

Erika's Ferns

Part 1

July 23rd 2004

My therapist said to buy a diary and write in it. So I did. It's overpriced. I don't know why I paid 18 credits for this stupid thing. It has a waterproof casing with a zipper and it's all fancy. Maybe that's why I need it? I'm impulsive and stupid. Anyway. Buy it and write in it. Done and done. Maybe he'll shut up now.

July 30th 2004

Okay, so I had another session today and he scolded me. I'll start using this. He insists that it'll help. I asked what to write because, I don't even know! He suggested that I narrate my life, work out my feelings that way. It feels like a load of crap, but, I guess I'll give it a try.

So, here it goes. My name is Ericka Saunders. I was born May 3rd 1983. So I'm 21 at the start of my stupid little book. Yay? I'm going to school in Albany New York. I'm trying to be a botanist, but I'm a year over. This is my 5th year here. I do fine with most of my classes, but I just can't seem to get out the door. I've tried focusing on the medicinal functionality of lectins. There's a very specific type of fern that grows up in the mountains not far from here that I think would have the ability to really extend someone's life. I've tried to prove it three times now. I've worked with some of my roommates, one of which was a biology major, to prove the point, but the professor just keeps shooting it down! He says that I'm a botanist, not a medicine woman. He doesn't believe in homeopathy. Like, where does he think medicine comes from? Magic??

Ok yea, some of it is magic, but most of it's not! You can rely on nature. With magic, you never know what you'll get.

Either way, I just have to keep working. I don't have anything else to write on but I guess I could just posit some boring theory about plant immunity or... the value of sap. Who knows. Just something to get me out of this place. I know these ferns have value! I don't know why he's shitting all over my work.

I get new roommates every year, ya know? I rent the same four-bedroom four bath dorm style apartment year after year, but I keep getting new people. This year, one of them is a meerkat named Sadie. She has a boyfriend... Deacon... that won't leave me alone. I've tried to tell this muscle-brained bear that I'm not into guys, but he says I just... haven't been mated right. Disgusting pig of a man.

I'm not a social person in general. I spend most of my time in my room, but since I'm the oldest here now, I've wound up being the 'den mother' for the group. I'm the only one that knows how to cook. Shit, I wouldn't be surprised if I was the only one that knew how to read. These girls are so dumb. I just... can't stand any of them, but I have to take care of them, or they'll find up trashing the apartment and it'll be *my* security deposit that gets withheld... again.

August 6th 2004

Better. That's what my therapist said. What I wrote was better. I guess I'm doing the right thing. He says there's a lot of anger and frustration in my words. No shit? I'm in my 5th year of a 4 year degree. I'm in this dorm with dumbasses and this bear that does NOT live here that always seems to BE here! I swear to Soth he tried to sneak into my room the other day. If he lays a hand on me he's gonna find out real quick that wolf fangs are a lot bigger than they look! I'm not above biting someone to defend myself! He'd better keep that disgusting cock of his away from me or I'll bite it off and spit it in that stupid meerkat's of a girlfriend's face!

Yea, he's gonna say I'm being angry again. I *am* angry! These people drive me up the wall! I think tomorrow I'm gonna go up the trail a bit. I need more samples for my thesis. I just... I'm stuck on this idea. I know it'll work! This fern is something special. I don't know... I'm probably just a moron barking up the wrong tree. At least I'll get out of this stupid apartment, though.

August 7th 2004

I love it out here. I took my diary with me today. Drove out past the Hudson, a few hours really. I'm as far away from school and... society as I could ever possibly be, sitting beneath a tree, writing away. There's birds chirping around me, squirrels and chipmunks here and there, and, a rather generous supply of the ferns I've been looking for! There's an old, abandoned railway that goes through there. Some people use it as a trail, but most don't even know it exists. I've been coming up here for the last 5 years when I needed to relax.

I learned about the ferns when I hurt my leg, actually. You're never supposed to hike alone, but, like I said, I'm stupid. I don't like other people that much. I slid down a hill and cut myself pretty bad on some rocks that were jutting out. Ya know, those... flat ones that sheer off with time? I'm no geologist, don't judge me. Anyway, I landed on one of those ferns and didn't even realize my leg was cut until I peeled it off. It hurt like hell! So... I put it back on and went back to my SUV and went home. By the time I got there... my wound was healed! That's why I started looking into these things. That's why my thesis is about them.

