Summary

A fan-made sequel taking place months after the first film. When a new villain arrives to threaten Zootopia Nick Wilde and Judy Hopps are on the case. But while they try to solve this case their feelings start to cause a brand new obstacle.
Prologue:

A wild storm pounded against the walls of Elkcatraz, keeping its guards inside. Deep in the lowest cell a large silhouette crouched. Chains bolted to the walls wrapped around its body, holding large paws behind its back and a muzzle trapping its jaws. It was a lioness.

Her black tipped ears flicked back and forth, listening to the thunderous beat of raindrops and hail, listening to the paw steps of her guards just outside the door. Her breath was calm and shallow, her chest barely rising with each intake. She was waiting.

A new sound touched her ear, so quiet she would have missed it if she hadn’t been listening for it. Her golden eyes snapped open, the pupils sharp and dilated. The sound was like a scraping, like someone was using a knife to open a locked door. The lioness looked up.

The tiles of the metal roof were shaped like squares and she could see what appeared to be a blade slicing through one tile, her heart started to hammer with excitement. The tile was pulled away to reveal a vent that would be a tight squeeze but one that would be worth it. And then she found herself looking into intelligent eyes. A spider monkey was staring back at her, wearing black silk and grinning like a mad animal. He slid out of the hole he had just carved, landing silently on his feet as if he were a cat.

The lioness couldn’t speak for the muzzle pressed painfully against her mouth, but her eyes spoke volumes. The monkey nodded once before holding up the small blade that he held by his tail. In a matter of seconds he had undone the locks that chained the lioness. He made to release the muzzle but before he could the lioness brought her unbound paws to her face, revealing her abnormally long claws that were plated with a shining iron, with one quick flick of one she had sliced the muzzle free, she smiled. Without a sound she picked the spider monkey up and put him in the vent, quickly jumping in after him. The smaller mammal led her through the maze until finally she smelled the glorious scent of rain and wind and nearly crushed her rescuer in her haste to be free.

Outside the lioness stood to her full height and spread her arms out, taking in a deep breath as rain slammed mercilessly into her fur. She had not felt this amazing in thirteen years.

The spider monkey impatiently tugged on the lioness’s shirt and she followed him, there were no guards out in this deluge, they made their way to the opening he had made of the wall, crawled down the rocky outcropping of the island and made it to a hidden boat.

When Elkcatraz was just a dot in the distance the lioness let out a victorious roar, “Finally! Finally, I am free!”

Her glowing eyes turned to the monkey, “Arachnid, you have done well, my friend.”

Arachnid’s smile was oily, “Of course, my dear. You are the key to our victory.”

Those words made her ears perk up, “Victory? We still have allies?”

“Only a few,” he admitted, “But enough to reach out goal. What are your orders, Ironclaw?”

Ironclaw turned to the south, where her old home lay. She grinned, showing off her row of fangs, a violently gleeful light in her eyes, “Take me to Zootopia. Our plan has not changed; I will burn that city of lies to ashes.”
“Deep breaths, Nick,” Judy encouraged her police partner and friend while she drove down the dusty road.

“Carrots, I forgot how to breathe,” Nick gulped, as he munched on his secret stash of blueberries he always kept in his pocket. He only ate them when his nerves were on edge and an animal could certainly tell by looking at him. His tail was bushed up, making it almost as big as the rest of his body and his eyes were wide with anxious fear.

“I’d rather face a rampaging rhino or rescue a drowning hippo,” he confessed, looking desperately at the rabbit who rode driver, “Literally anything else but this.”

Judy cast an anxious look at the fox and tried to distract him, “Hippos can’t drown; they live in water.”

Nick rolled his eyes, “That isn’t the point, Judy the point is this is worst mission you’ve ever dragged me into. And they can drown if they’re unconscious, everyone can.”

Judy rolled her eyes right back at him, “What mission, Nick? We’re going to see my family.”

The two were driving through Bunnyburrow. Just yesterday Judy got the news that her newest litter of siblings had been born and she along with a handful of other hundred relatives were coming to greet the new arrivals. Not wanting to go by herself and not wanting him to get into trouble while she was away she had invited Nick. Well, if you could call forcing him into her dad’s old truck (they were only allowed to use the police car for police cases) inviting.

Nick wasn’t fond of the idea of spending a whole weekend with a bunch of bunnies who would be scared of him.

“They won’t be,” Judy kept trying to assure him. “I’ve told them all about you.”

“Yes, but I can’t help but remember these are the same bunnies who gave you that old fox away spray,” he pointed out and Judy felt a stab of guilt.

“They’re different now,” she tried to assure him, “Actually, they work with a fox now, Gideon Gray. And he was a worse jerk than you were.”

Those words made Nick look at her sharply, “Gideon who?”

“Gideon Gray,” she began. “He’s a great baker, uses those blueberries you love to make the most amazing of pies. It’s funny, when we were kids he was a lot like you from when we first met. Rude, stuck up,” she smiled, “But he turned around in the end just like you.”

But Nick didn’t look appeased by the words, if anything he looked annoyed, he turned to the window, “I didn’t know you had another friend who’s a fox.”

Judy cast him a sly look, “Are you jealous?”

He snorted, “No, come on Carrots, don’t flatter yourself.”

Judy laughed as her home came into sight, she could already see a number of cars, mostly vans, already parked and a few familiar faces talking and playing outside.

“Just relax,” she told him as they parked, she gave his paw a gentle pat, “Have a smile and a compliment ready and you’ll do just fine.”

His eyes were on the large group of rabbits and he looked so nervous, so anxious about being accepted by her family that her heart went out to him. “Don’t worry,” she said, “I’m here; I’ll protect you.”

He glanced at her then sighed, looking somber, “Alright, alright.”

Trying not to worry about her friend she opened the door to jump out.

“Judy,” he said in an uncharacteristically serious voice. It made her stop and look at him, “What?”

He stared at her with an intense look in his eye, “Don’t let your ego get caught in the car door.”

“Oh shut up,” she laughed, jumping out and slamming the door behind her.

Together she and Nick walked to the large group of rabbits and she couldn’t help a big grin, it had been too long since she last visited.

One small niece turned her head and beamed with surprised delight when she spotted them, “Aunt Judy!”
“I’m here!” she yelled exuberantly, spreading her arms.
Nick jumped back as suddenly his partner was swarmed by tiny balls of fur that buried her in a giant group hug.
He was momentarily concerned that she had just been crushed then relaxed ever so slightly when she heard her laugh. Feeling eyes on him he turned to look at the adult rabbits but they were laughing at Judy and the kids, none of them had noticed him yet. Then who…A tap on his leg gave Nick his answer and the fox looked down to see a small rabbit in a pink bow staring up at him with big eyes, an orange pacifier in her mouth.
Nick was reminded of his old partner in crime Finnick when they played the ‘Baby Fox Wants to Be an Elephant’ act. He offered a wary smile to the baby bunny and patted her on the head, “Hi…Hey there lil…whiskers?”
She blinked but otherwise gave no reaction; meanwhile the adult rabbits were helping pull bunnies off Judy who got to her feet with a laugh, only to be hugged by the adults this time which she gladly accepted.
“Uncle Joe, Mindy, Aunt Clara, Aunt Linda, Uncle Peter, Alfred, Helena, Aunt Gertrude, Joe Jr!”
Nick stared at his partner in awe, how in the world was she able to remember all these names? How was she able to even recognize any of them, they all looked the same!
“Is this your partner, Judy dear,” one of the aunts (Clara or Gertrude) asked, immediately all eyes turned to Nick and he, for a split second, seriously considered running back to Zootopia. But Judy wanted him to come so for her he stood up straight, trying to appear as respectful and cop-like as he could with only his classic shirt, tie, and khaki combo.
“That’s right,” Judy, feeling the sudden tension of the air, slipped out of her older brother, Alfred’s hug and stood next to the fox. “Everyone this is Nick Wilde, the very first fox ZPD officer, my best friend and partner in making the world a better place.”
“Nice to meet you, Uncle Joe, Aunt Clara, Helena and….the rest of you,” Nick said awkwardly, he was disheartened by the suspicious stares some of them were casting him.
He felt a tug on his pant leg; it was still the little bunny with the pacifier, she now had her paws up, grabbing at the air like she wanted something.
“That’s my niece, Winnie,” Judy whispered to him. “She wants you to pick her up.”
He stared at her, “I’ve never held a baby in my life,” he whispered sharply while Winnie still grabbed at him with her chubby paws.
“What are you talking about? You used to hold Finnick all the time! What’s the difference?”
Finnick was a grown animal who doesn’t have a fragile body that could easily break if I held him too tight. But Nick wanted to show he was a good guy and rejecting this bunny wasn’t the way to go.
Bending down he lifted Winnie into her arms and stood up, holding her to his chest, hoping his grip wasn’t too tight to hurt her or too loose to let her fall. Almost immediately Winnie fell asleep in his arms, Nick blinked, looking down at Judy.
She was smiling proudly at him and a bud of warmth spread in Nick’s chest, from Judy’s proud smile and that Winnie so easily fell asleep while being held by a fox.
Her falling asleep however but have been some silent signal because suddenly he was overrun by small furry bodies, clamoring at his feet and tail, their noses twitching in curiosity and ears perked up with excitement.
“How old are you?”
“How did you meet Aunt Judy?”
“What’s your favorite color?”
Nick let out a yelp as his tail was stepped on and tried to ease away from the mob with no such luck. Judy laughed before suddenly stepping away from the crowd to run toward the two rabbits that had just walked out of the house.
“Mom, Dad!” Judy barreled into Bonnie and Stu Hopps who nearly fell down from their daughter’s sudden attack before laughing and wrapping her up in an embrace.
“It’s so good to see you, Sweetie,” Bonnie smiled sweetly as she took a step back to look her
daughter over, “You’ve been keeping safe, right?”
“Of course, Mom,” Judy rolled her eyes good naturedly.
“Did ol’ Bessie treat you good,” Stu asked, indicating to the truck she and Nick had driven to get here.
“Yes, Dad,” she answered before handing him the keys, “But you can have it back, we’ll be taking the train back to Zootopia.”
“We,” her parents’ echoed then simultaneously looked over her shoulder.
“J-Judy,” Nick stammered from where he was being slowly overrun by bunnies who started climbing on him, even little Jack was sitting on top of his head, “Help. Please.”
Judy hurried over and started shooing the bunnies away, telling them Nick would play later and the children walked away, slightly put out, to play ball.
Winnie’s mother walked over to take her daughter back but hesitated from getting so near Nick, before he could notice Judy took Winnie out of the fox’s arms and handed her to her mother who nodded gratefully, Judy squelched a wave of annoyance.
“Nick, these are my parents, Stu and Bonnie Hopps,” she introduced her friend to the two older rabbits who walked over. She was relieved to see them give him warm smiles and even shake his paw.
“It’s so nice to meet you, Mr. Wilde,” Bonnie greeted, “Our daughter’s told us all about you.”
“Heh, I’m scared of the stories she’d tell,” Nick chuckled, “But you can just call me Nick… Ma’am,” he added the last part for good measure.
“Mainly that you helped with that Night Howler outbreak,” Stu answered.
Nick smiled at the memory, “Ah, yes, good times. If you like being blackmailed, nearly iced, chased, and shot with a dart of blue berries.”
“So where’s my new brothers and sisters,” Judy broke in, clapping her paws together. She and Nick could go into detail about their Great Case some other time.
Bonnie’s ears shot up, “Oh, of course! Silly me, come in, come in, both of you.”
The two parents led Judy and Nick inside, the fox’s ears touching the ceiling of the house that was built for rabbits.
The biggest room of the house was the nursery where Nick counted at least fourteen cribs, eight occupied.
“It was a small litter this time,” Bonnie explained to them as she and her husband picked up four bunnies each.
Nick looked to Judy with horror and mouth ‘small?’ Judy covered her giggle behind her paw. There were four girls and four boys in this litter, Judy happily took one of her baby sisters and smiled down at the soft sleeping face. “She’s beautiful, Mom. All of them are.”
“Always bragged me and Bonnie made the best looking litters,” Stu joked to Nick. The fox nodded with wide-eyed agreement, “Gorgeous, sir.”
Judy smiled softly at him before offering her baby sister; Nick’s ear went back against his skull. “I know I just had, like, a million bunnies crawling over me a second ago but I’m not so sure I’m ready to hold another one just yet.”
“Stop being so nervous,” Judy scolded lightly, “She won’t be any fuss, she’s sleeping.”
Nick took a reluctant breath before sitting down on the floor, cross-legged, and taking the baby in his arms, she squirmed slightly before going back to sleep.
“Which one is that again, darling,” Stu asked his wife, he was never good at telling the newborns apart.
“That’s Annie, dear,” Bonnie said patiently.
“Annie,” Judy tried out the name, “It’s pretty, just like her.”
“Stu? Bonnie?” A rabbit appeared in the doorway of the nursery, “Shouldn’t we start cooking dinner soon?”
“We’ll be right there, Martha,” Stu assured her and Martha nodded before vanishing.
“Go ahead, Nick and I can take care of them,” Judy offered, Stu was all too happy to let his daughter take over. Placing the other babies in their cribs the two parents walked out of the nursery to the kitchen.
Nick was still sitting on the floor, softly rocking Annie; Judy kneeled down across from him. “I never get tired of it,” Judy admitted to him. His ears perked up and he looked up at her, “Of what?”

“This,” she indicated to the entire nursery, “New brothers and sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews, I know some animals would be overwhelmed and angry to have to share attention with siblings…but that was never me.”

“Really,” Nick spoke quietly, smiling at her, “You’re lucky. I think I would’ve gotten into less trouble if I had a sibling to watch out for me, or siblings to watch out for.”

“Feel free to watch out for any of mine,” Judy grinned, “We could always use an extra pair of eyes.”

Nick looked down at the bunny still sleeping soundly, “I just might.”

About an hour later Judy’s grandmother arrived to relieve them of babysitting duty, though she nearly had a heart attack seeing Nick leaning over one of the cribs, apparently they had forgotten to tell her about him.

Nick took the surprise coolly but she still wanted to distract him and offered to show him around town before dinner, Nick gladly accepted.

“And this is where I broke it to my parents that I planned on being a police officer,” she stood in the middle of a field and pointed to a empty barn, “It was when we had a big play about how Zootopia is where anyone can be anything. I was eight.”

“Sound familiar,” Nick replied. “But I would’ve paid to see cute little Judy Hopps skipping around Bunnyburrow, bet you even had a little police hat.” Nick started to skip around and spoke in a high-pitched voice that Judy guessed was suppose to be here.

“Put your hands in the air, bad guy, officer Hopps to the rescue! Oh, no need to thank me ma’m, all in a day’s work for the best rabbit officer of all time! Just wait ‘til I get to Zootopia! The criminals will tremble in my shadow!”

“Stop it,” Judy laughed, pushing Nick a little too roughly and accidentally sent the fox falling on to his rump. “Oops. Sorry.” She shrugged innocently.

Nick gave her a look that said he didn’t believe that before jumping to his feet.

“Anyway back to the tour of my childhood.” Judy pointed to a certain spot in the dirt. “That is where I did my first public service to the justice.”

“Which was?”

“I took back some tickets Gideon stole.”

Nick suddenly frowned, “Gideon again?”

“Hey, animals like him were the reason I got into being an officer,” Judy replied, then her ears drooped, “Though, I guess he’s also the reason I wasn’t the…biggest fan of foxes.”

She felt Nick’s eyes on her but decided a patch of grass was much more interesting.

“Judy Hopps if you start getting all quiet and depressed on me I swear I’ll trip you,” Nick said sternly, “I’ve done it before.”

Judy turned to reply when suddenly a car horn blasted through the air, making them both jumped. Judy looked over her shoulder to see a familiar looking vehicle and smiled, “Speak of the devil.”

“Wha-” Nick began but snapped his jaw shut when out of the vehicle came a husky fox, he narrowed his eyes.

“I thought that was you Miss Judy,” Gideon greeted cheerfully, walking over. Judy met him halfway and gave him a quick hug, feeling a hand shake was too formal for someone she had known all her life, even if most of that life had spent not being able to stand each other.

“It’s good to see you, Gideon,” she smiled.

“Likewise,” the fox nodded, “I heard from your pop you were coming to visit but I figured you would be there not out here with…” his ears perked and he finally looked at Nick who didn’t look friendly in the least.

“I thought that was you Miss Judy,” Gideon greeted cheerfully, walking over. Judy met him halfway and gave him a quick hug, feeling a hand shake was too formal for someone she had known all her life, even if most of that life had spent not being able to stand each other.

“It’s good to see you, Gideon,” she smiled.

“You still are,” Judy informed him and beckoned for Nick. “This is Nick, he’s on the police force with me; he’s my partner. Nick, this is Gideon the one I told you about.”
“Ah, yes, Gideon Gray,” Nick said with a sour smile as he walked over to stand by Judy, closer than he usually did. Apparently Gideon wasn’t good at sensing the bitter atmosphere and offered his paw to Nick, after being elbowed by Judy the other fox shook it.

“Pleased to meet you, Nick. Haven’t seen another fox outside the family since…well, ever I guess.”

“Hmm,” Nick replied with disinterest.

An awkward silence ensued and Judy spoke, “We—we better be getting back,” she told Gideon. “It was nice seeing you.”

“It was real nice seeing you too, Miss Judy, and your, uh, friend.” Gideon nodded and waved before walking back to his vehicle and driving away.

Judy crossed her arms and glared up at Nick, her foot tapping. Nick met her glare, “You’re kidding right?”

Her brow furrowed, “What are you talking about?”

“That’s the first fox you ever met,” he looked sickened. “No wonder you didn’t like me, too bad you didn’t have a better first impression.”

“First off,” Judy began, “I didn’t like you because you were a con artist who tricked me, not because of Gideon. Second off, I’d hardly call my first impression of you a good impression either.”

Nick frowned deeply, his eyes stubborn, “Still, if you have to choose what kind of fox to befriend, it’s me.”

Judy laughed as they walked back to the Hopps house, casting him a sly glance. “Nicholas Wilde you are jealous of Gideon Gray.”

He scowled, “This again, Carrots? I don’t know how high that tower you put yourself on is, but I’d suggest climbing down a few feet before you fall.”

“Well, I hate to feed your ego but I’m going to anyway,” Judy began, “You don’t have to worry. Gideon Gray may be a family friend but you are my best friend.”

Nick glanced down at her, “Oh, am I?”

“The best friend a bunny could ask for,” she declared and took his paw in her own, only for Nick to pull it away and walked faster. Judy laughed at his flustered expression as she hurried to keep pace with him. “Are you embarrassed now?”

“No,” Nick replied all too quickly.

“You sure?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Nick Wilde is the best fox in all the world,” Judy sang loudly, “He’s smart and clever and brave and—”

“Not funny Judy!”

Because of the hundreds of rabbits visiting they had dinner outside on the lawn, the adults and children each getting their own set of tables. Judy was dining with the adults but Nick had been dragged to the kiddy tables by the younger bunnies and was eating with all the manners of royalty with the loud, messy children.

Judy smiled toward him before jumping into the conversations around her which was mainly about carrot growing and how best to raise your bunnies, which led to her Aunt Linda looking at Judy slyly.

“Speaking of bunnies, have you met any strapping young rabbits out in the big city, Judy?”

“Surely you’ve met at least a couple of other rabbits in Zootopia,” her mother asked.

“Strapping young rabbits,” she echoed.

“Surely you’ve met any strapping young rabbits out in the big city, Judy?”

“Yeah, a few,” Judy admitted with a shrug, “But I’m not looking to settle down just yet.”

Linda frowned, “Surely you want to be a mother one day.”

“Of course I want kids of my own,” Judy said maybe a little too loudly, she saw Nick stare at her from the corner of her eye. “But it’s barely been a year since I became a cop; I’m not ready to settle down just yet.”
A few relatives shared uncertain glances and Judy had to bite back her annoyance, “Besides, I have all of you, it’s not like I’m lonely.”

Wanting to change the subject she mentioned she and Nick had ran into Gideon Gray which started a conversation about his pie, which started a conversation about his blueberries which eventually led back to carrots and Judy sagged with relief.

She had told the truth, she wanted to be a mother, just not anytime soon. She wanted to spend as many years as possible chasing down criminals before she started hunting for the One and having kids. That day would come, just not right now.

A few hours later dinner was over and the older rabbits started to clean away the tables, Judy used that time to check on Nick who she hadn’t talked to all through dinner.

“How’d it go,” she asked him. He was still surrounded by bunnies, some sitting on his lap and tail. “Intense,” he told her, with his ears pressed against his skull. “Lulu here was just telling me about this giant rabbit hole she found that is filled with gold and Andy beat up a pair of wolf cubs yesterday that were bothering his little sisters, I don’t think you’ll be the only rabbit officer for long, Carrots.”

Judy smiled, “I better watch my back then.”

One of her little sisters stood up and tugged on Judy’s shirt, “Can Nick read us a bed time story?” The others quickly voiced their enthusiasm at the idea and Judy swallowed, remembering all the children stories in the Hopps house… Most of them had foxes as the villain.

“How about Nick and I tell you our own story,” she offered; placing her paws on her knees to lean down to be at eye level with them all. “How about the very first case we ever had?”

Hundreds of eyes lit up with delight and Nick stood up, placing the pair of twins that had been sitting on his lap down onto the grass. “I guess we could, if you want them to know how you needed my help and would’ve completely and utterly failed without me.”

She placed her paws on her hips, “If you don’t mind me sharing the details about how I saved your tail.”

The bunnies sat in awed silence as Nick and Judy reenacted their very first case, but they both decided not to mention Nick’s con-artist past and their big fight. Finally they ended where Nick had feigned being savage and them tricking Bellwether to admit her dastardly plan. Their crowd cheered when the two bowed, Nick leading the kids inside to sleep and Judy going to the kitchen to help clean dishes.

“You missed the big show,” she told her mother as she stood beside her to help wash the dishes. “Oh I’m sure I’d just be a mess hearing about all the danger you faced,” Bonnie shuddered. “I like to think my daughter is taking all the safe cases, even going back to being a meter maid.”

Judy rolled her eyes but smiled, her mother was only scared because she loved her so she wouldn’t tell her about all the danger she faced.

“Don’t worry,” she assured her, “I have Nick, he’s a good partner, and he looks out for me.” “I’m glad you have such a good friend out in Zootopia,” her mother replied warmly. “He seems like a nice fox.”

“He is,” Judy said with equal warmth. “I don’t know what I would’ve done if I hadn’t met him.” “You’d have come back to Bunnyburrow and stayed in the carrot field,” Stu popped up out of nowhere, walking over to give his wife a kiss on the cheek.

“Very funny, Dad,” Judy said wryly. “But I plan on being a cop for a long time.”

“I know, I know,” Stu sighed before bringing his wife and daughter in for a group hug, “But if you ever need us just know we aren’t far.”

“I won’t,” she promised, wrapping her arms around her parents, “I love you guys.”

After her parents had checked on the newborns and went to bed Judy found her partner in the living room, hundreds of bunnies sprawled over the floor asleep, he was leaning on the back of the couch (also overrun by snoozing bunnies) gently rubbing Winnie’s fur who hogged his lap all to herself.

Judy carefully stepped over her tiny kin to walk over to Nick and sit beside him, “Hi,” she whispered.

“Hi, yourself,” he replied.
The two friends sat in a comfortable silence for a few minutes, listening to the soft snores around them. Judy decided she really, really liked this. Sitting in her old childhood home with her best friend beside her and her family surrounding her, knowing that when the weekend was over she’d go back home to Zootopia to continue living her dream job. She felt so, so content.

Nick cleared his throat, breaking her away from her thoughts, “So, you of course want kids of your own.”

She looked at Nick like he had lost his mind and he frowned, “You said it not me.”

“Oh. Oh!” She recalled the dinner conversation. “That, sorry I was being loud for a second there.”

When Nick still looked at her weirdly she realized why he had brought it up. “My aunt was wondering when I was planning on settling down and I told her not any time soon. I want to have a family of my own. But first I want to be a cop.” She gave him a friendly nudge, “So don’t worry. You won’t be getting rid of me so easy.”

He smiled and Judy could swear she saw relief in his eyes.

“Besides,” she added, “I expect Uncle Nick to come and visit all the time.”

“Phew,” he blew out a breath, “I think enough rabbits have an Uncle Nick right now.”

Judy giggled, burying her face into his arm, “Right now.”

Not five minutes later the fox and the rabbit fell asleep leaning against each other.
“What are you smirking about,” Nick demanded. The two were on their way back to Zootopia via train. They had left a pack of rabbits who wanted Judy and Uncle Nick to visit again. Judy’s grin grew as she looked up at her friend, “No reason, I just like being right. No wonder you’re so smug when that happen to you it really is great.”

Nick frowned, “Right about what?”

“I knew my family would love you and they do,” she lifted her head proudly.

“The kids loved me,” Nick pointed out, “The adults… I’m not so sure about, especially that grandmother of yours.”

“The kids make up seventy percent of the family,” Judy argued, “That’s close enough for me to be right.” She playfully punched his shoulder. “You’re officially a member of the Hopps family.”

“Oh, no,” Nick playfully moaned, “I’m going to have to have to hop around, wiggle my nose, and eat nothing but carrots now, aren’t I?”

“That’s what we do,” Judy shrugged.

“Well, might as well get started,” Nick said acceptingly. He then started to wiggle his snout in an exaggerated, cartoon-y way, making Judy giggle.

“Officer Wilde reporting for duty,” he jumped up with gusto and Judy suspected he was mimicking her. “I am hot on pursuit! Woo hoo! I popped the weasel!”

The two nearly fell over in laughter, Judy’s cheeks heating up; she had told Nick all about her first chase in exquisite detail.

“Did you seriously say that,” he asked between laughs.

“Well,” Judy’s cheeks hurt from smiling, “I saw the opportunity and I took it. You can ask Clawhauser and the rest of the precinct.”

“I will,” Nick promised, “Speaking off.”

He perked his ears up and a voice spoke through the train’s intercom: “Now arriving at Zootopia.”

They smiled at each other, “Duty calls.”

The two walked through the large, vast city. The view never ceased to take Judy’s breath away. As for Nick, well, she was never good at telling if the fox was impressed or not.

“I should’ve brought souvenirs,” Judy suddenly realized with a moan, face-palming.

“Oh no,” Nick said without worry. “Poor Bogo and Clawhauser are going to cry when they find out you didn’t bring them the famous carrots of Bunnyburrow.”

“Your sarcasm is getting stale,” she replied dryly.

Nick opened his mouth to retort when a sudden crash interrupted them.

They turned to see a pig and panther glaring at each other, spilled fruit at their feet from a now ruined fruit stand.

“Vacation’s over,” Nick muttered as the two pulled out their badges.

“You knocked my fruit down on purpose,” the pig almost growled.

“And you wouldn’t sell me any fruit!”

“Alright, alright,” Judy jumped in between the two, “Let’s break this up, we’re all friends here!”

“No, we’re not,” the animals snapped so viciously Judy almost jumped out of her fur.

“Okay, we’re not friends,” Nick slipped in between them to stand by his partner’s side. “Then let’s stop for the sake of the fruit. Enough have been harmed today. Plus,” he pointed at his badge, “I’m sure if I look hard enough I could find some law being broken. Causing traffic, fruit endangerment…”

“Is that a threat,” the panther snarled, making Judy’s brow furrow. She stood up straighter, “How about we try to figure out what happened?”

“He knocked down my fruit,” the pig yelled.

“You refused to sell me fruit,” the panther snarled.

“You’re a predator! You don’t eat fruit!”

“Calm down, calm down,” Judy tried to gently push the panther back; she was more worried
about his anger than the pig’s. “I understand you’re upset but there’s no need to—”
The panther snapped at her, Judy barely jumping back in time, her mouth opened in shock. Nick
immediately stepped forward, blocking the panther from her, his own teeth bared and looking
angrier than she had even seen him.
“Stop it!” he snarled at the animal, “If you’re so upset about not buying fruit that you’d try to
attack my partner then how about you cool off in a jail cell!”
Sudden sirens had Judy relaxing against Nick as Officer Richard (a rhino) and Officer Wilfred (a
wolf) appeared to help break up the fight.
The panther, seeing larger animals with badges coming, dashed leaving Nick yelling insults at
him.
“Are you okay,” Nick asked Judy after she explained the situations to the two officers who
calmed down the pig.
“I’m fine,” she assured him, then turned her eyes to where the panther disappeared. “That was
really weird.”
“Really weird,” Nick agreed, glaring after the animal as well. “He’s lucky Rick and Willy arrived
before I lost my temper.”
Judy placed a paw on his arm.
“You two just got back, right,” Wilfred asked. “So you don’t know then…”
The two smaller animals stared up at him, “Know what?”

Judy and Nick sat in Bogo’s office where they waited patiently for him to arrive.
Nick still seemed on edge from the fruit stand, Judy decided to try and cheer him up. “You were
very brave, a regular knight in shining armor.”
Nick’s ears lowered like he was embarrassed before sitting up straighter, puffing his chest out.
“I’m a cop. It’s what I do.”
“Next time I’ll have to save you,” Judy decided with a nod.
Hearing the door behind them open they turned around to see Chief Bogo walk in.
“Welcome back, Hopps, Wilde,” he greeted, taking a seat on the other side of the desk.
“Glad to be back, Chief,” Nick grinned. “I gotta tell you it wasn’t easy waking up and knowing I
wouldn’t be seeing your handsome face.”
The Chief rolled his eyes, “We don’t have time for your jokes, Wilde. This is serious.”
He tossed a folder onto the desk, Judy seeing blurry pictures of animals facing off against each
other, looking ready to tear each other apart.
“Since you two left Friday regular fights are starting to break out all over the city.”
“Is it only predators and prey fighting,” Judy asked warily.
Bogo shook his head, Judy noticed Nick relaxing ever so slightly.
“Yesterday an elephant and giraffe nearly crushed a family of rodents when they started arguing
over a parking space.”
“I know parking space is how animals get slashed tires,” Nick replied with a thoughtful frown,
“But I’ve never heard of someone nearly getting stepped on because of it.”
“It’s like the fruit stand,” Judy pointed out. “I can understand the panther getting upset sure, but
he’s a predator, he doesn’t eat fruit. There was no reason for him to try and attack that pig.”
“And there was no reason for him to try and bite you,” Nick snarled, obviously still sour about the
whole thing.
“We need to figure out the real reason behind these outbursts,” Bogo told them, his eyes dark with
thought.
Judy looked down at her feet and tried to think. “Maybe everyone is just starting to feel crowded,”
she pondered out loud. “Zootopia is big and it definitely has a huge population.”
“There’s not much we can do about that,” Bogo told her.
“No, but the point of Zootopia is to remind everyone that we can all live together in peace. We
just need to remind them.”
She glared at the ground, her thoughts rushing, feeling her partner and Chief’s eyes on her. What
was a good way to get everyone’s attention…?
Her head shot up, her ears at attention as an idea finally hit her, “Gazelle!”
“Really,” Nick didn’t try to hide his exasperation. “Now’s not the time for a concert, Carrots.”
“Now’s the perfect time,” Judy looked excitedly to him. “Gazelle is a huge believer in coexistence between prey and predators! And all of Zootopia adore her! If we can get her to talk about this, well, it certainly wouldn’t make the situation worse!”
She looked to her Chief who was nodded; she remembered that he was a big Gazelle fan.
“It’s worth a try at least. Maybe I should—”
“Leave it us,” Judy interrupted, grabbing Nick’s arm and dragging him out of the office. “Let’s go talk to Clawhauser!”

