city almost immediately. As soon as he awoke, he had been booked by another officer – the hare had been left in an interrogation room while he recovered from his tranquilizer-induced haze.

A text from Jorgenson gave Judy the okay to go in and talk to him. Nick gave her a quick hug before she entered.

“Be careful, Carrots” he said warmly.

She opened the door and strode in confidently. Williams looked up at her blankly.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Williams,” she said as she sat down across from him. “I’m Detective Judy Hopps. We met earlier today.”

No response. Judy continued.

“It looks like you’ve been quite the busy man. Thousands of illegal plants in your barn, plus some very suspicious looking muzzles… things don’t look so hot for you right now.”

Williams leaned over the table.

“I want a lawyer.”

Judy nodded brightly.

“Yes, of course! You have that right. You don’t have to say a word, and that’s fine. But I’m just going to lay this out for you, so you can think about it. You know, of course, that we’re going to throw the book at you. You’re looking at three years in prison for grand theft of the night howlers, another three for grand theft of water due to your illegal siphoning of the lake, six months for possession of an unregistered handgun, and three months for each and every one of those fifteen muzzles we found in your barn. I’ll sum that up for you, in case you’ve lost count. That’s ten years and three months of prison time. And that’s not even considering the inevitable drug trafficking and possession charges.”

Williams’ ears, already at half mast, drooped throughout Judy’s monologue and were now firmly planted against his back. He stared at the ground, offering no response.

Judy shuffled the papers in front of her.

“However…”

Williams’ ears perked up, and his eyes rose slowly to meet Judy’s.

“The District Attorney may be willing to cut you a deal.”

Williams spoke, his voice hoarse.

“What kind of deal?”

Judy continued to stare the hare down.
“If you give us the name of everyone involved in your little enterprise, those felonies will be dropped to misdemeanors. You’ll be looking at three years, max. Oh, and we’d also like to know why you have so many muzzles and chains in your barn. You might imagine how something like that excites our curiosity.”

Williams let our a sour laugh that was completely devoid of humor.

“What you’re offering me is a death sentence, rabbit. You have no idea what the fuck kind of people you’re dealing with. If I roll, I’m dead. Your deal ain’t shit.”

He leaned back in his chair, staring stubbornly at the two-way mirror behind Judy.

*Shit,* Judy thought. *We’re so close, I can’t lose him now.*

“We can offer you protective custody.”

Williams rolled his eyes.

“The hell you can.”

Judy ignored him.

“We can offer you protective custody. We can get you into witness protection, and you can serve your sentence under house arrest.”

“I want to hear it from the D.A.”, Williams growled. But his body language betrayed his excitement. As soon as Judy mentioned witness protection, Williams’ ears perked back up and his eyes brightened.

*Got him!* Thought Judy excitedly.

“Well, Mr. Williams”, she sighed, “the D.A. will be in court all day today. But I can bring the assistant D.A. and they can make the deal with you today, should you choose to waive your right to counsel.”

She got up and calmly left the room, closing the door quietly behind her. She was immediately set upon by Nick, Jorgenson, and Chief Bogo.

Nick and Jorgenson were grinning excitedly, but Bogo’s expression was indecipherable (as per usual). Nick spoke first.

“Nice going, Carrots! He’s going to roll for sure.”

Jorgenson shook her paw.

“What your partner said. Well done in there, he almost clammed up on us.”

Judy grinned.

“Thanks, Captain.”
She turned to Bogo.

“Sir?”

Bogo looked down at her, and Judy was reminded once again how painfully small she was compared to the Chief. She felt like an ant under a magnifying glass.

“Hopps”, he grumbled, “making deals without consulting with the District Attorney first makes my life extremely difficult. I’m assuming you know that, since you seem to go out of your way to do it on every case.”

Judy assumed a chastised look, but her excitement couldn’t be dampened.

“Yes sir. I’m sorry sir.”

Bogo snorted.

“No you’re not. Sorry is what you’re going to be if this doesn’t pan out.”

He turned to Nick and Jorgenson.

“If you gentlemammals will excuse me, I have to go grovel before the D.A.”

He shot Judy a venomous look, but it bounced right off of her beaming face.

Jorgenson smiled wide, revealing his razor-sharp teeth.

“Hey, you’re the one that wanted to be the Chief. You don’t get to complain now.”

Bogo stamped off without responding – Jorgenson called after him.

“You know you miss being a Captain!”

A door slammed and Bogo vanished. Jorgenson turned back to his detectives, his smile still present.

“I’m heading back to my office. Well done, you two. Take the rest of the day and come back in the morning – I want to start interrogating Williams at 0900.” Judy and Nick nodded their assent, and Jorgenson left.

The partners slowly started walking toward the front of the station. Nick draped a paw around Judy’s shoulders – not too personal, but not exactly professional, either.

“Well Carrots, I guess we’re not going to beat our speed record after all. Too bad, I would have liked to upped the stakes a little bit.”

Judy smiled and leaned into Nick’s side. She breathed in, catching a faint echo of his scent.

“I can live with that. It looks like we got our guy, and soon we’ll flush out the rest of them. And then
we do it all over again.”

After a long and quiet walk, they finally reached Judy’s apartment and began to change out of their work clothes. Judy froze as she was pulling her shirt over her head.

“Oh God.”

“What?”

“Nick, we haven’t told my parents anything about what happened today. They still think we’re on vacation in the burrows. They’re going to completely freak out on us!”

Judy grew more hysterical as she spoke. Nick never understood how she could get so emotional about easily rectifiable problems, but could easily maintain her cool under insane amounts of on-the-job stress.

Secrets of the Universe, he mused. Judy was already dialing her mother.

It wasn’t a comfortable conversation. Bonnie wasn’t pleased that she had been misled, and gave both Nick and her daughter a thorough brow-beating. It ended with Judy and Nick promising to spend some real time off at the Hopps burrow – no investigations allowed. The call finally ended and Nick breathed a huge sigh of relief.

“I see where you get it from now.”

“Get what from, Nick?”

“Your ability to make everyone around you feel guilty.”

Judy smiled.

“I might be the black sheep in my family, but there are some things that just run in the family.”

They had been sitting on the couch while on the phone with Bonnie. Judy scooted over to Nick and leaned heavily against him as he wrapped a long arm around her.

“Nick, it’s been a long day.”

He sighed contentedly.

“I know. But a good one.”

There was a tired pause.

“Hey, Nick?”

“Mmm?”

“I know that wasn’t easy for you earlier. With the muzzles and… stuff.”

Nick’s stomach turned. He had almost forgotten about that. When he was alone with Judy, it was easy to forget that the world wasn’t always so… perfect. He forced himself to speak jauntily. He
didn’t want to ruin a nice evening.

“Oh, no big deal. Nothing to be worried about, I had a big strong bunny with me.”

He gave her a tickle and she giggled, apparently forgetting the subject. *Thank God.*

“What do you say we watch a movie, Carrots? I’ve been wanting to see *Mad Max* for a while now.”

Judy looked up at him and nodded.

---

They were only twenty minutes in when Nick started gently rubbing Judy’s shoulders. Which turned into rubbing her back. He eventually let his claws out – it drove Judy absolutely nuts, and Nick *loved* that.

Judy moaned softly as Nick’s claws gently combed her belly. She leaned back against him, looking up into his muzzle.

“Nick, I don’t think I would have lasted the entire week.”

Nick’s paw descended a bit farther past her belly, and she yipped in pleasure. The fox grinned hungrily.

“Likewise. Bedroom.”

“Bedroom,” said Judy breathlessly.
The Brood

Chapter Notes

Let the gloom begin.

Chapter Fifteen - The Brood

ZPD Interrogation Room - Friday - 0850

Judy, Nick, and Captain Jorgenson looked into the interrogation room through the two-way mirror in the hallway. Floyd Williams sat on a metal chair, with both hands knotted together on the table in front of him. His right foot tapped relentlessly against the concrete floor, and he wouldn’t stop looking around the bare room.

He was terrified.

The trio had already decided that Jorgenson would lead the interrogation. He was by far the most experienced, and was a new, trustworthy face to Williams. Judy had been miffed that she wasn’t doing the interview, but it was a logical decision and she made her peace with it.