Places like this make me feel reflective. I'm a bank teller when I'm not at school. I sit in a drive through window all day depositing checks and handing out money, letting people yell at me when their overdraft fee makes them even more in the red than they were before, struggling to hear obnoxious people over their loud diesel motors... It's close to campus so I can just take the sidewalk. I get cat calls sometimes, it's disgusting. Why are people like this?

Maybe if I had a partner... maybe if I wasn't alone, ya know? Someone else that's into nature? Someone to spend time with out here in the woods! Someone like Macey. Gods but I miss her. If she were here, we could both just sit under this tree, shoot the shit and watch the day go by. It's not much fun in the winter, but, during the summer like this? It's absolutely gorgeous here, and it's gonna be a gorgeous fall, too. I just know it.

I had a girlfriend in highschool. Macey. She was a mixed breed. German Shephard and border collie. A shollie! You would not believe how cute she was. Those adorable floppy ears and that medium weight fur... that mixed up almost nonsensical fur pattern... gods but she was adorable. We got along pretty good, she wasn't much for the outdoors, though. The park was the best I could get out of her.

Heh, I used to joke with her that we could go to the park and play ball! One time I even got her to agree, thinking I meant baseball instead of fetch. I taunted her with that for months.

That summer after we graduated was the best and... worst time of my life. Best because I was with her. Worst because... well she had a scholarship for some school in Texas, and I was staying right here in Albany. I wasn't smart enough to get a scholarship, and my family... well... let's just say, I'm the first in the last several generations to even finish highschool. I have a long lineage of blue-collar relatives. 'No-collar' as my dad would put it.

Well, I can see the shadows getting a bit long, guess I'll gather up a few fronds and take them back to the lab on campus. It's gonna be a late night.

August 8th 2004

Oh god, what've I done?!

Okay okay... this is... THIS IS STUPID! I'll stay here for now. Gods, I'm still bleeding somehow. Shit!

August 14th? I think? 2004

I've been in this old railway tunnel for a while now. A week? Just over a week? I don't know. I left my diary in my car on the night of the 7th. That's the only reason I have it now. Thank the gods I still have it! I'd be going insane.

So, I guess... I'm just gonna confess here.

It was like... 3am on the 8th before I got back to the apartment. I was exhausted from being out near the trail all day and then... I got on a roll at the lab! I found a lot of useful info! It's... I guess it's all still in my car. Not that it matters. It's not like I can...

Deacon was at the apartment, because of course he was. His bimbo bitch of a girlfriend was passed out naked on the couch, apparently, they'd been taking Sylin. Or at least, she was. He tried to get me to take it... prepped a needle, tried to force it on me. You know what that shit does! It makes you forget... he was gonna fucking rape me and make me forget that it happened. I'M NOT STUPID! I told him I'd rather die than let that gross cock of his get near me and he just... he wouldn't stop!

We fought and somehow, I wound up in the kitchen and... the knife was still on the drying rack. I'm pretty sure he's dead. I don't know how many times I stabbed him, but I didn't stop until he let go of me and I could roll him off. He cut me up really bad when he threw me into the coffee table. Gods, I'm surprised it didn't break my back!

I drove back out to the trail, left my keys in my suv and limped as far as I could. I didn't know what to do! I couldn't go to the police! With the Sylin and the stabbing...they'd never believe me! I was in the lab alone! I had no alibi, and Sadie sure as fuck wouldn't remember! I'm the weird quiet girl, the wolf... the villain in every story, even all these years after the Jagdfrei! They'd never believe me.

I didn't even know this old railroad tunnel existed. It's well off the trail, and hard to see. I'm not even sure how I found it, but it's been my savior. I've been in here using the ferns to treat my wounds. I made a makeshift bed out of some heavy leaves. I can't even go back to the trail. No doubt they'll be looking for me out here. I have to lay low.

I don't have a long term solution. I can't just... live in the woods like some crazy hermit! I'll have to face the music eventually. I just... I just can't right now.

I'm running out of food, though. I'm not really sure what to do.

August? Late August, 2004.

Been a while. I've started hunting. How? Don't know. I just seem to know how to do this. There's a stream not far from the tunnel, and I've been able to use a spear for fishing. I have my lighter still, and I keep a knife in my bag, so I've been having fish and... other animals every day. This isn't so bad. My wounds have healed like they were never even there. Take THAT Dr. Farric! You were wrong! This stuff works! Was it Farric? Ferric? Or was he just a Ferret and I'm completely wrong? Doesn't matter.