Clawhauser, of course, was all for Judy’s plan 110%.
“But she’s on tour now, oh,” he moaned, picking up another donut and devouring it one gulp.
“When will she get back,” Nick asked, taking the donut the cheetah offered him.
“In a few weeks,” Clawhauser answered.
Judy frowned, “I don’t know if we can wait that long. If we could just get into contact with her…”
“Unfortunately celebrities don’t leave their numbers on billboards,” Nick replied.
“I wish,” Clawhauser sighed wistfully, resting his chin on his paws. “You know, before I got into the police business I had dreams of becoming her manager.”
Nick’s eyes suddenly bulged like he had just realized something. He placed the half-eaten donut on the desk.
“You’ve got a plan,” Judy told him.
“I have a thought,” Nick corrected her. “I may know somebody who knows somebody who may be able to call Gazelle.”
Judy shook her head in an exasperated/fond way, “That’s so you. Let’s go find that somebody, then.”
The air of Tundra Town was cold and crisp, small flurries danced across the air and stuck to Judy’s fur as she and Nick walked through the town. They were on the way to Jingle Studio, where the world-famous Sven Jingle wrote the hottest hits.

“Are you sure you can get us in,” she asked Nick. “Sven Jingle’s almost as hard to get to as Gazelle.”

The fox was walking around, side-ways and spinning, like he was trying to draw a picture with the treks he made in the snow.

“You wound me, Carrots. I told you I have an in so that means I have an in.”

“And yet I still worry,” Judy clasped her paws together and looked up in thought. “I wonder why that is, Nick? Maybe because all the ‘in’s’ you have are animals you’ve conned?”

When Nick stayed quiet she let out a groan, “What did you do to this one?”

“Nothing that will get us iced,” Nick assured as he returned to her side, his paws in his pockets, “…Mainly because this particular mammal isn’t in the mafia.”

Well, that’s good at least, Judy thought to herself but was hardly comforted.

“What’d you do?”

Nick sucked on his teeth and Judy waited for the worse. “Jingle’s assistant and I were pretty good buddies, almost as close as me and Finnick, and I was helping plan out some big fancy party he was throwing and my assistant friend gave me the money to bug a large load of very expensive caviar. You know, for the predators.”

Judy held back another groan, “Did you take the money and run away?”

“Judy Hopps I may have been a con artist but I was a con artist who delivered results. I went to the seafood store where they sold that caviar and decided that was way too much money for some fish eggs, so I thought I’d save some money and went to the lake to fish out my own caviar.”

“And,” Judy pressed.

“… I don’t know, I was gone by the time they found out that pound of free caviar was mainly tiny little rocks and a couple of tadpoles.”

Judy face-pawed, “And you expect this assistant to listen to you?”

“Hey, we were pretty tight,” Nick argued. “And no, not Nick Wilde the con artist, but Nick Wilde the cop has better persuasion skills.”

“Then work that persuasion, Officer Wilde because here we are.” The two stopped and stood before a pair of sliding glass doors.

“May I help you officers,” he asked, giving them a second long glance before turning back to his screen.

“Is a Winter Storme in?” Nick asked, standing on his toes to rest his arms on the counter.

“Yes. Why?”

“I need you to call in a message. Nick Wilde is here.”

Without turning his eyes from the screen he leaned forward to press an intercom button to speak through the mic. “Winter Storme, you have a Nick Wilde to see you.”

“It was a pleasure conversing with you,” Nick told the polar bear before stepping back to stand beside Judy. “Now we wait for the Storme to come,” he told her.

“Are you nervous?”

“Absolutely not.”

“You liar.”

“Such language, Carrots.”
“It’s perfectly normal to be nervous, you two haven’t seen each other since you conned him.”
“Yeah, that’s-”
“Nicholas P. Wilde.”
Judy whirled around and her jaw dropped. Out of the elevator came a gorgeous arctic fox who wore an expensive looking amethyst dress with an even more expensive looking diamond necklace.
Nick held his arms out as if expecting a hug, “Winter!” His voice cracked, “It’s been so long, you haven’t aged a day, lovely as ever!”
Judy looked at him in shock, this was Winter Storme? The assistant he had been good buddies with? Who he had been tight with? An uncomfortable feeling welled up in her chest.
Winter strolled over with an easy grace, “A part of me had always hoped you would come back so I could kick your tail good and properly. My mother always said good things come to those who wait!” She bared her teeth, she looked ready to tear Nick to pieces, and Nick looked ready to tuck his tail between his legs. Judy quickly jumped in front of him, wanting to protect him from Winter’s reasonable rage.
“Miss Storme please,” Judy spoke in her best authoritative voice. “I’m Officer Hopps and my partner and I really need to talk to your-”
“Partner,” Winter echoed in dismay. “I heard Wilde became a cop but I didn’t know they forced some poor officer to be his partner.”
She took Judy’s paw in her own and gave it a gentle pat.
“Hey, she asked me to be her partner,” Nick said, no subtly in his pride.
Winter’s face told her she didn’t believe a word he said; Judy found herself really wanting to explain their relationship in detail but remembered they didn’t have the time.
“Miss Storme, we need to talk to Sven Jingle.”
“Call me Winter,” she said with a friendly grin. “And why do you need to talk to my boss?”
As quickly as possible Judy explained their case and their possible solution, making Winter frown thoughtfully, “My boss is all for co-existence…” She glared at Nick, “But just because he didn’t blame me for the caviar incident doesn’t mean he wants to see him again.”
“I’ll make sure he doesn’t cause trouble,” Judy promised.
“He’s not something that can be contained.”
“I can contain him.”
Winter blinked, giving her an odd look which made Judy realize how forceful she had sounded.
“This way then,” she ordered as she turned and led them into the elevator. Going up she explained they would treat Sven with respect, speak only when spoken to, and as far as Sven was concerned Nick and Winter had never met.
“Awfully strict,” Judy whispered to Nick as they exited the elevator and followed Winter down the hall.
“What do you expect,” Nick whispered back, “He’s one of the richest animals in all of Zootopia.”
Winter stopped at a large set of ornate oak doors and told them to remember the rules before entering the room.
A reindeer was sitting cross-legged on a fluffy pillow, breathing in an odd way through his nose. Judy was temporarily reminded of Yax in charge of the naturalist club but thank the heavens this reindeer wasn’t nude. He was dressed in a finely tailored blue suit with fancy bells of all kinds of shapes tied to his antlers.
Judy realized this was Sven Jingle.
Winter cleared her throat and Sven’s eyes popped open and he beamed at her. “Winter, did you hear that!? I was whistling through my nose!”
Winter gave him a patient smile like he was a child, Nick clapped softly, and almost immediately Judy forgot rule number two.
“I didn’t hear you whistle.”
She could feel Winter’s terrified eyes on her and hear Nick face-paw himself and see Sven’s eyes locking in on her. The reindeer stood up, his bells jingling as he moved and marched over to bend
down to be at Judy’s eye level, she held her ground.
“So you’re saying I wasn’t whistling through my nose?”
“Uh…” Judy began awkwardly, “No? Sir?”
There was a long, tense-filled, moment of silence… Then Sven threw his head back and let out a 
booming laugh, startling the three smaller animals.
“Blatant honesty, I love it,” Sven cheered, shaking both of Judy’s paws. “I like you, bunny. 
You’re not afraid to speak your mind and keep to it, just like me!” He stood up straight and ruffled 
the fur on Winter’s head, “Always bringing in the best, huh Winter?”
“Yes, sir,” Winter replied, looking ready to faint with relief.
“Come sit with me, bunny,” Sven offered and Winter immediately ran over to the corner of the 
room to grab three extra pillows, placing them next to Sven’s.
“Super efficient my servant,” Sven nodded, jingling. “She’s going to make some animal super 
lucky.”
“Uh-huh,” Nick agreed. That weird feeling crept up into Judy’s chest again before she squelched 
it down and sat on the pillow closest to Sven. Nick and Winter joined her.
“My name is Judy,” she introduced herself to the reindeer, “And this is my partner, Nick.”
“Big fan,” Nick told him.
Sven’s eyes were alit with a sudden interest, “Partner?”
“Police partner,” Winter spoke up.
“Ah,” Sven seemed oddly disappointed by the words. He shook his head, “What can I do for the 
ZPD?”
Once again Judy explained her plan. “I have been hearing about these random fights,” Sven 
admitted. “Do you really think Gazelle could help? She’s a sweet girl but I wouldn’t call her that 
intimidating.”
“Having her speak out against the violence can’t hurt,” Judy pointed out.
Sven seemed to think for a moment before finally nodding, “Alright. As I said before I like you, 
Officer Bunny. I’ll get you that phone call to Gazelle. She does love this city and wouldn’t forgive 
me if I kept your plan from her.”
He stood up, “Follow me to my office, Officer Bunny.”
She stood up but stopped when she noticed Nick not doing the same. “Nick?”
“I’ll stay here with Winter,” he told her. “I don’t think I’ll be able to be of much help, my charm 
only works when I’m face to face with the target.”
Sven laughed and Winter snorted and Judy tried not to let it bother her that her partner wanted to 
stay with this pretty fox instead of her. She followed Sven out of the room.

Judy had expected to have a simple phone call with Gazelle, not talk to her via web cam, which 
was how she ended up staring dumbly at Gazelle’s face from the other side of the laptop.
“Gazelle, dearest, this is Officer Hopps,” Sven introduced, sitting beside Judy who was still 
gawking.
Gazelle smiled kindly, “I know you; you’re that brave bunny who helped saved Zootopia. How 
can I help you?”
“Y-you know me…well, I…uh…” Judy struggled to find the words. “I am a huge fan.” She 
resisted the urge to yank her ears; she was acting as star-struck as Clawhauser.
Gazelle chuckled softly, “Thank you.”
“I-I mean, I needed to ask a favor. You see I-uh, the thing is…”
“Fights have been going on around Zootopia,” Sven interrupted; apparently he had lost patience 
with Judy’s rambling, “Violent fights that have been happening over basically nothing.”
Gazelle’s ears lowered, her eyes going wide with dismay. “That’s awful!”
“We were hoping you could cut your tour short and head on home,” Sven continued. “The public 
may be able to calm down if their favorite pop star comes back to share some words of peace and 
encouragement!”
“I’ll talk to my manager,” Gazelle promised. “See what I can do, and then I’ll call you back.”
“That’s my pop star,” Sven cheered.
Gazelle smiled, “Nice talking to you, Sven. And nice meeting you Officer Hopps.”
Gazelle smiled, “Nice talking to you, Sven. And nice meeting you Officer Hopps.”

The two returned to Nick and Winter who seemed to be having a pleasant conversation. Nick stood up when he saw the two and walked over to Judy’s side, “How did it go?”

“I was awful,” Judy buried her face in her paws. “I told her I was a big fan!”

Nick patted her on the back, “There, there, Carrots. Look on the bright side, if you had been Clawhauser you’d have fainted.”

“Sven told her our plan and she’s going to try and make it back,” she added and Nick nodded. “Well I say that calls for a celebration,” Sven declared, “Winter, do we have any hot cocoa left?”

“Oh of course, sir,” Winter said, rising to her feet, “Should I make a cup for everyone?”

“Absolutely,” Sven said, sitting back down on his pillow. As soon as Winter had walked out of the room Sven tried his nose whistling again.

“So,” Judy started, putting her paws behind her back. “Why did you need to stay with Winter?”

Nick shrugged sheepishly, “I thought I should give my charm a run for its money and apologize.”

“Did it work?”

“More or less...I don’t think she wants to chop my tail off now.”

Judy nodded, trying to be happy for him but couldn’t help adding, “She’s very beautiful.”

She frowned, she didn’t like that answer, but it was her own fault for saying something she supposed. “Wait. Does that mean you befriended Finnick because of his handsome looks?”

“I befriended him for his van,” Nick sat down on his own cushion. “Have you seen that thing?”

“She’s very pretty.”

Judy however was saved from having to answer by the secretary polar bear’s voice blasting over the intercom: “Mr. Sven Jingle, one Charlie here to see you.”

Judy couldn’t recall an animal as big as Sven jumping up so fast, the reindeer’s antlers jingled merrily as he raced out of room. Nick and Judy shared one look before dashing after him.

They found Sven in the lobby just as he wrapped his arms around a pretty cheetah and spun her around, both of them laughing ecstatically.

“Charlie, Charlie, Charlie,” Sven nuzzled her neck and she giggled, “My world has been black and white for too long, how long of an eternity did I have to wait before I was once again blessed by your goddess-like image!”

“Three days, Sven,” the cheetah told him as she was placed back on her feet; her voice was both exasperated and adoring. “I had to make sure you would work without getting distracted.”

“You are quite the distraction, my spotted dearest,” Sven smiled lovingly and Judy suddenly felt like she was watching a scene in a romantic film.

Nick cleared his throat, drawing the two animals’ attention.

“Nice to meet you both,” Charlie greeted with a cheerful smile.

“Nice to meet you too,” Judy smiled and Nick nodded with a wink.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were coming over, I would’ve picked you up,” Sven spoke. He held his mate’s paws as he spoke, Judy didn’t think he had let her go since he had hugged her.

“I wanted to surprise you,” she replied, her tail mindlessly waving to and fro, at one point it was loosely shaped like a heart. “It’s not a bad time, is it?”

“It’s never a bad time, dearest,” Sven assured, “Excuse me a moment.”

He released his mate to walk over to the two cops. “Am I lucky or am I lucky,” he whispered to them with a devilish grin.

Judy giggled while Nick looked like he was resisting rolling his eyes, “She’s very pretty.”
“Gorgeous, actually,” Sven corrected her. “Can you two tell Winter that I’m off on a date.”
“Sure,” Judy replied easily. Sven slipped a hoof into his suit and pulled out a business card and
handed it to Judy. “Call me if need be, I’ll keep you posted on Gazelle.”
Judy barely had time to say thank you before he was dragging his mate out of the lobby. Judy held
the card to her heart, “That was the sweetest thing.”
His words left Judy wondering if he agreed with interspecies couples and that uncomfortable
feeling rose up once again.
“Come on,” Nick walked back to the elevator, “Let’s go tell Winter she doesn’t need to make four
cups of hot cocoa.”
Judy frowned as she followed him, muttering under her breath, “Can’t keep Winter waiting…’’
Ch. 4: The Muzzle

A day later Judy hopped through the precinct, her phone to her ear and a smile on her face, “You are the best, Mr. Jingle, we’ll be right over!”
“No problem, and please darling, call me Sven,” the reindeer replied happily on the other line, “I’m always ready to help.”
“By the way, how’d your date with Miss Charlotte go? If you don’t mind me asking,” she added. Sven made an adorable chuckle that told Judy all she needed to know.
She found Nick with Clawhauser; it looked like the fox was trying to teach him some kind of special paw shake.
“Good news,” she told them, slipping her phone back into her pocket. “Gazelle is back in Zootopia and Sven got us a meeting with her!”
“Are you serious,” Clawhauser gasped and Judy halted, realizing saying that to the singer’s biggest fan boy probably wasn’t the smartest move. “It was that easy?”
“Wouldn’t call it that easy,” Nick told him, “I nearly got my tail bitten off by an old friend.”
“Well whose fault is that,” Judy added maybe a little too sharply. “Besides you two looked to be on good terms when we left yesterday.”

Nick looked at her like she had just tried to bite his tail off, but Clawhauser hadn’t escaped the first topic. “So, you two are meeting Gazelle, the Gazelle, face to face…today?”
“Later tonight,” Judy informed, “Do-do you want to come along?” She didn’t find it fair that she got to meet Gazelle and not Clawhauser who was an even bigger fan than her.

Clawhauser’s eyes bugged out and his jaw dropped and he looked to have become brain dead.
“Hey, Spots, can you excuse us for a sec, buddy,” Nick asked as he pushed Judy away and out of ear shot of the cheetah.

“Hey, Spots, can you excuse us for a sec, buddy,” Nick asked as he pushed Judy away and out of ear shot of the cheetah.

“Are you insane,” he snapped at her when he stopped, “You want to bring Clawhauser to talk to Gazelle.”
“Yeah, why not,” Judy asked and Nick looked like he wanted to smack her.

“Have you met Clawhauser,” he demanded, “Have you seen his desk? It’s like a shrine!”
“And this could be his only chance to meet her,” Judy argued, “He’s a cop just like us, he’ll be professional.”

“Like you were when you just made a phone call to her,” Nick countered and Judy frowned.

“He’s coming with us,” Judy said with finality, “But if you’d rather stay here and guard the fort I’ll understand.”

Nick returned the frown, looking annoyed but Judy knew when she had won an argument.

“Okay, remember, this isn’t for fun,” Nick sternly told Clawhauser as the four walked into the large condo apartment in the heart of Zootopia, outside the moon was rising.

“This is a professional meeting,” Nick kept going on, “We are here so Gazelle will talk down the riots. Not to shine your snow globe or mug or face.”

Clawhauser didn’t reply, he was too busy bouncing in place, biting his bottom lip, his eyes shining with star-studded excitement.

“Calm down, Nick,” Judy ordered, she just nearly avoided knocking into a drowsy looking tiger who was walking out of the lobby of the building. “This is a little fun, enjoy it.”

“I’m not as easily impressed by one animal who can sing,” Nick replied as they crowed into the elevator.

“But she’s more than just that!” Clawhauser looked affronted by the mere thought. “She’s a symbol of Zootopia! Proving you can make it big no matter what you are!”

“As long as you’re pretty and talented,” Nick added cynically. Clawhauser almost growled something he never did. “She’s more than just a pretty face! You’ve seen how much she loves the diversity and co-existence of the city! And her songs are so uplifting
“Besides, Nick,” Judy piped up, not wanting the two to start a fight in a cramped elevator, “You’re pretty and talented, too.”

Nick snorted and turned away, meanwhile Clawhauser looked incredibly smug and for some reason Judy felt it wasn’t just about winning the Gazelle argument. The elevator dinged open and they were greeted with a familiar face.

“Winter!” Nick and Judy said in unison, both not sounding overly ecstatic.

“Thought you forgot to come,” she blinked up at Clawhauser, “And who is this?”

“Fellow officer,” Judy answered, talking his chubby paw and leading him out into the hall.

“And huge fan,” Clawhauser added as the four made their way to the end of the hall.

“Marvelous,” Winter said, looking as nervous as Nick had. They reached the door at the end of the hall and without much fanfare Winter opened it to reveal a large condo full of trees and beautiful vegetation.

Nick whistled appreciatively as Winter led them in, telling them to wait in the living room while she fetched her boss and Gazelle.

Judy and Clawhauser grinned madly at each other, neither could believe they were in the home of the most famous celebrity in all of Zootopia.

“How does my fur look,” the cheetah asked, licking his paw to try and fix the messy fur atop his head.

“I doubt your head will be the first thing she notices,” Nick told him, his eyes going to his generous belly.

“You’re right,” Clawhauser declared and tried to smooth out his tail that was just out of reach. This led to him chasing his tail around like a dog. Judy gave Nick a look and he smiled innocently.

“Officer Bunny!” Sven’s cheerful boom had them whirling around to see the reindeer with Winter at his side, and right next to them: Gazelle.

Clawhauser made a high keening noise when his eyes landed on her and Judy was positive he’d faint, Nick elbowed him in the stomach to make him go mute.

“M-Miss Gazelle,” Judy hurried over and offered a paw. Gazelle shook it.

“It’s so nice to finally meet you. You know, face to face.”

Gazelle smiled, “It’s nice to meet you too, Judy.”

“This-this is my partner, Nick Wilde.” Judy clawed at the air for a second while Nick waltzed over, grabbing his arm when he was finally in reach. The two shook paws, Nick keeping his cool the entire time and Judy wondered how he did it.

“And that cheetah over there staring at you is our fellow officer, Benjamin Clawhauser.” Nick jerked a thumb at Clawhauser who was, indeed, staring dumbly at Gazelle.

She smiled at him nonetheless, “I’m happy to meet you, Officer Clawhauser.”

“B-B-Benjamin-I mean, uh, you can just call me Ben,” he said, practically gasping. “And it’s an honor to meet you, Lady Gazelle.”

She chuckled, “You’re sweet. Would anyone like some tea while we talk?”

A few minutes later they all sat in Gazelle’s living room, sipping tea with a notepad in front of them, brainstorming an inspirational speech.

“Maybe we should bring up the Night Howler case,” Judy said, her brow furrowed and ears laid back in concentration.

“I don’t know if bringing up such a scary time would be the best idea,” Winter commented, Sven and Nick nodded in agreement.

“However,” Gazelle spoke up, “It would also remind everyone that we got through such a dark time, that we could do the same this time.” She scribbled down a few notes. “What else?”

“Zootopia is full of really nice animals,” Clawhauser spoke up, “Maybe we could point out that it’s a good city filled with good animals?”

Gazelle nodded and wrote down more notes, Clawhauser looked elated.

“And Zootopia has been around for more years than I can count,” Sven added, “More years than I have money and I have a lot of money, isn’t that right Winter?”
“Yes, sir,” Winter answered with gusto.
“And it’s still ticking,” Sven finished.

A few ideas later Gazelle decided they should take a break and Winter hopped up to get snacks, apparently she had been in Gazelle’s home long enough to know what was where.
“T’ll help you,” Nick offered, breaking his silent vigil as he stood up.
“You don’t have to,” Winter replied and Judy had to bite her tongue to keep from saying the same thing. Nick shrugged, “It’s not big deal, not like I was offering anything with the inspirational speech.”

The two foxes disappeared into the kitchen and Judy was surprised that Clawhauser looked as angry as she felt.
“What does he think he’s doing,” he whispered to Judy and she shook her head helplessly.

“Why didn’t that lovely Charlie of yours come, I’ve missed her,” Gazelle turned to Sven.

The reindeer placed his hooves over his heart, “Bless my beloved’s heart. She went out to the start spreading the word of this predicament; she’s good at getting animals excited, her being a famous athlete and all.”

“You both need to come have dinner with me sometime,” Gazelle invited.

“Can I ask a question, Mr. Jingle,” Judy spoke up.

“I told you to call me Sven,” the reindeer answered, “And yes.”

“How did you and Miss Charlotte meet?”

Sven smiled, his eyes going far away to a pleasant memory. “We met when we were just kids. My dad was visiting a friend out in Sahara Square and I got lost, I panicked naturally, mainly because I didn’t know where to find any Popsicle stands. There I was bawling my eyes out when a cute little cheetah cub walked over and told me to stop whining. And then she led me to the nearest Popsicle stand and I was a goner. After that we kept in touch and after graduating school I finally asked her to date me and we’ve been going steady since.”

“Aww,” Judy and Clawhauser said in unison.

Nick and Winter returned, the snowy white fox giggling at something Nick had said which killed the bunny and cheetah’s good moods, they glared at Nick who appeared to not notice. They placed two trays of finger sandwiches on the table, though the only ones to eat were the herbivores of the group.

The foxes had just sat back down when suddenly the lights flickered out.

“Nick,” Judy said immediately, reaching her paws out to try and find him, despite the moon shining through the window she couldn’t see the animals around her. She felt Nick take her paw in his and she relaxed.

“Right here, Carrots,” he assured. “What happened to the lights?”

“I have no idea,” Gazelle answered and Judy could hear her standing up and feeling around. “Let me go find a flashlight and then I’ll try to call for the lobby, maybe there’s been a black out.”

Frantic jingling told everyone Sven was up and moving around.

“Please calm down, sir,” Winter told him calmly.

“I don’t like not seeing, Winter,” Sven replied in a tight voice, “Why aren’t you predators freaking out!”?

“Because we can see in the dark,” Clawhauser answered. Judy could just make out him standing up and he turned on his phone flashlight. Judy felt foolish for not thinking the same and pulled out her own, the glare following over the table before going to Sven who was being calmed down by Winter, and Gazelle who had stopped in the middle of the living room, staring at the door.

Judy was wondering why when she heard the door open.
And then everything happened too fast.

A striped body flew into the room with a viscous snarl, heading straight for Gazelle, Judy and Nick jumped to their feet but somehow Clawhauser was faster and managed to leap forward, pushing Gazelle out of harm’s way just in time.

The figure landed on the floor and Judy recognized it as the tiger from the lobby. Fear clogged her throat as the tiger stood up and glared around with wild eyes that brought her back to the rainforest district and a rabid panther…
“Claude,” Gazelle spoke up, shocked and the tiger slowly turned his eyes to glare at her and Clawhauser, but then suddenly Winter and Sven were on the tiger’s back, their weight forcing the tiger down as he tried to thrash free.

“Carrots, come on,” Nick ordered and Judy followed him and they both grabbed a massive arm, the muscles bulging under the tiger’s slick fur. Muscles straining the two forced the struggling tiger’s arms behind his back as Winter and Sven did their best to keep him contained.

“Clawhauser-cuff him,” Judy yelled, her voice strained with the effort of holding onto the tiger’s paw.

Clawhauser scurried over, handcuffs at the ready, when suddenly the tiger let out a roar that shook Judy’s bones and was able to thrash Sven and Winter off his back and free his arms, he fled the room back out into the hall.

The room was silent as everyone caught their breath; in the distance Judy could hear police sirens.

“That…that was Claude, one of my dancers,” Gazelle finally broke the silence, sounding dazed.

“He…he’s never acted like that before…”

Judy shared a frightened look with Nick, “That was something else.”

“Are we sure no one else got a hold of some Night Howlers,” Nick muttered to himself.

Sven helped Winter up, asking her if she was okay with fatherly concern. Judy’s eyes fell on a metal object on the floor that she had realized Claude had dropped. She picked it up and realized it was a muzzle, fit for a predator larger than Nick and Clawhauser. She turned to her partner with a confused/scared look, but her eyes stopped on Clawhauser who was staring at the muzzle with recognition and horror.

“Oh no,” he mumbled and all eyes turned to him.

“What’s wrong, Clawhauser,” Judy asked.

“That muzzle…I hate to say it you guys, but I don’t know if an inspirational speech from Gazelle is going to cut it this time.”
Bogo had taken one look at the muzzle Judy had brought in and disappeared into his office to make a few phone calls. Judy studied the muzzle while they waited; Clawhauser was back at his desk, telling anyone who would listen that he had saved Gazelle’s life. “There’s a weird symbol inside it,” Judy said, peering into the muzzle to stare at what looked like a coat of arms. “Look.” She offered the muzzle to Nick but the fox took a step back, eyeing the metal object with venom, “Keep it away from me.” Judy pulled back, remembering too late how Nick felt about muzzles, “Sorry.” “Do you think it’s the Night Howlers again,” he asked tightly, keeping his eyes on the ground. Judy shook her head, “No, I don’t think so. ZPD has been careful in monitoring if Night Howlers are shipped into the city. Besides, if that tiger had been infected by Night Howlers he wouldn’t have just run away like that. He would’ve kept attacking until he was subdued or…” Judy trailed off. “Killed,” Nick finished for her. “It’s not the Night Howlers,” Judy insisted. “But it looks like something just as dangerous,” he replied. “Judy, Nick,” Clawhauser called from his desk, taking a break from chatting an otter’s ear off, “Chief just called he needs all officers in the bullpen for a meeting.” Nick and Judy shared a look; Judy looked down at the muzzle.

A few minutes later the bullpen was full of all the officers of ZPD, and Bogo looked more serious than usual. “I have just gotten off the phone with Elkcatraz,” he began somberly, “Ironclaw has escaped.” Murmuring immediately broke out, anxious and confused; Judy raised her paw, “Excuse me, sir. Who is Ironclaw?” “She is one of the most dangerous criminals Zootopia has ever known,” he answered. “She nearly had all of Tundra Town destroyed when she was last free, it was pure luck we caught her and was able to make an arrest. But now, she somehow freed herself.” He looked around the room, his eyes hard. “Ironclaw has a knack for leaving a trial of chaos around her, and despite being questioned she never told us how, we could suspect Night Howlers but the only thing for certain is that we have to keep our eyes and ears open.” “She’s been causing all these fights,” Nick demanded. Bogo nodded, “And odds are the next time you see one she won’t be far from it. Now, this is red alert but the public are not to know until we have a solid lead, panic will not help us. Until another fight ensues go back to your original duty. Dismissed.” The animals crowded out but Judy hurried over to the buffalo. “Chief, that’s it?” “I’m afraid so,” he replied. “One of the reason Ironclaw is so dangerous is because we don’t have much information on her.” “Well I can’t wait patiently for another fight,” Judy argued, “Isn’t there someone else who might have more information?” Bogo huffed but looked thoughtful, “…There’s a wolf, named Casper; he’s a retired Elkcatraz guard. He might have something else to tell you.” “Then Nick and I are on it,” she told him, dragging her partner out of the room before he could get a word in.

They were driving through the city, the GPS blaring instructions, when Nick spoke: “Carrots, I’m
gonna do this thing I like to do that involves me telling you this is a bad idea, you ready?” He cleared his throat, “This is a bad idea.”
“And I’m going to do this thing where I ask how so.” She cleared her throat, “How so?”
“The last time we went to interview an animal we nearly got our faces clawed off. Remember Manchas?”
“Yes, and I also remember the last animal we investigated was Weselton.”
“Weaselton,” Nick corrected, “And he was a weasel, a panther and wolf are different, we can’t step on them if they go rabid.”
“Don’t worry, Nick,” Judy assured, “I’ll protect you.”
“Hah,” Nick shot back. “We both know if anyone is carrying anyone out of there it’s gonna be me carrying you, in which case you owe me dinner.”
“Deal,” she agreed, the car parking as they reached their destination. She knocked on the door of Casper’s house and an olden, raspy voice invited them in. Judy didn’t hesitate to open the door and walk in, Nick grabbing her shoulders as he followed. Judy could feel his tension through his paws.
A gray timber wolf sat in an arm chair, his eyes glared at them as his TV blasted an old black and white comedy. If it wasn’t for the TV and the door Judy had left open the room would’ve been pitch black.
“Mr. Casper,” Judy asked warily. “I’m-
“I know who you are,” the wolf growled in his gravely voice. “Your Chief called, you want to know about Ironclaw.”
“Yes, sir,” Judy answered, “We think she’s somewhere in Zootopia.”
The wolf nodded, “There’s no where else she’d go.”
“What can you tell us about her,” Judy asked.
“She hates this city,” the wolf growled, “Don’t ask me why, she never told anyone why. I just know she will reverse it back to the Stone Age if she can.”
Judy looked up at Nick before speaking again, “How can she do that?”
“Chaos,” he replied. “Somehow she can make any animal turn on each other, and she is patient. If she is free to do such things she will, no matter how long it takes.”
“And you have no idea how to stop her,” Nick asked.
Casper shook his head, “I’m afraid not. But I do know she hates any positive relationships between predators and prey so I’d watch your backs.”
They thanked him and turned to leave but Casper’s voice brought them to a halt. “One more thing, I don’t know if this will help the case, but Ironclaw’s birth name is Lucy Lionheart.”
Ch. 6: Unexpected Dates and Handsome Bunnies

“The mayor has a sister?! Nick couldn’t get over it.
“We need to talk to him,” Judy said. Nick steered the car from the passenger seat while Judy texted Clawhauser. They needed to know where Lionheart was (They had already checked City Hall); they needed to talk to him.
“Clawhauser says Leodore just tweeted that he’s eating at Sebastian’s Sushi.”
“Looks like you’re buying me dinner after all, Carrots-NOW EYES ON THE ROAD!”