Jorgenson checked his watch.

“Okay, I’m going in. Let’s see how far this rabbit hole goes.”

He entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Nick leaned over to Judy and whispered so that only she could hear.

“He could always ask me. I have very recent experience with exploring rabbit holes.”

Judy turned bright red and suppressed a giggle. She shot Nick a halfhearted warning look, and they both turned their attention towards Jorgenson, who was just now sitting down across from Williams.

The muscular panther was far larger than the hare, but somehow managed to make himself seem smaller and less threatening. It was a skill that most ZPD beat cops had to master - it was difficult to get witnesses to talk to you if they were intimidated by your size. Jorgenson opened a small folder in front of him, clicked open his pen, then looked up at Williams.

“Mr. Williams, I’m glad you accepted the District Attorney’s offer. I would like to remind you that you have been granted protective custody via house arrest in lieu of possible prison time. Please be entirely honest with me so that I can help you. There is no such thing as insignificant information - tell me everything you can when I ask you a question. Do you understand?”

Williams nodded.

“Yes”, he rasped.
Jorgenson nodded.

“Very good. Let’s begin, then. We’ll start with the Night Howlers. How were you able to breed such an unusually large number of the plants?”

Williams kept his eyes focused on the table - he appeared unable to meet Jorgenson’s strong gaze. He paused for a moment before finally answering.

“I bought a male plant off a fella that lifted a couple from the Registry. He must have had an in there, somewhere. Maybe he knows a janitor.”

Williams cleared his throat and continued.

“Once I had that plant it was easy. The barn was already done, so I picked up some lamps and ran irrigation from the lake. The whole thing took a couple weeks to set up, and I just kept breeding new plants.”

Jorgenson nodded, his pen scratching away at his notes.

“What were you planning on doing with the Night Howlers?”

Williams shifted uncomfortably in his chair, and didn’t answer.

“Mr. Williams?”

The hare mumbled something incomprehensible.

“Could you please repeat that a little louder, Mr. Williams?”

The hare looked up at Jorgenson.

“I was selling them.”

Jorgenson stared him down.

“To whom?”

Judy and Nick could practically smell the fear on Williams through the wall. His foot had resumed its relentless assault on the floor, and it looked as though he was shaking slightly. The hare was terrified, and it baffled the detectives. Jorgenson spoke again.

“Floyd, you’re in protective custody. Whoever it is can’t get to you. It’s better for all involved that you tell us, now.”

The hare’s foot slowly came to a stop, and he looked up at the Captain.

“I was selling them to The Brood.”

Judy raised her eyebrows and turned to Nick.

“The Brood? What the hell is the Brood?”
“Beats me. Sounds like a bunny punk band.”

Jorgenson looked at Williams curiously.

“Who or what is the Brood, Mr. Williams?”

Williams threw his paws up in an innocent gesture.

“I swear I don’t know. That’s just what they called themselves. They signed all of their messages that way. I never met anybody. I would box up the flowers in crates overnight and they’d be gone the next morning, replaced with cash. That’s it. That’s all I know.”

Jorgenson leaned forward. Judy and Nick could tell that he was excited.

“We looked through your phone records and your email. We didn’t find anything.”

Williams was speaking faster, and his voice was higher. He was starting to become even more nervous.

“All of the notes were on paper. I burned them after reading. No traces.”

This time it was Nick that turned to Judy.

“Well, whoever these guys are, they’re smart. They didn’t want ol’ Floyd to leave a trail of breadcrumbs leading back to them.”

Judy nodded and gave a soft noise of agreement - she was almost totally focused on the scene in front of them.

Jorgenson had moved on.

“Very well. Tell us about the stakes, chains, and muzzles in your barn.”

Williams looked away from Jorgenson.

“I dunno about any of that. They just showed up one morning along with the cash. I didn’t put them there. I’m not big enough to get those stakes into the ground.”

Judy nodded to herself. That was true, he wasn’t big enough and didn’t have the proper equipment - but the hare could easily have had some help.

Jorgenson’s eyes drilled into the hare. The panther’s gaze could easily rival Bogo’s.

“I don’t believe you. I think you know exactly why they’re there.”

Williams’ foot resumed its tapping, and he gave no answer. Jorgenson’s brow furrowed, and he leaned back in his chair.

“Very well, Mr. Williams. I suppose you leave me no choice but to retract your protective custody, and to let your case go forward.”
Williams blanched.

“No, no! We’ve got a deal!”

Jorgenson delicately raised one clawed finger.

“No. We had a deal. That is, until you decided to go back on your end of it. Enjoy general population, Mr. Williams.” Jorgenson got up to leave.

“Wait!” cried the hare desperately. Jorgenson paused.

“Yes?”

Williams was staring right at the Captain.

“I never saw what they were used for. And I was telling the truth, they just showed up there one morning. But there was a note there, too.”

Williams nervously licked his lips, his eyes darting back and forth.

“They told me to get lost for a couple days. To not be around the house. There was some extra money that time, so I took a little vacation. When I got back, nothing had changed. But I could tell that there had been people in the barn. There were pawprints all around, especially near the stakes.”

Jorgenson was as still as a statue. Williams continued.

“I didn’t recognize most of them. Probably from mammals I’ve never seem before. But they all had one thing in common.”

The hare looked down shamefully, then slowly raised his head to look Jorgenson in the eye.

“They were all really, really small.”

---

Jorgenson had called an emergency meeting in his office immediately after the interview. Judy and Nick were there, of course - but so were at least six other detectives, along with Chief Bogo. Jorgenson had just been explaining the case to the uninitiated that had gathered around, and had finally come to their most recent revelation.

“This case”, he said heavily, “just got a lot bigger than some Night Howlers. We’re looking at a full-on mammal trafficking ring - and the victims appear to all be children.”

Murmuring filled the room. The news was big - and disturbing. Judy looked over at Nick - his face had been completely expressionless since they left the interrogation room, and he stared blankly through Jorgenson. All Judy wanted to do was to take his paw in her - just for a moment - but that wasn’t an option. So she nudged him instead, and he appeared to rouse slightly from his stupor.

Bogo took over the conversation.

“I want all of you on this. Top priority. I have no idea who the Brood is, but they’re about to find out who we are. Find them and bring them in. I want them to rot.”
He left, ostensibly to meet with the other division Captains to coordinate the investigation. Jorgenson watched him go.

“Right, then”, he said. “I want you all to shake down your frequent fliers. See if they know about any new players in town. I want an encyclopedia on these fuckers on my desk before 1700 hours. Get moving.”

The mass of detectives leaked out of his office. Judy and Nick headed for their own.

The warm, earthy lights were a comfort. Judy flopped down on one of her bean bags and rubbed her eyes vigorously, then looked at Nick. His arms were crossed, and he was staring at the wall.

“Nick.”

He didn’t respond. Judy got up, walked over to him, and took his paw in hers.

“Nick, I need you here right now.”

He looked down at her.

“Sorry, Carrots. Just lost in my own thoughts. It’s not easy being a genius.”

The joke rang hollow and forced. He was trying to make fun, but his heart just wasn’t in it. The new development in the case was hitting him hard. Judy knew that Nick’s childhood had been rough, but she wasn’t going to press the issue. He would come to her when he was ready, and she would be there for him when he was.

But until then, they had a case to solve. Judy let go of Nick’s hand, and they both collapsed onto a bean bag.

Judy’s mind was racing trying to think of people to question about the Brood, but one name kept popping to the front of her mind.

“Nick,” she said, “do you think Mr. Big might be involved with this?”

Nick shook his head.

“No way. He sticks to the grey areas of the law. Drugs and slavery are way off the mark for him.”

Nick paused.

“But you think he might have heard some whispers.”

Judy nodded.

“Right. He’s got people all over the place, he’s bound to have heard something by now, even if it’s only a rumor.”

“Mmm”, said Nick. “I’ll take whatever we can get right now. Think we could see him today?”

Judy had already started towards the door.
“Only one way to find out. If anybody asks, we’re just visiting Fru-Fru.”
Chapter Summary

Hooray! This is the biggest chapter in the story by far, and it serves as the end of this story arc.

All of the following chapters are going to be one shots set after this story - I just had so many ideas for fun little interludes that I have to keep writing here.