My clothes are getting torn up out here. I'm not sure what to do. Winter will be here in a few months and I don't even have a coat. I might could go back down to my car, but, I honestly don't remember where it is. I had to read back. I left the keys in it. Why would I do that? It's probably been stolen by now.

The funny thing is, no one's come out here looking for me. I saw some hikers a few weeks ago, I think, but I stayed out of sight. Thankfully they didn't find my cave. It's bad enough they're in my territory. At some point I have to go back. I have to go home and face the music. I killed that bear. Deacon, my older entries called him. I honestly didn't remember. Shit, at this point, I don't know that I even remember my way back to town. I'm sure I can find it, though... when the time comes.

Fall 2004

I have no idea what day it is. I think it September, but late. Maybe October. Leaves change, getting crunchy. It makes prey easier to hear. No more fish. Takes too long, not enough food. I track larger prey now. Raccoon, rabbit, boar, deer. Sometimes hard to catch, harder to take down. Deer run, but I'm fast. Surprisingly so. It feels like I've changed somehow. I'm not just running along on two legs with a spear or something to hunt. I hunt on all fours. Make my pants feel weird. Like they don't fit right to my legs now. My claws are big. I can see, they get in the way of writing. Should I go home?

Where is home? Tunnel is home, but, I mean the other home. Other home is where the bear was killed. I can't go. They'll hurt me. I can't go back. This isn't so bad. I hunt well, I eat well. My lighter ran out. No more cooked meat. No more fire, unless I find flint. I am looking. For now, meat is raw, meat is good. String it up, let it drain. Makes eating less messy. My clothes are ruined. Maybe I should take them off.

Some still come near. Hikers in my territory. They don't look for me. Why? Why did they never look for me? I follow on all fours. I keep my head down. They can't see or hear. They act so blind. They would do poor as hunters.

I've got a few nicks and scratches when hunting. That's nothing new. Every time I just use fern. Fern heals. Fern makes it better. Ferret was wrong.

Late Fall 2004

Still none look. Hunting easier without cloths. Put aside. I am changing. All fours always. I can write. I can read. Why bother? Hunt deer, boar, easy. Food plenty for me. When hurt, use fern. Always use fern.

Snow is falling. My fur thickens. Winter comes. I must gather more fern. I must gather bedding to make nest. I must be warm. Clothes shreds will be warm. If hiker trespass... maybe they make warm with clothes and bedding. Maybe carcasses of prey make warm. Maybe carcasses of hikers, too.

Wintur 20004

Hiker found cave. Hiker food. Carcass warm. Meat tender. Fern heals.

Part 2

April 3rd 2013

I... I think she wants me to write in this. Ericka, it seems. She nosed it at me two days ago when... when I woke up. She'd bandaged my wounds with some kind of fern, but why? She caused them! I don't understand.

I can't really tell what I'm even dealing with here. I thought it was just some kind of giant wolf but, the more I looked at her the more I realized that it wasn't just some animal. It used to be a person! Now I see that it used to be a woman named Erika. Has she really been here 9 years??

My name is Rebecca Gnead. I was born August 13th 1991. I'm a wolf. I was out hiking with my boyfriend Patrick. He's... he's a red panda. We found this old train tunnel and we started to explore and... she came back and found us. Apparently, this is her home. Patrick is... oh gods! She dragged him off... I have no idea where he is, but... for the last two days she's been bringing me cooked meats that... I'm afraid of what they might be. I refused to eat it at first, and... she didn't make me! But after being here so long my stomach's starting to gnaw at my spine and I... I broke down and tried it. It's like nothing I've ever tasted before.

She sits on all fours. She moves like an animal... if you didn't look close at the few strands of hair still on her head, you'd think she was just an enormous brown furred wolf. There's definitely intelligence behind those eyes, and... she doesn't really seem hostile to me, but... she certainly won't let me leave. Even though my leg's already healed, she gets in my way and growls at me every time I try.

I tried to talk to her... called her by name. I remember reading something about a missing woman. Apparently, a bear at campus got into a fight and got stabbed up real bad a decade ago, but he didn't die. He was arrested for dealing Sylin. He never said a word about where the girl had been. Turns out... she'd been up here terrified that she was going to suffer the consequences of defending herself. Poor thing.

I told her all of this but she just snorted at me and turned her back. Gods, she looks so much like an animal. What could've done this to her? She keeps talking about that fern in this diary... the one she used to heal my leg. Is this gonna happen to me, too? Shit. I have to get out of here!