“Welcome to Sebastian’s Sushi,” a finely dressed otter greeted the two. “Does the lovely couple have a reservation?”
“We’re actually here to talk to Mayor Lionheart,” Judy informed her. Nick cast her a weird look but Judy was too busy trying to spot the mayor to say anything.
“I’m sorry officers but this is Mayor Lionheart’s day off and he gave specific instructions not to be bothered by—”
“Officer Hopps!” The mayor’s booming voice shook Judy’s bones. “And Officer…fox…guy…” The mayor along with a rhino bodyguard walked over. “What are you doing here?”
Judy opened her mouth to start asking questions about Ironclaw when Nick’s paw clamped over her mouth.
“My partner and I wanted to enjoy a nice dinner out. But doesn’t that just beat all we were so busy making the world a better place that we forgot to make a reservation.”
“Don’t you worry, you can dine with me.” He led them across the room to his table, “Anything for Zootopia’s finest.”
Sebastian’s Sushi consisted of low tables with cushions instead of chairs. Nick and Judy sat across from the mayor. Nick picked up a menu along with Lionheart.
“Sir,” Judy spoke up, “We were hoping you could—”
“They have an herbivore course, Officer Hopps,” Lionheart interrupted. “Want me to order it for you, it’s on the house.”
“Sure,” Judy replied, “But I was hoping—”
Nick tugged her ear which made her yelp and glare up at him. Nick leaned forward to whisper in her ear, “I wasn’t kidding, I’m starving and this food is free. Question the mayor to your little heart’s desire after he feeds us.”
Judy rolled her eyes but she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t hungry. The three animals ordered their chosen meals and started to talk mildly.
“I have someone in line to be my new assistant mayor,” Lionheart informed them. “You’d love this guy, he’s so dependable.”
“Bellweather was considered dependable too,” Nick added, just barely hiding his snark. But Lionheart nodded, “True which is why I haven’t hired him yet, but you two should meet him sometime, see what you think.”
“We’d be honored,” Judy told him and tried to think how to ease into the Ironclaw topic. She might have to wait for Nick to do so, he was good at that. But the sly fox wouldn’t bring that up until his belly was full.
When their food arrived Lionheart enjoyed his meal with relish, Judy shoveling her own plate down, Nick eating his food at a much slower pace.
“Oh!” Lionheart exclaimed, swallowing his mouthful as he looked across the room. “Is that Milo? He’s one of our best donators to every charity we come up with! Excuse me.” He hurried across the room, leaving the two officers alone, Judy sighed with exhaustion, “This is going to take forever.”
Nick didn’t answer, he was staring at her.
Judy frowned deeply, “What is it?”
“What,” he asked.

“Why are you staring at me?” She wondered if she had lettuce stuck between her teeth.

“I’m not staring, I’m waiting.”

“Waiting for what, for Lionheart to get back?”

“Oh no,” he grinned, “I’m waiting for you to realize what that otter said.”

Judy looked over to said otter; she was greeting a couple of panthers who had just walked in. She tried to remember what the otter’s exact words were.

Nick chuckled, “She said we were a “lovely couple”, and you didn’t correct her.”

Judy frowned, “So? It was an honest mistake and we had bigger things to worry about.”

Nick’s grin widened, revealing his sharp teeth, “Geez, Miss Hopps, never thought you’d of all animals would trick some poor guy into a date.”

“Oh, hush up,” Judy punched his arm.

“Ow,” he said, rubbing his arm, but he was still laughing. And for some reason it made Judy very, very annoyed.

“You could’ve said something if it bothered you,” she snapped. “Let’s hope Winter doesn’t find out.”

Nick’s smile vanished, “Why would-”

“Sorry about that,” Lionheart sat down across from them again. “I love that guy, he has the best jokes. So, tell me how the ZPD is handling these fights. They never tell me anything anymore.”

Judy was still feeling prickly; Nick straightened up, “To be honest sir we didn’t find out about this until after the weekend.”

“Oh?”

“We were visiting Judy’s family at Bunnyburrow,” he continued. “Nice place, Bunnyburrow, and Judy has tons of siblings, I’d say they’d overpopulate Zootopia.” He smiled his charming smile at Lionheart, “It actually made me wish I had siblings. What about you, mayor? Ever wished you had some siblings to run around with as a cub?”

Clever fox, Judy grudgingly admired.

Lionheart frowned in thought, “Maybe… personally I liked being the center of attention when I was a cub. It may have been fun but unless my aging mother decided to adopt it’s something I’ll have to live without.”

“But what about Lucy,” Judy blurted out before covering her mouth with both paws, she hadn’t been able to help it. She had expected Lionheart to be saddened to talk about his sister but to pretend she didn’t exist? Nick sighed.

Lionheart’s eyes narrowed, “Who told you about Lucy?”

“Sir, we were told she escaped and have proof that she is in the city,” Judy threw caution to the wind. “And we were hoping maybe you could tell us something to help find her?”

“I haven’t seen nor heard from her for years,” Lionheart said seriously, standing up, “I can’t help.”

“Mayor Lionheart, you must know something,” Nick tried.

“She’s your sister,” Judy continued.

“That’s enough,” Lionheart snapped, making them go silent. “It was nice seeing you both, but I think its time I go home, I’d suggest you both do the same.”

Lionheart departed Sebastian’s Sushi and had disappeared by the time Nick and Judy walked out.

“Real smooth, Carrots,” Nick told her, unable to hold back his aggravation.

“We didn’t have all night, Nick,” Judy said with equal irritation. “A dangerous criminal is out there now, wreaking havoc.”

“Some things require patience,” Nick argued, “You can’t force everyone to comply; you have to meet them halfway, talk to them.”

“She’s his sister,” Judy repeated, sounding more upset than angry now. “How can he just act like she never existed?”

“Because she’s dangerous and psychotic,” Nick told her bluntly, “I’d try to forget her too.”

Judy shook her head. “I just can’t imagine being that way to your sibling, no matter how awful they are. You don’t get it Nick; you never had brothers or sisters.”

They were silent for a long moment before Nick spoke up, “I’m tired, and it’s getting late.”
She nodded, “Come on, I’ll drive you home.”
“I can walk,” he replied tersely, “See you tomorrow, Carrots.”
She watched him walk away and felt almost…hollow. “Good night.”

Judy was so caught up on the disastrous dinner, Lionheart refusing to help with the Ironclaw case, knowing she was out there now, mysterious and deadly, Nick thinking it was the funniest thing that animals might think them a couple.
She shook her head at the last one and nearly ran over an animal because of it.
She screeched the car to a halt and jumped out of the car to console the animal that had just had his life flash before his eyes.
“I’m so, so, sorry,” she began but stopped when she got a good look at the stranger.
He was a rabbit, his fur a deep shade of reddish brown and his eyes dark blue like the night sky,
Judy suddenly felt self-conscious when the extremely handsome rabbit’s eyes landed on her.
“I’m really sorry,” she repeated.
The rabbit shook his head as if trying to clear it, “No, no, it’s okay. Accidents happen, no harm done, true you may have scared a few years off my life but all the more reason to live in the moment.
She chuckled awkwardly. “I-I’m-”
“Officer Judy Hopps,” he replied then smiled at her confused look, “Every rabbit knows about you, not only were you the very first officer rabbit but you also solved the Night Howler case.”
Judy felt her cheeks heat up, “Uh, m-my friend Nick, he helped.”
The rabbit nodded like he already knew this two then offered a paw, “I’m Percival Sprintly, but please call me Percy, all my friends do.”
“Percy,” Judy smiled and shook his paw, “It’s very nice to meet you.”
“And it’s a pleasure to meet you, Judy; I really am a big fan.”
She sighed happily, “I needed to hear that.”
“Well, I loved to stay and chat but it’s late and I have some errands to run,” Percy told her, “I already missed dinner with my boss. But maybe you’ll almost run over me again and we can go out for some coffee.”
“That sounds nice,” Judy agreed, “I’ll be looking forward to nearly running you over again.”
He laughed and walked over to the safety of the sidewalk, waving goodbye as he vanished around a corner. As Judy got back into her car and drove home, the hollow feeling from earlier had started to fill in.
Judy walked into the precinct the next morning to see Nick and Clawhauser enjoying donuts and coffee.  "Good morning," she smiled happily at them, skipping over.  "You look like you're in a good mood," Nick noticed, "Despite it being six in the morning, you monster."

"Something good may have happened last night," she bounced on the balls of her feet.  "I know," Clawhauser spoke up gleefully, looking as excited as when he met Gazelle, "I heard about you two going on a date!"

By the look on Nick's face Judy knew Clawhauser wasn’t supposed to have said anything. Judy wondered how many other animals he had told, she bet they had all had a good laugh.

"Actually, no," Judy said, her smile straining, "That was a misunderstanding, and I met someone last night."

The two predators stared at her in surprise and she continued, "His name is Percy, he’s a really handsome bunny."

"I thought you weren’t planning on settling down yet," Nick said and Judy thought she could hear accusation in his voice.

"I’m not," she answered. "But it wouldn’t hurt to have a cup of coffee with him once in a while."

"I thought you were all crazy about solving this Ironclaw case," he said and this time she was definitely hearing accusation.

"Oh, so now it’s okay to be all impatient," she demanded, her paws on her hips.

"Woah, woah now," Clawhauser spoke up; he was flailing his chubby arms around to get their attention, "We’re all friends here, remember? The best of best friends who don’t want to fight and argue because it’s not what best of best friends do."

The two looked at him strangely and he went on. "But I have to say Judy, I do not like the sound of this Percy guy. He sounds shady."

"Shady," Judy echoed. "I told you two things about him, his name and that he’s handsome. I didn’t even bring up the part where I nearly ran him over."

One day Judy Hopps you will learn to keep your mouth shut.

Nick nearly fell over laughing as the two left the precinct to patrol.

"Seriously, Carrots are all bunnies’ bad drivers or is it just you?" He snickered.

Judy ignored him, her body flushing as Nick’s laughter caught the attention of other animals walking around the precinct.

"Wait, did his life flash before his eyes and he saw you in a wedding dress and realized you were the one? Oh, oh! Maybe he saw you standing over his grave and thought he better seduce you out of that future plan!!"

"Yeah, because no one would ever find me, pretty or interesting enough to date," she muttered to herself as Nick continued to laugh.

"What," Nick smiled, not hearing her words.

Judy just shook her head, "If you’re making such a big deal why don’t you drive, then?"

"I’d rather walk, actually," he told her. "It’s a nice day, plus I feel like it’s going to be a slow day. Ever have that feeling?"

Judy didn’t answer, only turning onto the sidewalk, looking around for anything that could be considered suspicious.

"For the record, he’s a big fan of mine," Judy told Nick, not looking at him, "Because I’m the first police bunny."

"We still talking about Perry?"

"Percy."

"Right, right."

"And you were just laughing about him a second ago."
Nick didn’t answer; apparently he had quickly gotten over her car incident despite the big scene he had made. The two walked in silence, the streets bustling yet calm as they continued walking, looking for any disturbances to clear up, Judy looked over her shoulder to see the fox watching a group of rodents walking by them, one of the children holding a balloon that nearly carried him away.

“Why didn’t you want me to take you home last night,” she asked cautiously.

“Because you’re a terrible driver, obviously,” Nick replied easily, his eyes going to a balcony window where a sheep was watering her flowers.

Judy thought about angrily retorting but ultimately sighed and turned to face forward.

“…Carrots? I was just kidding.”

“Hmm,” Judy replied, still annoyed. Nick caught up to walk by her side, “I’m serious, it was just a joke. I wasn’t trying to make you angry.”

“Were you angry at me,” Judy asked him, “Last night?”

Nick frowned, “Of course I wasn’t angry at you. I was just frustrated that everyone refused to give us decent information. Plus I think better when I’m on the move; I was hoping I’d think of a better plan than just…wait.”

“And did you,” she asked not really caring she realized, she was too busy trying not to show her relief that he hadn’t gone to visit a pretty fox.

“No,” Nick replied flatly, “Really, all we know is she’s angry and is Lionheart’s estranged sister. I can’t work with that. I’m an ex-con artist not a miracle worker.”

Judy nodded, “We’ll figure out something.”

They walked in silence for a few moments longer when Nick suddenly grabbed her paw, Judy tensed up at the unexpected touch and Nick pulled away, looking guilty.

“I am sorry, Carrots,” he insisted. “I wasn’t trying to hurt your feelings.”

“I know,” she sighed but her lips curled up into a small smile, “You just can’t help being a dumb fox.”

Nick smiled back and it amazed Judy how easily her anger melted away. Nick actually could be a miracle worker once in a while.

Judy’s phone suddenly rang Gazelle’s ‘Try Everything’. She answered it, “Hello Clawhauser-”

“Judy! There was another fight! This time on the train! Citizen! Conductor! Train’s going too fast! No co-conductor!”

“Calm down, Clawhauser,” Judy ordered, “Where is the train headed?”

“It’s about to come through the crossroads at Leo Street!”

“On it!” Judy hung up and raced down the street that was conveniently named Leo. Nick raced after her, “Feel free to catch me up anytime now!”

“We have a runaway train,” Judy didn’t have time to give him the details. “I hope you know how to stop it.”

They skidded to a halt at the end of the crossroads. Judy’s mind raced to figure out how they’d board a moving train. Her eyes went to a tall lamppost beside the rails, then to the giraffe next to it. A few moments later with the helpful assistance from the giraffe the two cops balanced precariously on top of the lamp post, making out the speeding train heading their way.

“Some animals are fighting in there, aren’t they,” Nick asked.

“Yeah,”

“How will I stop it?”

Judy touched the elephant tranquilizer gun at her hip, glad she had taken it before she left the precinct.

“I’ll stop them. You stop the train.”

Nick didn’t voice his opinion on the plan but Judy suspected that he didn’t like it. But there was no time for hesitation; innocent animals could be seriously hurt if they didn’t do something.

“On the count of three, okay,” she spoke as the train grew closer, “Ready?”

“No, but I’ll jump anyway.”

Judy tightened her grip on his arm as the train got closer…closer…

“One…,” she began, “THREE!”
Pushing a startled Nick the two fell from the lamppost and slammed into the roof of the train, rolling across at least three cars before skidding to a halt.

“You nose-twitching, cotton tailed, carrot sucking, liar,” Nick moaned as he sat up, the rushing wind nearly blowing his words away.

“I’m sorry,” Judy yelled above the wind. “We can talk about it when we stop this train!”

The crawled forward, their ears whipped back against their skulls as Judy jumped down to land at the next car’s door. “Get to the engine!” She called to Nick.

She opened the door, walking inside she noticed only a few animals in the car, cowering at the end of their seats. In front of the car two animals were fighting ferociously, fur flying. It was a pair of wolves, one gray, one brown.

“Stop!” She yelled over the sounds of snarling and howls, “This is the ZPD and you are under arrest!”

The wolves ignored her completely, Judy swallowed and picked up the tranquilizer gun, she had to hurry and subdue them before they killed each other.

One dart flew through the air and struck the brown wolf just below the ear; he released his opponent and fell to the ground, unconscious. Judy noticed his outfit that was the conductor.

As she reloaded the dart gun the gray whole whirled around to fix a feral yet blank gaze on her.

The wolf lunged but just as Judy lifted her gun she was tackled from behind. The wolf stood up, shaking his head. His eyes looked for Judy and narrowed when they found her, he licked his chops and a new wave of fear suddenly washed over her.

The stranger kept her pinned and even kicked the dart gun out of her paw as the wolf slowly stalked toward them. It disturbed Judy that the wolf’s hungry yet empty eyes stayed on her, like she had been the target all along.

A sudden high-pitched shrieking made the wolf halt, and then a gang of rats jumped on the stranger, making him stumble and release Judy. Quick as lightning she reached for her dart gun, grabbed it and fired just as the wolf went for her throat. The dart stuck him in the nose and he landed on top of Judy, out cold.

With the help of the other passengers she crawled out from under the wolf and looked around, the rats that had saved her were still there, but the stranger had vanished.

Nick walked into the engine car, where the controls laid. He whimpered when he saw this control panel was more updated than the last train he steered.

“Okay, Wilde, you got this,” Nick told himself as he walked to the panel. “Yeah it’s a little more needlessly complicated but you can adapt, you’re a sly fox…a sly fox whose remembering he crashed that last train before he could figure out how to stop it.”

Nick shook his head, “Keep it together, Nicky, keep it together. This whole train needs you, Judy needs you; you can-”

He looked through the window and saw a traffic jam up ahead, one car was stuck on the train rails.

“Oh sweet cheese and crackers…”

Nick looked around desperately for a train manual, seeing none in sight he deduced this conductor was one of those jerks who actually knew how to do their jobs.

Panicking he dropped to his knees and opened up the control panel, revealing messes of wires, he took notice of a green wire and a red wire.

“Green’s for go and red means stop,” he told himself with a chuckle bordering on hysteria. “But I think today’s opposite day so-” he ripped the green wire and covered his ears as the train started to screech to a halt.

Shaking Nick rose to his feet to look out the open side window to see the train had just barely tapped the car stuck on the rails. A sheep stared up from the car in stunned terror.
“You okay,” he asked her and realized he was hyperventilating.
The sheep nodded mutely.
Nick spent a couple of seconds taking deep breaths, “You sure?”
“Nick!” Judy suddenly shrieked and Nick had horrifying visions of his partner being torn to shred but then he saw her jumping out of the train and running into the street. She was chasing some animal in an overcoat.
“After him,” she called and Nick slipped through the window and raced after them even though he hadn’t fully caught his breath.
Judy and Nick ran through zigzagging corners, between legs of smaller animals but the stranger was able to keep a yard away from them. Judy put on a burst of speed and turned a corner. The suspect had vanished.
“What,” Judy gasped, her heart pounding in her ribs, she looked around the street. Empty. “No!”
Harsh panting had her turning around to see Nick struggling over, falling to his knees when he got to her side.
“What…” he gasped, “…happened?”
“I don’t know who that was,” Judy continued to look around. “But he held me down when one of the wolves that were fighting tried to kill me; he’s behind this somehow, probably working with Ironclaw.”
Nick nodded, “We can…we can go check surveillance cameras…find him.”
She nodded, “Right. I forgot.” But she was frustrated she couldn’t get him on her own. She kneeled down and patted Nick’s head, “You okay? You need to exercise more.”
Nick breathed out, “Remember when I said it was gonna be a long day?”
“Yeah,” she replied.
“I was wrong.”
Judy and Nick, after catching their breath, returned to the train in time to see Bogo and a few other officers place the unconscious wolves in the back of a patrol car. Bogo’s ears twitched in surprise when they walked to them, their fur sticky with dry sweat. “Apparently you’ve had a busy morning.”

“Ha!” Nick barked out a laugh.

“Sir, I believe we’ve found a suspect,” Judy informed.

The buffalo’s eyes narrowed, “Ironclaw?”

Judy shook her head, “No, I’m not sure what kind of animal it was but he nearly let that wolf devour me in the train, if it wasn’t for a pack of brave rats he probably would’ve succeeded.”

“You can both explain in the car,” Bogo told them, “Let’s get these wolves back to the precinct.”

“Devoured,” Nick echoed as he and Judy sat in the passenger seat next to their chief.

Judy nodded, shuddering at the memory. “It was terrifying… he, he really wanted to kill me. But there was something wrong with the wolf’s eyes, almost like… he wasn’t completely there.”

They filled Bogo in on the fight and how Nick was able to stop the train as they returned to the precinct. Judy followed her boss inside, her legs starting to ache from the adrenaline rush of facing death and chasing a suspect, she really wished she had the time to go home and shower and…

“Miss Judy!”

The rabbit’s eyes bulged as she spotted a familiar figure standing next to Clawhauser who just looked annoyed. It was Percival Sprintly.

“Hi,” she walked over with a shy wave, Nick in her shadow. “I didn’t think I’d see you again so soon. Are you following me?”

Percy chuckled good-naturedly, it was a nice chuckle. “Actually I came here to get my bearings; I’ll probably be visiting a lot now.”

Judy’s ears shot up in surprise, “Are you a cop?”

“Oh no, no,” Percy shook his head, “I’m not as strong as you. Actually, I’m… I’m the new assistant mayor.”

Judy smiled in surprised delight, “Are you serious? That’s so cool, congrats—”

Nick suddenly cleared his throat very loudly, making Judy jump. “Oh, sorry, Nick. Percy this is my partner, Officer Nick Wilde.”

“Yes, I’ve heard of you, the first fox officer of Zootopia, it’s an honor to meet you.” Percy offered a paw to shake and Nick took it, not looking overly pleased by it. “Nice to meet you, and congrats on making assistant mayor, let’s hope you aren’t as psychotic as the last one.”

“Nick,” Judy gaped at him in horror.

“I was voted least likely to become psychotic actually,” Percy joked weakly and Nick looked ready to roll his eyes.

“Ignore him, Percy,” Judy stepped forward and offered an apologetic smile. “That’s what everyone else does. But say, want to help us out?”

He looked immediately interested, “I’m all ears.”

“We need to check out some surveillance cameras, and if you’re the new assistant mayor you’ll need to get your bearings there too.”

“Sounds fun just let me deliver these papers to Bogo who looks incredibly irritable and I’ll be right back.” He dashed away with a youthful excitement that made Judy smile, then instantly frown when Nick spoke.

“You’re kidding right,” the fox asked, he rested an elbow on Clawhauser’s desk, giving her his most infuriating smirk.

“Don’t start,” she ordered, “You already insulted him enough just this morning and I don’t want another fight.”

“I don’t either,” he promised. “But… He isn’t actually the kind of animal I could see you settling down with.”
Clawhauser stood up so suddenly he knocked his mug down and had Nick and Judy jumping back in fright.

“Sorry. Sorry. I just remembered…the re-mastered edition of Tigtanic. It’s really good you should watch it. Anyway what were you saying, Nick?” He sat back down and tried to appear causal.

“He’s not saying anything,” Judy answered for the fox. “Because I don’t plan on settling down anytime soon, and even if I was I wouldn’t call Percy a bad choice.”

“You barely know him,” both Nick and Clawhauser said in unison.

“Neither do you two, and you’re assuming the worse!”

“He just looks so…” Nick struggled for the right word. “Boring, if I’m going to be Uncle Nick I want your litter to be out having fun not stuck reading boring text books.”

“Personally Nick I don’t think you’d make a great uncle,” Clawhauser said. Judy turned her attention back to Percy who was walking back to them.

Nick glared at Clawhauser, “Gee, thanks Spots. Anything else you’d like to say to hurt my feelings, now’s the time.”

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” Percy interrupted, coming to a stop by Judy with a pearly white smile. “Ready when you are.”

“Let’s go, Nick,” Judy told her partner, sending him a sharp gaze, silently telling him to behave. Nick held up his paws innocently.

“Personally I think it’s amazing how we can hide so many cameras all over Zootopia,” Percy said as he admired the thousands of screens, each surveying a street or lane of Zootopia.

“It is cool, isn’t it,” Judy stood beside him, “I can never get over how big it all is.”

“Oh, good I’m not the only one a little star struck,” he chuckled and Judy smiled at him.

“I grew up in Bunnyburrow,” she began, “It was a pretty small town despite the very large population and I couldn’t wait to come out here and become a cop.”

“You went above and beyond that,” Percy replied. “Actually, I think you were one of the reasons I decided to try and become the assistant mayor.”

“Really,” Judy felt her cheeks heat up.

“Well, yeah, you inspired a lot of animals,” he continued. “Rabbits can be considered one of the most fragile of animals but you went and proved you were anything but.”

His eyes were shining as he looked at her and Judy found herself staring at the floor, she couldn’t remember being complicated by such a handsome rabbit before.

“If you two are done bonding over computer screens,” Nick’s voice split the mood like a knife to butter. “I found the camera we were looking for.”

He forcibly pushed himself between them and Judy frowned. Nick pointed at one of the screens and she recognized a store she had zoomed past during her chase. Suddenly a figure appeared on screen and she recognized the overcoat, the three watched with baited breath as the suspect climbed up a building, disappearing onto the room and off the camera.

“He climbed,” Judy growled with frustration, “Why didn’t I think of that.”

“There he is again,” Percy pointed to a screen farther up and she recognized the figure back on the ground and disappearing into what appeared to be an old warehouse.

“Do you know where that is,” Judy asked the deputy mayor.

“It’s on Boulder Boulevard,” Nick answered for her and the two rabbits looked up at him.

“I may have used it as a secret base, years ago, not important. Let’s go, Carrots.”

Nick walked out of the room but Judy was stopped by Percy. “I know we promised to wait until after you tried to run me over again, but maybe we can still have that coffee some time when we’re both free?”

Judy smiled prettily, “As soon as we get a more solid lead on Ironclaw you bet.”

“Come on, Carrots we’re partners for a reason.” Nick suddenly appeared again, grabbed her arm and dragging her after him.

“Goodbye Judy, goodbye Officer Wilde,” Percy called.

“Goodbye,” Judy called but Nick didn’t acknowledge the rabbit.
“If Lionheart gives you any trouble,” she continued before Nick closed the door behind them, “Just let me know!”

Any annoyance Judy might have had for Nick’s attitude vanished when they stood in the shadow of the abandoned warehouse on Boulder Boulevard.

“Maybe we should call for backup,” Nick proposed, “This place feels creepier since I last visited it.”

“We already have backup,” Judy held up her elephant dart gun, “And a sidekick.” She patted the spray at her side.

“And what do I have as weapons, my charm and good looks,” Nick asked but Judy was already walking into the warehouse. Her blood was boiling with excitement, she needed answers and she needed them now. What was Ironclaw’s ultimate objective? How was she creating such chaos? The sunlight outside poured into the old building, showing off the cobwebs, beat down floor, there were pile of old, abandoned boxes of all sizes scattered around the large space. Judy swallowed, stepping closer to Nick.

“You wanna scream a little louder, Carrots,” Nick asked dryly, “I think everyone in Bunnyburrow didn’t catch that. And now that suspect is probably-”

“Hiding,” a voice suddenly echoed through the room rendering Nick silent. The voice was smooth but sharp, like honey with a drop of venom.

A sudden weight crashed onto her back and she and Nick were suddenly pushed to the ground, heavy paws pinning them to the ground. She looked up and recognized the face of Claude, Gazelle’s friend; his eyes were blank like the wolf from the train.

“I have only hid once in my life,” the voice continued, “And if I ever hide again, I assure you it will be from an actual threat.”

A shape suddenly morphed and pulled away from the shadows. It was a tail, lithe figure, wearing dark clothes, a long ebony cloak trailing behind it. Glowing golden eyes fixed the two in a predatory glare and Judy used all her willpower not to shiver in fright, her instincts screamed at her that she had been an idiot for not running when she had the chance.

The figure smiled, revealing two rows of sharp fangs. Nick snarled at Judy’s side, one word: “Ironclaw.”
Judy scrambled for her dart gun but realized it had fallen off her belt when she had been slammed to the ground. Her eyes darted around, finding it on the ground but out of reach. She forced herself to meet the lioness’s eyes; if she couldn’t fight she would at least show she wasn’t afraid…even if she was.

“Lucy Lionheart,” she snapped.

Ironclaw’s eyes lit up with surprise, an arrogant grin revealing her teeth, “You did your homework. Too bad I can’t be bothered to be impressed.”

“I know how you feel, sister,” Nick grinned nastily. “I was expecting Ironclaw to be taller, and with better fashion sense.”

She laughed, the sound rasped over Judy and she fought back another shudder. “Suck cheek, just what I expected from you, Officer Wilde.”

Nick couldn’t hide his surprise and Ironclaw’s grin widened. “I may have lived on a rock for thirteen years, but I have a knack for getting information. I’ve heard how you and your little bunny saved this detestable town and I find the whole thing…disgusting.” The last word was said in a vicious snarl.

Judy frowned; Ironclaw’s hatred was like a wave of heat.

Nick spoke again, “Boo hoo. Sorry honey but no one really cared about your opinion when we became cops.”

“You are annoying me,” she flicked her tail.

Nick let out a yelp as the tiger put more pressure on his spine.

“Stop!” Judy yelled and Ironclaw’s eyes snapped to her.

“My friend Arachnid told me about you,” she growled. “You stopped two good for nothing wolves from killing each other and ruined what would’ve been a marvelous train wreck. That upset me.”

“You need to stop Lucy, you-”

“DON’T CALL ME THAT!” Her roar nearly caused the walls to shake.

Judy tried to calm her racing heart, “Then what should I call you?”

“You don’t have to call me anything.” She lifted her paw, her abnormally long claws that appeared to have been dipped in iron, glinted in the sunlight. “The dead don’t talk.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Judy continued, hoping she sounded confident. “We called in back up who should be here any minute now. And killing us isn’t going to shorten your time when you get back to prison.”

“Oh, dearest me,” she mockingly moaned. “Then I guess I have no choice but to wait until they arrive.”

Causal she strolled over to one of the dusty boxes and pried it open with her bare claws. “Oh, look at that,” she said with mild delight, reaching inside to pick up a dog-like skull.

Judy snuck a glance at Nick, seeing he was already staring at her. His eyes flickered to her belt and she followed his gaze. She saw her spray…

“It must be from an old anatomy class,” Ironclaw went on, examining the skull. “That was my favorite class you know, it told me what body parts would make the best scratching post.”

Judy’s paw slowly slid to her belt.

“I wonder if this skull is real, oh wouldn’t that be marvelous,” Ironclaw purred, running her claws over the snout and leaving grooves.

The two officers stayed silent.

Ironclaw slowly turned her head to them. “I bet this animal was just like you two, all optimistic and full of hope. This is Zootopia, where anyone can be anything. But slowly it came to realize that was all a lie, and so just like its dreams and hopes…” She crushed the skull to jagged fragments between her large paws. “It crumbled.”

“Well I hate to burst your bubble,” Judy spoke up. “But we won’t be joining it.”
She sprayed Claude directly into his eyes and the tiger released them with a pain-filled roar, pawing his face. Judy and Nick wasted no time in dashing past him and out of the warehouse, jumping in the patrol car they were so happy they had brought.

Judy started the engine and sped away just as Ironclaw appeared at the edge of her vision, nearly slicing at the tires before Judy drove out of her reach.

“She’s still following us,” Nick panicked, staring behind them, “And she is really fast!”