I just wanted to say thanks to everyone for reading and enjoying this story, and I hope you continue to read as Nick and Judy's trials and tribulations continue. Updates will come at least once a week.

Chapter 16 – Raid

Judy’s Apartment – Friday – 1500

Judy and Nick lay limply on the couch. Their visit with Mr. Big had been completely fruitless – the miniscule crime lord was as clueless as they were about the Brood, but promised to poke around. He did, after all, have connections that Judy and Nick lacked. The duo had briefly visited with Fru-Fru and little Judy, but soon left downtrodden.

Judy knew that she should have been excited about the progress she and Nick had made on the case, but all she felt was a deep ache in her chest when she thought about the ramifications of what Williams had revealed. She looked over at Nick; even a cursory glance told her that he felt exactly as she did. All she wanted in the world was to scoot over and plop herself down on his lap, but all energy seemed to have drained from her limbs. It was a blessing, then, when Nick came to her instead. He pulled her in close, and held her paws in his.

The physical contact alone bolstered Judy’s spirits. They could do this. She looked up at Nick.

“So what do you think of Bogo’s plan?”

Nick hesitated a moment, then answered.

“I think it’s good. It might be a few days or weeks before we see results, but it’s good.”

Bogo’s master plan hinged on a department-wide crackdown on blue frost dealers. It stood to reason that at least one of them could point them to a higher level on the Brood food chain. Williams, unfortunately, was a dead end – but his arrest had cut off the Night Howler supply, which meant that the Brood was going to get desperate. And desperate criminals always made mistakes.

Unfortunately, it meant that there was going to be a lot of waiting involved for Judy and Nick. And
while they might be different in almost every conceivable way, they both loathed waiting.

Nick sighed.

“It just bothers me that we’re sitting here, on a comfy couch in a nice apartment, while these sickos are carting around a bunch of kids.”

Judy’s heart sank.

“Nick, we’re going to figure this out and find them. I promise.”

She turned and buried her face in his neck, and he leaned into her in return. After a while, they both drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

---

As it turned out, the detectives didn’t have to wait very long. The patrol division had pinched a blue frost dealer early Monday morning, which coincided perfectly with the end of Nick and Judy’s weekend. Neither knew quite what to expect when they saw the dealer for the first time, but it certainly wasn’t the familiar face that greeted them in the interrogation room.

Jeremy, the frenetic-looking ocelot from the Overlook Pancake House, sat chained to the table.

Nick looked over to Judy.

“I told you he was shifty. And it’s totally not speciest if I say it.”

Judy sighed.

“You want to take this one?”

Nick grinned.

“Sure.”

He walked into the room with the case file and sat down across from Jeremy, then opened the case file. Seconds ticked by, and Judy smiled to herself. Classic interviewing technique – look busy and let the suspect stew for a while, and let them volunteer the information. It didn’t work with every suspect (and some officers were just bad at it, including Judy), but it was probably going to be a sure hit with the twitchy ocelot, who grew increasingly nervous with every tick of the clock.

Not thirty seconds had passed before Jeremy broke the silence with a high, reedy voice.

“Am I going to go to prison?”

Nick looked up lazily.

“Oh yeah. You’re gonna go to prison.”

Jeremy’s tail, previously swinging to and fro at a moderate pace, went into overdrive, thunking
Nick continued, glancing at the case file.

“‘I have some great news for you, though. You might have some input over how long you’re there.’ He looked up at Jeremy again, and leaned forward slightly. “Give us the supplier. A name and a location, and I’ll be sure to mention to the DA how helpful you’ve been. Hell, you might even get off entirely, seeing as you’re a first time offender.”

Nick’s eyes returned to the case file. Jeremy continued to quake for a few seconds before he replied.

“Do you have anything I could write with?”

---

Judy and Nick had taken off at a full sprint towards Bogo’s office, and were almost out of breath by the time they got there (there were an awful lot of stairs between the interrogation room and Bogo’s top-level office). They didn’t bother knocking.

Bogo’s glare could kill, but Nick and Judy ignored it. Before he could open his mouth, Judy piped up enthusiastically.

“Sir, we’ve got a location for the Brood!”

Bogo, who had half risen from his seat in order to chew out the fox and the rabbit, sat back down and folded his arms, which Judy took as her cue to continue.

“Abandoned warehouse in Savannah Central, down by the waterfront. Our suspect says it’s the whole shebang – storage, production, and headquarters. We can get the whole thing today.”

Bogo nodded.

“You think the children are there too?”

Judy nodded.

“It would make sense, sir.”

Nick took over her explanation.

“They’re probably using the kids as part of the operation. Our perp never saw the kids because he never actually went inside the building, but I’d bet a good stack of cash that they’re being held there.”

Bogo thought for a moment, then leaned forward and hit a small green button on his phone and spoke into the receiver.

“I need all of you in my office, now. Drop what you’re doing and get up here.”

An involuntary shiver ran through Judy. The green button was legendary. It was a direct line to every senior officer in the precinct – that meant that, within ten minutes, every captain and lieutenant was going to march into Bogo’s office.
They were all gathered within five. It was intimidating to be surrounded by so many mammals that outranked them, but the discomfort that Judy and Nick felt was mitigated somewhat by the presence of Jorgenson, who had taken up a position near them.

Bogo stood and addressed the room.

“We have a location for ‘The Brood’. Warehouse in south Savannah Central, on the waterfront. The address has been sent to all of you.”

He paused for a moment, then continued.

“The plan is as follows. We’re going to wait for nightfall, then use thermal imaging to scope out the building. We’re mostly concerned about children – if there are kits anywhere in that building, our insertion will be wherever they’re being held. I want to get them out quickly in case the situation… escalates. I want SWAT ready, and I want patrol ready to close off every single path out of the area as soon as we give the word. I want boats ready, I want helicopters ready. Nobody is getting away. I want you all back here at 1300 hours for a progress update. Get to it.”

Judy and Nick made way for the brass leaving the room. As they turned to leave, Bogo halted them.

“You two aren’t going in with SWAT. You’ll be on hand, but I’m expressly forbidding you from entering that building until it’s been cleared.”

Judy, indignant, was about to retort, but Nick laid a paw on her shoulder. She simply huffed at Bogo and stomped out of the room.

Nick caught up to her halfway down the hallway.

“Oh come on, Carrots. We did our job. Let’s let SWAT handle this one.”

Judy continued to frown, ignoring Nick, who gently poked one fluffy cheek.

“Didn’t your mother ever tell you that your face will freeze like that?”

Judy couldn’t help but let out a short bark of laughter.

“I know he has a really good reason, Nick, but it’s so… personal!”

Nick nodded.

“I get it, Carrots. I promise I do. But let’s face it. We’re not the perfect ones for the job this time. The SWAT folks are huge. Elephants, rhinos, buffalo. They can literally kick down doors.”

Judy let out a frustrated sigh. She hated it when Nick was right. And he usually was.

She looked at her partner as they headed back to their shared office.

“I think I’m going to grab a nap when we get back to the bureau. I want to be alert tonight.”
Nick grinned.

“Now you’re talking.”

---

The afternoon passed by quickly, and the precinct was a nonstop blur of commotion. Every division was mobilizing for the operation, and it was unlike anything Judy or Nick had ever seen before. Not even the first night howler case had generated this much activity.

Finally, as the sun began to set, Judy and Nick were herded into the command vehicle. It was a large but nondescript black van filled with communication and surveillance equipment – the perfect place for Bogo to run the operation from. The cape buffalo was already there, as was Jorgenson and several other brass that Nick and Judy weren’t as familiar with – officers from other precincts, perhaps.

Judy stumbled as the van began to move. Her heart started to pound, so she took a couple of deep breaths. After a moment, everything returned to normal. She was ready. She turned to Nick, who greeted her with a lazy smile.

It took them almost twenty minutes to reach their destination, which was roughly a block down the street from the warehouse. The sun had fully set by the time they arrived, and Judy could barely make out anything when she peered out the minuscule windows. The van jolted again as it came to a stop, but this time Judy was prepared and didn’t stumble. She made her way toward the front of the van, where Bogo and several other officers were gathered around a large screen showing a thermal imaging readout from one of the department’s drones.