April 6th 2013

I'm lucky I'm alive right now. Why is she keeping me here?? Is she afraid I'll tell someone? I told her I won't! She even seems to understand, but she won't let me leave!

She was out doing... something earlier and I managed to get some fresh air. The tunnel's stifling, and it's dark. I looked around and didn't see her, so I started to head down the hill to see if I could find the trail. Instead, I found what's left of Patrick. I know why the meat tasted funny now. I should feel sick, but... I don't somehow. I don't even know that I'm all that surprised, really. What else would a weird, mutated wolf monster feed me except my own fiancé's meat?? It's like every horror movie ever.

Is she saving me for later?? Am I just preserves?? I don't understand. I don't wanna die! There's no cell service out here, and I don't dare yell for help. She'd take out any hiker that tries to come close.

April 6th 2013

Weird evening. She's sitting here with me beside the fire she had me start, resting her head on my lap like a dog as I re-read her diary to her. She fell asleep and I decided to start this entry. Reading about her old partner Macey makes me wonder if I'm here for a different reason. I think she's... lonely.

How much of Ericka is still inside this big fuzzy wolf creature, I'm just not sure, but it's pretty obvious that she doesn't want to harm me. She just wants to keep me here. So long as I stay, I'm safe. Why'd she kill Patrick, though? And why am I so calm about his death? He was fiancé! My entire future! I'm not even five miles from a main-line trail in the Catskills and here I am trapped in a train tunnel with a monster, having eaten my future husband for breakfast, lunch and dinner for the last few days!

This is so fucked up. Maybe I should just make a run for it. She'll either kill me or let me go. Either way... I won't have to stay here and wait to turn into a monster like her. Even now though, I can't help but feel sorry for her. Other than a bunch of hikers that've been missing out in these woods for the last 9 years, and... what she did to Patrick and I... she never did anything wrong! And I think it's safe to say, she's not exactly in her right mind right now. This was an educated woman on her way to a scientific breakthrough. Now she's... just a... dumb beast.

April 10th 2013

Oh boy did I fuck up. On the 7th, I waited for her to leave for her morning hunt and I snuck out. I started heading down the hill toward the trail. She saw me and quickly ran up to block my path. When I tried to get around her she moved again. Finally, I made a run for it, pleading with her to just let me go home. She tackled me and bit me on the leg. She can talk! Sort of. While she was standing over me she looked at me with those still blue eyes and she barked a commanding "NO!" at me. I tried to plead but she just repeated it.

After a moment, she stepped off and waited for me, but as soon as she turned her back, I bolted for the trail again, screaming for help. She tackled me again and bit me, this time holding her teeth to my throat, staring me in the eye to let me know that she'd rather kill me than see me leave her. I pleaded again. Let's go home, go get help... maybe they can... fix you. I reminded her of the ferns, her botany degree, her name... she wouldn't hear it.

She stepped off again and stared at me. I was about to try it again. I told her, I'd rather die than be a monster like her. Her ears actually started to splay. Does she know what's happened to her? Is there anything in there?? I thought I was getting through but... just then... a pair of hikers responded to my screams.

She made me watch. After she'd killed them, I helped her drag them back to the tunnel, and she... prepped the meat right in front of me, all the while looking at me to silently tell me it was my fault that they were dead.

I have their IDs right here. Marjorie Hill, a beaver, 37, and her husband Huel, 42. I guess I know what I'm eating tonight.

The worst thing is... I've had to use those damned ferns again to heal my wounds. I'm pretty sure that's bad news for my future. Gods... I'm gonna wind up just like her. I have to *do something*!

April 11th 2013

We've been arguing. She talks to me at least. Single words, or just two to make a point. Things like 'no leave' or 'this home.' ... I don't know if her mind is limited, her language, or both. Either way, her memory is pretty much shot. When I ask her about Albany or Macey, Sadie, any of the things she wrote about, she says she doesn't remember them. Well, she just shakes her head, but I think that says enough. When I ask why I have to stay, she says... family. I think she's.... claimed me as her mate or something. I guess that explains why she didn't kill me when I tried to get away.

Beaver meat is surprisingly tender. It's juicy, too. I should be horrified. I should be sick to my stomach even at the thought of eating this stuff, but as I write with my right hand, I'm eating with my left, and it doesn't bother me at all.

I feel bad that they died because of me, but I don't feel bad that their bodies aren't going to waste. I wonder if they have a family? I hope we're not making orphans with this.