“We’ll have to lose her in traffic,” Judy decided pulling into the main road, angry drivers honking at her for appearing out of nowhere.

Judy drove for a few frantic seconds before daring to speak again, “Is she gone?”

“I don’t see her,” Nick answered, his teeth grinding together.

Judy tried to be comforted by his words but she couldn’t help but feel the lioness’s eyes on her. Into her. Knowing exactly who she was and laughing at her for thinking she could possibly stop her.

“Judy, watch out!” Nick’s voice brought her out of her daze and she swerved, missing the car she had nearly slammed into only to end up crashing into the railing of the bridge they were on instead.

“Oh, Bogo is so killing us for that,” Nick declared before the two stepped out to assess the damage. Then the bridge started to shake.

Judy looked around, her eyes landed at the river bank below, there was Ironclaw. And she was smiling.

The bridge shook again and when Judy looked back the lioness was gone.

“Judy, the bridge is collapsing!”

As if on cue she felt the bridge quake and drop several feet, she stared at the cords that kept the bridge upright and realized some were missing.

“She did this!”

Panic ensued as the mammals on the bridge jumped out of their vehicles and ran for land on either side.

“We need to help!” Judy said, running farther onto the bridge, Ironclaw’s smile still in her head. She picked up a rodent-sized car where a mother gerbil was trying to comfort her screaming babies, all too many for her to carry herself.

She gave Judy a look of sincere gratitude when she placed the car safely on land; she gave a quick nod before hurrying back on the bridge. She saw Nick help an elderly beaver to the other side of the bridge, the only two animals left was a wolf stuck between two abandoned cars and a hippo already making his way off the bridge. Judy hurried to the wolf and helped him navigate between the two cars. When he was free he quickly thanked her and fled to land. The bridge shuddered again and she could feel it sinking at a faster rate.

“Carrots, duck!”

Judy followed Nick’s order immediately just as she felt something whiz by her ear. It was one of the severed cable cords of the bridge and it was headed toward the hippo that still hadn’t made it to safety.

“Look out,” Judy cried too late. The cable smacked into the hippo’s face unbalancing him and with a yell he fell over the edge of the bridge. Judy made it just in time to see the hippo’s head hit a rock in the water, knocking him out cold as he slowly started to sink.

There was a splash and Nick was in the water, paddling to the hippo. Judy jumped over the bridge, cold water slammed into her and buried her before she kicked out and her head broke surface. The hippo was almost completely submerged when she and Nick reached his side. They both dove under water, swimming under him and tried to lift him back up, but it didn’t take long for Judy to realize that this hippo was simply too heavy for them to carry back up to the surface. They swam back to the surface and desperately looked around for something to help as the hippo continued to sink. Hippos could hold their breath for a long time but Judy knew they couldn’t waste a second.

“Look,” Nick pointed and Judy saw an old crane at the bank, its wrecking ball had been removed but the long chain was still intact.
“Hope you’re good at knots,” Nick said then started to swim with all his might to the bank. Judy watched as he climbed up into the driver seat and started to fiddle with the controls. Judy could tell by his face that he was completely winging this. But miraculously the neck of the crane started to move, the chain sliding from the sandy bank and splashed into the water. Wasting no time Judy grabbed it and plunged under water, the hippo was completely submerged by now. As fast as possible she wrapped the chain around his wide belly but ended up trapping her leg as well, too concerned for the hippo she finished the knot and gave the chain a yank, it started to rise and Judy started to struggle to get her leg. It came free and Judy let out a soundless cry as pain shot up her leg and she couldn’t move it. Panic and lack of oxygen started to kick in and she tried to swim up to grab the hippo and be carried to the surface, but he was out of reach and with only her arms and one leg she couldn’t make it, she could only flounder as the pressure built on her lungs and the edge of her vision turned black.

One thought flitted through her mind: Nick.

And then she was falling…falling…drowning.

Nick placed the hippo safely onto the bank and jumped out of the crane. He could hear sirens in the distance, the cavalry was coming a little too late.

The bridge had collapsed as they had rescued the drowning hippo (he would’ve laughed had it been appropriate); cars were lost but no lives so it was a victory.

He stood at the edge of the water, waiting for his partner to break the surface and swim to him, grinning from ear to ear because they were heroes.

Only she didn’t.

Fear started to pump through his veins. “Carrots,” he called. Nothing broke the surface. The water was utterly peaceful, and it terrified him.

“JUDY!” Nick waded into the water and dove, scanning the murky depths, his terror had adrenaline rushing through his body, making him swim faster. If his lungs needed air he couldn’t tell.

There! A small gray figure was drifting down to the water’s bed; he lunged down, his heart hammering. He felt a moment of relief when he finally grabbed her and turned to swim up to the surface, one arm wrapped around her.

He gritted his teeth, with the extra weight and the use of only one arm he was swimming too slowly. They wouldn’t make it before he’d black out too and then what use would he be?

Nick grabbed her scruff with his teeth, careful not to break skin, freeing his other arm to help him paddle. His speed only rose slightly but he’d have to make it work. He kicked his throbbing legs, his eyes on the surface, Judy’s limp body leaning against his chest.

He had to save her. She wasn’t going to die like this, her cold, drowned corpse fished out of the water like trash. He could imagine she would find it an honor to die during duty, saving a life. But Nick refused to let that happen. She was going to die an old, retired bunny surrounded by her large family and friends who loved and cherished her.

He finally broke the surface, breathing in air through his nose at an alarming rate, trying to feed his starving lungs while still holding Judy between his teeth. He saw police cars and imagined he made quite the sight, his eyes wide, nostrils flaring, fur a mess, with an unconscious bunny in his mouth, he noticed a couple of ambulances, the unconscious hippo being placed in one. He forced his aching limbs to move and started to paddle to land. A couple of officers had waded up to their legs and were waiting for them. The elephant, Francine, stretched her trunk out to wrap around Nick’s body and lifted him out of the water. Nick wrapped her arms around Judy, releasing her scruff. His entire, soaking wet body went limp except for his arms as they carried him to safety.

When he was placed on the ground he dropped to his knees and laid Judy down, he was then forced away as paramedics surrounded her.

Nick’s heart went to his throat and he struggled to get back to her side, “Judy! Judy! Let me through! I have to stay with her!”

The officers held him back as he struggled and Judy was out of his sight.
“Get away!” Nick didn’t know who he was snarling at. The police for holding him back or the paramedics who were surrounding her and not letting him see her.
“I said get away!”
“Wilde!”
Bogo was suddenly there, grabbing Nick’s shoulders, forcing him to look at him. “You need to tell me what happened.”
He saw Judy being carried into an ambulance, and he tried to struggle out of Bogo’s grip. He needed to go with her, they had to stay together, otherwise something terrible would happen and he’d never see her again.
What happened today? He was losing his partner! His best friend! All because…
“Ironclaw,” he growled the name.
Bogo’s eyes widened, “What?”
“Ironclaw…we met her, she did something to the bridge…she tried to kill us. Judy…”
The ambulance was driving away and panic had him trying to squirm out of the chief’s grip again. But she was gone. She could be done. He couldn’t save her.
“She’ll be fine,” Bogo assured, “Let’s go.”
Nick might as well have been deaf, no words said were processing. He was led to the patrol car but kept his eyes on the ground. He couldn’t meet anyone’s eyes. He knew they were all staring at him and he knew they all shared the same thought. The exact same thought running through his own head, over and over, like a mantra:
This is all your fault…
It’s all your fault.
Those words kept playing over and over again in Nick’s head as he and Bogo sat in the waiting room. They had been told the hippo they had saved would be fine but there was still no news on Judy.
Bogo had contacted her family to inform them that she was in the hospital and Nick felt sick. He could imagine Stu and Bonnie in tears, their worst fear realized, and all those little bunnies asking why Uncle Nick didn’t save her.
It’s all your fault.
“She’s the toughed animal I know,” Bogo broke the quiet. “She’ll be fine.”
“They why haven’t we heard anything,” he demanded, his throat felt dry.
Bogo didn’t answer. “They checked that old warehouse, Ironclaw wasn’t there.”
“I wasn’t lying,” Nick insisted.
“I know you’re not.”
“She was crazy.”
“You told me she spoke about another animal named Arachnid?”
Nick nodded, “Do you know him?”
Bogo shook his head, “No. But I will take any new clues I can get.”
A jaguar doctor walked into the waiting room and the two officers stood up.
“She’s stable now you can-
Nick rushed past him and down the hall before the doctor finished speaking.
“How is she?”
“Her leg was severely sprained but if she stays of it for a few weeks it’ll heal. She had a small concussion, must have hit her head. There was a very large amount of water in her lungs; if she stayed under any longer she would’ve drowned.”
Bogo nodded, “Is she awake?”
“She woke up after we got the water out of her lungs but she passed out after. But you are free to go see her.”

Nick’s breath caught when he finally found Judy’s room and walked in to see her asleep on a large bed.
She looked too small, too fragile.
“Carrots…” he breathed. Without thinking he crawled onto the bed and curled around her. The heavy weight in his chest lifted ever so slightly. He was with her, they were together again.
He watched her chest rise and fall faintly. Guilt still clogged his throat.
It’s all your fault.
Bogo walked in, watching Judy for a second before pulling her blanket back to reveal her leg that was in a cast. Nick looked away until Bogo placed the cover back over her.
“She’s going to be fine,” he told Nick. “She can start receiving visitors now.”
“She’s asleep,” Nick replied. Not liking the thought of animals as loud as Clawhauser crowding into the room. “She can’t have visitors.”
Bogo smirked, “You’re here.”
“That’s different,” Nick replied sharply, “And I’m not moving.”
Bogo chuckled gently, “I wasn’t going to try. But I’ll call her family; let her know she’s alright.”
Nick nodded and laid his head back down next to Judy’s ear.
“Wilde…did you two tell Ironclaw who you are?”
“She already knew.”
“…I’m going to need you and Hopps to take a break from the case.”
Nick glanced up at him, “She’s not going to like that.” Though secretly he felt relief. “I know, and I hate to do this. But Ironclaw can have you killed and not leave any evidence. I talked to those wolves from the train and they can’t remember anything. I want you two to stay safe until we can figure something out. I’ll return when she wakes up to explain it to Judy.” “Okay,” Nick replied and Bogo walked out of the room.

It was quiet except for the beeping of machines and the two animals breathing. Nick’s paw found Judy’s and he gave it a gentle squeeze.

Judy’s chest ached. She opened her eyes only to slam them shut immediately, the bright light burning her eyes. While she adjusted to the light she used her other senses. She could hear machines beeping and breathing that wasn’t her own. She smelled the air, she could tell by the scent she was in a hospital but there was another scent, a familiar one. And she was warm, warmer than she had been in a while.

Judy blinked her eyes open, staring up at a hospital ceiling, then she glanced to the right and saw Nick. He was lying on the best, by her side, using his tail like an extra blanket for her, breathing through his nose as he slept.

She looked toward the window and saw it was night, the day’s events slammed into her and she let out a shaky breath of relief. She and her partner could’ve died so easily today. So many animals could have died today…

She noticed Nick’s paw was wrapped around her own and she squeezed it gently.

“Nick,” she breathed and the fox’s head shot up instantly like he had just been waiting to hear her voice. “Carrots,” he breathed, smiling. His eyes were blood-shot.

“Did…did that hippo make it out okay?”

His head fell back onto the bed and he let out a breathy laugh, “Yeah, yeah he did. You saved him.”

“Good,” she nodded, and tried to sit up, her entire body ached. “My leg hurts.”

“The doctor said you sprained it,” he answered, still lying down.

“Oh,” she looked around the room, “Are you okay?”

“I wasn’t the one who almost drowned.”

“I’m glad. Anyway I need a crutch.”

Nick narrowed his eyes, “Don’t tell me you want to leave, you just woke up!”

“I know, I know,” Judy’s body was starting to thrum with energy as her drowsiness vanished. “We need to get to the precinct, we met Ironclaw, and we have to figure out who Arachnid is. And then we—”

Nick’s paw shot out and grabbed her arm, Judy yelped in surprise as he pulled her back down. He released her and sat up, glaring down at her with an angry expression made all the worse by his red eyes.

“What is it?”

“Do you not know what happened yesterday,” he asked quietly.

“We met Ironclaw and she destroyed that bridge,” Judy answered. “We saved them.”

“And you almost drowned because of it!” Nick snapped, leering over her, his paws caging her. “Being in danger is always a possibility,” Judy said warily, “But we still have to do what we can to rescue animals and stop criminals.”

Nick let out a shuddering breath, “You don’t get it. You almost drowned, not me, you. I can handle my life being threatened but I didn’t sign up to see you die.”

Judy frowned, “It’s part of my job, Nick. You can’t change that.”

He flinched and a heart breaking look came over his face. He pulled away, staring out the window. “I know.”

“Nick…?”

“I can’t do anything right,” his voice was hollow, bitter. “You almost died, and it was all my fault. I should’ve been there in the water with you, to make sure you got out safely. I should’ve called
for backup before going into that warehouse. I should have…I should have… And you act like it’s no big deal, like you dying wouldn’t affect Bogo or Clawhauser or your parents or me.”

“Nick.” She reached her arms out to him.
He glanced at her arms then to her face.
She offered a smile, “I’m sorry.”
He wrapped an arm around her, holding her while she wrapped her arms around his necks and she felt her tears build, her fear and relief coming out as a shaking breath.
“You scared me to death, you dumb, dumb bunny.”

They were playing a game of cards when Judy received her first visitor.
“Guess who,” Nick said not looking to the door as the sound of jingling grew closer.
Sven burst through the door, carrying a vase large enough for Judy to sit in, full of roses and daises and tulips and probably every other flower known.
“For my favorite officer bunny,” he stated placing the large vase on a table.
Before Judy could thank him Charlie and Winter walked in, Winter was carrying a carrot cake.
“How you feeling, kiddo,” Sven pulled up a chair and sat next to Judy opposite Nick.
“Water-logged,” she replied, “But pretty good.”
“We brought you cake,” Winter stated the obvious, placing the cake next to the flowers. “How have you two been?”
Judy didn’t know if they should tell the three about Ironclaw, Nick shrugged, saying they were fine. His eyes had lost their reddish tinge and he appeared to have calmed down.
“We heard about the bridge,” Charlie sat on the edge of the bed, “You two are being proclaimed as heroes.”
“Bogo’s handling the paparazzi outside,” Sven nodded to the door.
“You gave us a scare when we found out you were in the hospital, Judy,” Winter added, walking over to stand by Nick’s side. Judy’s annoyance with her had vanished; it was hard to being annoyed with anyone when they looked at you with such concern.
“I’ll be fine,” she promised. “Nick will make sure of that.”
Nick smirked and patted her paw that he still hadn’t released. Somehow neither of them noticed the knowing look the other three animals shared. They didn’t notice because a second after Judy spoke Clawhauser burst through the door, bent over and panting.
“Judy, I’m so sorry I wanted to come see you right away but Bogo told me to stay and finish my shift and-and everyone was talking about the bridge and how you almost drowned and I was so worried and I-”
“Clawhauser,” Judy and Nick spoke in unison, rendering him silent.
“It’s okay,” Judy assured him, “I’m fine and I’m glad to see you.”
Clawhauser grinned with relief then noticed Charlie, “Hi.”
“Hello,” she smiled, “Let me guess…Benjamin Clawhauser? Gazelle’s knight in shining uniform?”
His jaw dropped, “She talked about me?”
“You did save her life,” Sven pointed out.
Clawhauser looked ready to expire with joy.
“None of the other officers came with you,” Nick asked.
Clawhauser blinked with realization, “Oh! I almost forgot!” He ran out of the door and returned later pulling a cart completely covered with flowers, cards, and sweets. “This all came from the precinct. It’s from the officers, animals that were on the bridge, random strangers who heard about it.”
Judy placed her paw over her heart, touched. “That’s so sweet.”
Sven walked over and looked at the flowers with a critical eye. “The flowers I bought for you were state of the art, by the way. These are run of the mill.”
“Stop being jealous because you aren’t the only one to send her flowers, Sven,” Charlie ordered but she was smiling warmly at him.
Judy felt a small twinge of longing in her chest. To completely adore and cherish someone like Sven and Charlie did, and know that you were completely adored and cherished in return. Her eyes trailed to Nick.

“Are you hungry, Judy?” Winter asked out of the blue. “I’d like to see what you think of the cake, Charlie and I made it.”

“And they nearly burned my house down while doing it,” Sven laughed despite the glares his mate and assistant threw at him.

A few minutes later all six animals sat around Judy’s bed, eating carrot cake. She was reminded of home. Clawhauser and Winter had started a conversation about Gazelle’s newest CD. Charlie had fed Sven a bite of cake and he made a long, dramatic speech of how tasting it was worth nearly having his home go up in flames. Charlie laughed and lightly punched his arm, her tail wrapped around Sven’s waist.

“You’re being awfully quiet,” Nick observed, eating his slice of a cake with a fork, as dainty as ever.

“I like listening,” she smiled at him.

“You mean you can make sense of all this noise,” he asked.

“I was raised with over two hundred siblings that loved to talk,” she pointed out.

The door opened, stalling all conversation as Chief Bogo walked in. He offered Judy a surprisingly kind smile, “Good to see you awake, Officer.”

“Thank you, sir.”

He cast a glance at the others, “I need to speak with you, Hopps.”

No one moved for a moment then Sven gasped, “Oh you mean alone! Right, right, silly me, Charlie, Winter, Officer…?”

“Clawhauser.”

“Clawhauser! Let’s go everyone, honestly the manners these days.”

Sven practically pushed the other mammals out into the hall and shut the door behind him.

Bogo looked to Nick who leaned back against his chair and crossed his arms, making Bogo sigh.

“Hopps, I’m afraid I’m going to have to temporarily suspend you and Wilde.”

Judy’s jaw dropped, “What? Sir, with all do respect I-”

“This is not a punishment,” Bogo held his hand up to interrupt. “This is for your safety. You’re an exceptional officer but we simply can’t expect Ironclaw not to come after you.”

“She’s going after everyone!” Judy argued. “You need every cop you can get.”

“I need able-bodied cops and at the moment that isn’t you. Wilde told me what happened; you barely escaped with the use of both your legs. And that bridge accident could’ve ended disastrously.”

Judy opened her mouth to speak but Nick cut in, “Let’s just wait until your leg heals, Carrots. We’ll get a chance to cool down and maybe come up with something.”

Judy frowned at him but she remembered his earlier words and sighed. “Alright, I’ll wait. But only until my leg gets better.”

Bogo nodded and stepped back out and Judy remembered something.

“Nick, where’s my uniform?”

Nick jerked his thumb to a table that had her uniform freshly laundered and folded.

“Do me a favor and check its left pocket please.”

Nick did so but shook his head when he came up empty. Judy moaned and buried her face in her paws, “My keys must’ve gotten lost in the water.”

“You can’t get a new one?”

“My landlady told me not to lose the first one. I asked my crazy neighbors and they said it’d take forever to get a new one.” She looked up at Nick, “Can I stay at your place?”

“Sure you can,” Nick answered, “…If I haven’t got evicted a few days ago.”

She stared at him, “Where have you been staying?”

“With a friend.”

“Do you think he’d let me stay over too?”

Nick smiled a very unsure smile, “Sure…he’d…love to…”
Ch. 11: Old Friends, New Hijinks

Hours later thanks to her excellent persuasion skills Judy was released from the hospital. Despite being given a crutch to walk in she ended up being carried on Nick’s back as he walked them to their new room and board.

Judy had already had an idea about who his friend was and wasn’t surprised when they turned to an alley and saw a familiar van. An exotic wolf carrying his fainted beloved painted on the side. “Oh Finnick,” Nick sang out. “Good news, we got ourselves a new roomie!” The driver’s window rolled down and the big-eared head of the fennec fox popped out, fixing them both with a glare that only got steelier when his eyes landed on Judy.

“No,” his deep voice said flatly before he disappeared back into the van, turning the radio up to drown them out.

Nick rolled his eyes, more exasperated than anything and opened the van’s back doors, revealing a pile of music equipment on one side and a mess of blankets and pillows on the other. “Welcome to your home away from home, Carrots,” Nick told her, picking her up and placing her in the van before she could protest. The music died and Finnick jumped into the back, looking ready to tear Nick’s face off.

“I let you stay for old time’s sake,” he snapped before pointing at Judy. “But that didn’t mean your girlfriend can stay.”

Judy felt herself heat up. Was Finnick joking or did he seriously believe they were a couple? “She’s stranded, Finnick,” Nick continued, not addressing the fennec’s latter sentence. “She hurt her leg saving helpless animals and then lost the keys to her apartment. She can’t get new ones made for at least a week. Come on, pal, have a heart.”

“It’s bad enough having one cop around,” Finnick growled. “I’m on the straight and narrow now after you left. I joined the music business.”

“Well technically we aren’t cops, not right now,” Nick informed him. “We’ve been suspended for an unknown amount of time.” Finnick stared at him for a second before throwing his head back and laughing, Judy nearly choked on her mortification.

“You got suspended? You’ve only been a cop for a few months!” he cackled. “What you do? Crash the police car into a bridge?”

“Well…”

Finnick laughed harder.

“That made my day better,” he said after he caught his breath, wiping a tear from his eye. “But the answer is still no.”

Nick frowned at him, then Judy could practically see the light bulb glowing in his head, he shrugged. “All right, I can take a hint. If you had let her stay with us I’d have been overwhelm with gratitude. And I might add I’m on personal terms with Sven Jingle…and Gazelle.”

Finnick glowered, knowing where Nick was going.

“I could’ve gotten in a good word for your music, maybe even arrange a meeting. But the last thing I want to do is overstay my welcome and take advantage of my friend’s good graces. Come along, Carrots, we’ll find some motel.”

“You got suspended? You’ve only been a cop for a few months!” he cackled. “What you do? Crash the police car into a bridge?”

“Well…”

Finnick laughed harder.

“That made my day better,” he said after he caught his breath, wiping a tear from his eye. “But the answer is still no.”

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“I could’ve gotten in a good word for your music, maybe even arrange a meeting. But the last thing I want to do is overstay my welcome and take advantage of my friend’s good graces. Come along, Carrots, we’ll find some motel.”

“Wait,” the words hissed through Finnick’s gritted teeth. Nick smirked.

“She can stay for one week. Then you are both gone.”

“Who’s the nicest wittle fox in the whole word,” Nick cooed.

Finnick snarled and went back to the driver seat. “Thank you, Finnick!” Judy called.

“Whatever, Hustler!”

Judy grinned at Nick, “Hustler? He still hasn’t let that go?”

“Oh, he will never let that go.” Nick crawled into the van and started to straighten out a pallet for her, picking her up once again despite her protests he placed her on an old but comfy pillow, placing her wounded leg on a tinier cushion.
“Thank you,” she told him and he waved her words away, crawling into the passenger seat to sit next to Finnick who was holding a tiny guitar, tweaking its strings.

“So you’re writing music now, Finnick,” Judy asked, wanting to get on the fox’s good graces.

“He’s trying to start a band,” Nick told her, resting his crossed legs on the dashboard, “Should’ve come up with this idea early on so I could’ve joined.”

Finnick snorted, “You’re tone-deaf.”

“Ha! You wish! I’ve been told I have the voice of an angel.”

Judy listed her head to the side. Who had told him that? She had never heard Nick sing. Not even in the car when she was singing along with the radio and told him to join in. He’d just playfully roll his eyes and pretend to cover his ears.

Judy was about to ask him to sing for her when her phone started to ring. Still shocked it had somehow managed to be saved despite her being in the water for so long.

“It’s my parents,” she swallowed. She hadn’t contacted them since she had woken up in the hospital.

She pressed the answer button.

“JUDY!!” Her parents’ faces were bunched up on the screen, their eyes red with freshly shed tears and Judy’s heart twisted.

“Hi Mom, hi Dad,” she tried to smile.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call you, so much stuff had been going on…”

“Your chief told us you were in the hospital,” her mom sobbed. “We were so scared!”

“I’m sorry,” Judy forced herself to hold back tears. “Y-you don’t have to worry. I’ve been temporarily suspended. I’ll be off the force until at least…a while.” Bogo may have already told her parents about her leg but she didn’t want to bring it up.

“That’s good,” Stu proclaimed. “You can stay with us, where it’s safe!”

But Judy shook her head, “I’ll be fine here as long as I don’t go poking my nose into anyone’s business. Besides, I want to stay with Nick.”

Her parents both frowned, their eyes hardening, and Judy didn’t have time to hang up before her father opened his mouth.

“You know when you told us you’re partner was a fox, I figured he’d protect you better.”

“He did, you don’t-”

“Chief Bogo also told us that you found a dangerous criminal before the bridge accident,” Bonnie added. “Was he any help then?”

“Of course he was! He-”

“We heard you nearly had your bone broken, Judy,” Stu kept on. “A bunny who can’t use both legs can’t run, and if that fox isn’t going to look out for you-”

“Okay!” Judy barked, rendering her parents silent. “That’s enough, I need to go. Love you.” She quickly hung up before they could say more.

Silent, the van was now full of tension. Nick was right behind her in the passenger seat, having heard every word. She was grateful she couldn’t make out his expression.

“Nick…” she began, “They just don’t understand what happened. They were scared. And for the longest time they thought foxes were fierce and cunning so-”

“Too bad I’m not either,” Nick mumbled in a monotone.

“Nick…”

“Whose hungry,” his voice was overly cheerful as he opened the passenger door, “I’ll go get us something to eat.” He slammed the door shut before Judy could say anything else, leaving her alone with Finnick who had kept quiet through the entire call.

“They’re just worried,” she tired to explain her parents. “When they’ve calmed down I’ll call them again, explain what happened.”

“I’d be more worried about Nick,” Finnick replied. His eyes on his guitar as he strummed a simple tune, “You’re family are rabbits. Rabbits are, well, active in all things love. You don’t have to worry about losing them. But Nick…he’s vanished for days before. And I assumed, but never actually knew if he was coming back.”

His words made Judy want to dash out of the van and chase after her partner. But she couldn’t,
not with her leg. And she trusted Nick, she trusted him to always come back.
“He’ll be back,” she assured Finnick. “He’s our friend.”
The small fox glanced down at her, “How has he been, before he got evicted and started crashing
in my van, anyway?”
“Good,” Judy answered. “Still arrogant, still rude, but he’s smart too and helped me solve so many
cases… I would’ve died if he hadn’t saved me. Doesn’t he realize that?”
“Hustler, you are forgetting one important fact about Nick Wilde.”
“What is?”
“That he’s an idiot.”
“Oh yeah, I forgot about that.” Judy giggled and she thought she caught Finnick smirking and
remembered something she meant to have said before the phone call.
“By the way, I’m not sure if you were joking or not earlier but in case you weren’t, Nick and I
aren’t a couple.”
Finnick gave her an unreadable look before turning back to his guitar, not saying anything. Judy
sat in quiet for a while before pointed to his equipment. “That’s all pretty fancy.”
“Don’t touch it,” Finnick said immediately.
“I wasn’t going to,” she argued. “Personally I think it’s great that you have gone to find more
honest work.”
“Yeah, but dishonest work actually paid.”
Judy shook her head. “Nick wasn’t lying about telling Sven Jingle about you. I’ll even put in a
good word; he adores me and my blatant honesty. But first…” She leaned back against the pillow
and made herself comfortable. “Play me a song.”
“Huh?”
“You’re a musician right? Play me one of your songs.”
Finnick looked, dare she say it, flustered, “I haven’t written anything original yet, I’ve only done
covers.”
“Then play me a cover.”
“You can’t look at me.”
Judy giggled and closed her eyes, “Oh, okay, but you’ll have to get over stage fright.”
“I’m working on it.” After a few moments of silence Judy heard Finnick start to prickle the guitar
strings. A soft song slowly playing out, to her surprise she realized she recognized it. It was an old
song, played at the barn dances of Bunnyburrow where all the young love-struck rabbits held each
other and swayed. Judy couldn’t remember ever finding someone to dance with…
As the music got smoother and Finnick started to get more into it he started to sing, his deep voice
surprisingly melodic:

“Your eyes glowing like the moon
You fur makes me want to swoon
And if I could howl, howl you know I would
Because you make me feel feelings I never knew I could
You’re as pretty as a flower
Over my heart you hold so much power
And if I could sing, sing I would
Because you make me feel feelings, I don’t know if I should
And if you’ll hold me, hold me true
I don’t want to be anywhere if it’s not with you
If I could howl, how I would
You make me feel feelings I never knew I could”

“Are you serenading my police partner?”
Judy’s eyes popped open, Nick had returned and opened the back door and was standing there
holding a bag of take out, he smiled at Judy and she was quick to smile back, hoping he had
gotten over what her parents said. But she felt they should still talk about it later.
Finnick growled at him before turning away, “She asked me too. And I need her on my side more
than you when I talk to Jingle.”
“Ouch, you wound me, Fin.” Nick crawled in and shut the door, handing out food. When everyone was seated with food in their belly Judy asked Finnick to play the song again for Nick. “I want him to hear it, when I was a kid it was the number one slow song in Bunnyburrow. All rabbits danced to it.”
“How many poor love sick fools did you dance with to this song,” Nick asked jokingly.
Judy smirked, “Tons,” she lied. “And if my foot was healed and we weren’t in a van I’d dragged you to your feet and make you dance with me.”
“Well, tell you what darling, the next time we’re in a situation that calls for a dance you can certainly drag me to the dance floor.”
“It’s a promise.”
Finnick rolled his eyes at them before starting up the song again. Judy smiled sleepily at the small fox before her ears pricked in surprise. Nick was starting to sing. His eyes were closed and he wore a small smile and seemed so relaxed, more so than usual. Judy couldn’t take her eyes off him.
When the song slowed to a still once again Judy clapped enthusiastically.
“Woo hoo! That was so good, you were both so great! Encore, encore!”
“Not for me,” Finnick let out a loud yawn. “I’m going to sleep. And if you two aren’t then stay quiet. I have always slept exactly eight hours and that’s not gonna change tonight.”
He placed his guitar down with all the care of a mother to her child and then crawled into the driver seat to curl up.
“Goodnight Finnick,” Judy told him.
He made a noise that Judy assumed meant goodnight.
She lay down, but before she could tuck the blanket around her Nick did it for her.
“Sweet dreams, Carrots,” he whispered and made to go to the passenger seat but she grabbed his arm before he could go.
“Can you stay back here…with me?”
He nodded and lay down beside her, his tail curling around her like it was the most natural thing in the world. Nick closed his eyes and Judy did the same, but before she could even feel tired a very loud snore vibrated through the air.
Judy’s eyes popped open and stared up at Finnick. He looked cuddly lying curled in the seat, but Judy imagined that all of Zootopia could hear that snoring. Judy tried to fall asleep again; after all she was sued to her neighbors’ arguments being her lullaby. But that and Finnick’s snoring were two completely different things.
“Nick,” she whispered to him.
“Hmm,” Nick hummed, his eyes closed.
“Finnick is snoring.”
“Your deduction skills are legendary,” Nick replied, eyes still closed, “Are you Basil of Barker Street?”
She ignored his joke, “How do you sleep through it?”
“I have a secret.”
“What is?”
“I don’t sleep.”
Judy rolled her eyes, “Then look at me when we’re talking.”
He slid his eyes open, green eyes glowing in the dimness.
“I wanted to talk to you anyway,” she told him.
His brow furrowed, “About what?”
“Earlier…with my parents,” she began awkwardly, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know they’d say that. I’ll call them once they calm down and explain-”
Nick placed his paw over Judy’s face, muffling her. “You need to calm down.”
She pulled his paw away, her eyes moist.
“Its okay, Carrots,” he insisted.
“Yeah, I was upset but I couldn’t be mad at your parents…they were right.”
“Stop that,” she practically growled, tightly squeezing the paw she still held between her own. “I don’t care what anyone, including you, says. You were a hero Nicholas Wilde. You saved my life.”