Bogo had decided against helicopters for surveillance. They were noisy and obvious, whereas the drone was silent and sneaky – perfect for the work they wanted to accomplish.

Judy and Nick leaned in closer to the screen. It looked as though the warehouse was a simple two-story design. The ground floor had two rooms – one was a large open space that showed approximately twenty mammals standing at some sort of work. The other room was much smaller, crammed with two large mammals and a pack of very small ones. On the second floor, there were two mid-sized offices at either end of the warehouse – there must have been some significant source of heat on in both of them, because they only registered as a big white blur on the screen.

Bogo turned away and spoke into a radio to the SWAT teams.

“This is Bogo. Team one, you’ll enter through the north side of the building. You’re looking at approximately twenty adults. Team two, you’re entering on the south side. The juveniles are through your door, it they appear to be guarded by two adults. Over.”

The radio crackled.

“Team one copies.”

“Team two copies.”

Bogo spoke into the radio again.
“Patrol, put up your barricades now, and be ready. I’m expecting some runners.”

Patrol responded in the affirmative, and the van was filled with a silent energy.

Bogo signaled his teams for a third time.

“Teams one and two, gas and go.”

Even from a block away, Judy could hear the Whump! of tear gas canisters being fired. The canisters would be shot through the windows along with flash bang grenades, blinding the occupants and rendering them mostly helpless.

All was silent for several minutes. The lack of sound contrasted sharply with the images from the SWAT teams’ helmet cameras – the action was sharp, smooth, and professional. The officers in the main room had their suspects down and bound almost immediately. Team two, the group assigned to extract the children, had a slightly rougher go of it. The two adults in the room (a large at – maybe a lion, and a wildebeest) were armed with lengths of metal pipe, and managed to land a couple of hits on an officer with their blind swings. They were quickly brought down with tasers and cuffed as the children were evacuated from the building, coughing heavily. The SWAT teams finally signaled.

“Building is clear, sir.”

Cheers erupted in the van, and paws pumped the air excitedly – it was over. Judy felt a paw squeeze her shoulder, and looked up to find Nick at her side. She glowed with pride.

Nick spoke.

“Sir, permission to go inside?”

Bogo was uncharacteristically upbeat.

“Granted. Kevlar and mask first. Jorgenson, please escort them.”

They all obeyed, strapping on bulletproof vests and helping each other fit their masks. They all jogged down to the warehouse and entered through main entrance, where team one stood guard over their charges. The tear gas had mostly dissipated, but all of the officers kept their masks tightly fastened. They had all been gassed as part of their training at the academy, and none of them were eager to repeat the experience.

Nick was the first to start poking around the warehouse – the large space was filled with long tables, most of which were stacked high with cardboard boxes. Nick peered inside one to find large packets of blue frost – no surprise there. He started to head back towards Judy, who was chatting with one of the SWAT officers. He had almost reached her when he heard a sharp crack, followed by a loud snap. Gunfire.

Time seemed to roll to a stop. He heard one of the SWAT members scream.

“Sniper! Get down!”

Nick dove towards his partner, wrapping himself around her as he pulled them both to the floor. He heard more cracks, but the only thing he was aware of was the warm, fragile body in his arms. He
felt a sudden twinge of pain in his back and gasped into his mask, but the sound was drowned out but the *whump* of tear gas canisters firing. There was chaos for another minute, then silence.

Nick looked around – the firing had ended and the SWAT team was storming the office at the far end of the building, he heard a commotion, then – barely making them out – saw two officers emerge with a small form pinned between them. Nick attempted to rise to his feet, but gasped at an intense burning pain spread throughout his back.

“Nick!” Judy cried. She rushed to his side just in time for him to lean into her. With Judy supporting him, Nick limped slowly towards the exit. As soon as he crossed the threshold, he tore off his mask and hungrily inhaled the cool, clear air. It was only then that he became aware of his radio buzzing with activity.

“Officer down! I repeat, we have an officer down!”

Nick blinked, confused.

“But I’m fine.”

Judy ignored his comment, leaning him up against the side of the warehouse.

“You stay here and wait for the paramedics. I’m going back in to help.”

Nick tried to protest, but he didn’t have the energy. He could only sit against the warehouse wall, which sagged slightly under his weight. He tried to stretch slightly, and was met with nausea-inducing pain. *Okay then*, he thought to himself and he tried to steady his breathing, *none of that. Time to wait.*

He didn’t have to wait long. The paramedics arrived within seconds, and immediately started examining him, which was good – his back was really starting to hurt. Looking over the head of one of the paramedics, he was able to see Judy emerge and hurry towards them.

She spoke quickly.

“There’s one more inside the building. Seriously injured.”

Two paramedics grabbed their kits and a stretcher and ran at a dead sprint into the building.

Nick looked at Judy’s ashen face.

“Jorgenson”, she said simply.

Nick felt his stomach drop. That wasn’t right. This was supposed to be easy. Jorgenson wasn’t supposed to get hurt. He had more thoughts on the matter, but they were lost as his vision faded into blackness. The last thing he heard before losing consciousness was Judy calling his name.

---
When Nick awoke, it was light out again. He was lying face-down in a hospital bed, with a number of tubes sticking out of his left arm. He looked away – he wasn’t afraid of needles, per say, but there was something genuinely disturbing about seeing so many unnatural elements connected to his body. He felt a slight weight on his right arm, and he turned to look.

Judy had pulled up a chair as far as it could go, all the way up to his bed. Her lower body was planted in the chair, but her torso was on the bed, and she had wrapped both of her arms around Nick’s right arms and paw. She looked peaceful.

Nick shifted slightly and she awoke, letting out the most adorable yawn that Nick had ever seen. She brightened up immediately when she saw that Nick was awake.

She grinned widely.

“Hey you.”

Nick smiled in return.

“There’s a stain on your shirt.”

Judy rolled her eyes.

“Seriously? You wake up next to me in the hospital, and that’s the first thing you have to say?”

Nick thought for a moment.

“I love you?”

Judy giggled.

“And now we’re being romantic?”

Nick chuckled into his pillow.

“Well, I haven’t seen the doctor yet. I might be dying, I figured I should get that out there. I love you.”

Judy leaned close to him for a kiss.

“And I love you, you brave, stupid fox.”

Nick smiled, then grimaced.

“My back hurts like a bitch.”

“I bet. You got peppered by some shrapnel. It was a real bleeder, apparently. But there’s no permanent damage. Missed your spine entirely, and it didn’t go deep enough to hit a kidney. So the worst you’ll end up with are some extremely sexy scars.”

She was scratching the back of his neck now, and Nick was in heaven. Bless this bunny.
He raised his head out of the pillow as a thought occurred to him.

“Jorgenson?”

Judy sobered immediately.

“He’s alive, though I wouldn’t want to be him right now. Bullet shattered his femur into a bunch of pieces. He’s going to be out for a while, if he’s able to come back at all.”

Nick winced, but he was glad Jorgenson was alive. As much grief as Nick gave him on a daily basis, the Captain was an excellent leader, and a good friend.

“What was the deal with the shooter? Why didn’t SWAT nab him when they swept the building for the first time?”

“The shooter was a mole rat. They have trouble maintaining their body temperature; he was probably cold and didn’t show up on thermal imaging. SWAT poked around the office and he was able to keep himself hidden until they went back downstairs.”

Nick shook his head.

“I don’t know what he was thinking, shooting at two dozen officers like that. Did anyone else get hurt?”

Judy shook her head.

“You’ll be happy to know that bragging rights belong solely to you and Jorgenson.”

“And the Brood?”

“Got ‘em. Lots of full cells at the ZPD right now.”

She hopped out of the chair and headed towards the door.

“I’m starving, so I’m going to head out and get some lunch. Oh and Nick?”

“Hmm?”

“You need to call your mom. Because somehow she got my number and demands hourly updates.”

Nick paled, but Judy left before he could respond.

---

Nick was out of the hospital three days later, but it would take him weeks to be cleared for duty. He didn’t mind – the injury was still painful, and he would need a little bit of physical therapy before
returning to work. On the bright side, Bogo was allowing him to put in some work on the case.