My objectivity about the Hill family really has me worried that I'm losing touch with reality. I had to go back a few pages to look up my last name. I know that I'm Rebecca, but I didn't know how old I was, what my birthday was or even my last name. Gnead. My name is Rebecca Gnead. I'm 22 years old. I.. think I'm from Albany? Or was I visiting? I don't remember now. I don't even remember Patrick. I don't guess it matters. If I can't get out of here soon, I'll just be another naked beast like her, wandering around hunting prey in our territory. I wonder if she'll teach me what to do. I wonder if I'll be any good at it.

At least, if I hunt with her, I won't be eating hikers anymore. That's the more ethical solution, isn't it?

Summer 2013

It rings! How? So long! How it rings?? Phone from beaver. So long. I looked, I tried to answer, Ericka said no. She stomped phone. Too late for home now anyway. Changing like her. I hate it. She wonders why I still write. Even in this short amount of time I feel my mind coming back, but it will slip again when pen is down.

Fern must be the cause. We use for injury. We heal, but we change. Is this life better? Hard to remember. Feels sad. Like lost something. Reading old pages hurts now. Hard to know what said. We are mates now. We mate. We are female. She knows well what to do. I long for pups. Perhaps winter, we find a male that will give us pups.

Am I so far gone that this is what I think? My own thoughts, and my moments of clarity, terrify me. What will my next entry be? When will it be? Will another be? What to say? Nothing. Sleep now. Hunt early dawn.

Cold 20...?

Snow comes. Ericka, why do you write? To keep myself. I say she do same, but she refuse. I remind of name. I remind of Rebecca.

Hikers come, explore tunnel. They die. Food again. Rather hunt. No sport in hiker prey. Cloths make bed warm. Tunnel on internet. Bad for us. I say move. Ericka no. Tunnel home. Territory ours.

I say bad comes to hurt. Ericka no. Defend home. I remind gun. Ericka unsure.

No pups yet. We mate. We female. Need male for pups. No males. Hikers not wolf.

Dead hiker prey makes sad. Why? I miss something. What is it?

We like them once. Why sad? Life is good. Well fed, good prey. Too many hiker.

Go back. Ericka No.

Warm

Many come. More and more. They look fern. They take fern. We stay away. They see, they run. We chase! One falls. Wolf! Male. Pups?

He rests now. More might come to ~~remind~~ retrieve him. Ericka is not worried, but I am. We...are not what we once were and fear return might harm. I ask him to write when he awakens.

Part 3

June 14th 2023

This... thing... keeps telling me to write. Wel, she's actually saying 'read, write.' I've already skimmed through it, though. There's two of them. Large feral wolves, the size of a person on all fours. The one that's speaking seems to be Rebecca, which would make the other one with a little gray on her muzzle Ericka.

If they hadn't spoken to me I'd never believe it. We knew that the ferns had some... anomalous properties, but, I had no idea it could do something like this. I wasn't sent out here to study them, just to retrieve them for the team. After seeing what she wrote about pups... I'm kind of... well... scared.

My name's David Tanibard. I'm a wolf, which seems to be the only reason I'm still alive, and, I was born in 89. We're about an hour and a half northwest of Albany, New York, in the Catskills, in the old Western Passage New York train tunnel. It's sometimes called "Wolf's Howl Pass." It's been rumored for years that it was inhabited by dangerous animals, but it's so far off the trail people used to never come out here, or... they rarely did. You have to cross a ravine that used to have a trestle connected to even get here, so it's not for anyone except the most ardent hiking enthusiast. Or train nerd, I guess.

Ericka keeps pacing in front of me, her head lowered, her eyes locked onto me. She seems to think I'm gonna try to run which... isn't likely with how badly she chewed up my leg. They've wrapped one of the fern fronds around the wound. It doesn't hurt and, well I know it's gonna heal pretty quick. What I don't want happening is... well... what obviously happened to them. So right now I either have to convince them to let me go, convince them to come with me, or... hope that my team comes back with tranq guns before I wind up on all fours.

Now what the two ladies *don't* know is that I have a satellite phone, and a distress beacon. The beacon's already active, and it's subdermal. There's no likely way that they can detect it. The phone, though... well I think that's why Ericka's pacing.

Two or three times now, Rebecca's gotten in her way, but if they've said anything to one another, I don't hear it. I'm not even sure if the older one can still speak. That's... that's all for now.