She didn’t break eye contact with him, trying to get her words through his thick head. And she tried to ignore how their noses were almost touching.

Finally Nick smiled sweetly, “Please blink, you’re looking scary.”

Judy did so. “Are you feeling better now?”

“You know what? I am. Aren’t you a little, fluffy, magic worker.”

Judy smiled, “I do have an uncle who’s a magician.”

Nick chuckled and rolled over, “Let’s try and get some shut eye. Key word: Try.”

Judy rolled over as well, “Okay, good night Nick.”

“Nighty night, Carrots.”

“Oh and Nick? You really do have the voice of an angel.”

“Stop trying to seduce me Officer, you already got me in your bed.”

She kicked him in the tail.
Ch. 12: The Anniversary

The next few days Judy was fighting a constant battle with boredom. Being an athletic bunny she had no taste for sitting immobile in a van that felt like it was getting smaller everyday.
The two foxes tried to help ease her boredom. Nick told her all the jokes he knew, took her on short walks, he even sang for her. Finnick wasn’t as talkative or animated as his former partner in crime but he did play a lot of music (Nick told her he hadn’t played nearly as much when it was just the two of them which made Judy feel special). The minuscule fox even told the story of an old con where Nick had dressed as a female fortune teller and swindled a rich lion out of his money. Nick had not been happy to share that memory.
Now Judy sat on the edge of the van’s bed, the back doors flung open to let her soak in some sunlight as Finnick fiddled with his guitar in the driver seat.
Judy still hadn’t called her parents back, the only contact she had was texts and the card she mailed along with her get well flowers. Her anger with them was starting to fade, she realized, but an odd feeling had started to settle in Judy’s chest, making her more restless than ever. But she couldn’t figure out what it was.
Her ears sprung up as Nick appeared around the corner. He was carrying a bouquet of flowers.
Judy’s heart stuttered, “Who’s that for?”
“For someone very special. I’m about to go visit them, they live on the outskirts of town.”
Judy noticed Nick was dressed in the best clothes he owned and looked freshly groomed. A pressure started to build in her stomach.
Nick looked anxious, his eyes darting around before landing on her. “Do you…do you want to come with me?”
She blinked, “Wouldn’t I get in the way?” If he was going on a date she definitely didn’t want to be the third wheel.
“Of course you wouldn’t,” he replied, “My parents would love you.”
Judy’s jaw dropped, “We’re going to see your parents!?!”
He nodded, still looking on edge, “It’s their wedding anniversary and I haven’t seen them in years. I decided now that I have a respectable job and some free time I might as well…give them a visit. You don’t have to come if you don’t want to though.”
“Are you kidding,” she grinned from ear to ear, “Try and stop me! I’ve wanted to meet your parents for months! Let’s go, let’s go!”

Finnick dropped them off at the edge of the city and told them he’d be back at 9 p.m. sharp and drove away.
Judy hobbled at Nick’s side with her crutch; she insisted she didn’t need him to carry her.
She looked around the street; it wasn’t fancy like the rest of Zootopia. It was like a suburb, but the houses were small and run down, the lawns prickly and dry with yellow green grass. But like the rest of Zootopia the population was mainly prey, though she spotted a tiger cub and a tiny weasel chasing each other around a yard.
“You grew up here,” she asked Nick. He was still looking on edge, holding the bouquet a little too tight, the fur on his tail as prickly as the grass.
“Y-yeah,” Nick answered. “This is where your drop dead handsome and charming partner grew up.”
Judy smiled, “How long has it been since you last visited?”
“A long time, I left when I was fifteen I used to send letters but started to get…distracted. And I didn’t want my parents to know I was a con-artist. The last time I visited was about five years ago.”
“I can’t wait to meet them,” Judy admitted, she would’ve skipped if she could. “And hear about all the embarrassing stuff you did as a pup. And to see the house you grew up in, and your old
bedroom.”
“You really are curious,” Nick couldn’t help his slight surprise.
“You’re my best friend,” Judy said, “Naturally I’d want to know more about you.”

Nick smiled softly before his eyes turned forward and he stopped in his tracks, his eyes wide with fear and anxiety.

Before them stood a house that was better maintained than the others, a picket fence surrounded the yard, its white paint having yellowed with age. A small garden of flowers sat under a window.

“Here we are, Carrots,” Nick breathed, “Home sweet home.”

Judy was already hopping into the yard before Nick finished speaking. “Get back here,” he ordered, chasing after her but Judy already rang the doorbell.

The door opened and out stepped a fox, she was wearing a sun dress covered in flowers under a pink apron, wiping her red paws with a dish towel. She had Nick’s green eyes and a kind smile, she held herself with an assured confidence.

Nick’s mother was beautiful.

“May I help you, dear?” she asked Judy.

“I-I’m Judy Hopps, ma’am.” She answered and then pointed over her shoulder. “I came with him.”

Her eyes looked past her to her son and Judy could see her eyes flashing with surprise and recognition.

“Nicholas?” She sounded like she couldn’t believe it.

“H-Hi, Mom,” he stammered then held up the flowers, “Happy anniversary.”

“Oh, Nick,” his mother ran past Judy and wrapped her arms around her son.

Nick was tense for only a second before he seemed to go limp in his mother’s arms, returning the embrace.

“I’ve missed you,” his voice was a murmur.

“I’ve missed you too, baby.” Her voice was thick with tears.

She finally pulled away to hold him at arm’s length to check him over. “You’ve gotten so tall and handsome.”

“And I’ve got a good job,” he quickly added, pulling out his badge. “I’m an official member of the ZPD.”

His mother’s ears perked up and she waved her tail, “That’s marvelous, sweetie!”

“And you already met my partner,” he indicated to Judy who still stood at the door way. “Officer Hopps. Judy, this is my mom, Amelia Wilde.”

“It’s so nice to finally meet you, Mrs. Wilde.”

Amelia’s smile grew, “It’s so nice to meet you too. Will you come in, the both of you, I just made some tea.”

Despite it having been years since Nick had seen his mother he hardly got a word in edgewise between his mother and Judy.

The rabbit was telling Amelia about all the cases they’d been on, exaggerating some facts to make Nick look good. His mother, on the other hand, had no qualms with telling every embarrassing story of Nick’s pup-hood in excruciating detail.

“When he was four he got his poor little tail stuck in the toilet,” Amelia giggled, “Poor thing refused to use the toilet for months after that.”

Judy nearly spewed tea everywhere but kept it together long enough to swallow.

Nick grumbled, “Please don’t bring that up, Mom. She’ll tell the entire precinct.”

“And you already met my partner,” he indicated to Judy who still stood at the door way. “Officer Hopps. Judy, this is my mom, Amelia Wilde.”

“It’s so nice to finally meet you, Mrs. Wilde.”

Amelia’s smile grew, “It’s so nice to meet you too. Will you come in, the both of you, I just made some tea.”
But Amelia shook her head again, “I haven’t touched it since you’ve left.”
The words seemed to shock Nick, “Oh…okay. Let’s go, Judy.”
The three mammals walked upstairs, Amelia in the lead. They walked down a nice hall and stopped at the end where she saw a door covered in posters, from famous movie super heroes to signs that said ‘Keep Out’ and ‘Nick’s Lair’.
“I’m going to go fix some things in the kitchen,” Amelia said turning back to the stairs. “You two have fun.”
“Oh I will,” Judy grinned with malicious glee before walking into the room; Nick followed seeming less than ecstatic.
The bedroom screamed Nick. The red car bed was all twisted blankets and wrinkled pillows, random magazines and comic books and action figures littered the floor. There was a desk with an old computer that looked kind of dusty, the closet was full of children-sized clothes, and Judy felt a twinge in her heart when she recognized a Cub Scout uniform stuffed in the very back.
She could barely see the walls for all the posters, signs, pictures, calendars, all from movies and comic books and famous parts of Zootopia. She noticed a large magazine about amusement parks and picked it up, skimming through the pages.
“I wanted to own my own amusement park when I was little,” Nick explained, he was leaning against the wall, his eyes unfocused as he looked around the room. He appeared to be lost in thought.
“That’s cool,” Judy smiled, “What made you give up on it?”
“An old neighbor told me a fox couldn’t run a successful business.”
Judy’s ears dropped but Nick shook head, “Don’t worry, I’m over it. Besides, joke’s on him because now I’m a cop.”
She nodded, “You sure are.” She placed the magazine on his desk then noticed the picture next to his computer. She saw Amelia and a handsome fox who she knew was Nick’s father, they both had the same nose (Judy assumed he was at work). Nick sat in his father’s arms, he was beaming like mad, one of his teeth missing and wearing a balloon hat.
“Aww,” she cooed. “You were so cute.”
Nick frowned at her and she grinned, “Sorry, you are so cute.”
“Don’t call me cute,” Nick said, trying to hide his embarrassment under grumpiness and Judy laughed.
She walked over to his bed and jumped onto it, laying on her back as she smiled up at the ceiling that was covered in glow in the dark stars. Secretly she was glad to get off her foot, it still had a while before it healed and she had probably over-exerted it if the aching was anything to go by.
“I really like your mom,” she told Nick, glancing over to him. “She’s really nice. You have her eyes.”
“Yes,” Nick replied, oddly quiet. He was looking at Judy with a dark look in his eyes.
She frowned, “Something wrong?”
“No,” his eyes were still dark as he looked at her with an abnormally serious expression. “Just thinking…”
“Oh,” she replied awkwardly, “Oh! Did you not want me on your bed? I’m sorry.”
“No, you’re fine,” he shook his head, “Actually…”
Nick was suddenly at her side, leering over here with one knee on the bed, with his arms caging her, a devilish grin on his lips and a glint in his eye. “I think I like having you in my bed, Officer Hopps.”
Judy’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets, and she suddenly felt hot all over.
“W-w-what?”
“This bed is just the right size for a fox and a rabbit,” Nick practically growled, “Plenty of leg room. And I know my mom can’t hear a thing from here while she’s in the kitchen.”
Judy tried to swallow but her throat was dry, and her blood was pulsing in her ears. What was going on?
Nick’s teeth flashed as his grin widened, “What’s the problem, Carrots? Just a second ago you said I was cute, and then not a week ago you wanted me sleeping with you. What’s a poor fella to
“I-uh…I um…” she couldn’t think straight, Nick was too, too close and getting closer. Judy slammed her eyes shut, her body burning up as her heart tried to break through her ribs. Nick’s lips were pressed against her ear…

“Gotcha.”

Judy’s eyes popped open as Nick sat up, laughing. Judy didn’t know how she felt at the moment. “You should’ve seen your face,” Nick stood up, holding his stomach. “I thought you were going to have a heart attack!”

“Ha!” Judy barked, trying to calm her still racing heart, “A regular lady killer.” “That’s what you get for laughing at me because I was a sensitive kid who had an even more sensitive tail.”

Once Nick had calmed down they made it back downstairs, Judy trying her best to put that whole crazy, confusing event behind her. Nick was acting like it had never happened after all. “Here you are,” Amelia handed them each a muffin when they reached the kitchen. “Hurry and eat it’s almost time to go see your father.”

“I can’t wait to meet him,” Judy said, taking a bite of the warm, buttery muffin. Amelia frowned with confusion but didn’t say anything and Judy noticed Nick’s joking mood had disappeared.

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Nick once again carried Judy on his back as he and his mother walked out of the house and onto the street. So he felt her body go rigid when they walked into the cemetery. Nick let her slide off his back while his mother kneeled down at his father’s grave, placing the flowers at the tombstone. “You can wait here,” Nick told her, she nodded numbly.

Nick knelt next to his mother as she was telling the grave stone that read ‘Max Wilde’, that his son was now a police officer. “Hi, Dad,” Nick said quietly. “It’s been a while.”

“He’s grown up so much,” Amelia added. “He looks just like you.”

“I’m sorry it’s been so long since I visited,” Nick apologized, looking to his mother. She smiled softly and kissed his temple. “We’re just glad you did come back, and that you are out making the world a better place and have the most adorable friend.” Nick glanced over at Judy who watched, her eyes shining sadly. But she quickly smiled at him when their eyes met and he returned the smile.

A few minutes later Amelia wished her husband a happy anniversary and stood up. “I’ll get up in a sec,” he told her and she patted him on the shoulder before walking away. Nick looked down at the flowers that were staring to show the signs of wilt; he had thought he had bought fresher ones.

There was a presence at his shoulder and he didn’t have to look to know it was Judy. “Remember when I told you the last time I visited was five years ago?”

“Yeah?”

“It was the day of my dad’s funeral; I couldn’t even force myself to go into the church. I was nothing but a con artist, from just outside the door I could hear his relatives and friends muttering how I was a terrible son. That I didn’t even come to comfort my mother.” He heard Judy take in a deep breath then stepped over to the grave. “Mr. Wilde! My name is Judy Hopps! Your son’s partner and best friend! And since your son doesn’t listen to me I’m hoping you will. He…he really is a good guy. Is he perfect? Far from it but I’m not either. The point is that doesn’t stop him from being so-so wonderful. So smart and funny and brave and wonderful, I’m sorry he couldn’t give you an official goodbye, but I’m glad he became a con artist otherwise I would have never met him… And a world without Nick Wilde is not a world I want to be in… sir.”

Judy had started to tear up in the middle of her speech and now tears were overflowing her eyes. If she had said that to my dad when she was alive, Nick thought to himself, He’d wonder when
the wedding was.
His mouth turned up in a small smile, “Judy…” he held his arm out to her.  
She ran forward to wrap her arms around him, burying her face in his neck, her tears dampened his fur.  
“It’s okay, Judy,” he assured her, wrapping his arm around her and pulling her close.  
“I don’t care what anyone says,” Judy’s voice was muffled in his fur. “I think you’re great!”  
“I know, I know. I think you’re great too.” Without thinking he leaned down and kissed her cheek. Judy tightened her arms around him and she didn’t look like she was going to let go. Nick found he didn’t mind at all.
Back at the Wilde home Nick and Judy enjoyed a meal with Amelia, she and Judy sharing more embarrassing Nick stories. When it was 8:55 they shared their goodbyes. Nick hugging his mother tightly, Amelia telling him to visit more often. Judy promised she’d make sure of that and Amelia pulled her into a loving hug that Judy happily returned. Before they walked out Amelia gave them a picture of young Nick and his parents which Judy happily accepted. They walked through the street, lamp posts offering light in the dark.

“Are you feeling better,” Nick asked his friend.
“Yeah,” Judy answered. “I’m fine.”

But Judy wasn’t completely sure, she was feeling even weirder than usual, her entire body on edge.

“Good,” Nick said, “You’ve been acting weird lately.”
“So have you,” Judy argued, remembering what happened in the bedroom and feeling flustered all over again.

Nick shrugged, “I’ve always been weird.”

They met Finnick as nine sharp which seemed to surprise the little fox. Nick walked to the passenger door, brushing past Judy as he did so and the rabbit suddenly jumped. Nick gave her an odd look as Judy tried to ponder why her fur was crackling with lightning where nick had touched her.

When Nick opened the passenger door Judy hurriedly climbed onto the seat and to the back, curling up in her corner. As Finnick drove them back to the city Judy rubbed her still tingling arm, trying to figure out what was going on with her.

The next morning Judy was walking down the street not far from the van, testing out her leg without her crutch. It was still tender but she was able to start putting weight on it. Nick stood not too far away, leaning against the side of a shop while finishing his cup of coffee. Judy could feel his eyes on her and it made her feel self-conscious.

Suddenly a limo stopped next to them and Judy’s brow furrowed. A window rolled down and she was surprised to see Mayor Lionheart, looking uncharacteristically forlorn.

“I’ve been looking for you two,” he said somberly.

Nick tossed his empty cup into a nearby bin and joined Judy’s side.

“What can we do for, Mayor,” Judy asked, remembering their last talk with him had ended disastrously.

“Get in,” Lionheart told them, “We need to talk.”

The two sat across from Lionheart as the limo drove downtown, Nick making himself at home in the luxurious vehicle.

“I was told Ironclaw was the reason that bridge collapsed,” Lionheart began.

Judy nodded, “I saw her.”

Lionheart glanced out the window, his eyes melancholy. “I’ve been unable to stop thinking about that, since we shared blood I didn’t want to believe she was truly that awful…but I can’t hide from that fact anymore.” His eyes turned to them, “I’m ready to tell you all I know about her.”

Judy and Nick leaned forward with open ears as Lionheart began his story:

“Lucy and I shared the same father. However he was never serious about Lucy’s mother and left not long after Lucy was born, he then met my mother and fell in love. He would visit Lucy ever other week and would bring me along, but we were never overly fond of each other. Lucy’s mother had since then met and fallen in love with a zebra, so much so she wanted to pretend not to be a lion and clipped her own claws. She did the same to Lucy despite her trying to resist. She wasn’t fond of the zebra anymore than she was of her distant father so she tired to find her own pride of lions. However Lucy was small for a lion cub and everyone knew about how her father
didn’t want her and her mother refused to behave like a lion. So they rejected her multiple times, except for one cub, he was her only friend… then one day he abandoned her as well, joined the other cubs in abusing her. She returned him broken-hearted, deciding maybe being a lion wasn’t great, and went home to follow her mother’s footsteps only to find her mother sobbing, her heart broken after that zebra abandoned her.”

Lionheart let out a heavy sigh. “Months later her mother became sick and passed away, she didn’t want to live with us so she was sent from foster home to foster home, I had asked how she was treated in each home and none were good. Lucy was an outcast, she was bullied and rejected, anything she wanted to do, any dreams she had she was told do, any dreams she had she was told it would never, ever happen. Until finally she was old enough to live on her own and she left Zootopia. Years later she returned and started her attacks.”

Lionheart fixed them with an intense stare, “Lucy spent her whole life having her heart broken over and over again by the city where anyone can be anything and it told her she was nothing. She hates it all; predators and prey, same species relationships and interspecies relationships, and she will not stop until she destroys all of Zootopia.”

Judy had thanked Lionheart for talking to them and asked if he would have any idea where she would hide. Lionheart said the only thing she had enjoyed since her mother died was the history of the Stone Age, which gave Judy an idea.

“Shouldn’t we call it in,” Nick asked as he and his partner made their way to the museum.

“If we do Bogo will order us to stand down so he can get someone else to check,” Judy replied. “Besides, we’re only going to look for clues.”

“This isn’t going to end well,” Nick predicted.

They made it to the museum which was closed for the day for cleaning, thanks to Nick’s street smarts breaking in had been criminally easy (Judy once again following the rule that if they believed a suspicious figure was in a closed off property they wouldn’t need a warrant) and they walked into an empty museum, their paw steps loud on the tile floor.

“We’ll have to split up,” Judy decided.

“No,” Nick replied without hesitation.

“If we split up we can cover more ground which means leaving here quicker,” she argued.

“Carrots…” Nick began warily. “Remember the last time we ran into her?”

Judy frowned, “Here, will keep our phones on so if anything happens the other will know right away.”

Nick still didn’t look happy, “I wonder how hard it would be to drag you out of here.”

“It would be trouble that isn’t worth it,” she replied and made her way across the lobby, “I’ll check downstairs, you check up.”

As she walked she called Nick’s number, the fox telling her he still didn’t like the idea and made her swear she’d stay on call.

Judy passed exhibits of fake prey and how they acted during the Stone Age, huddled in holes and munching on leaves.

The exhibits mixed with the quiet and dim lights made for a creepy vibe but Judy didn’t dare say anything, knowing Nick could hear her on the phone. He had no problem voicing his opinion on the exhibits upstairs that was reserved for the predators.

Judy noticed a STAFF ONLY door and was surprised and frightened to find it unlocked. Slipping in she saw it was a security room full of security screens, a few were nothing but static, she sat at the desk and studied them, seeing Nick by an exhibit of a pack of wolves turning on a fox, she shuddered. Looking down at the desk she noticed an official looking file folder and she opened it.

Her jaw dropped, this was a folder over Arachnid, Ironclaw’s ‘friend’. He was a vile looking spider monkey, looking through his arrest record she saw surprised it said nothing about Ironclaw. Only that he was a con artist who used hypnosis, swindling animals out of money and possession.

She checked the date of the file, it had been years ago, years before he and Ironclaw met she reckoned… And when he started to hypnotize animals to go rabid for her, he stole this file from
City Hall before someone could read it and put two and two together.

“Nick, I just found a major clue,” Judy said breathlessly, snapping photos of the file.

“Really, can we go now?”

“Yeah, it’s—” Judy suddenly saw a shadow flit by one of the cameras on the upper floor. Judy swallowed, “Nick, head downstairs. We need to go now.” She slipped her phone safely into her pocket and raced out the door, only to be slammed into and pinned to the floor.

“Well, well, well,” an oily voice spoke. “I didn’t think I’d see you again.”

Judy glared over her shoulder to see the grinning face of Arachnid the spider monkey. “After the bridge Ironclaw and I were sure you’d be a smart little bunny and leave well enough alone.”

Judy squirmed under his surprisingly heavy monkey, he pressed his foot onto Judy’s cast and she yelled out in pain. “Nick! Nick help!”

There was no answer.

“I wouldn’t hold my breath,” Arachnid chuckled, “Ironclaw will handle your fox friend.” Instant terror took Judy’s breath away and she couldn’t believe she had been so stupid! Nick had told her this was a terrible idea but she had ignored him and now who knows what’s happening to him! All because of her!

With fear and fury pumping in her veins Judy started to squirm again, and then Arach nid’s tail reached around him and dangled over her head, a strange medallion-like object tied to his tail. It started to wave back and forth and Judy’s eyes couldn’t help but follow it.

“I want you to realize what and where you are,” Arachnid’s voice seemed to echo in her head, digging into her brain. “You are a rabbit, a rabbit that can be easily killed in this city, you can be stepped on, run over, if I had my way you’d be eaten. You may think you’re a cop but once Ironclaw and I are through with this pathetic city there will be no such thing. Now, I’m going to get up and leave, and when you get up all you’ll see is predators and all they’ll see in you is a snack. I’ll be gracious however; I’ll give you a second chance. This little spell won’t last long, but when it does I highly suggest you run, far, far away, little bunny, because next time I’ll think of very creative ways to torture you.”

Arachnid snapped his fingers and Judy felt her body go numb, she couldn’t even move her tongue and was forced to watch while Arachnid casually walked away. The numbness started to wear off as soon as the monkey was out of sight and she reached for her phone.

“Nick,” she tried to call, “Nick, where are you?”

There was still no answer and Judy’s heart dropped. She called Clawhauser who answered on the second ring.

“Judy?” He asked, as cheerful as ever. “How are you?”

“Clawhauser, I—” Judy stopped, having seen something moving in the edge of her vision. She looked over and saw a snarling fox.

“Nick?” she asked, terror pumping in her blood. But no, this fox was slightly bigger, it’s eyes yellow as he snarled, spittle dripping from his fangs, it took a step forward.

“Judy?” Clawhauser asked.

“M-museum,” she began but let out a scream as the fox ran at her. She jumped to her feet and started to dash, trying to ignore the pain in her leg, she felt the fox’s hot breath on her heels as it ran on four legs, growling and snapping at her. Judy turned a corner and slipped, falling onto her back as a wolf suddenly loomed over her, looking just as monstrous and hungry as the fox. It’s shadow fell over her and Judy couldn’t breathe, she curled into herself as the fox and wolf drew closer, fangs dripped, ready to tear her to pieces.

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Nick opened his eyes, his head aching. He looked around and realized his arms were tied behind his back, he was leaning against a wall and his snout felt abnormally heavy.

“I’m surprised,” a familiar voice spoke, “I didn’t think you’d wake up so quickly after I whacked you in the head.”
Nick’s fur stood on end, Ironclaw sitting on the rail of the second floor, a smug smirk on her mouth. “But then, you must have a thick head, after all you didn’t come here for a tour did you? You came to find me.”

Nick tried to open his mouth to speak but something stopped him, he looked down at her nose and his heart nearly stopped. He was wearing a muzzle. He shook his head and started to struggle against his restraints, feeling like his face was burning as those awful memories came back and beat in his head without mercy, those awful words screaming in his ears.

Even though you’re a fox?
If you really think we’d trust a fox without a muzzle, you’re dumber than you look!
Aw, is he gonna cry?
“Stop struggling,” Ironclaw slid off the rail. Nick didn’t listen, he couldn’t breathe.
“Stop struggling!” Suddenly Nick was pressed against the wall, his legs dangling as Ironclaw held him by the throat.
“I want you to listen to me, and listen well, fox. What’s happened to you right now? It'll only get worse if you keep trying to get in my way. And I want to wonder if it’s really worth it. And I want you to answer one question for me.”
Nick glared at her and Ironclaw grinned nastily.
“Do you seriously think that rabbit will look at you the same way you look at her?”
Nick’s heart dropped.
“Do you honestly think she’d ever look at you and see anything other than a fox? Diversity in Zootopia is a myth. You may think you’re friends, but one day she will meet another stupid little rabbit and they’ll run away to have a million baby bunnies and she’ll forgot all about you.”
Nick tried to swallow, he couldn’t.
“You need a back up plan,” Ironclaw told him, “And I can offer you that, if you’re smart and realize I’m right, that that bunny will leave you all alone.”

Suddenly sirens blasted through the air and Ironclaw let out a frustrated growl.

The sirens had Judy looking up to see the fox and wolf had vanished, she let out a breath of relief and then remembered Nick.
“Oh no, no, no, no, no,” she raced up the stairs, trying to ignore her throbbing leg and pounding heart. Please let him be okay, she prayed, please let him be okay!
Reaching the upper floor she came to a halt. Nick was alive thank goodness, but his arms were tied behind his back, he was ferociously rubbing his face against the floor trying to get rid of the muzzle tied to his head.
“Nick,” Judy ran over and Nick shot her a desperate look.
“Hold on, I got you,” she quickly untied his paws and he suddenly grabbed her, carrying her down the stairs and out of the museum where they nearly crashed into the ZPD.
“What happened,” Bogo demanded.
Judy pointed to the museum, “Ironclaw,” she panted, “Arachnid!”
Immediately Bogo and a handful of other officers disappeared inside the building. Nick put her down and desperately reached to untie the muzzle but his paws were shaking uncontrollably.
“Nick let me help,” Judy begged.
“Judy!” A new voice spoke up and she saw Percy jumping out a police car and ran over to them. Judy was busy trying to untie Nick’s muzzle, Percy reached forward to help. “I was at the precinct when you called Clawhauser,” he explained, “I wanted to come and see if I could help.”
“Thank you,” Judy said breathlessly as the two rabbits successfully undid the muzzle and Nick pulled away with a gasping breath, he then grabbed the muzzle and threw it as hard as he could with a feral yell.
“It’s okay, Nick,” Judy tried to assure him but she still hadn’t calmed down from her terrifying hallucinations.
“What happened,” Percy asked, looking at the two with concern and helplessness. Judy opened her mouth to answer but then Nick whirled around with a snarl on his face, “Let me ask you something, Mr. Assistant Mayor!” He took a step forward as he talked, “Why do we still make muzzles? What are the prey still terrified we’ll rip you to pieces?” “We don’t,” Percy began uncertainly. “It’s only a precaution.” “Precaution,” Nick snapped, “That’s right because we’re all a bunch of wild, bloodthirsty monsters aren’t we? We’re all like Ironclaw aren’t we!” “Nick, stop it!” Judy jumped forward between the two, pushing Nick back. “This isn’t Percy’s fault, stop talking to him like that!” Nick looked to her, and then to Percy, then back again, he gave her a disgusted look that surprised her before he stomped away to the patrol cars. “I’m so sorry,” Judy turned to Percy. “He just—that was all really, really bad.” For the first time since she started this case Judy start to wonder if they were all in over their heads?
Ironclaw and Arachnid had disappeared by the time the ZPD had swept the museum. Nick had vanished after arriving at the precinct, Judy ultimately decided to give him some time to calm down before she called him. In Bogo’s office she showed the buffalo and Percy her pictures of Arachnid’s file.

“He’s been hypnotizing all these animals, and they don’t even realize it.”
“How can you remember then,” Percy asked her, she had already told them about her meeting with the monkey.

“He wanted me to remember,” Judy guessed. “He’s trying to scare me.”
“And you’re not,” Percy asked.

She was but she wasn’t going to give up. She was a police officer and she had vowed to protect Zootopia. But she had also vowed to herself that she would look after Nick and that didn’t turn out so great.

Bogo let Judy go while he informed the rest of the officers about Arachnid’s file and Percy made a public broadcast that mammals needed to be on the look out for him, but refrained from mentioning Ironclaw. Judy didn’t know if that was a good idea or not, animals should know when a dangerous criminal was on the loose but it would also cause panic; if Ironclaw approached an animal hopefully they’d see her claws and glinting eyes and know to run the other way.

Judy picked up her new key from the landlady and walked into her room that was exactly the same as she had left it.

She pulled out her phone and dialed Nick’s number for what felt like the twentieth time. Once again only the voicemail answered her.

“Nick,” Judy practically begged, “Please call me, I need to talk to you. I need to know you’re okay.”

“Who’s Nick,” one of her neighbors yelled through her wall.

“Her fox boyfriend,” the other answered just as loudly. “He probably dumped her.”

“He did not!” Judy told them just as loudly. “And he’s not my boyfriend!”

“Don’t deny what’s obvious to see!”

“Like how you deny you leave the empty milk carton in the fridge!”

“I didn’t!”

“Liar!”

“Shut up!”

“You shut up!”

Judy let out a groan and lay on her bed, wrapped the comforter around her and curling into herself, sending Nick one last message before the revealed secrets and danger of the day drew her into slumber.

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One week later

Sven and Winter stepped out of the car and onto Sahara Square. Sven walking with a skip in his step, his fox assistant following calmly behind, they were off to visit Charlie who had texted that she had free time and wanted them to come for dinner.

“I’ll never get used to this weather,” Winter said, the hot sun bearing down on thick white fur.

“But you act like it’s nothing, sir.”

“Ah, Winter my dear,” Sven let out a happy sigh, “When you’ve found your soul mate your love is like a fan for your heart. I can’t even feel the heat.”

Winter smiled fondly, “It’s been a while since she’s invited us to her house. Actually, it’s weird that she texted. She told me she loved hearing your deep brrr over the phone.”