As everyone was interviewed in the aftermath of the raid things started to make sense. As a means of extorting silence from the workers, the kingpin of the blue frost operation (a squirrel named Lucas Amado – he hadn’t been present at the warehouse and had likely skipped town after hearing of the raid) had abducted their children (or young relatives) and forced them to work on synthesizing blue frost for him. They had mostly been held at the warehouse, but were occasionally smuggled to the Burrows in order to harvest and process the Night Howlers. It explained the lack of missing mammal reports regarding the children – the relatives were simply too frightened to come forward.

Jorgenson had been brought out of his drug-induced stupor, and was quite cheery considering the state of his leg. Nick had visited him with Judy as Bogo’s visit was ending – Bogo was apparently the one to tell Jorgenson that he might not be able to come back to the ZPD. Jorgenson, miraculously, remained upbeat.

“It’s okay. Now that I’m physically useless, maybe they’ll make me Chief.”

Bogo growled a very un-buffalo like growl and stalked out of the hospital room.

The Captain had winked at Judy and Nick, then.

“We used to be partners in patrol when we were both new. I drove him up the wall.”

Judy had chuckled.

“I can’t imagine what that must be like.”

Nick could only smile.

---

Nick was spending most of his time at Judy’s apartment during his recovery. It was convenient, and it allowed Judy to fulfill her urge to dote on the injured fox. Judy was especially energetic today – she had spent the entire morning sanitizing the apartment in preparation for a special guest.

“Judy”, Nick sighed, “my mom won’t care if the apartment isn’t spotless. She’s interested in you, not your digs.”

Judy scowled at him.

“I only get one first impression, Nick, and it’s going to be a good one.”

She finally gave up and joined her injured partner on the couch, being sure not to jostle him too hard. His lower back was supported by very soft pillows, which made snuggling with him a little bit difficult - but Judy, being Judy, found a way to make it work.

The rabbit tucked herself into the crook of Nick’s arm, and gently tugged at the fur on his chest.

“This was a rough one, Nick.”

He looked down at her.
“Yeah, it was. But we made it though in one piece. Mostly.”

“That we did.”

Judy pulled Nick a little bit closer so that she could kiss him.

As Judy and Nick held each other close, they were both aware of one simple fact: everything was going to be just fine.
Extension I: Not for Naught

Chapter Notes

The first of the T&T story extensions! This was originally a spinoff work, but I decided to add it here since

Judy's Apartment

Several weeks after the end of the blue frost case

Judy was panicked.

“How is that even a thing?! Why is that even a thing?! What if it never comes out?!”

Nick had found the situation funny, at first. During one of their intimate encounters, Judy expressed a desire to try something new - Nick had protested, but Judy got her way, as usual.

She was now regretting her decision, because Nick was… stuck. Inside of her.

When it happened, Nick tried his best to hold back a mad fit of giggles, but he failed miserably. The situation was just too bizarre not to laugh.

Judy’s paws were covering her eyes in shame. Nick gently pried them away and kissed her.

“There’s nobody I’d rather be stuck in, Carrots. I promise you, you’re overreacting. It'll be fine.”

Judy just glared.

Nick smiled and leaned closer to her face.

“It’s not a big deal.”

The glare intensified.

“I’m starting to think this was all for naught, Judy.”

Nick realized too late that he was stuck within punching distance of Judy for the next fifteen minutes. But it was worth it.
Judy’s Apartment

A month after the blue frost case

Judy and Nick fell asleep together in almost the exact same way every night, with Nick’s extremities wrapped around Judy (a position they both affectionately referred to as “The Burrito of Love”).

Tonight was going to be a little bit different.

Judy rolled around in Nick’s grasp, her arms looped loosely around his neck.

“Nick.”

The fox gazed at her softly.

“Carrots.”

“I want to try being the big spoon. I’ve never done it before and I want to see what it’s like.”

Nick nodded seriously.

“I understand. But you can’t be the big spoon.”

Judy started to interject, but Nick placed a clawed finger on her mouth, shushing her.

“You can be my jetpack.”

Judy giggled and climbed over him, her chin snugly tucked over his shoulder – then they both drifted off into sleep.
Chapter Summary

In which Nick and Judy's relationship is finally outing.

Six months later…

Judy kept expecting the honeymoon period to wear off. She kept waiting for the moment when her stomach wouldn’t flutter when Nick touched her, or when a flirtatious look from Nick wouldn’t distract her from her work – but it never came.

Eventually, she just accepted the fact that she was hopelessly in love with Nick.

The feeling was mutual – Nick couldn’t remember a time in his life that he’d been happier. He woke up every morning next to the love of his life before leaving to do the job he’d been born to do. Pulling hustles had been fun, but there’d been a lack of fulfillment. For the first time in his life, Nick felt as though he was accomplishing everything he was capable of.

They were blissfully happy.

But there was just one problem.

Their relationship, wonderful though it was, still remained a secret from their colleagues at the ZPD. Clawhauser was suspicious, but he too remained in the dark. Nick and Judy both understood the need for absolute professionalism during work, and were absolutely appropriate on the job. They rarely even touched as to not give away their relationship. The couple joked about it, but deep down they were terrified that they’d both be reassigned to other partners.

Neither knew how exactly to broach the subject with their employer, or when.

It was a decision that they wouldn’t have to make.

---

Nick and Judy were lying on the couch together watching a movie when their phones vibrated simultaneously. Nick got to his first – it was Clawhauser. When he read the message, he bolted upright, sending Judy flying.

Clawhauser had sent a picture of Nick kissing Judy at a café in the Rainforest District they frequented. One of the reasons they went there was because it was relatively unknown to other ZPD officers, but apparently one had seen them and surreptitiously taken a photo – and send it to the biggest blabbermouth in Zootopia.
There was a single line of text beneath the photo.

*I knew it. CUTIE PATOOTIES!*

Judy had seen the message, and looked at Nick guiltily. Tomorrow was not going to be fun.

---

They managed to avoid Clawhauser on the way in, and were able to get to their office without running into anyone. But it was not to last – Jorgenson called the duo into his office almost immediately.

Jorgenson’s leg was still in a cast – he had at least another couple of months to go before his femur was completely healed, and even then it was unlikely that he would be fully functional. On the bright side, he had finally graduated to crutches after many months spent in a wheelchair, and constantly abused his newly regained mobility by visiting his detectives in their offices instead of calling them in – so Judy was a little nervous about being summoned. She glanced at Nick, who seemed singularly unshaken.

They entered and Nick closed the door behind them. They sat down and waited for the Captain to speak.

He peered at them over his desk.

“So… how long?”

Judy gulped, getting ready to speak – but Nick beat her to the punch.

“About seven months.”

Jorgenson pounded his fist on the desk.

“Ah, damn. My money was on three weeks ago. You two just lost me fifty bucks.”

Judy and Nick stared at him incredulously. There was a pause, then Judy spoke.

“Sir… are we being reprimanded?”

Jorgenson snorted.
“Only for not keeping me in the loop. I would have split the winnings with you, you know.”

He leaned forward, now serious.

“There’s precedent for separating you two. But given how professional you’ve both been about this… situation… I’m fine with letting it fly. Just keep doing what you’ve been doing. Bogo will yell at you later, but he’ll be fine with it. Just a little upset that he lost money too. He bet on you two getting together right after Wilde graduated from the academy.”

After that the conversation steered into case discussion, then slowly fizzled out. Nick and Judy returned to their office and checked their phones – they both had massive amounts of unread messages. It seemed as though the photo had made the rounds, thanks to Clawhauser.

Nick started reading through them, and snorted as he read one.

Judy started.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Nothing”’, Nick said hastily. He paused for a second, then decided to tell her.

“I’ve had three separate people ask me what rabbit tastes like.”

Judy gasped.

“What?! What did you say?!”

“Nothing, yet.”

Judy glared.

“And you won’t say anything.”

“But I like the way you taste.”

“Our coworkers don’t need to know that.”

The rest of the morning passed in a flurry of work and bickering – just like it always did.
Hooray, 200 kudos! Thanks to everyone who is reading and enjoying. More to come from this story, and I love hearing your comments.

Enjoy! :)

About a month later…

At long last, Nick Wilde was no longer the only fox in the ZPD. He had expected to keep his title for a while longer, but he’d been surprised before.