June 14th 2023

Evening. After the girls fed me... something... they both curled up at my feet and went to sleep. They seem to like cooked food, but have no problem eating it raw, either. I used my lighter to get a fire going after Rebecca brought in some sticks. She even found some coal from deep inside the tunnel, but I think it's too wet to be of any use. There's a lot of leaking back there.

There's an obvious sense of affection from Rebecca that Ericka doesn't have. If I talk to her enough, she even starts to speak more coherently. I think the most I got out of her was something like 'you're here now to start a family.' It was clear, plain common speech. Her thought processes might be warped, but there's a person between those ears of hers.

The lab hasn't sent anyone yet, but it's only been probably four hours. I think I'll at least be here overnight. I've got the satellite phone turned off to save battery. I have a feeling if Ericka hears it, she'll smash it. It's obvious that neither of these two think they should go back to civilization. Looking like they do, though... I don't know if that'd be possible, anyway.

My leg's healed up, but when I tried to remove the frond, Ericka snapped at me. I think she wants to leave it on me to hasten the change. To be honest, the idea that... such a thing's even possible makes my skin crawl, and yet... somehow I'm still calm about it.

From what I know about it, there's a type of lectin... or... something... on these fronds that interacts with our genetic material. It 'heals' us, but it does so to an earlier state in our evolution, so to speak. This thing stays on me long enough, I'll be right there with them.

If I move, they're gonna wake up, so... I should probably just... get some rest. Tomorrow's another day. Gods, I hope they fix this before it's too late. If not... Kalu take me."

June 15th 2023

I dunno how she did it, but Rebecca managed to start the fire herself this morning. I woke up to the smell of meat cooking. She'd built a spit and was turning it with her paw. When I tilted my head at her, she smiled and rushed over to me with her ears splayed and her tail wagging. She even gave me a cheerful 'good morning!' I wonder if she remembers Patrick at all. She seemed... surprisingly not upset about what'd happened to him, but I suspect it's the same thing that's keeping me level-headed.

This meat she's cooking... I think I know what it is. Or I should say, *who* it is. It ought to bother me, but it doesn't. It smells good, and I'm at least in good hands until my rescue team can come back. *If* they come back. I'm expecting them some time today if they do. I'm gonna try to play on Rebecca's sweet side to see if I can move around some. Maybe, if I can get her away from Ericka, she'll let me use the satellite phone. I don't think she really wants to stay out here.

June 15th 2023 – again

Apparently... Ericka *can* talk, if you make her mad enough. After we had breakfast, the wolves parted ways. Rebecca stayed with me, and Ericka went out to hunt, or mark her territory or... whatever a devolved 40 something year old wolf woman does. I was able to pet Rebecca a little, and convince her to let me take a short walk.

It's a little hot this time of year, but this place is really nice up here on the mountainside. The elevation makes it cooler, and the wind through the tunnel keeps the shade pleasant. I tried my best to talk with her as I walked, but she didn't have much to say. She can't remember where she's from, what her last name is, or what year it was that she came here. She said she had a phone, but didn't know what happened to it. I asked her if she remembered Patrick, and she tilted her head. Eventually she said no, but her ears were splayed and her tail curled. I think she just doesn't want to admit it.

I pulled out my phone and showed it to her. She sniffed it and said 'no service.' When I explained that it was a satellite phone, though, she seemed to get a little interested. I turned it on and made my call. My supervisor Robert says that a team's enroute, and should arrive tomorrow morning. I told them to bring tranqs, especially for the gray-nose. He agreed and we were about to hand off LZ details, but... well I guess I musta been way too loud.

That old wolf snatched the thing right out of my hand, crushed it in her teeth, threw it on the ground and stomped on it repeatedly, all the while yelling 'No!' as plain as day. When I argued with her about it, she pounced me and knocked me to the ground, stood over me, looked me dead in the eye and I swear to Soth in the clearest common I'd ever heard, she said.. 'I'm not going back to that place, and neither are you.'

I doubt anyone'll believe me, considering the way they write, and the way they were talking before... maybe it's me filling in the gaps in words... maybe I'm still getting dumber. I can't really say. All I know is that I'm back in the tunnel, and it seems, Rebecca's in the doghouse for letting me leave in the first place.

I feel bad for her. She's sleeping out there curled up in the rain, but Ericka's not about to let her come in here. I guess... if I do turn, I'll be able to give that old graying alpha a run for her money. I'm not letting her treat my mate like that.

..... I really wish I didn't mean what I just wrote.