Sven grinned cheekily, “Yeah…but I suppose, knowing her, she is actually elbow deep in work
but wants to see me.”
“I suppose,” Winter shrugged.
They arrived at Charlie’s door and rang the doorbell. But there was no answer.
“Maybe he’s listening to music,” Winter mused as Sven opened the door.
The hallway was dark and uneasiness immediately set the two on edge, something was wrong.
“Charlie,” Sven called, again no answer. “Charlie, are you here?”
“This is a nice house.”
Sven and Winter went stock-still, paw steps were echoing through the house. Out of the living room strolled a large lioness clad in black smiling at them with all the innocence of a lamb.
Sven took a step back and pulled Winter behind him, “Where’s Charlie?”
“That pretty little cheetah? Oh, don’t worry she’s fine. Well…except for the fact she’s in a relationship with a prey.” She spat the last word out like poison. “But I will soon remedy her of that tragedy. Or rather, she will.”
“Ironclaw,” Sven spoke up, looking at her glinting claws. “I’ve heard of you.”
“And I’ve heard of you,” the lioness replied, turning her back on them. “Sven Jingle, what a successful reindeer you are. It makes me sick, the world is beginning to revert to the Stone Age and you are going right back to where you belong: in the belly of a predator.”
“If you want to attack me go ahead,” Sven replied calmly. “But I assure you these antlers aren’t just for decoration.”
Ironclaw looked over her shoulder with a grin on her mouth, “Oh yes, you wouldn’t hesitate to strike back if I attack you.” She pointed a deadly claw down the hall, “But she’s a different story.”
The two mammals turned their heads and Ironclaw’s grin widened when she saw the looks on their faces.
Charlie was on all fours, snarling rabidly at her mate and friend, her eyes blank.
“Charlie…” Sven’s voice cracked.
Winter grabbed his arm and dragged him to the door, he offered no resistance. The cheetah lunged, Winter slamming the door shut just in time, Charlie crashed into it with a painful snarl. By the time Ironclaw opened the door the two animals were in their car, leaving a dust trail as they drove away.
She sighed and looked down at the pacing cheetah in disgust. “Predators these days, you’ve all become so fat and slow. Pathetic.”

It was with no small cry of relief that Judy removed her cast, her leg fixed like brand new.
Hopping in place she dressed in her uniform and headed toward the precinct, she was ready to go and finish this Ironclaw case.
And she was ready to finally see Nick again.
Over the week she had stayed in her apartment, resting her leg and trying to get over what had happened at the museum, Nick had only texted her once or twice every day to inform her he was still alive.
Arriving at the department her eyes immediately narrowed in on Nick who was standing at the coffee pot. For a second she allowed herself the joy of seeing he was okay, his fur wasn’t on end, his paws weren’t shaking, and he didn’t have that awful fear in his eyes. He looked normal, like nothing had happened.
Judy gave a quick nod to Clawhauser who told her hello before walking over to her partner and punching him in the gut.
“Ow!” Nick yelped, staring at her with an affronted look, “Good morning to you too, Carrots!”
“Where were you,” she demanded, “I kept trying to call you but all you could do was send me a couple of texts that said you’re fine? You had vanished an entire week.”
“I just needed time to myself to clear my head,” Nick replied, still looking slighted. “We did almost die, you know.”
“And I needed you,” Judy stopped herself from wailing the words. “And I was hoping you would’ve needed me too. I was scared… It’s all my fault that happened to you, and then you were
screaming at Percy going on that you think we think you’re like Ironclaw, and then you vanished without a trace!”

“Carrots,” Nick began but didn’t look like he knew what to say.

“NICK! JUDY!”

The two officers whirled around to see Winter running into the precinct, her fur on end and eyes wide. She raced over to them and seemed to break down as she went, she fell against Nick’s shoulder and started to sob.

“What happened,” Nick asked, his face a mix of concern and confusion as he placed his paws on her shoulders.

“Charlie-Charlie she…” Winter took a shuddering breath, “Ironclaw has her.”

Judy’s jaw dropped, “Where’s Sven?”

“In-in the car. He can’t…he hasn’t spoken since… that lion was in her house! And she did something to her that made her wild and attacked us!”

“Arachnid,” Judy breathed, fear for the innocent cheetah making her heart race. “Nick, go get the chief, I’m going to go get Mr. Jingle!”

Outside she found the car, Sven was sitting in the passenger seat, his eyes hollow as he stared out the window, when Judy opened the door he didn’t react.

“Mr. Jingle… it’s me Officer Bunny.” She reached her paw out to touch his arm. “Winter told me, we’ll get Charlie back. I swear it.”

“Her eyes…” Sven breathed, “Those weren’t her eyes.”

Judy’s throat closed and she tried to take a breath, “Can you, can you come inside? Answer some questions?”

“Winter can answer any questions… I can’t even take care of the animals I love.”

“Please,” Judy spoke quietly, “You don’t have to talk, but I think it’s best if you and Winter stay together. She’s upset too.”

Finally Sven nodded he stepped out of the car and followed Judy inside without a word. Bogo was talking with Nick and Winter, the arctic fox eyes streaming with tears. They had the two victims sit down and Winter explained what had happened, Bogo sent a team to Charlie’s house to try and find any evidence or clues.

Meanwhile Bogo decided Sven and Winter needed to stay somewhere safe, knowing Ironclaw would be after them.

“I know someone,” Judy told him, “Leave it to us.”

Nick gave her a droll look, “I know who you’re thinking of and once upon a time I may have been against it but then I remembered you don’t listen to me.”

“I’ll start,” Judy promised him. “But I really can’t think of any better place that would be safe from Ironclaw. Besides, it’s been a long time since I’ve visited my goddaughter.”
Ch. 15: Broken Hearts

Twenty five years ago

Everything hurt. And everything was awful. Eight year old Lucy stumbled home, her fur clumped, the bruises on her body throbbing, despite that an hour had passed her tears were still streaming. She had hid in an old tree house from what she had once hoped would be her pride as they jeered and laughed from her pain, calling out that she would never be one of them. And she still didn’t understand why. But she could’ve lived with the physical pain; it was the pain in her heart that she couldn’t handle. Leon had told her he was her friend. Why would he lie like that? What did she do wrong? His words were the only ones she could remember and they left the deepest cut: Did you really think I’d be friends with someone like you? You’re just a runt whose dad didn’t even want her! Why don’t you go be like your mom and be a prey!

Lucy took a shuddering breath, the words playing over and over as she finally reached her house, it was late. Maybe Leon had been right, maybe she was better off clipping off her beloved claws and pretending to be a prey, her mother’s mate wasn’t that fond of her but maybe she could find a prey that would be.

She found her mother sitting on the floor sobbing, and not three months later her mother died of a broken heart and that terrible zebra hadn’t even bothered to come to her funeral, her years from foster home to foster home was a blur of pain, fear, and anger. Both prey and predators rejected her, some picking fights with her that they wouldn’t soon forget because when Lucy fought back she fought to kill. She remembered her last year before she turned eighteen, a wolf and a sheep had lived in the foster home with her and had been stupid enough to fall in love. She had felt sorry for them, they didn’t particularly like her but they weren’t mean to her either. They obviously had no idea what would happen to them if they were in an interspecies relationship. Animals would hate them, maybe even attack them, if they decided to start a family their children would be tortured for things that weren’t their fault. Or most likely, the sheep would leave, leaving the wolf to die sad and alone. She had tried to warn them constantly, even once forcefully pulling them apart to help, but they turned on her just like the rest of the world.

She was so happy when her birthday came and she could finally flee Zootopia, Zootopia, where anyone could be anything…unless you were a small lion, with a neglectful father, a stupid mother, or, if she could help it, in a disgusting interspecies relationship.

It was all lies and Lucy understood that the longer she was gone, learning all she could about history and figuring out the plan that she supposed she had had in her head ever since her mother died.

It was all lies…
It was all lies…

“Ironclaw, Ironclaw, wake up.”

The lioness’s eyes popped open and she looked around, she was surrounded by woodened walls and was lying on an old moth-bitten blanket, by her side stood Arachnid, looking down at her. “You had the dream again, didn’t you,” Arachnid asked.

“I have that dream every night,” Ironclaw replied, letting one shudder rack her body. “I’ll sleep peacefully when this city burns.”

“She should I go and hypnotize some pyromaniacs,” Arachnid asked, his tone not indicating if he was joking or serious. He was shining his medallion with a rag.

She had met him when she had finally returned to Zootopia. He had tried to swindle her out of
money and she nearly killed him for it, her hate of this hypocritical city returning full-force. But then she remembered the medallion, years ago she had explored an old temple and found the medallion, reading about how it had belonged to very talented hypnotists who could bend mammals to their will.

She had explained this and her plan to Arachnid, even offered him a place by her side, which would be the only safe place when she was done. The spider monkey was, for lack of a better word, a street rat. He had held no love for the city but was incredibly fascinated by the medallion and the power it could give him.

An alliance had formed but it was more formed out of nesscity and a mutual but silent respect, other than trust or loyalty or affection. She needed Arachnid to bring this city to its knees, and Arachnid...he was scared of her but Ironclaw could imagine the power he could have over her, why didn’t he? She would have to assume that he needed her just as much as she needed him.

“Are we really going to use this brand new ‘ally’ of ours,” Arachnid asked, still shining the medallion.

Ironclaw grinned maliciously, “Oh I am positive, and if he turns out useless we can at least use him for entertainment. I enjoy watching him squirm.”

He reminded her of that pathetic little lion cub named Lucy Lionheart, Ironclaw wanted to stomp her out of existence.

“So what’s the latest plan,” Arachnid asked.
“‘We break some hearts,’” she replied, grinning despite the shattered pieces that had lain in her chest since she was eight years old.

The four animals were welcomed with open arms into the home of Mr. Big.

“My dearest Judy,” Mr. Big greeted her in his office, kissing Judy on the cheek. “It has been a long time since you’ve visited.”

“It’s good to see you again, sir,” Judy beckoned the somber Sven and Winter who stood behind her with Nick. The two stepped forward.

“These two are really good friends of mine, and they need a safe place to stay,” Judy explained. “Would it be too much to ask that they stay here?”

Mr. Big gave the two a once over, his whiskered face thoughtful.

“I’ve heard of you, you are Sven Jingle. You have written very famous music, some of my favorites. For that reason and because Judy asked I will offer you protection.”

Sven nodded, “Thank you,” he mumbled quietly and Winter repeated his words.

Judy thanked Mr. Big and led the two to a guest room. Sven laid on the polar bear sized-bed and seemed to turn to stone. Judy shared a worried look with Nick, Winter still looked aggrieved but determined to keep it together.

“Winter, let’s go get something to eat,” Nick spoke up, “Trust me, Mr. Big’s food is to die for.”

The two foxes walked out of the room and Judy turned back to Sven who remained quiet, she was desperately thinking of something to say when the door opened and a polar bear walked in.

“May I help you,” Judy asked the serious looking bodyguard but then let out a squeal of delight when she saw who the polar bear was carrying in his massive paw.

“Judy!”

“Fru Fru!”

The rabbit picked up the pretty arctic shrew and they shared a kiss on the cheek. In Fru Fru’s arms was her one year old daughter, Judy.

“How’d my beautiful goddaughter get to be so big,” she cooed to the baby before kissing her head, making the baby squeal.

“Are you going to make it to her birthday party tomorrow,” Fru Fru asked.

That was right, Judy was turning two tomorrow. “I’ll do my best.”

Fru Fru seemed satisfied with that.

Remembering Sven was in the room she turned to him while the polar bear moved to a corner of the room and stood, stoic, “Fru Fru, this is Sven Jingle, he’ll be staying here for a while.”
“Nice to meet you,” Fru Fru said politely and Sven nodded mutely. Fru Fru frowned and Judy placed her on the large armchair of the room before hopping up to join her, holding baby Judy in her paws.

“Some really bad stuff has happened, Fru Fru.”
The shrew made herself comfortable and Judy told her about everything that had happened. Sven had drifted off into a miserable sleep, the baby having started to snore much earlier.
Fru Fru placed a small paw on Judy’s arm, “I’m so sorry; that all sounds awful.”
Judy nodded, it was awful, but she already knew that. She needed Fru Fru to explain something she didn’t know.

“Something’s wrong with me, Fru,” Judy finally admitted what she knew for days out loud.
Fru Fru frowned in concern, “What is it, is it about your case?”
Judy shook her head, “It’s…it’s something else. I’ve been having this weird feeling in my chest.”
Fru Fru relaxed, “Let me guess, this only happens when a certain someone is around.”

When had she fallen in love with Nick Wilde?
“Judy,” Fru Fru spoke, “Why are you crying?”
Judy started to see tears were blurring her eyes, she rubbed at them furiously. “This isn’t good, Fru Fru,” she sniffled.

“Why are you talking about? When is love not good?”
When you were in love with an animal you treated horribly. She remembered all the arguments, how it was her stupid idea that had them first meet Ironclaw and caused a bridge to collapse, she had to have Nick save her, she forced him to go to the museum and he was tortured because of it, she had snapped at him for yelling at Percy, and just that morning what did she do because he had wanted some alone time? She had hit him. And now he was alone with a beautiful fox.

“He-he’s not going to listen,” Judy breathed, “He won’t feel the same.”
“Yeah, but—” Judy stopped and stared at the shrew in surprise. “You knew…?”
“More like I guessed,” Fru Fru shrugged, “It wasn’t that hard.”

Nick stepped out of the kitchen with a tray piled with tiny cups, tiny teapots, and tiny cakes. Beside him Winter was doing her best to stay calm, Nick could only repeat that everything would be fine, they’d rescue Charlie.

She nodded, “I know…thank you.” She cast him a look, “You’ve changed so much. It’s almost uncanny.”
Nick smiled, “I think I’ve changed a lot too.”

“Because of Judy, isn’t it?”
Nick stumbled and nearly dropped his tray. “Wh-what makes you say that?! I’m a cop, of course I’ve become a better mammal!”

“And I wonder who got you to become a cop,” she wondered.

Nick felt his body heat up, “What are you trying to say Winter?” they were walking down the hall, getting closer to the guest room.
“I think you aren’t being completely honest with her or yourself.”
Those words instantly put Nick on edge. He wasn’t lying to himself. Judy was only a friend.
Besides, he saw how she acted around Perry or whatever that rabbit’s name was, if anything she-
Do you seriously think that rabbit will look at you the same way you look at her?
A surge of sudden anger made Nick growl, he stopped and turned to look at Winter who was
trailing behind him.
“I don’t know where you’re getting at but nothing’s going to happen between me and Judy. I
know interspecies relationships work for some mammals but that isn’t for me. A fox and a
rabbit…it wouldn’t work out, besides I don’t want it to.”
Winter’s eyes went past his shoulder and widened in concern, a second later a door slammed
behind Nick.

Nick and Judy left Sven and Winter in the capable and caring hands of Mr. Big and Fru Fru,
returning to the precinct in stony silence.
“Carrots,” Nick tried when they walked inside. “It’s not what you think!”
“Obviously not,” Judy muttered, not looking at him. “I thought I wasn’t that bad but apparently I
am.”
She was so embarrassed, worse so, after pouring her heart out to Fru Fru, she had been about to
do the same to Nick. It made her sick thinking about how he’d react. But mostly it made her heart
hurt.
“I didn’t say that,” Nick argued, “I was just talking with Winter.”
“Talking about me,” she snapped loudly, whirling around to glare at him, Clawhauser and a few
other officers looked up in surprise at the two.
Nick frowned then scowled, “And I bet your assistant mayor and you talk about nothing but desk
work.” Judy’s brow furrowed, “What?”
“Please, I’m sure he only had nice things to say about me after the whole museum episode. I was
gone for a week; did you two have that cup of coffee?”
“And if we did,” she demanded, “What do you care, not like it’s an interspecies relationship.”
Nick flinched, “I didn’t mean anything bad about that and you know it.”
“Oh, I do,” Judy’s voice dripped with sarcasm. “How could anyone possibly take that any other
way?”
“Carrots,” Nick threw his head up with an exasperated sigh. “Don’t start this. We have bigger
problems remember?”
“Of course I do,” Judy replied.
“Do you?” Nick demanded angrily, “Do you really get how dangerous Ironclaw is? Because so
far this case involves you ignoring what I say and thinking you’ll defeat a crazy criminal by sheer
optimism while I’m the one who has to suffer for it!”
“I do understand!” she snapped, “Why are you acting like this!?”
“Maybe I’d rather have a different partner!”
The words sent a shocked silence through the precinct, bystanders staring at the two in shock,
Clawhauser covering his mouth with his paws, eyes wide and upset, he looked like he was about
to cry.
Judy gaped at Nick whose face was unreadable. Judy made to speak but stopped, she had
promised to listen to him, and if this is what he wanted, if he didn’t want to be her friend, if he
didn’t want to see her again…then okay. She’d do that, even if it broke her heart.
Even though I’m in love with him…
She took a breath to collect herself, and then another because one wasn’t enough, then spoke:
“Okay.”
Ch. 16: Betrayal

It was raining. Nick stood under a tree in the park, deserted now that it was night. He looked down at his phone where he had sent a message ten minutes ago. How long would he have to wait?

“You’ll have to forgive her for not coming herself,” a voice spoke above his head. Nick looked up at the tree to see a figure coiled around its branches. “She still doesn’t trust you wouldn’t bring in the ZPD to lay a trap.”

“So she makes you come,” Nick replied drolly.

“Oh I volunteered,” Arachnid flashed his teeth. “This is one of the most dramatic things to ever happen to us, Ironclaw was right. You are entertainment in red fur.”

“Do you want to know why I’m here or not,” Nick demanded.

“Sorry, sorry,” Arachnid slid down to be at eye level with the fox, “Go on.”

“I wanted to tell Ironclaw she was right,” Nick said, his voice heavy, unable to meet the monkey’s eyes. “About Judy-the rabbit, she’s not my partner anymore. She’s going to…she’s going to forgot all about me.”

“This is the part where I say she told you so but,” Arachnid made an amused noise, “You already know that. Are you ready to help us?”

Nick shook Judy out of his thoughts and met Arachnid’s eyes, “Tell me what you want me to do.”

Judy’s mind had gone all foggy. She tried to do her best, tried to focus in work, try to help figure out where Ironclaw or Charlie is, called Sven who was still inconsolable and tell him everything was going to be okay when she didn’t believe it herself. The only successful thing she managed to do was avoid Nick.

If only she could do the same to Clawhauser.

“Everything’s going to fine,” Clawhauser said, eating donuts in an anxious pace, his eyes alit with sympathy that made Judy want to hide in a hole. “You two have argued before, right?”

Judy nodded, but didn’t answer. They hadn’t argued like this. Nick had never wanted to stop being partners before.

“You two just need to talk,” he continued. “Call him and set a dinner date and you two can discuss, forgive and forget.”

“I doubt he’d answer me,” Judy replied forlornly.

“Hello Officer Clawhauser, Officer Hopps,” Percy walked into the precinct, heading over to the two.

“Mr. Assistant Mayor,” Clawhauser said grudgingly.

“Hello, Percy,” Judy greeted, trying to appear happy but dropped the act when she saw the sympathetic glint in his eyes.

“I heard about you and Officer Wilde,” he told her, “I’m sorry.”

“Not your fault,” Judy replied and hoped Clawhauser wouldn’t tell Percy that he was brought up during the fight. “Did you need to talk to Chief Bogo?”

“Actually I was wondering when you’re going on break,” he asked shyly, “I was hoping to finally take you for coffee.”

“You know what,” Judy told him, “I could really go for some coffee.”

“But you need to talk to Nick,” Clawhauser said in an almost desperate tone.

“Clawhauser you heard what Nick says, he doesn’t want anything to do with me.” She couldn’t help a bit of her irritation escape her voice before she turned and followed Percy out the door.

As the two sat in a café and Percy told her about what had happened that day and how he and Lionheart were becoming good friends she realized something, any attraction she had for Percy had vanished completely. She still liked him, he was nice, but any romantic thought was completely gone. Judy knew why and it didn’t approve her mood.
“How is the mayor doing,” she asked him, taking a sip of coffee.
“He’s doing well but he’s getting more anxious about Ironclaw, there was another scuffle
yesterday.”
She sighed, “I know. But with the museum guarded I know Ironclaw is hiding out somewhere
else and I just don’t know where. You’d think Zootopia would have more than one museum.”
“It does,” Percy said simply. Judy stared at him. “I mean, it’s an old museum, labeled dangerous
and there has been talk about tearing it down but right now it’s sitting next to the Main River all
by itself.”
Judy pulled out a pen and paper, “Can you give me the exact address?”

Judy called Nick as she drove to the old abandoned museum, not surprised when she was told to
leave a voicemail.
“Nick, it’s me. Listen I’m really sorry about what happened and Clawhauser is right we need to
talk but not right now, we have a new lead. The old museum next to Main River, but I’m not
running into it this time. I’ll wait for you and then we can decide what to do.” She sent the
voicemail and then called in Clawhauser, telling him of the lead and that she’d need back up.
Clawhauser told her most of the officers were out breaking up another riot but he would deliver
her message as soon as they got back and told her to wait before proceeding, she hung up before
he could ask about coffee with Percy.
Seeing the museum up ahead Judy parked her car far enough to where it wouldn’t be spotted. It
looked more like a mansion than a museum and she was surprised it was still standing; it looked
like one wind would knock it down. Not only that it was built to stand just over the river, if it fell
it would be swept away.
Judy held up her phone again and waited for a text or phone call or something from Nick. She
couldn’t do this without him, despite what he said to her he was still her partner and partners stuck
together.
A sudden tapping had her looking up with a smile on her face expecting to see Nick with that
handsome, infuriating grin. Instead she saw a different and unwelcome familiar face before
Arachnid snapped his fingers and Judy’s entire body went numb.
The spider monkey jumped off the hood of her car and opened the driver door, “I hope you didn’t
think my hypnosis on you was temporary, little bunny that had been warned.”
He dragged Judy’s immobile body out of the car and tossed her to the ground, but Judy barely
registered the pain. How did Arachnid know she was here? He couldn’t have seen the car from
the museum. Arachnid grabbed her by the foot and started to drag her across the river bank to the
museum, he apparently had guessed Judy’s thoughts.
“A little, well, let’s call him a bird, told us you were on your way.”
What? The only mammals who knew she was here was Nick and Clawhauser and…
Percy.
Can we not have one assistant mayor who isn’t crazy? Judy couldn’t believe she was tricked
again.
She was right about the museum looking unstable, the paint was chipping away and it creaked as
Arachnid stepped inside. It really did look to have been a home before it was turned into a
museum. They stood in what appeared to have once been a large living room, a spiral staircase led
to the top floor, there were no exhibits in here, but a disturbing amount of bones and coats of fur,
some piled together and others purposely moved around to make the shape of large predators and
small prey, she noticed a few bones had been crushed to pieces.
Arachnid dragged her down splinterly stairs into a basement and her eyes widened. A small pack
of animals were sprawled around the floor predators and a couple of prey, by their eyes that
zoomed in on Arachnid when he came down she realized they were all numb just like her.
She recognized some, Claude, Gazelle’s dancer and even the panther that had snapped at her at
the fruit stand. She tried to struggle when she spotted Charlie, whose eyes lit up with recognition
when they landed on her.
Arachnid dropped her into the middle of the room and crouched down next to her, “She’s busy at the moment, she will be an hour tops so how about you entertain me, stupid bunny and hold a conversation.”

He snapped his fingers again and Judy spoke: “ARE YOU INSANE?”

The monkey smirked, “Good, keep going.”

“I know how talented you are with your hypnotizing; you’re more powerful than Ironclaw! She’s trying to bring back the Stone Age back when prey like you were eaten! Why would you want me to help her?”

Arachnid leaned back, relaxing, “I may be a criminal but I know gratitude.” He waved his tail in her face, the medallion swaying to and fro. “I was an amateur hypnotist before I met her. And then she gave me this incredible medallion, something she couldn’t use because one would need experience in hypnotism, and now every animal in Zootopia can bow to my will.”

“And yet you take orders from a lioness who hates prey,” Judy nearly growled.

Arachnid shook his head, “I don’t expect you to get it, dumb bunny.”

He leaned forward to be nose to nose with her, Judy could smell his breath.

“She gave me this power; do you turn against your mother for giving you life? My whole life I lived with a distant family and absolutely no purpose. Even if I had come across this medallion on my own I wouldn’t of thought of any way to use it efficiently. But she gave me a purpose; she showed me how terrible Zootopia really is. She is strong and graceful and ferocious and she needs me. For the first time in my life someone needs me, and it’s someone like her.”

Judy’s eyes widened in shock as she realized why Arachnid, who could so easily turn the tables on Ironclaw, didn’t, “You’re in love with her…”

His eyes narrowed but he didn’t deny it, instead he stood up and walked out of the room, the medallion flashing.

Judy tried to turn her head to Charlie but it was fruitless.

“Charlie,” she called out, “Charlie can you speak?”

There was no answer but Judy kept going, “Don’t worry, I’m going to get you out, I’m going to get you back to Sven no matter what it takes. I’m going to get you all out, my partner and the precinct are on their way!”

Judy had been beating her brain trying to figure something out, it didn’t appear ZPD would make it in time, Judy wondered how bad that riot truly was.

Footsteps had her lifting her eyes to see Arachnid walking down the steps, he walked out of her line of sight and a second later she heard him snap his fingers. Another set of footsteps and suddenly she was picked up by Charlie.

“Charlie,” Judy began but saw the cheetah’s eyes were blank.

“Personally she’s one of my favorites,” Arachnid told her as he led them back up to the ground floor, “So dependable, fast and fierce.”

Up on the ground floor Judy’s heart pounded with fear when she saw Ironclaw. She leaned against the wall, her eyes, dark with thought, were staring down at the screen of a phone. It looked odd to see such a dangerous animal use technology. Then her eyes looked up to see the three and she put the phone away.

Arachnid had Charlie place Judy in the middle of the floor. The wood creaked under her and Judy had two things to fear.

“You know what, little bunny,” Ironclaw began as she walked over to leer over her. “I was wrong. I thought I’d never be impressed by you, but I am. You are so much more stupid than I gave you credit for.”

Judy tried to sit up but her body was still heavy and unresponsive.

“So what’s the plan,” she demanded, “Are you going to kill me?”

“Yes,” Ironclaw replied mildly, “But not right now. A brand new ally of mine has told me you’d be used best as bait for the rest of the meddling ZPD, and then I’ll kill you.”

“Brand new ally, huh,” Judy growled, “Where is Percy?”
Ironclaw cocked her head to the side, “Whose Percy?”
Judy’s eyes narrowed, “The—the rabbit who told you I was coming here, the assistant mayor.”
Ironclaw burst out laughing, “That’s who you think told us!? I don’t know if that’s adorable or sad!”
“Well if he didn’t tell you who did,” Judy demanded.
“Nick, it’s me. Listen I’m really sorry about what happened and Clawhauser is right we need to
talk but not right now, we have a new lead. The old museum next to Main River, but I’m not
running into it this time. I’ll wait for you and then we can decide what to do.”
Judy would’ve been less surprised if Ironclaw ripped her heart out of her chest right then. It
certainly would’ve hurt less.
On the upper floor Nick placed his phone back in his pocket, his mouth was turned down into a
frown forlornly, and his eyes were unreadable…but clear as day.
“Nick,” she breathed, the words sounding more like ‘no’ to her ears.
The fox walked down the stairs to the waiting mammals, stopping to stand just beside Ironclaw,
he was unable to meet Judy’s eyes.
“What did you do to him,” Judy directed her question at Arachnid who smirked.
“Don’t look at me, he’s not hypnotized. He’s doing this out of his own free will.”
Judy didn’t want to believe that, she refused. They may have not hypnotized him but they did
something. Her Nick would never join animals like them.
“If only the rest of Zootopia were like this fox, it might have actually stood a chance,” Ironclaw
purred.
“If it was still the Stone Age your life would’ve been worse,” Judy snapped. “Making innocent
mammals suffer won’t make your pain go away, Lucy!”
“What do you know about pain, Carrots?”
Judy forced her eyes to go back to Nick; he was looking at her with an expression that matched
her emotions.
“You don’t understand,” Nick told her then sighed, like the next thing was going to be hard to
say. “You’re just a bunny.”
Judy would’ve flinched if she could move, she opened her mouth to speak but Nick kept on
going. “You can’t understand, you…you were lucky enough to have a family that loved you, no
one told you that you were untrustworthy or savage.”
Judy wanted to scowl, “You’re kidding me!”
Ironclaw narrowed her eyes, “Oh?”
“Yes! I don’t know what you did to him but Nick isn’t like that!” Judy looked back at Nick. “You
do have a family that loves you! How could you forget your mother, or the precinct, or my
family!” Or me. “No one ever said I was untrustworthy or savage but plenty said I was small and
weak but I’m not going to let any of that get to me! I may be a bunny but don’t you dare think I’ve
never been in pain before!”
Like right now, she couldn’t look at Nick anymore. I’m in love with someone who will never love
me back…
“Nice speech,” Ironclaw replied disinterestedly. “But you still don’t get it, do you? Why your
friend is on our side looking at your numb body sprawled across the floor.”
Judy glared at her.
“Tell her, Nick,” Arachnid finally spoke up.
Nick was turned away, his eyes bitter and melancholy, “You didn’t choose me.”
Her brow furrowed, “What are you talking about?”
Nick turned his head to glare at her, “You chose that stupid rabbit over me!”
Judy couldn’t reply, her mind was racing a million miles per minute. The way he had said that…
was it possible…maybe…
Ironclaw frowned, “This wasn’t nearly as entertaining as I thought it’d be. Arachnid, do you have
any ideas?”
The monkey looked down at Judy, his dark eyes thoughtful. “I just might, actually.”
His tail flicked and the medallion twirled, Judy’s eyes unconsciously watching it. Suddenly an
invisible force dragged her to her feet.
“I think,” Arachnid continued, “It would be a nice gesture to let Wilde do with her as he’d like.”
Nick stared at him in shock, “What?”
“Why not,” Ironclaw asked; by her tone she found interest in the idea. “I think you deserve such a
treat, since she wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you. If it had been me, I’d take that chance
immediately.”
“We’re different,” Nick said the words as if he didn’t believe them.
“Maybe you need some ‘gentle encouragement’,,” Arachnid decided and with another snap of his
fingers Judy felt her mouth opening of its own free will.
“I hate you!”
Judy gasped as the hateful words came out of her mouth and she tried to take it back but her
tongue had turned to stone once the words had come out, she wouldn’t be able to say anything
unless Arachnid wanted to.
Nick couldn’t look at her and Judy felt tears prick her eyes.
I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.
“You heard her,” Ironclaw nudged Nick in an almost playful manner. “She hates you.”
“You’re making her say that,” Nick tried to argue but his voice was flat.
“And you think it isn’t true,” Arachnid asked, “If she didn’t before she certainly does now.”
“He’s right,” Judy’s traitorous mouth snapped, “I was right to choose Percy over you!”
Shut up, shut up; shut up!
Nick had flinched at her words and wrapped his arms around himself, “I wanted to help you but
not like this.”
Ironclaw snorted in aggravation, “Arachnid.”
Judy’s feet suddenly moved and she charged at Nick so fast the fox had no time to react before
she slammed into him, causing him to fall onto his back and before he could recover her paws
were at his neck.
No, no, no, no!
“What are you doing,” Nick directed his question at the laughing Arachnid but it was Ironclaw
who answered.
“We’ve passed the point of ‘gentle’ encouragement. If you want to stay Wilde you need to prove
yourself, your supposed friend is choking you as we speak. Kill her.”
Judy’s paws tightened on his windpipe and Nick tried to pull her arms away but they stiff as stone.
Her tears were overflowing now and she still couldn’t speak as she strangled her best friend to
death.
Ironclaw kneeled beside Nick and Judy, grinning expectantly at Nick. “Don’t let your false guilt
stop you Wilde. She left you, just like animals have been doing to me all my life and trust me you
will regret not taking this chance for the rest of your life.”
“Okay,” Nick gasped out, “Okay! I’ll do it!”
Ironclaw’s grin widened, “You’ll do what, exactly?”
“…I’ll kill her.”
Judy’s heart stopped as she released Nick and he sat up, coughing. Ironclaw still kneeled before
him like she wanted to be sprayed by the blood about to be spilled.
“Go for the jugular,” she breathed, a crazy light in her eyes, “Make a mess.”
Nick looked down at her and she could tell they were both thinking about their Great Case, where
this had just been a plan, that she trusted him to not hurt her. But this wasn’t the Great Case; there
were no Night Howlers involved. And she had no idea what to think.
“I-I need to say one thing first,” Nick said somberly, his intense gaze on Judy.
“What,” Ironclaw asked, her voice still quiet, her rabid eyes still on Judy.
“Gotcha.”
Ironclaw let out a scream as, quick as a flash, Nick pulled out a fox taser of all things and slammed
it into her gut. The lioness sprang back and fell to the floor, spasming as thousands of electric volts
coursed through her body.
Before Arachnid could react Nick tackled him to the floor, standing on him with one foot on his
tail, keeping him from using hypnosis. He held up the taser with a smirk on his face, “Here’s the thing, I know I’m just a silly old fox but the thing about foxes is that a majority of us are pretty clever. So clever even that, instead of being insulted by finding a fox taser at the Hopps House, I decided to take it, never know when it would be useful. I was also clever enough to trick you two geniuses.