It was a different story for Judy – rabbits far outnumbered foxes, and Judy served as a huge inspiration. Her success as an officer led to another three rabbits (and one hare) being accepted into the force after her.

But this new fox was something as a surprise – foxes, as a general rule, were wary of the police – but things were starting to change, slowly.

Her name was Hazel Fleming. Judy had met her very briefly once, shortly after the fox had graduated the academy. Hazel had earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology, and immediately after applied to the ZPD. She was fast-tracked to the academy, and graduated near the top of her class. Not valedictorian, but high enough to be assigned to Precinct 1.

Judy and Nick eventually bumped into her at work one morning. They were walking past Clawhauser’s desk on the way out the door when Hazel had called out to them, and they stopped to talk.

Judy briefly introduced herself, and then Hazel started talking to Nick.

“Wow Detective Wilde, it’s uh… it’s really amazing to finally get to meet you. I just wanted to say that you’re a great inspiration for foxes everywhere, and I… I’m really excited to get to work with you. I’m Officer Fleming, by the way. Hazel Fleming.”

She was slightly shorter than Nick, and gazed up at him with large green eyes.

Judy had grinned as Hazel awkwardly introduced herself, but her grin slowly vanished. Hazel was looking a little too closely at Nick. And was she… batting her eyelashes?

Judy wasn’t exactly a judge of fox beauty when it came to foxes other than Nick, but her partner had filled her in on what foxes considered attractive. Large ears (though Judy certainly felt she had Hazel
beat in that regard), a long and fluffy tail (Hazel’s certainly was both), and a lithe figure all topped the list. And then came the bombshell.

“Would you mind getting lunch with me today, Detective?”

Judy said nothing, and instead leaned over to Nick and wrapped her arm around his waist possessively, casting a neutral look at the enemy Officer Fleming.

Nick was somewhat surprised – he and Judy typically didn’t get physical during work, but he got the message.

He turned back to the other fox.

“Sorry, but I’ve made some plans already. It’s nice to meet you, Officer Fleming. Glad you have you with us.”

Hazel’s face was blank. She only nodded and gave a polite “Thank you.”

As much as Judy wanted to hate her for flirting with her fox, she couldn’t help but notice that Fleming seemed… embarrassed. She gave the fox a forced lukewarm smile and walked out of the building with Nick, arm still around his waist.

Nick waited until they were out of earshot of anyone else before looking down at Judy. His voice was dripping with snark.

“Carrots, did you just get jealous?”

“No.”

“Uh huh. So it doesn’t bother you at all that Officer Fleming just asked me out.”

“Nope.”

Judy turned back, looking thorough the windows at Fleming, who was now talking to Clawhauser.

“Carrots, what are you looking at?”

“Not much.”

“Am I in trouble?”

Judy gently squeezed the base of his tail, and Nick could barely refrain from letting out a yip. Judy winked at him.

“Only the fun kind.”

---

The next day, Officer Fleming sought out Judy immediately, asking to speak to her privately. Judy was confused and slightly irritated, but she saw no reason to refuse.
Before Judy could ask Fleming what the deal was, the fox started speaking in a nervous voice.

“Detective, I just wanted to say that I’m sorry about yesterday. I didn’t know that you and Detective Wilde were a thing, and I was kind of… tricked into that conversation.”

Judy raised an eyebrow.

“Tricked? How’s that?”

It was difficult to see a fox blush, but Judy had gotten a lot of practice over the last couple of years – and this fox was beet red underneath her fur. Officer Fleming spoke again, showing an incredible discomfort.

“Someone hinted that Detective Wilde was single, and, uh… interested in me. Which is obviously not the case. I just really wanted to give you a good explanation for yesterday, and I had known I wouldn’t have gone near him with a ten foot pole.”

Judy felt a pang of sympathy for the fox. Pranks within the department were common – especially with rookies – but this one was just mean. Judy did her best to give Fleming a warm smile.

“Look, Officer Fleming – is it okay if I call you Hazel?”

Hazel nodded sheepishly.

“Hazel – don’t worry about it. Pranks happen, awkward stuff happens. It’s part of the job, and I really appreciate you talking to me. That takes some serious cajones.”

A small smile had slid across Hazel’s face. Judy continued.

“Don’t feel like you need to avoid us, either. We’re all on the same team, here.”

Hazel’s small smile had expanded into a full-on toothy grin.

“Good to know, Detective Hopps.”

“Judy.”

“Judy, then.”

Hazel paused for a moment, looking away from the rabbit, then looked back.

“Do you think it would be all right if I had a similar conversation with Detective Wilde?”

Judy gave a small chuckle.

“Didn’t I just say something about you not needing to avoid us?”

---
After talking with Nick, Judy gleaned that his conversation with Hazel had gone very much the same way as hers.

There was a comfortable quiet as they sat basked in the orange glow of their office working on paperwork. After thinking for a bit, Judy piped up.

“I think we should take Hazel out.”

Nick raised an eyebrow at her.

“I don’t know about you, Carrots, but I’m not really into the whole ‘open relationship’ thing. I’m a one-bunny kind of guy.”

Judy threw a balled-up piece of paper at him, hitting her mark.

“No, I mean as friends. Peers. Whatever. She probably feels really stupid and really isolated right now. Does she have any friends in the department?”

Nick thought for a moment.

“Well, there’s Clawhauser…”

“Nick, everyone is friends with Clawhauser. Even people that haven’t met him, they just don’t know it yet.”

Nick frowned.

“Well, I can’t think of any then. But I’m fine with us all grabbing dinner or hitting up a gastropub or something.”

Judy nodded.

“Yeah. I didn’t get her number, so I’ll just try to grab her at the end of her shift.”

Nick put on the smile he reserved for times he was tormenting Judy.

“Grab her, huh? Should I be jealous?”

“Maybe. She’s better looking than you, that’s for sure.”

“Ouch. My fragile heart.”

“You’ll get over it. Now hand me the evidence report.”
Chapter Notes

Only a few more chapters left! They may or may not involve a proposal, a wedding, and children. And Clawhauser finding love.

Judy was eventually able to get ahold of Hazel via another officer that happened to have her cell number. Judy was feared that the conversation would be awkward, but it ended up being fine. Hazel seemed overjoyed at the prospect of getting together, and agreed to meet them at Flannigan’s (a nearby Irish gastropub that was widely considered to be a cop bar).

Judy and Nick got home (Nick had moved in the second his lease expired), changed, and headed to the bar. Hazel was already waiting for them at a table. They sat down, exchanged greetings, and ordered food and drinks. A couple of minutes passed, filled with nothing but semi-awkward small talk.

“Nick, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“Was it like this for you when you first joined? You know, hard making friends in the department?”

Nick shifted uncomfortably.

“Well… not really. I had Judy to vouch for me. And the whole Night Howler thing, so I was coming in with a little more ammo.”

Hazel was quiet for a moment.

“So it’s just me, then.”

Nick smiled disarmingly and leaned back in his chair.

“Okay, speaking strictly as a fox here: try not to take it too personally. You’re a rookie, and everybody goes through that nonsense. Even Carrots McFluff, detective extraordinaire.”

Judy snorted.

“Yeah, I spent my first couple shifts as a meter maid. It sucked.”

Nick nodded.

“See, Hazel? You’re already off to a better start than Judy. You actually started in patrol.”

Hazel allowed herself a small grin, then sighed softly.
“Thanks, you guys. I’ve been wondering about whether I’m fitting in here, and I think now that it’s gonna be good. Just psyching myself out a little.”

Judy piped up.

“Your friends will start to emerge out of the woodwork. It’ll take some time, but you’ll eventually find the people that you really click with. Not counting Clawhauser.”

Hazel’s smile broadened, then her brow furrowed.

“Okay, speaking of Clawhauser. And keep in mind that I’m only asking this out of my own morbid curiosity, and you two have known him for much longer than I have. Is he gay?”

Nick and Judy shared a look. Nick answered.

“You know what? We have no idea. Never seen him with anyone, male or female. He’s flamboyant, but that might just be his personality. Maybe if you make detective one day you can find out for the rest of us.”

A soft blow landed on Nick’s arm. Judy gave him a playful glare. The fox blanched.