June 16th 2023

I didn't tell Ericka about the rescue crew, and it seems that Rebecca didn't either. I woke up early to the sound of whimpers, looking out to see my girl sitting just outside the tunnel entrance. She had a fresh rabbit in her maw for me. When I met her stare, she laid it on the ground and said 'sorry no cook.'

It's a little weird to me for a woman to think she needs to do the cooking in a relationship in 2023. I mean, yea, she was stranded here in 2013, so... ~~8 years~~... 10 years ago, but things haven't changed *that* much. Maybe she's just doing it because of the whole wolf brain thing, who can say for sure.

I don't know when the team will arrive. I don't know *where* they'll arrive, either. Our territory's pretty big. Closest landing area would be out near the trailhead, then it's a good hour hike into the woods before they reach us. They better keep their guns trained, or Ericka will no doubt take them out. I don't know how I can tell, but I can just tell that she's a skilled hunter. I have... an odd sense of respect for her. For now, I'm going to cook Becky and I some rabbit, and... hope that Ericka doesn't get the drop on our rescue team.

June 16th.. or 17th? I don't know for sure. Dark. 2023.

That didn't play out how I'd hoped, but the end result was satisfactory. Ericka spotted them landing and took out one of the guys right away. Damn but she can fight. They pumped her fulla tranqs, bundled her up nice and warm and put her on board, then set out looking for me.

I heard the chopper while Rebecca and I were cuddling. She's so soft and warm and welcoming... I can't believe this of all places would be where I'd meet my mate, though, my supervisor swears that my judgement's being affected by the fronds. Apparently, my hands were getting a little long, too. Physical changes were already starting.

Becky didn't put up a fight. She was scared, but I told her it was okay. They'd help us. She didn't wanna go home, not after what she knows she's done with hikers in our territory, but... she let them take her in.

I made damned sure that they treated her right. They put her in a cage with some warm bedding, and... well they put me in one, too. But at least they let me keep the diary, for now. This thing's gonna be real valuable in the next couple months.

Part 4

Dr. Saynurs's medical journal:

June 25th 2023

We admitted the specimens to the lab when they arrived on the evening of June 17th. They'd been airlifted from Albany to my lab here in Buffalo. It's not my normal choice for genetic research but given my specimen's... condition.... It makes sense to give them a more rural atmosphere, and a small area to... play in.

We have three individuals of varying age, based on the journal provided by one of the specimen, and some identification information left behind at the site. The oldest, Ericka Saunders, 40. She has gray in her muzzle, which is interesting, given that she's hardly middle aged. She seems to be the first to feel the effects, and in an odd twist of fate, the very person to discover this effect from the *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio* fern fronds that seem to grow in very isolated regions of the Catskills. Her research had been panned twice by a rather obtuse professor at the university of Albany, despite conclusive studies that there were benefits and... anomalous results from exposure to the plant produces. Her car had been abandoned at the edge of the nature preserve in 2004. We now know why.

Next is Rebecca Gnead, 31, almost 32. Another female wolf, no signs of gray, and... surprisingly very talkative compared to her older counterpart. From what we can glean, she was... taken... by Ericka while hiking near the tunnel. Her partner was killed, prepared and... fed to her, though she seems to have no memory of this, or of her partner at all, which at this time is a relief. Most of her decidedly limited vocabular centers around her desire to mate and produce pups, something that we... do not plan to allow in her current state.

Finally, our most recent... David Tanibard, 34. He's a member of my staff. We sent him out with a crew to retrieve samples, not... quite realizing the danger that we'd be putting him in. He was rescued quickly and though he showed almost no signs of change upon retrieval, he has since continued to devolve like the others. We are... investigating the cause.

Due to Ms. Gnead's frequent statements of intent to mate, we've opted to keep them separate for now, treating them with what we hope at least... is an antidote to the de-evolving effects of the fern lectin that'd been applied to their bodies for so long. Their genetic code has been modified, but... we can see where those modifications were made, if that... makes any sense. We simply need to reverse the process. David should show the fastest turnaround, if any of them do, since he's had the least exposure.

Tomorrow, I'm going to sit down with him and... see what he has to say. We can evaluate his mental faculties and disposition then.

June 26th 2023

Interview transcript with David Tanibard:

Preface: David Tanibard, though mostly physically changed, still exhibited some anthro features. Subject was restrained on his back to a hospital bed and connected to an IV for easy injection and treatment

Dr. Saynurs: Good afternoon, David, how are you feeling?