“However, I can also be quite the grudge holder when I want to be,” Nick added, “Which is why I’m doing this!” He stomped on the medallion, crushing it into tiny, useless fragments.

“NO,” Arachnid screamed.

Judy felt her body relax and knew she was free, Charlie who had been watching the entire thing in silent, immobile horror, fell to her knees in relief and down in the basement they could hear the triumphant howls of the now freed prisoners.

Nick jumped off him and the monkey desperately tried to collect the pieces and put them back together.

Nick started to make his way to Judy when Ironclaw let out a furious roar and tackled him, slamming him into the wall.

“Leave him alone,” Judy yelled and ran to them, jumping onto Ironclaw’s head before she could think. The lioness grabbed her and yanked her off with ease, throwing her across the room, only the swiftness of Charlie who caught her kept her from serious energy.

Nick had used the temporary distraction to his advantage. With Ironclaw’s focus elsewhere he slashed at her with sharp claws, the lioness let out a painful yowl, covering her right eye. She released Nick and slashed at him, Nick cried out before he fell to the floor, clutching his stomach.

“Nick,” Judy called when sudden noise had her turn to see the prisoners running up to the ground floor. Most headed straight out the door to freedom, but Claude the tiger and the fruit stand panther spotted Arachnid and their eyes glittered with righteous hostility. The monkey cowered under their gaze and took several steps back; he couldn’t take control of them without his medallion.

Ironclaw stepped away from Nick to Arachnid’s side, a paw still over her damaged eye, and she snarled, “Are you angry? Come and get me then!”

The two predators didn’t need further encouragement; they ran at them with angry yells but thanks to her hearing Judy also her the creaking of wood, right where Ironclaw stood.

“Stop!”

She jumped in front of the tiger and panther, causing the two to skid to a halt, their eyes wide with surprise. And then the creaking grew louder.

Judy whirled around as Ironclaw lunged at her but before she was even close the wood splintered and broke apart under her and she and Arachnid disappeared, a loud splash following as they were swallowed up by the fast moving Main River.

But the creaking didn’t stop.

“Run,” she yelled at the predators as she hurried to Nick. His face scrunched up in pain and Judy was too scared to get a good look at the claw marks on his stomach. She slung his arm over her shoulders and tried to drag him to his feet.

“Come on, Nick, we need to go,” Judy begged as Charlie hurried over to lend assistance, the other two predators having already left.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” Nick gasped out in pain, trying to get his feet to move.

The three made it out just as the creaking grew deafening and half of the old museum fell into the river.

“Oh no,” Nick pathetically moaned as he fell down on the sandy bank, “I left your dad’s fox taser in there.”

Judy fell to her knees as she heard sirens blaring, “Why did you take my dad’s taser anyway?”

“I totally wasn’t planning on using it on Gideon Gray,” he grinned, trying to laugh only to wince and clutch his stomach again. Judy placed her paw on his shoulder, “Hold on, Nick. Help’s on the way.”

When Bogo and the others arrived he stared at the cluster of former prisoners on the bank that Judy hadn’t even realized were there. And then they look to the ruined museum before looking to
Judy for an explanation.
And she only had one: “Ironclaw is dead.”

Arachnid let out a hacking cough, feeling like he was coughing up the entire river. His limbs ached as he crawled across the rocky bank, he didn’t even know where he was. He let out a breath of relief when he saw a larger, familiar figure further down the river bank.

“Ironclaw,” he called and hurried to kneel at her side.
The lioness was crouched on all fours, staring at the stones underneath her with an almost dead look. Her right eye was nearly sealed shut by four red claw marks and Arachnid felt a surge of protective fury.

“I’ll make the fox pay,” he told her, “I’ll make him claw his own fur out.”
“How,” she rasped, turning her gaze on him, “You lost the medallion.”

He felt a wave of guilt and grief at having lost such a powerful object. But all hope was not lost. “I’ll hone my own skills,” he promised her, “Just give me some time and we’ll be back to where we were, we’ll destroy them all I promise you.”

Her unharmed eye narrowed, “Will you?”

He nodded furiously, “Yes, yes, I promise! I won’t let them get away with this; I’ll make them pay for what they did to you!” He didn’t even realize his hand had sought out and touched her shoulder, her fur was surprisingly soft.

“What are you doing,” Ironclaw stood up all too fast, stepping away from Arachnid’s reach. She held her left shoulder as if she had wounded it but her eyes stayed on the monkey with an almost fearful look. “What happened to you?”

Arachnid swallowed, it was too late to take any of his words back. It was time to tell her the truth. “I’m in l-”

“Stop,” Ironclaw’s snarl was nearly a beg and she glared at Arachnid with…betrayal. “Why have you done this? How could you!?”

“I-I,” Arachnid struggled to find the words. “I can’t help it!”

“You knew better,” she snapped, “I trusted you to…” She stopped as realization hit. “That’s it…this is all my fault…I trusted you…I let you get close…I relied on you. Well no more, no more!”

Her eyes went back to Arachnid, the crazy light that demanded blood had returned. She spoke and Arachnid found it ironic that the same words that started their alliance would be the same words that ended it:

“Come here, Arachnid. I want to show you something.”
Nick had passed out some time on the ride to the hospital and Judy finally understood his panic from the last time they were in the hospital and he had to wait for her. Judy paced back and forth around the waiting room, telling Bogo who kept her company, what had happened in the museum. Arachnid’s victims had been brought to the hospital as well to be checked over, most of them only had bumps and bruises, the prey saying they had accidentally been witnesses and were captured. According to them if Judy hadn’t arrived sooner Ironclaw would’ve started using them as scratching posts. Judy couldn’t help feeling stupid; she should’ve realized Nick had been playing a trick. But she didn’t and he nearly died and Judy really needed to talk to him. The door swung open and Judy’s ears perked up. “Judy Hopps, Chief Bogo,” the nurse antelope called and Judy was immediately at her side. “How is he?” “He lost some blood but nothing too serious, it was a shallow wound and we were able to patch him up,” the nurse explained, “You can go see him now but he is on medication and may be incoherent for a while.” Judy thanked the nurse and walked down the hall, finding Nick’s room she hurried inside and climbed onto the large bed, Nick was sleeping, they had taken his shirt away, thick bandages wrapped around his torso. “Oh, Nick,” she sat down beside him and took his paw, holding it to her heart. “I’m so sorry. I should’ve known you were tricking them but I was an idiot. Not only that, she nearly killed you because I just had to go to Main River without backup, you were right all along… But please, please, don’t be mad at me. Everything I said… Everything I did… I didn’t mean any of it. I really, really care about you and I want us to at least be friends again. I want to get your trust back, tell me what to do?” “Well for starters,” Nick’s eyes popped open and he grinned lazily at her. “You can let go of my paw, since I feel like you’re about to break the bones.” “Sorry, sorry,” Judy let him go and scooted back a bit to give him his space as relief nearly choked her. “And you can stop apologizing,” Nick replied. “You may have made some stupid decisions, some really stupid decisions, but you did it because you believed it was the right thing to do.” Judy nodded, “How are you feeling?” “Like I just got attacked by a crazy lion in an old abandoned museum,” he replied. “Did that happen?” She smiled softly, “You were a hero.” But Nick shook his head, “No… I was making amends. Carrots, that day at Mr. Big’s, I didn’t mean any of that. I’m sorry.” Judy listed her head to the side, “Then why did you say it?” “There have been moments in my life where I simply don’t think,” he admitted. “That was one of them. At least, I wasn’t thinking about what came out of my mouth. I was thinking about Ironclaw… I may have been able to trick her, but before that she could see right through me. And I know why.” Judy leaned forward to listen. “Since we first met she reminded me of someone, I just couldn’t figure out who, I figured maybe I met her when I was a cub. But then I figured it out… Carrots, she reminded me of me. Back when I was a con-artist, I said awful things just like her, how Zootopia wasn’t a place where anyone could be anything. If I never met you I’d still think like that, I’d probably have agreed with her. And that made me so scared and angry.” “You’re nothing like her,” Judy insisted. “Ironclaw had a terrible life and she let it get to her, your life may have not been perfect but you still had your parents and then you got me. You didn’t let it
get to you.”
Nick’s lazy smile returned, “I’m flattered, Carrots.”
“So,” Judy began awkwardly. “Everything you said was a trick?”
He gave her a confused look.
“You know…about Percy and me. Did it really bother you so much?”
Nick looked away, going silent and Judy’s ears lowered.
“Nick, please. I know things have been crazy with us but we’re friends, no matter what happens I want us to always be friends, and friends need to be honest with each other.”
There was a long moment of silence and Judy thought he wouldn’t say anything but then he took in a deep breath.
“Okay,” he exhaled.
He sat up, wincing slightly from his wounds. “Okay.”
His arms reached out for her and trapped her face in his grip, and then he was leaning forward with his eyes closed, his lips slightly parted and then Judy realized what was happening and her chest nearly exploded with the shock and joy.
He’s going to kiss me!? Here? Now? On a hospital bed when we just fought a criminal? He likes me? He likes me?!
Her mind babble was cut short when Nick suddenly bumped noses before falling on top of her squishing her onto the bed; he let out a rattling snore.
“What,” she said, not fully grasping what had just happened.
“Oh, did he fall asleep,” the voice of the nurse from before spoke up as she walked in, “That’s natural with the painkillers we gave him.”
“Oh,” Judy muttered as she climbed out from under her friend.
“Are you okay,” the nurse asked politely as she stepped over to pull Nick back onto his pillows.
“You look a little flustered.”
“He just surprised me,” Judy assured, “You know, with the spontaneous falling asleep, nothing else.”
The nurse hummed in agreement and politely shooed Judy off the bed so she could tuck the covers around Nick, “Also a polar bear driving a very nice limo is outside waiting for you and Miss Spotwood.”
Judy’s ears pricked up, that’s right. No one had told Sven they found Charlie.
“What about Nick,” she asked, unwillingly to leave him alone.
“He’ll probably be sleeping all day; hopefully he’ll be up and ready to leave by tonight. I was told by that polar bear that when he is ready to leave I’m supposed to call the number so they can pick him up.”
“We have a party to go to,” Judy told her, remembering Judy’s birthday but she still didn’t like leaving Nick.
“You better get to it then, that cheetah looked ready to leave.”
Judy relented and called a goodbye to the snoozing Nick before walking out the door.

Judy and Charlie sat in the back seat as they were driven to Tundra Town. The cheetah was a ball of nerves, impatient to see Sven.
“Do you remember what they made you do while you were hypnotized,” Judy asked.
Charlie frowned, her eyes darkening, “No. My mind went blank every time they made me go savage. But I wasn’t the largest predator there so I don’t think they did much to me.”
She swallowed, “I almost attacked Sven and Winter though didn’t I?”
“What makes you think that?”
“They had only paralyzed me when they broke in, I saw them send the text, and then I blacked out.”
“They don’t blame you,” Judy assured her. “Sven’s missed you so much; he’s been inconsolable without you.”
“I’ve missed him too,” Charlie’s voice was thick with emotion, “Thank you Judy, for saving me,
for bringing me back to him.”

“IT was mainly Nick,” Judy said, and then her heart skipped a beat as the hospital scene replayed through her mind again.

“I’ll thank him too,” Charlie promised.

They arrived at Mr. Big’s home and followed their polar bear escort inside, the usually elegant house was decorated in all kinds of childish birthday decorations, they passed one open door to see the courtyard that had hosted Fru Fru’s wedding, and it was being decorated with numerous large tables, one holding things like slides and bouncy houses, one for miniature tables and birthday cake, and another for presents. Judy mentally kicked herself when she realized she had forgotten to buy her goddaughter anything.

“Judy, there you are!”

Judy faced forward and beamed, seeing Fru Fru and her father sitting on Mr. Big’s desk, beside them stood Winter and Sven, who still looked depressed.

That is, until his eyes landed on Charlie.

“Char-”

“SVEN!”

The cheetah pounced on her mate who caught her and spun her around before they both tumbled to the floor, laughing with tears in their eyes. Charlie covered Sven in kisses and the reindeer’s arms were wrapped around her in a grip that said he wouldn’t be letting go anytime soon.

“You’re okay, you’re okay.” Sven’s voice cracked with emotion as he buried his face into his mate’s fur. “You’re okay!”

They pulled Winter into their hug who was crying tears of joy as well, and when that wasn’t enough they pulled Judy into the group hug as well. Judy felt warmth in her chest as she was practically squished by the elated larger mammals.

“I knew you and Nick could do it, I knew it!” Winter cheered once she and Judy were released. She grabbed Judy’s paws and they danced around laughing merrily.

“How about we take this celebration outside,” Mr. Big spoke up, “Before someone accidentally breaks something?”

“Judy come with me,” Fru Fru told her, “We have your dress.”

When inviting Judy to the party weeks ago Fru Fru had wanted to get Judy a new dress so the rabbit didn’t have to have her parents send one from home. The two had spend a Saturday dress hunting until they found one they both agreed was perfect.

Judy carried Fru Fru to her room, admitting on the way that the case had left her no time to buy her goddaughter a gift.

“Why don’t we take her for a girl’s day on the weekend,” Fru Fru suggested and Judy happily agreed.

A few mintues later Judy stepped out of Fru Fru’s room in a eggshell blue dress with a white bow wrapped around her waist and a flower choker around her neck, the silky dress reached to her knees and Judy couldn’t help spinning around and having it flow around her.

“You look beautiful,” Fru Fru exclaimed.

“So do you,” Judy told her. She wore a puffy pink dress that matched her personality as well as her looks.

They returned to Mr. Big’s office and with the two arctic shrews Judy and Winter headed out into the party. Baby Judy was already playing with the other birthday guests but pulled away from the crowd when she spotted her mother and godmother.

“Ju Ju!” she babbled, holding her tiny paws out to Judy who picked her up and nuzzled her with her nose, making the child laugh in delight.

The other children all turned their attention to Winter, cooing over how pretty her fur was which she took with flattered delight. Judy placed her goddaughter down so she could rejoin her friends. Fru Fru and her father were placed on the table for the adults who were chatting away. Judy walked over and thanked the polar bear who fetched her a chair before sitting down.

“Where’s Sven and Charlie,” she asked them.

“They decided to stay inside so they could be alone,” Mr. Big told her. “My daughter told me
about this Ironclaw case,” he went on, “You defeated her?”
Judy nodded, so relieved to not have to worry about the dangerous lioness anymore. “But it
wasn’t just me. It was mostly Nick, he was a real hero.”
Mr. Big didn’t look like he completely believed that statement but only nodded before turning to
talk to a friend who was starting to look tipsy.
Fru Fru smiled at her, “It sounds like you two made up.”
Judy couldn’t stop her lips from turning up into a smile, “You could say that.”
Fru Fru immediately scooted closer to Judy, “Tell me everything.”
Judy checked to make sure everyone else at the table were busy with their own conversation
before leaning forward, “He tried to kiss me.”
The little shrew let out a squeal of delight, “Shut up, shut up! What did you do?”
“Actually…he kind of fell asleep before I could do anything.”
Fru Fru frowned, “Maybe you should start from the beginning again.”

Nick was considering living in the hospital for the rest of his life as the doctor checked him over
and sent him out of the room with painkillers and fresh bandages.
It was one thing to try and kiss Judy; it was an entirely mortifying different thing to fall asleep
while trying. But more importantly, had Judy planned on kissing him back?
Outside the hospital he saw Kevin waiting for him with a limo, Nick bit back a groan.
Weeks ago Judy had officially named him her plus one for baby Judy’s birthday party. He had
tried to get out of it by saying he didn’t own a tux. Before he knew it he was being measured for a
suit Mr. Big’s employers would make for him. And he knew said tux was at that shrew’s place
now, waiting.
“Nick!” A sudden deep voice nearly made the fox jump out of his fur.
Finnick had appeared out of nowhere, carrying a CD and trying to catch his breath.
“My van…ran out…of gas,” he panted between gasps.
“Fascinating,” Nick replied, not sure why his friend was here.
When Finnick had caught his breath he looked up and glared at Nick, “You promised to get me a
meeting with Sven Jingle!”
Oh, that’s right.
“Perfect timing then, that’s where I’m going.” He turned to Kevin who he swore was smirking.
“This is my plus one.”
The polar bear rolled his eyes but opened the door for the two, Nick and Finnick climbed in.
“Don’t worry, by the way,” Nick told his old friend as they drove to Tundra Town, “I know I just
got out of a hospital but I’m fine, really, thanks for asking.”
“What’d you do to get yourself into the hospital,” the smaller fox asked.
“I defeated a psychotic criminal by sheer wit,” Nick said with no small amount of pride.
“Huh,” Finnick said, unimpressed, but that was probably because he didn’t believe what Nick
said.
“Now look Sven Jingle is at Mr. Big’s place so you need to be on your best behavior,” Nick
warned him.
“Mr. Big? Isn’t he that crime boss that you sold…?”
“Yes,” Nick replied flatly, “Yes, he is.”
When they arrived at their destination Nick was dragged to where his tux waited for him while
Finnick slipped away.
Nick walked out of the dressing room in a fancy black suit with a bright red tie and he admitted…
he looked good. Like, really good.
But there was only one animal whose opinion he wanted on his looks.
Kevin had disappeared after leading Nick to the dressing room and handing him his outfit which
left Nick to find the party on his own.
He made his way down the hall, his ears pricked for any noise, to his relief it didn’t take him long
to hear music, following the sound he found the door that led to the courtyard.
He walked out and his breath stopped.
The courtyard, while the tables still held bouncy houses and half finished cakes, was empty except for Judy who was swaying around the courtyard to the soft music that seemed to be coming from thin air.
“Hey, Carrots,” Nick said when he got used to seeing her in a dress.
Judy whirled around and smiled when her eyes landed on him, “Nick!”
She ran toward him, looking like she was about to hug him and Nick stretched his arms out to receive the embrace but at the last second Judy skidded to a halt. Her face was wary and Nick tried not to flinch, of course he ruined it. He tried to kiss her and fell asleep of course he ruined it.
“Should I hug you right now,” Judy asked, “What about the…bandages?”
“Oh, that,” Nick let out a loud breath of relief that made Judy blink in surprise. “No, no, it’s fine.”
Judy’s smile returned, “Good.” She wrapped her arms around his waist and Nick returned the hug. She pulled back too soon.
She looked him up and down, “Nice tux.”
He grinned, flashing his teeth, “Carrots, on a scale of 10/10, how hot am I right now?”
Judy broke into a laugh and Nick couldn’t tell if she was flustered by the question or not. Nick knew he was.
“I’ll give you a twelve,” she offered with a cheeky grin.
Nick tried not to smile like a dork, “Then it’s amazing you didn’t catch fire when you hugged me.”
The two beamed at each for an awkward moment that Nick decided he couldn’t handle.
“So,” he cleared his throat and looked around the empty courtyard, “Where is everybody?”
“After Judy opened all her presents everyone went inside to watch a movie,” she answered, “But I wanted to stay out here a little longer.”
“And dance alone,” he asked.
“Well…” Judy ducked her head, looking embarrassed. “A part of me had hoped you’d arrive and dance with me.”
Nick tried to ignore the quickening of his heartbeat at those words. “Well, I did promise I’d let you drag me to the dance floor the next time the opportunity presented itself.” He held out his paw, “And this is that opportunity.”
Judy took his paw without hesitation as they next song started. Nick pulled her to him and it may have just been him but he thought she fit perfectly in his arms. Mindful of their paws Judy kept her eyes on the ground as they swayed around the courtyard, Nick had a paw on her back and the other wrapped around Judy’s paw.
“Can’t you keep your eyes on me,” he asked playfully.
Judy looked up with an apologetic expression, “I don’t want to step on your feet.”
“Haven’t you danced before,” he asked as they continued to move to the music, Nick noticing how her dress twirled around her.
“Yeah, but only with other rabbits,” she answered, her eyes going back to the ground. “Not with a fox.”
He knew it was silly but Nick felt really happy hearing that, “In Gideon Gray’s face.”
Judy laughed, “Goodness, Nick are you ever going to let it go that I know another fox? We aren’t even that close. Besides, I already told you, you’re my favorite fox.”
“And I’ll never let him forget it,” Nick grinned and Judy rolled her eyes but was still smiling.
They spent a few seconds twirling around before Judy spoke up again, “Sing for me.”
“Really,” Nick’s ears perked up.
“You really don’t listen, do you,” she smiled, “I already said you have the voice of an angel.”
Nick smiled and started to sing along with the words, still swaying to the beat with ease, Judy rested her against him and warmth spread through his chest and he pulled her closer.
Judy giggled against his chest, “I can hear your heart; it’s beating like crazy.”
Nick chuckled awkwardly, “Imagine that.” He wondered if he should bring up the almost kiss but decided against it, it could ruin this moment and he definitely didn’t want that.
The song slowed to a stop and Nick’s ears lowered, waiting for Judy to move out of his arms. But
instead the rabbit grabbed both his paws and with a laugh started to spin around with him as the music got bouncier.

Nick grinned and he didn’t know whether it was from amusement or relief as he tightened his grip on Judy’s paws. He spun her under his arm before he released her paw and grabbed her waist, lifting her up into the air and continuing whirling around the courtyard, Judy’s peals of laughter music to his ears.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and Nick ended up breathing in her scent, it smelled of carrots and perfume, a combination he’d never thought he’d like.

Feeling his stomach starting to get sore from the dancing and laughter he placed Judy on top of a table, his paws remaining on her hips and she didn’t seem inclined to remove her paws from his shoulders.

They gazed at each other as they caught their breath and Nick tried to think of something witty or charming or romantic to say but for once his mind was blank, it was just him and his raw emotions for once and he had no idea what to do with him. He had no idea what to do about her, this crazy, wild bunny who had suddenly become the most important part of his life.

“Nick,” Judy’s words broke his thoughts and her smile had vanished, “Can I ask you something?”

“Anything,” he answered without thinking.

“Earlier at the hospital, did you try to kiss me?”

Nick gulped and removed his paws, his entire body turning hot with mortification. For a split second he thought about lying to her but then remembered he had promised they’d be honest with each other from now on. He nodded; his eyes looking anywhere but at her.

“And it wasn’t the medication that made you do it, was it,” she asked.

That Nick couldn’t help feeling a little offended by, he met her eyes with a scowl, “Of course not, I wouldn’t do that!”

Judy nodded, “Just checking.”

And then she leaned forward and smashed their lips together.

Nick’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets as all of his emotions boiled to the surface, as he tried to comprehend the obvious that Judy Hopps was kissing him. She pulled away all too soon, her eyes shining and she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and he knew he looked like an idiot right now, his eyes wide and shining like hers, his mouth slightly open, his ears pressed against his skull.

He didn’t know the next words were true until he blurted them out: “Carrots…I think I’m in love with you.”

Judy buried her face in his neck, muffling her laughter, his fur turning damp from her tears. Nick wrapped his arms around her and spun her around again, laughing as a bubble of joy and love burst in his chest, nearly stopping his rapidly-beating heart.

Mayor Leodore Lionheart was relaxing in his office with a cup of coffee, enjoying Zootopia’s night time skyline.

He had sent his guards home early; he was finally free of the fear that had plagued him for days. Lucy was dead.

A part of him couldn’t help but grieve for his half sister; her life had been heartbreaking to put it mildly. But there had been no saving her; she had been a threat that had needed to be put down. Now his city was safe.

Leodore had been about to drift off when he heard his office door opening, he sat up, finding it odd since he had been pretty sure he was the only one left in the building. Leodore’s heart dropped when he saw a figure he hadn’t seen in twenty five years.

“Hello, Leo,” Lucy said calmly, leaning against the wall as if she belonged in his office. “Do you want to play tag like when we were cubs? I remember how I always caught you…”
Lionheart stayed still, not moving a muscle under Lucy’s gaze, her eyes narrowed into glowing slits. Despite her calm air her fur was matted and in clumps, scratches ran over her arms and head as if she had ran her claws furiously over her skin.

“You were dead,” Lionheart breathed.

Lucy bared her fangs, “No, but someone is.” She suddenly looked over Lionheart’s shoulder, her eyes burning with a betrayed hatred.

Lionheart followed her gaze but no one was there.

“What are you doing here, Lucy,” Lionheart asked, fearing the answer.

Lucy turned her eyes back to him and snarled, “Don’t call me that. Now answer my question.”

“What question?”

“Where is our father?”

Lionheart furrowed his brow, “What are you talking about?”

Lucy suddenly jumped over the desk and knocked Lionheart to the floor, pressing a paw down on his throat. Lionheart desperately tried to push her away but his sister was stronger, and there was now a crazy look in her eyes.

“Where is our father, Leodore! Someone has to pay and it has to be him!”

“Lucy,” Lionheart gasped, “Dad died years ago.”

Her eyes widened and she took her paw off his throat, “…What?”

She suddenly whirled around and snarled at the air, “Shut up! I can do this on my own!”

Who is she talking to, Lionheart wondered in fright.

She turned back to Lionheart, now panting as if she couldn’t get enough air, “You’re lying; you have to be!”

He shook his head, “He died five years ago.”

“No, no, no,” she started pacing her room, digging her sharp claws into her scalp. “It can’t end like this, it can’t end like this!”

Lionheart discreetly reached for the phone in his pocket only to flinch when Lucy suddenly picked up his computer and slung it at the wall, smashing it to pieces.

“Shut up, Arachnid!” Lucy’s voice cracked and she looked ready to break.

She whipped around to Lionheart, “You’re a liar, Leo. Our father is still alive, and when I find him I will make him pay for how he treated me and my mother! And then I’ll come back for you.”

She turned and ran out of the room before Lionheart could even think of replying.

Judy and Nick went to bed with aching feet and sore sides. They had not spoken much since Nick’s confession and quietly walked into the guest room they had been given.

There were two beds and Nick silently crawled onto one, only for Judy to climb in beside him, curling into his side. Nick only smiled and wrapped his arm around her, Judy did the same.

Surrounded by Nick’s warmth and scent she slipped into the most peaceful slumber of her entire life.

The next morning Judy was the first to wake up, snuggling into Nick’s side for a moment before she pulled away and sat up. She smiled down at Nick’s peaceful sleeping face. She pulled his tux up slightly to check on his bandages, relieved they looked well in order.

Leaving him to sleep in, Judy walked out of the guest room to find yesterday’s clothes, wanting to get out of her now wrinkled dress. Down the hall she heard music and a deep singing voice; she smiled and followed the music.

She found a den and inside was Sven and Charlie and Winter sharing a couch, Charlie snuggled up into his mate’s side. To Judy’s surprise Finnick was there as well, standing by a CD player that was playing one of his songs, he looked uncharacteristically nervous, his eyes on the ground.

“Good morning, Judy,” Fru Fru sat on a table, with her baby in her arms. Baby Judy was holding
a stuffed polar bear that was nearly as big as the baby shrew. “I had yours and Nicky’s clothes washed.” She pointed to said clothes that were folded onto the table.

“Thank you,” Judy said and patted her goddaughter on the head who grinned goofily up at the rabbit. “How was the movie?”

“It was cute but I’m wondering what you were up to staying out in the courtyard,” Fru Fru asked with a sly grin.

Judy beamed at her, “Whatever makes you think that, Fru?”

“What did you do?”

“Nick and I may have…danced.”

Fru Fru placed her paws on her cheeks, elated, “Anything else?”

“…I kissed him.”

“YOU DID WHAT?!”

The rest of the room turned their eyes on the rabbit. Sven and Winter grinning like mad while Finnick looked like he couldn’t wrap his head around it.

Judy let out an adorable giggle, “I kissed him…and he said he loved me.”

“YES,” Winter practically screeched and Judy was surprised by how happy the fox was for him and couldn’t help a twinge of guilt for all the mean thoughts she had once had about her.”

“I knew I should’ve made that bet,” Sven shook his head but his smile was big.

“What are you all screaming about,” Nick walked in, his tux just as wrinkled as Judy’s dress; he opened his jaws in a loud yawn. His eyes found Judy and he gave her a sleepy smile which she happily returned, her heart picking up speed.

“Nothing,” Sven, Winter, and Fru Fru said in unison, their smiles practically breaking their faces.

Nick gave them a suspicious look before turning to look at Finnick, “So how’d it go?”

“He found me last night and I listened to a few tracks before going to bed,” Sven said, “And then I got up and listened to the rest and I have three words. I. Love. It!”

He jumped up and grabbed Finnick’s paw in both hooves, startling the small fox, “You got yourself a contract!”


While the room congratulated the fennec fox Judy fished her phone out of her pants pocket and was shocked to see she had twenty missed calls, all from Clawhauser.

She called his number, “Hello?”

“JUDY! Where have you been,” Clawhauser’s voice was loud and panicked.

“I spent the night at a friend’s,” she answered, “I didn’t have my phone on me. What’s wrong?”