“What?! Inquiring minds need to know!”

From there, the trio descended into drunken banter that only ended when the bar staff ejected them. Judy and Nick called a Zuber for Hazel, and then walked back to their apartment.

They collapsed on the bed together. Judy lay on top of Nick, who had somehow lost his shirt somewhere between the bedroom and the front door. The rabbit let her paws grip the soft, creamy fur of Nick’s chest, and they both drifted off to a deep sleep.
Extension VI: Proposal

Three years later

It amazed Judy that she’d been on the job for almost five years. They’d sped right by in an exciting blur of cases, coffee, and late nights snuggled up against Nick.

She stretched out in her chair and looked around her office. She’d had her own for the last two months, and so had Nick – one of Bogo’s last acts before hitting mandatory retirement age was to simultaneously promote her and Nick to Detective Lieutenant. There was typically only one of those, and one Captain, but Bogo knew better than to separate the ZPD’s power team. Nick and Judy were happy enough to split the pay raise, and nobody minded.

Bogo still kept busy. Luckily for him, there was no upper age limit for Academy instructors, and he was happily looking forward to endless days of torturing recruits.

Jorgenson had been promoted to Chief. He wasn’t in quite the shape he used to be (nobody ever fully recovers from a shattered femur), but he still struck an intimidating figure behind Bogo’s old desk.

Officer Hazel Fleming had recently been promoted to detective, and was overjoyed to be working under the supervision of two of her first friends in the ZPD.

And life went on.

Nick, for one, was ready to commit to Judy. He’d taken his time in deciding to ask her – as much as they clicked personally and professionally, he wanted to give things time to settle before he popped the question. There were some in the department that wondered why he was taking so long, but the fox paid them no mind.

Nick had spent a long time thinking about how he wanted to do it. He didn’t want to do something tacky and overdone, like a ring in a champagne glass. He and Judy didn’t really do fancy restaurants. He didn’t want to make it too work-related, because it was already hard enough to spend time with Judy outside of work. Eventually, though, he knew exactly how he wanted to propose.

He pulled the small black box out of his pocket, and opened it up. The ring was simple, but beautiful. A gold band with a small, solitary emerald. Judy hated fancy jewelry, but he wanted to give her something nice. Something classy. This seemed like a good compromise. He glanced over to the clock – only five minutes until the end of his shift. He decided to call it early. What the hell, he was a Lieutenant now.

He and Judy walked out of the department, keeping their paws to themselves as they always did at work. The farther they got from the ZPD, the closer together they walked until Judy leaned entirely against him. By the time they got home, they were practically intertwined – Judy’s arms were wrapped around Nick, and his tail encircled her torso in order to keep her warm. It was like a rehearsed dance, and it hadn’t changed in years. It was just… comforting.
They both changed. Judy popped her head out of the closet.

“So... date night. Where are we going? Your turn to pick.”

Nick smiled to himself.

“Oh, found this cool omnivore restaurant in the Rainforest District. It’s new. Apparently pretty hip, but also quiet.”

Judy nodded. Quiet was good. It meant she and Nick could spend more time talking.

---

An hour later, they were halfway through their meals and laughing over a story Judy was telling Nick about one of her subordinates. A moose detective had been following a particularly talented mouse thief. After tracking him to Tundratown, the moose had located the small criminal’s collection of stolen art pieces. What he failed to locate at the time was the criminal himself, who had hitched a ride on a branch of the mooses’ antlers. Somehow the mouse had removed a portion of the mooses’ antler with a tiny wire saw and taken it as a trophy. The detective was mortified, and Judy was barely able to hold back her laughter when he reported back to her.

Nick found the story entertaining, of course. But he was much more focused on Judy, and the little lines that appeared at the corners of her eyes whenever she laughed. He’s never noticed them before, and subsequently wondered how many other little things about Judy had slipped his attention. There would always be more to learn about the wonderful little bunny he loved.

They finally wrapped up, and Nick walked her out. The gondolas running to downtown were within a block – something that Nick had made sure of. They were much closer than the train line, and the busses had just stopped running, so they were the only logical choice. He held the door for Judy, then followed her into the car.

They leaned together and cuddled for a moment, saying nothing. Then Nick, his heart pounding, broke the silence.

“You know I love you, right, Carrots?”

Judy chuckled.

“News to me! I thought we were just messing around for the last few years.”

Nick smiled. Judy would never admit it, but he had rubbed off on her.

“Just checking, hon.”

He shifted slightly.

“You know, this is where I first started noticing you were special. I don’t think it was romantic yet. But this is where I first started figuring it out.”
Judy looked at him with those round amethyst eyes and said nothing. Nick continued on.

“I can’t even imagine where I’d be now without you. And to be honest, I really can’t imagine ever spending a day without you. So I thought I’d go ahead and make this official.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the box. He faced Judy and opened it.

“Judy, will you marry me?”

Nick wasn’t sure what he was expecting, but it certainly wasn’t tears. His felt his stomach lurch, like someone had kicked him in the gut, then heard Judy force out a couple of words in between sobs.

“YES, you dumb fox!”

They embraced, and Nick felt a warm glow spread to every corner of his body. He patted Judy’s head.

“So emotional.”

“Shut up!”

“Make me.”

So she kissed him, and he kissed her back until the gondola reached its destination and they started drawing looks and snickers from passerby.

Nick took Judy by the paw and started to lead her back to their home. His tail casually wrapped around his fiancé to protect her from the chilly wind. He squeezed her paw and felt the ring there.

Everything was just right.
Nick and Judy married four months after Nick’s proposal. They were able to rent a large space in a public park that was big enough to fit a sizeable portion of the ZPD and the lion’s share of Judy’s family. The event also attracted a fair amount of press, though at that point Judy and Nick were used to the attention and mostly ignored the uninvited guests, who were kept at a respectful distance by some of Nick and Judy’s more muscular coworkers.

It was a simple ceremony, but it was nice and heartfelt. The wedding was more for family and friends than for the bride and groom. Bunnies loved weddings. And birthday parties. And any event that gave them an excuse to get together and romp about.

Nick’s mother was there, one of the few guests from Nick’s past aside from Finnick. She spent most of the ceremony weeping with joy, and practically collapsed on Judy, whom she adored. Most everyone got fabulously drunk, and everyone had a grand time.

As far as weddings go, it was a rousing success.

---

They decided to wait on the honeymoon. Having both of the detective Lieutenants leaving at the same time would throw the department into chaos, so Judy and Nick set a date six months in advance to make sure nothing would explode when they left. Neither of them minded, but they were both looking forward to it.

---

Judy lay curled up next to Nick after a long day of work, her left paw kneading the creamy fur of his chest. She nuzzled his side and grunted.

Nick chuckled and gave her a small squeeze.

“What’s up?”

Judy looked up at him.

“Nick, have you ever thought about starting a family?”

“You are my family.”

“You know what I mean.”

Nick sighed. This conversation was about to get a little depressing.

“Yeah Carrots, I’ve thought about it. I don’t think it’s gonna happen naturally.”

“But how do you know?”
“Carrots, we’ve been having massive amounts of unprotected sex over the last five years. So either I’m shooting blanks, which is unlikely considering my fifteen illegitimate children” – that one earned him a pinch from Judy – “or we’re just not compatible that way.”

Judy sighed.

“Well, it’d be a living hell for them. Can you imagine being that good-looking? They’d be constantly harassed. Trust me, it’s a tough life.”

Judy giggled in spite of herself.

“You probably just want me for my dashing good looks.”

Judy rolled her eyes.

“In your dreams, slick.”

Nick started to massage her shoulders.

“Fine, then it must be my extremely manly yet delicate and sensitive paws.”

“Mmmmm… nope. Go a little lower…”

Nick’s muzzle suddenly disappeared down past her belly. She felt a warm pleasure radiate from between her legs, and she moaned softly. It stopped, and Nick’s head reappeared in her view.

“I was going to say something clever about my silver tongue, but that little noise you made was
really hot and made me forget what I was going to say.”

“You’re not going to say anything until you finish what you just started, mister.”

“Fine. I’ll just say it in Morse Code.”