“Oh, Judy,” Clawhauser moaned. “I have awful news. We got a call from Lionheart last night, Ironclaw is still alive.”

She nearly dropped her phone, her eyes widening with fear.

“Carrots,” Nick was looking at her with concern, “What’s wrong?”

She beckoned Nick to follow her outside and once they were in the hall out of the others’ earshot she put her phone on speaker. “Clawhauser, tell Nick what you just told me.”

“Nick’s there,” Clawhauser gasped, “Oh thank goodness I heard he was in the hospital. Are you okay Nick? Did you two make up?”

“Clawhauser,” the two snapped impatiently.

“Right, right, sorry. Lionheart called us last night and told us he was attacked by Ironclaw.”

Nick’s eyes widened and a haunted look crossed his face as he placed his paw on his stomach.

“Is Lionheart alright,” Judy asked.

“He’s fine, according to him Ironclaw mainly talked. She wanted to know where their father was but Lionheart told her he died years ago, she didn’t believe him. But he said the weirdest thing was that she kept talking to herself, and even said Arachnid.”

“Did Lionheart see him,” Judy inquired, thanks to Nick he wasn’t a big a threat as before but still who knew what he was capable of.

“No,” Clawhauser replied, “She was alone.”

“How much do you wanna bet Ironclaw killed Arachnid,” Nick asked, starting to pace.

“Bogo is out with some of the officers trying to find her,” Clawhauser continued, “But we’re back
“Thanks for telling us, Clawhauser,” Judy replied. “Keep us posted.”

She hung up and looked to Nick who kept pacing. “Can you think of anywhere she’d go?”

Nick shook his head, “She never said anything about that, oddly enough she thought that museum would actually last.”

“If only we could get in her head,” Judy sighed.

But Nick suddenly stopped and turned to her with a smile, “Carrots, you’re a genius! That’s it! We wanna catch a crazy criminal; we get help from a different crazy criminal!”

“You mean…”

“Yes.”

Decked up in their police uniforms once again Judy and Nick sat in the interrogation room and waited.

The door opened and a police gazelle walked in with a disgruntled sheep with an orange jumpsuit and handcuffs.

Dawn Bellwether sat in the chair opposite of the animals that had put her behind bars and fixed them with a glare, a glare they both smirked at.

“Smellwether,” Nick grinned and the sheep looked ready to bite his ear off.

“It’s been a long time,” Judy said, all professional. “How’s the food?”

“Terrible,” Bellwether replied, “Now cut the small talk and tell me what you want.”

“We need your help,” Judy began but before she could continue Bellwether threw her head back and laughed harshly.

“You want my help? Oh that is rich! You really are a dumb bunny.”

“This dumb bunny played you like a record,” Nick pointed out, “So what does that make you?”

Bellwether stopped laughing. “What makes you think I’d help you?”

“Because deep down we know you want what’s best for Zootopia, Bellwether,” Judy insisted, “Your methods were just…eccentric.”

“Crazy,” Nick answered, “The word you were looking for was crazy.”

“You think I’ll help you find that lioness that’s been making everyone feral,” Bellwether grinned devilishly. “Gee, if only the city had listened to me.”

“You laugh, Smellwether but I bet it just burns you up that you’re no longer the number one criminal in Zootopia,” Nick grinned nastily.

Bellwether snorted, “I can live with it. I’d rather see you two fail to protect the city you love ever so much.”

“We’d figure you say that,” Judy replied, pulling out her phone. “That’s why we had a talk with the Warden and decided if you were going to be difficult we’d move you to a different cell so you can make friends with a brand new roommate.”

She pulled up a picture and showed it to Bellwether, it was a mug shot of a crazy looking wolf who bared his fangs at the camera. Bellwether gulped.

“This is Wade Jones, an inmate here who I doubt is going to be released anytime soon. After all… he did spend his entire life chewing on things, from toys to furniture to other animals.”

“F.Y.I, his friends called him Frothy,” Nick added with an innocent grin.

Bellwether looked ready to strangle them both but then let out a groan, “What do you want me to do?”

“We want you to think,” Judy replied. “If you needed a place to hide from the ZPD where would you go?”

“A place where I feel comfortable,” the sheep answered, “Which would be my ‘office’ back at City Hall, the only place where everything went according to plan.”

That was something they could go off on, but Ironclaw didn’t have an old office.

“Do you think a house would work just as well,” she asked.

Bellwether shrugged, “I guess, it’s not like I know the lioness. But there, I helped you, so don’t move me into a cell with Frothy. I already have Spittle to worry about.”
Nick laughed as they got up to leave, “You got it, Smellwether. Have fun with your prison arts and crafts, and good luck out there on the courtyard.”

“When I get out of here fox you will be the first on my hit list,” she growled but Nick only smirked at her as the two cops walked out.

They got into their patrol car and Judy made her way to the hospital where Lionheart was. “Seems a little unnecessary,” Nick said on the way. “Clawhauser said he didn’t get hurt.”

“He’s the mayor, people get worried,” Judy replied. “But we need to ask him where Ironclaw’s childhood home is; I bet that’s where she’d hide.”

Nick nodded, “But can we agree that after this visit let’s avoid hospitals for a while?”

“Agreed,” Judy replied immediately.
Ch. 19: The Fall

Lionheart had been leaving the hospital when Nick and Judy caught up to him. They begged for any information on where Ironclaw may have felt at home.
Lionheart had pondered this for a moment and guessed the last place she was ever truly happy was at her old childhood home, he gave them an address before wishing them good luck.
“Stop her,” he said in a tired voice, “Do whatever it takes.” He then stepped into his limo and drove away.
But now was not the time to sneak around, this would be the final showdown, they both decided. With the help of the entire precinct they’d capture Ironclaw or die trying. They called Chief Bogo and told him the address and he and the rest of the officers were all too ready to climb into their patrol cars and that’s just what they did.
“Wilde,” Bogo spoke through the car’s radio, “Stay in the car when we get there, you can’t do your job in your condition.”
Nick cleared his throat, “Well sir, to quote Hamlet act three, scene three; line ninety two: No.”
Bogo let out an aggravated sigh, “I didn’t expect anything else.” He hung up.
“You do need to be careful,” Judy told him, her mind racing over all the bad things that could happen.
The same goes for you,” Nick replied, his face serious. “Be smart, okay Carrots?”
Judy nodded, “Okay.”

The address Lionheart had given them was not a house, at least, not anymore.
A large unfinished construction sight lay before the ZPD, and somewhere among those tarps and beams and metal sat a very dangerous animal.
The construction sight was going to one day be a large hotel complex, Bogo had already called in a warrant for the address and wasted no time walking into the area.
“Alright, we’ll split up into pairs and search,” Bogo replied, “But if you find her do not approach her, call for backup immediately and wait until the rest of us get to you.”
The police broke off and headed into the maze of unfinished building. Naturally Judy and Nick was a pair, each getting their own tranquilizer dart gun for their belts.
“I guess the entire street got destroyed,” Judy whispered to him.
Nick nodded his eyes up and scanning the hundreds of ramps and beams above them.
“Nick…” Judy breathed, “Do you hear that?”
Her ears flicked back and forth, she heard something. It was a mixture of snuffling and heavy breathing.
“Hear what,” Nick asked.
Judy’s eyes went to a pile of tarps that hung from a beam making a sort of tent. She pointed to it, “It’s coming from over there.”
Nick started to walk toward it but Judy quickly grabbed his arm, stopping him.
“What are you doing,” she whispered furiously. “You heard Chief Bogo; we need to call for the others.”
“We need to check to make sure it’s her,” Nick replied, “I won’t go after her, I’ll just check.”
When Judy still didn’t let him go he gave her a slightly frustrated look, “Carrots.”
“I’m scared,” Judy breathed, her ears lowered.
Nick’s face softened, and he placed a paw over her own, “Just stay close to me.”
He started to walk again and this time Judy forced her legs to move. They edged to the tarps and peaked in, holding their breath to not make any noise.
A crouched figure sat in the dirt; claws that used to flash and shine were now dinged and dirty as they left claw marks in the ground.
“It’s gone,” Ironclaw murmured, “It’s all gone.”
Nick and Judy shared a look before trying to step back to call for Bogo. But then Ironclaw turned her head to stare at them. The claw marks Nick had left over her eye looked infected, her expression looked broken and despite everything Judy felt her heart ache at the look even as her muscles went rigid.

“My home is gone,” Ironclaw told them, her voice hollow. “Why did they take it from me?”
The two could only stare at her, not wanting to make any sudden movements.
Ironclaw’s ear flicked and she turned her head, her eyes going sad, “Please stop talking, Arachnid. My head hurts.”
Nick made a move to call for the others but then Ironclaw turned her eyes back on them, staring straight at Nick.
“What made you so special,” the lioness growled softly, as she crawled out from under the tarps and standing up, “Why did you turn out so much better than me? We were both predators, we were both treated wrongly. Why didn’t the city turn on you?”
“Because I never let it,” Nick replied calmly. “I refused to let the bad things in Zootopia win.”
“You talk like there are good things,” Ironclaw muttered.
“There are,” Judy said with as much conviction as possible, even taking a step forward. “There are good things, Lucy! You just have to find them!”
The lioness’s eyes narrowed in on Judy and the crazy light returned, she bared her fangs.
Nick pulled his dart gun out but Ironclaw was too quick and jumped away, she landed on all fours with a feral snarl and raced at Nick. Nick tried to reload the dart gun but Ironclaw knocked into him, the dart gun falling from his paw as he slammed into a pile of beams, letting out a painful yelp.
Nick clutched his stomach and Judy knew the wound was opening up again.
“Hey,” Judy screamed and Ironclaw turned to glare at her, “I’m right here, Lucy! Come get me!”
The lioness snarled and took a slow step toward her. Nick tried to get back on his feet but fell to his knees with a hiss of pain.
Judy brought her paw to her own dart gun but Ironclaw charged at her with a roar and Judy just managed to jump back and scramble away in time. She ran up a ramp and the lioness gave chase as Judy started to make her way to the top of the unfinished building.
“Judy,” Nick cried out from below and her heart clenched but she kept going, she had to get Ironclaw far away from Nick. “JUDY!”
Judy turned around to glare at Judy’s retreating back. “Lucy, please,” Judy begged, looking over her shoulder at the lioness that seemed to be frothing.
“You don’t have to do this!”
“Yes, I do,” she screeched and jumped onto the railing in front of Judy, blocking her path. “If I stop now what am I?”
“Exactly what you are right now,” Judy said, “You aren’t going to gain anything from doing this!”
“I’ll have your corpse in my claws,” she growled and jumped at Judy who just managed to dodge, claws sliced through her belt and slid through her fur, almost making contact with flesh. Judy jumped away and kept on going, dread clogging her throat when she realized her dart gun had fallen off when the claws had slashed at her.
“If I can’t kill my father, I’ll have to make due with you,” Ironclaw said, loudly catching her breath as she slowly turned around to glare at Judy’s retreating back. “And then what will you be,” Judy demanded, they were almost as the top, “A crazy criminal with even more blood on her paws!”
“You deserve it.” Lucy slowly started to follow her, knowing the rabbit had no where to go. “You made everyone think Zootopia can be fixed when it can’t.”
“Yes, it can,” Judy insisted, reaching the top, the ground was far down below; she was forced to stop to catch her breath, a stitch in her side. “No place is perfect, I don’t think any place can ever be perfect, but it can be good. You just have to try; you have to understand that life is not one
good thing after another and you have to find the good and cherish it and help it grow!"
“Don’t give me any inspirational speech,” Ironclaw growled, climbing up onto the ramp with Judy, still on all fours but not making any move at the rabbit yet. “Just scream in fear.” Judy took a deep breath to steady herself and turned to face Ironclaw head on; meeting her eyes with all the courage she could muster: “I’m not afraid of you.” The lioness’s eyes widened then narrowed, “You should be, I can kill you right now with one slice to the throat.”
“Yes, you can,” Judy agreed, “You could kill me right now and that would be it, but I still wouldn’t be afraid of you. You know what I feel, Lucy?”
“Indulge me.”
“I feel sorry for you,” Judy answered. “Terrible things happened to you and you let it get to you so badly that you could never let it go, and you could never let the good things effect you.”
“What good things,” Ironclaw snapped.
“Your mother may have made some mistakes but she had loved you, didn’t she,” Judy demanded, “She just didn’t know how to show it. And I bet your father would’ve let you stay with him if you had just asked. And what about Arachnid, he loved you, Lucy! And you killed him!” Ironclaw had flinched when Judy had brought up Arachnid and Judy could see grief along with the crazy in her eyes. “That wasn’t supposed to happen!”
“A lot of things aren’t supposed to happen,” Judy replied. “When I was little and thought about who’d I fall in love with I never, not once, thought it’d be with a fox. But it was. I love him,” Judy’s voice cracked with emotion as she continued; “I love him so much, more than anything in the world. And knowing you’ll never feel how I feel about Nick, all I can do is pity you.” Ironclaw snarled, “Shut up…”
“I’m sorry, Lucy, I’m so sorry.”
“Shut up!” Lucy lunged at Judy and the rabbit ducked the lioness sailing over her. Lucy landed just at the edge of the ramp and struggled to keep her balance, only to fall, her claws digging into the ramp.
Judy stood up and hurried to her, “Lucy, let me help you up.” Ironclaw swiped at her but nearly fell again, hanging by her set of claws that were dug into the very edge of the ramp, her arm shaking as she tried to keep her grip.
“Lucy, come on.” She may have been a criminal but she had had a horrible life, and despite herself Nick’s words rang in her ears: Carrots, she reminded me of me. Judy reached her paw out to the lioness and Ironclaw grabbed at her again, this time grabbing Judy by the leg, the rabbit let out a cry as both she and the lioness slid off the ramp and fell. Judy grabbed at the air and managed to get a grip on the ramp on the second floor. Ironclaw had released Judy when they fell and used her own paw to grab onto the ramp; the lioness lifted her free arm to attack Judy.
“If I’m going down I’m taking you with me!” Judy braced herself for the pain of having claws slice her and then falling to her death and not getting to say goodbye to Nick or her family. But then Ironclaw’s eyes went above Judy’s head and widened with fear. She breathed one word to the empty air, “Arachnid.” Whatever was going through her head, whatever she thought Arachnid was doing, no one would ever know. Ironclaw’s grip slid off the ramp and she fell.
Judy turned her head away so she didn’t have to see, but the thump she heard seconds later rang in her ears. Judy took a deep breath and tried to move, to climb up onto the ramp but she was shaking with the strain, fire shooting up her arms. She realized she was going to fall. Judy closed her eyes and promised she wouldn’t cry when her paws slipped and she was falling through the air…for about half a second.
She let out a surprised yelp when a vice-like grip grabbed her arm and she jolted to a stop. Judy opened her eyes, looking up, and let out a joyous cry, “Nick!” The fox grinned at her, his paw tightening on her arm. “I got ya, Carrots.”
“I know you do,” she smiled, “Just don’t let me go.”
“Not even if you tried to run away from me,” Nick replied and pulled her up onto the ramp. Judy wrapped her arms around him as he fell onto his back, both letting out loud breaths of relief. “Do you think she survived that,” Judy asked, burying her face in his chest. She was still shaking slightly from the entire ordeal and didn’t want to move an inch. Not that she wanted to look over the edge to see Ironclaw anyway. Nick shook his head, “It’s over, Carrots; it’s finally over. You did it.” “I didn’t want to,” she admitted, taking comfort from the arm he slung over her. “I tried to talk her out of it.” “I know,” Nick replied, “I heard. You did your best, that’s all you can do. But now Zootopia’s safe, Sven, Charlie, Lionheart, Clawhauser, everyone. They’re safe.” Judy nodded, and then remembered his stomach, “Your wounds!” She tried to climb off him but Nick kept her pinned against his chest with both arms. “I’m fine,” he replied calmly, “They didn’t open up again, besides I really, really wanna hold you right now.” He grinned and started to chuckle, Judy furrowed her brow, giving up trying to get off him with his arms wrapped around her so tightly. “What’s so funny,” she demanded. “Oh, nothing,” he grinned at her, “It’s just so like you, only when you were facing a dangerous, bloodthirsty criminal did you finally admit you love me.” She blinked, then frowned, “You didn’t already know that?” Nick’s grin faltered slightly, “Well I can assume but it’s different when you finally admit it. Until then the guy who poured his heart out just kinda stands there, silent, waiting to see if he is something permanent or a passing fling, all the while the bunny of his dreams bats those pretty eyes at everybody and goes off into dangerous situations all on her own and he can only-” Judy placed her paw over his mouth, silencing him. “You dumb fox,” she grinned, “You know I love you.” “Yeah,” Nick grinned and ran his paws over her face, “I really do.” He leaned up and met her lips and Judy’s eyes fluttered shut, her chest warmth with relief and happiness and above all, love. She would always feel sad that Ironclaw would never know this feeling, but Judy did, and she would never let it go.
Ch. 20: Happily Ever After

It was a few weeks after Ironclaw’s death when Judy and Nick found themselves at the train station with Nick’s mother. Surprising the two officers the entire precinct hadn’t been surprised when they announced that they were officially a couple, though Clawhauser nearly broke glass with the squeal he let out. Sven, Charlie, and Winter begged to be invited to the wedding which had flustered them both. Finnick hadn’t really reacted and neither knew if he was happy for them or not. But by far Judy’s favorite reaction was Amelia’s.

They had visited her house for lunch one day and Nick told her they were dating. She had looked at them both with surprise before speaking, “You weren’t a couple already?” Amelia rubbed her paws together, looking anxious, “Are you sure I should be here? They might not like me.” Judy smiled at her from Nick’s side, “They’ll love you. Just like they loved Nick, who I was pretty sure wanted to jump out of the car when I first brought him to my parents.” “I did not,” Nick argued who didn’t seem much more relaxed than his mother.

She and Nick had called her parents a week ago to not only tell them they were dating but that they had bought an apartment together (Judy’s loud neighbors were surprisingly emotional when she told them goodbye). Her parents had stared at them with muted surprise while her younger siblings behind them jumped up and down with joy at the sight of Nick, her parents had to hang up to calm the kids down before they could share their opinion. But Judy had invited them to come see her new home and they could express their opinion then. She invited Amelia because she thought it would calm down Nick, and because she thought it was good for her parents to meet her as well, she didn’t like Amelia living by herself and wanted her to be friends with her own family.

The train arrived and skidded to a halt, Nick and Amelia stood up straighter and Judy smiled. The first to come out were the fifty youngest of her siblings that her parents had brought along; they caught one look at Nick and swarmed him with a jubilant yell, the fox disappearing in a mass of fluffy fur. Judy laughed loudly and Amelia smiled fondly.

“Judy,” Bonnie called out as she and Stu walked out of the train, Stu carrying loads of luggage. “Mom, Dad,” Judy hurried over and kissed her mother on the cheek before she helped her dad place the luggage on the ground and wrapped him in a hug. “I’ve missed you.” “Missed you too, hun,” Stu replied. “So, where’s your partner?” She couldn’t tell how he was feeling by his tone.

“He’s buried under my brothers and sisters,” Judy replied, then waved Amelia over. “But this is his mother, Mrs. Wilde; these are my parents Stu and Bonnie Hopps.” “It’s very nice to meet you,” Amelia smiled kindly; “Your daughter is the loveliest girl I’ve ever met.” Both the rabbits smiled, Stu shaking Amelia’s offered paw before Bonnie wrapped her in a hug which Amelia returned, surprised delight written all over her face.

“Help you with your luggage, Mr. Hopps,” Nick asked as he walked over, little bunnies still crawling over him. Stu let out a relieved breath, “I’d appreciate it. Come on, kids, get off Nick.” The bunnies grudgingly obeyed and Nick grabbed as much luggage as he could carry, Judy, Bonnie, and Amelia hurrying to help. Together the five adults led the gaggle of bunnies out of the train station and to Nick and Judy’s new apartment.

It was on the top floor of the complex, complete with a balcony that had a wonderful view of Zootopia’s skyline. The apartment consisted of a living room, kitchen, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a den. It was all covered in green carpet and blue walls that made it feel like a valley or meadow. Nick had guessed the weasel landlord was spoiling the ‘heroes’ of Zootopia by lowering the price of the apartment.
The little bunnies quickly broke apart from their parents to explore, the adults placing the luggage down before Stu and Bonnie slowly walked through the living room, examining it, Amelia, who had already had dinner here before, stayed by her son’s side.

“It’s very nice,” Bonnie admired, “Very spacious.”

Stu turned to them, “But isn’t it a little early to be moving in together?”

Nick tensed at her side as Judy spoke, “We’ve known each other for almost a year now. Dad, you practically moved in with Mom’s family after your first date.”

The words seemed to fluster her father who didn’t reply.

“Nick, give them the tour while I start lunch,” Judy told the fox before disappearing into the kitchen, Amelia followed after. “I’ve already had the tour,” she told Judy, “And I want to help.”

Judy nodded and headed to the fridge and pulled out carrots and fish. As Amelia helped her prepare the carrot casserole they naturally went back to their favorite topic: Nick’s childhood.

“So spill,” Judy told her, “What happened on his first day of school?”

“I thought it was adorable,” Amelia replied with fond amusement, “He fell head over tail with his classmate, Ellie.”

“How’d that go,” Judy asked, eager to know about Nick’s first crush.

“Not very far I’m afraid, Ellie had a crush on a wolf and spent snack time with him before Nick could even talk to her. For weeks he stomped around the house declaring he was done with love, never mind he was only five.”

Judy chuckled, “Poor thing. No wonder he didn’t want me to hear.”

“Oh the reason he didn’t want me to tell you this story was because Ellie was a bunny.”

Judy’s jaw dropped, “No! His first crush was a bunny?!”

Amelia nodded, “And now he’s dating you which I think is both ironic and cute.”

Judy smiled and turned back to the food, “Anything else new about him?”

“He’s quite the jealous type, isn’t he,” Amelia stated what Judy knew to be an obvious fact.

“Ah, did he tell you about Gideon Gray?”

Amelia frowned, “No, he told me you used to like the assistant mayor.”

“Oh, Percy,” Judy replied. “We’re just friends now, he actually went on a date with his old high school sweetheart last week; he told me. Lionheart even praised him in front of her, embarrassed the poor guy to death.”

Amelia chuckled, “I assumed he was jealous for no good reason, that’s a quirk of his.”

Judy nodded, “It can be exasperating but flattering all the same.” Her expression turned serious and she turned back to Amelia, “I really do love your son, Mrs. Wilde. He might get jealous from time to time but he’s the only one for me. You know that, right?”

“Oh of course I do, sweetie, I saw the way you looked at him when I first met you.” She patted Judy’s cheek and kissed her forehead. “My little boy is so lucky to have you.”

Judy, overwhelmed with emotion, nodded and turned back to her food.

It hadn’t taken long for Nick to give Stu and Bonnie the tour. And as soon as it was over they asked if they could have a private word with him on the balcony, with dread Nick had followed.

The two rabbits stood on the terrace looking awkward and Nick thought of thousands of terrible ways this conversation could go. The number one being they didn’t approve of their daughter dating a fox.

But what they said he’d have never guessed, “We wanted to apologize.”

Nick stared at Bonnie in surprise, “For what?”

“Judy told us that you had…overheard our talk after she was released from the hospital,” Stu said, still uncomfortable.

“Oh,” Nick replied, that day felt like it had happened years ago.

“And it wasn’t fair of us,” Bonnie put in, “We were scared for our daughter but that was no excuse to blame it on you.”

“I blamed myself too,” Nick told her, they both seemed surprised at his words. “When we became partners I promised myself I’d look after her, and I almost broke that promise. But I promise you I...”
love your daughter, more than I thought possible.”
They smiled. “No need to get worked up,” Stu told him, “We know how you feel Nick, and we’re
glad for you both.”
Bonnie smiled, “Just make sure our daughter doesn’t get into too much trouble.”
Nick was so relieved and happy by this acceptance that he wanted to cry, but instead he nodded
and wrapped the two into a hug. The rabbits were surprised by the sudden affection but returned
the hug nonetheless.
When Nick pulled away they returned inside to help Judy and his mother prepare lunch, the smile
never leaving his face.

Judy had a nice dinner with her parents and Mrs. Wilde, while Nick was dragged into the living
room to eat with the bunnies. After the dishes were washed the children’s sleeping bags were laid
out on the living room floor and they were all tucked in. Bonnie and Stu vanished into one of the
guest rooms while Amelia took the other, Judy and Nick snuggled in their own bedroom.
“I think it turned out well,” she told Nick who was nuzzling her neck.
“Yep,” he agreed, his lips pressed against her fur. “It turned out well. Your parents love me.”
She smiled, running her paws over his ears, “I know that. And your mother absolutely adores
me.”
“Not as much as I adore you,” Nick grinned, rubbing her shoulder.
“Of course not,” she giggled, “But she did tell me some interesting things.”
Nick pulled away and looked at her with dread, “What was it this time?”
She grinned, “I know about Ellie.”
Nick rolled off her and buried his head into the pillow and Judy laughed harder. “Don’t get
embarrassed!”
“Why can’t my mother ever stay quiet,” he moaned into the pillow, his fur prickled with
mortification.
“She also told me that you were still pretty jealous of Percy,” she laid across his back. “You really
are the dumbest fox I know.”
“What does that say about the bunny who’s in love with me,” Nick asked, still hiding his face in
the pillow.
“That she didn’t fall in love with your brains,” she replied, “Good thing he’s such a charmer.”
“Sorry, Carrots, but you’ve never been jealous so-”
“Never been jealous,” Judy sat up, “Of course I’ve been jealous.”
He peeped out from the pillow, “Over me?”
“Yes,” she replied, “For the longest time I thought you liked Winter.”
“Oh,” Nick smirked, “Imagine that.”
“Don’t you smile,” Judy pouted.
“You’ve been laughing at me,” he shot back.
“It’s different, you…you had options,” she tried to explain.
Nick cocked his head, “Options?”
“Yes, look at you,” she indicated to him, “You’re all handsome and charming and brave and
could have any girl you’d want. I’m just…me.”
“She’s says that like it’s no big deal,” Nick shook his head. “Trust me, Carrots, I’m the lucky
one.”
“No you’re not, I am.”
“No, I am.”
“No, I-”
Nick grabbed at her and pinned her down, kissing her into silence. Nick pulled back with a
devilish grin and Judy smiled back, her eyes fluttering. “It’s a tie.”


One month later

Judy decided Nick looked good all dressed up and dapper and standing at the altar. They had matched on purpose, Judy choosing a pretty, slightly puffy, purple dress that Fru Fru had chosen for her. Nick met her eyes and winked, Judy smiled.

Nick cleared his throat and turned his attention to the two fancily dressed sloths before him, “Do you, Flash, Flash, Hundred Yard Dash, take this lovely little sloth to be your mate?”

“I…” Flash spoke slowly (as usual), “…Do.”

As Nick asked the same question to Priscilla Judy looked around the church, on one side was Flash’s family, on the other Priscilla’s. Judy sat with Flash’s family as it was him who called Nick and asked him to marry him and Priscilla, although it took nearly an hour for him to ask the question. Judy and Finnick had come with him to be his plus one and now the fennec fox was snoring on Judy’s shoulder.

When the soon to be wedded couple finished their vows Nick stood up straighter, “I know pronounce you sloth and mate, you may kiss the bride, Flash. Take your time.”

As the crowd slowly stood up to applaud the newly weds Judy elbowed Finnick, making the fox jolt awake, half singing before realizing where he was. He glared at Judy who cocked a brow at him.

Finally Flash and Priscilla’s lips met and Judy and Finnick stood up to clap along with the rest of the sloths, it was the longest applause of Judy’s life.

“So you’re sure that was legal,” Judy asked Nick as everyone made their way to the wedding dinner.

“Of course,” Nick replied, pulling out a certificate, “I can marry anywhere in Zootopia except for Tundra Town and Wild Street.”

Judy only rolled her eyes as they followed the rest of the sloths and Finnick. Said fox was climbing onto a stage with his band. Thanks to Nick, Flash has hired him to play for his wedding, something Judy knew Finnick was grateful for but would never admit it to Nick.

The two leaned against the wall, Finnick starting a slow song as Flash and Priscilla shared the first dance.

“I’m happy for them,” she told Nick. “They’re so cute together.”

“Mmm,” Nick replied, his paws folded behind his back then started to chuckle quietly.

“What,” Judy looked at him.

“Flash has the same certificate,” he told her, casting a sly look at the rabbit.

Judy frowned, then her eyes widened. “Did you just propose?”

“Woah, woah, Carrots,” Nick waved his paws, “I know you’re a bunny but let’s take this slow, k?”

Judy was still trying to get over the horror that Flash would marry them off, that would be the longest wedding ever, not that she was planning on marrying the fox…anytime soon anyway.

Nick was still smiling at her, “We’ve done good, Judy.”

She blinked at the use of her first name, “What do you mean?”

“Night Howlers…Ironclaw…Flash’s wedding…we’re really doing some good, huh?”

Judy smiled at him warmly, “And we’ll keep doing that, no one’s gonna stop the best cops on the ZPD!”

Nick nodded with a playful grin, “You bet we are the criminals will tremble in our shadows!”

The first song finally ended and Finnick immediately started the next song and Judy instantly recognized the first chord.

“No.” She breathed.

“Your eyes glowing like the moon.”

Other sloths started to head onto the dance floor and Judy whirled on Nick, “This is all you, isn’t it?”

“Your fur makes me want to swoon.”

“Hey,” Nick placed a paw over his heart in mock pain, “This happens to be a very popular song, Carrots. But I may have requested this to Finnick, after all he got this gig because of me, he owed me one.”
“And if I could howl, howl you know I would.”
Judy placed a paw on her hip, “I say, Nick Wilde, it’s almost like you’re trying to seduce me with your friend’s band.”
“Because you make me feel feelings I never knew I could.”
“That depends,” Nick replied, “Is it working?”
“You didn’t need my favorite song to get me in your arms,” Judy replied.
“You’re as pretty as a flower; over my heart you hold so much power.”
“Well then,” Nick dropped to a knee and offered his paw, “Would you give me the greatest honor of sharing a dance, Miss Hopps?”
“You foxes,” she giggled, taking his paw, “You’re so dramatic.”
“And if I could sing, sing I would, because you make me feel feelings, I don’t know if I should.”
Nick pulled her to him and they waltzed onto the dance floor. Nick singing along with Finnick and Judy’s face hurt from smiling.
“And if you’ll hold me, hold me true.”
Simultaneously they pulled each other closer at those words, Judy practically buried in his chest, hearing his heart thumping madly. He spun her around, her feet leaving the floor.
“I don’t want to be anywhere if it’s not with you.”
Some of the dancers had stopped to smile at the couple and even the band had their eyes on them, the heroes of Zootopia.
“If I could howl, howl I would.”
Nick stopped spinning and dipped her, his white teeth flashing.
“You make me feel feelings I never knew I could.”
Their noses touched and Nick’s eyes were shining like emeralds, “I love you, Judy.”
She smiled back, joyful tears nearly blurring her vision, “I love you too, Nick.”
And then he kissed her.

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