Judy’s orgasm came in the midst of a violent fit of laughter. The combination resulted in several pulled muscles, a very skeptical ER doctor, and an extremely apologetic (yet proud) husband.
Extension VIII: The End

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for following this story. I had a joy writing it, but it was time to finally close the door on this one.

I've loved reading your wonderful comments and messages over the last two months - and thank you again for taking this little journey with me!

Two years after their wedding, Judy and Nick adopted. They had been rather quiet about it, not wanting to draw undue attention to their expanding family.

The adoptee was a one-year-old red fox. He had been left on the front door of a hospital, swaddled in blankets and crying his heart out. When Judy and Nick first saw him, they fell in love.

As Judy played with and cooed at the infant, Nick spoke to the social worker that accompanied them on their visit.

“So what’s his name?”

“Nicholas.”

A broad smile appeared across Nick’s face, and he joined Judy on the floor. She glanced over at him, beaming.

“Big Nick and little Nick.”

---

Adoption was an arduous process, especially for an interspecies couple. Though it was proven false in many studies (a fact that Judy often brought up when meeting with social workers), it was commonly believed that a mammal of a different species wouldn’t be as capable raising different kits.

Eventually, everything went through and they were able to bring little Nick home. The couple were as loving as any two parents could possibly be – they spent almost every free moment together with their child, and spent every night reading to him as he drifted off into sleep. They weren’t perfect, and would have a of of tough obstacles to overcome, but enthusiasm and love made up for any small parenting mistakes they made along the way.

---
Time passed and things changed. Little Nick got much bigger, turning into a bright, inquisitive, happy child. He had taken after Judy personality-wise, which Nick was grateful for. If his son could turn out to be half as sweet as Judy, he’d be the proudest father in Zootopia.

Nick was inching closer and closer to his pension, and was seriously considering leaving the ZPD soon to establish Wilde Times before he got too old. He had already secured more than enough funds – his left over cash from his hustling days along with a sizeable investment from Fru-Fru (who had long since taken over for her father, legitimizing his shady business practices) ensured that he’d at least have a shot at making his theme park a reality. He also wanted to be able to spend more time with little Nick.

Judy, on the other hand, was probably never going to leave the ZPD. She had recently been promoted to Captain of the detective Bureau, and had her eyes set of the Chief’s office. Jorgenson wasn’t going to be around forever, and Judy felt that she was up to the task. She was also, Nick reflected, by far the most popular choice. Every officer respected her, and she was adored by the general public.

---

Nick retired a year and a half later and immediately broke ground on his passion project, spending half of his time working on the park and the other half with his son – cooking dinner, taking him to baseball practice, helping him with his homework. Judy still worked full-time, but she was always there for family time, and they were happy.

---

When Jorgenson retired a couple of years later, Judy became Chief. Nobody was surprised – at this point, it seemed inevitable. Nick had helped her redesign her office to make it a bit more idiomatic for rabbits. She was, after all, the smallest Chief of Police that the ZPD ever had.

Nick finally finished the park, which became a roaring success. He left day-to-day operations in the hands of those younger and more energetic than he. Nick preferred to spend time with his family, and occasionally drop in unannounced. When he got bored, he came back on a temporary basis to assist the ZPD on cases, and occasionally taught at the academy.

Little Nick had decided that he wanted to become a firefighter. Nick and Judy groaned good-naturedly – they had often complained about the cavalier attitudes of the ZFD “hose jockeys”, but they were supportive.

Things were good for their family. They had their occasional rough times, but things were good.

In Zootopia, anyone could be anything.

And they were happy.

THE END.
Meeting

Chapter Summary

Just when you thought it was over...

I had an idea for this chapter and absolutely had to come back and write it. There may be more, I just love this story so much.

Nick, Judy, and little Nick sat facing the principal, who was a weary-looking moose named Dr. Mora.

Little Nick (who at the age of twelve was no longer very little, and preferred the name “Nicky”) had apparently gotten into a fight with a pig some years his senior. The other student had been hospitalized with a broken snout.

Dr. Mora sighed and rubbed his eyes with his hooves.

“Chief Hopps, Mr. Wilde – I’m sure you can understand the gravity of the situation. Your son seriously injured another student.”

Nick sat as still as a statue.

“I’m under the impression that he was provoked.”

“He was.”

“Then what, pray tell, is the problem?”

“We have a zero tolerance policy towards violence in the school.”

Nick snorted, leaning back in his chair.

“More like a zero intelligence policy. What’s Nicky supposed to do, let an older boy beat the crap out of him so you can cover your ass?”

Dr. Mora was about to begin a carefully prepared speech about how the young Mr. Wilde should have sought an adult, but just as he began he was interrupted by the older Mr. Wilde.

“And don’t tell us that he should have gotten an adult. You can’t call for someone when you’re in the middle of a fight. We would know.”

Nick put a comforting paw on his son’s shoulders, and Nicky looked as his father hopefully.

Judy sighed – there was even more tension in the room now, and she wanted it gone.
“Look, why doesn’t Nicky just tell us all what happened, and we’ll go from there.”

Dr. Mora nodded, and turned his gaze to Nicky, who took a deep breath.

“Well, Gordy’s always been kind of a di- I mean, a jerk. To foxes in general. But that doesn’t really bother me, he’s just ignorant. But I guess he was really hankering for a fight, because he was following me around during lunch insulting my parents. Basically being a huge tool. But then he started pushing me, and the pushes turned into punches.”

Dr. Mora blinked.

“And then?”

“Well, I called him an asshole, then I broke his snout.”

As Judy rubbed her son’s back reassuringly, she shot an acidic glare at her husband. That idiot was *grinning*. Grinning! This was serious.

Judy cleared her throat.

“And I’m assuming there were witnesses?”

Nicky nodded.

“Oh yeah. Tons. Happened right in front of a camera, too.”

Judy turned her imperious gaze towards Dr. Mora, who quailed under the pressure of that look. Chief Hopps had an uncanny knack of making even innocent mammals feel guilty. She spoke.

“Well, in that case we’ll take him home. I’m assuming you’re going to suspend him anyway, even though he was in the right?”

Dr. Mora tapped his foot against the ground nervously. Now *he* was the villain in the room, and he didn’t like it.

“Yes. It’s district policy.”

Judy didn’t respond. She simply stood up with her husband and son, and left the room.

---

It was silent in the car. Nick was driving, but he wasn’t taking them home.

Nicky glanced nervously at his father.
“Dad, where are we going?”

“We’re getting pizza.”

Nick was mystified.

“Uh… why? Aren’t I in trouble?”

Judy answered this time.

“No. You did the right thing. You stood up to a bully, and you defended yourself. Despite what that idiot principal says, that’s always the right thing to do, and we’ll never, ever punish you for it.”

“Oh.”

Nicky twiddled his fingers together.

“Can we get extra pineapple?”

Nick grinned from the driver’s seat.

“You bet.”

“And banana peppers?”

“Oh yeah.”

The silence was now comfortable. Nicky had been nervous about how his parents would take the news, but he wasn’t in trouble and there was pizza – and all of that on top of beating the crap out of a fifteen year old twice his size. This was shaping up to be a pretty good day.

Nick spoke again.

“Want to hear a joke?”

Judy groaned.

“Yeah!” exclaimed Nicky enthusiastically.
“Why can’t you leave a fireman in a room with three balls?”

Nicky chuckled. Ever since he had told his parents that he wanted to be a firefighter, his dad had been telling a nonstop barrage of firefighter jokes. They were both helping him, though. He knew he had to get a degree in fire science, but that was a long way off. Right now, there was pizza.

“So why, dad?”

“So because by the time you come back, one will be broken, one will be missing, and one will be pregnant.”

Nicky’s laughter drowned out Judy’s groan, and the car rolled to a stop at their favorite pizza joint.
“Nick.”

“What?”

“Nicky’s staying the night at a friend’s house.”

“Oh.”

“…do you have any plans?”

“Ah, just one. Though it’s more of a concept than a plan.”

“Oh yeah? What’s that? Are you going to take me out to a fancy restaurant and whisper sweet nothings in my ear?”

“Well, I was thinking more along the lines of pinning you down on the bed and eating you out until you’re speaking gibberish.”

“…”

“And then I’m going to take you out to a fancy restaurant and whisper sweet nothings in your ear.”

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