David: Odd. Why still change? You rescue. Why still change?

Dr. Saynurs: That's what we're trying to figure out. Are you able to form more complete sentences for me?

David: I'll try. Sorry. My head is full of cotton. It's hard to think clearly. Why am I still changing? There's no fern here, no injury, why change? Want... I want to be normal again.

Dr. Saynurs: That's better. Try to concentrate for me, alright, Mr. Tanibard? Now, can you tell me your date of birth?

David: 1989.

Dr. Saynurs: The full date, please.

David: Don't remember. Sorry.

Dr. Saynurs: Do you know the name of the company you work for? Do you your title?

David: No. Sorry.

-Dosage 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 administered.- 14:08hrs

Dr. Saynurs: I see. There were two wolves with you, do you remember their full names? First and last, if you please.

David: Rebecca... Gnead. Ericka... Saunders. Are they okay? Can change? Are we... lost?

Dr. Saynurs: They're fine. So you remember their names, but not your own job title. Does the name NRP mean anything to you?

David: New... new realm. My job for... Pharm...

Dr. Saynurs: New Realm Pharmaceuticals, right. You are a field operative for NRP. You are David Tanibard, born March 3rd 1989 in Boise Idaho.

David: No.

Dr. Saynurs: No?

David: Not Boise. Nampa. Southwest of... Boise. Suburb, but technicality. It's one of those things. You tell people from far away it's Boise, but you tell people from Boise it's Nampa.

Dr. Saynurs: How are you feeling? A little less cloudy now?

David: Yea, a lot better. What'd you do? Am I gonna change back?

Dr. Saynurs: Your mind is a good indicator, but the body will likely lag behind. I'll have the nursing staff monitor you, and then we can-

David: Doc... I think I ate some of the guys. I think... don't blame them, please? Becky and Ericka didn't know what they were doing. They're not murderers or... or cannibals. Oh gods... I'm gonna be sick!

Interview transcript with Rebecca Gnead:

Preface: Rebecca Gnead showed full transformation, but presented as docile, allowing restraints. Subject was connected to an IV for easy injection and treatment.

Dr. Saynurs: Good afternoon, Rebecca, how are you feeling?

Rebecca: Cage.

Dr. Saynurs: Yes, you are in cage. Do you know why?

Rebecca: Bad. Ericka. David. Where?

Dr. Saynurs: Can you try to form more coherent sentences for me? I'm having trouble under-

Rebecca: No! Cage! David! Ericka! Where??

-Dosage 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 administered.- 15:07hrs

Rebecca: What?? What is that?

Dr. Saynurs: Try again. Are you feeling better?

Rebecca: Where Ericka and David? Are they safe? You... bad. We did nothing. Our territory. You came to us! You took our ferns! We were defending our home.

Dr. Saynurs: You're making a lot more sense now. Do you remember your birthday?

Rebecca: What does my birthday have to do with this? It's... no. No remember.

Dr. Saynurs: What are Ericka and David's full names?

Rebecca: Ericka Saunders, David uh... I didn't know David. I didn't read write. He write I did not read. He's my mate. We have pups. Why is he not here?

Dr. Saynurs: Did you mate with him before you were picked up?

Rebecca: No. He was only with us a day or two. Not enough change.

Dr. Saynurs: I see. What do you think of Ericka?

Rebecca:

Dr. Saynurs: Nothing to say?

Rebecca: No.

Dr. Saynurs: She's your friend, right? Your partner?

Rebecca:

Dr. Saynurs: Please say something so that I know the medication is working.

Rebecca: Is she safe? She is good. Do not hurt her.

Dr. Saynurs: She's safe. Don't worry about that. Are you feeling any better? Any more... clear in the head?

Rebecca: Leave me alone, please.

Interview transcript with Ericka Saunders:

Preface: Ericka Saunders showed full transformation and presents aggression. Subject is being kept in a large, secured cage, but no IV can be attached.

-Growling and snarling noises-

Dr. Saynurs: Ericka Saunders?

-Growling ceases for a moment, then resumes again.

Dr. Saynurs: I'm not going to hurt you. Can you speak?

-Growling dies down, then stops.

Ericka: Why?

Dr. Saynurs: I want to interview you. I want to assess your mental state. Can you help me?

-Gentle cage rattling.

Ericka: Go.

Dr. Saynurs: Go? Can you elaborate?

-Growling returns

Ericka: GO! LEAVE!

Dr. Saynurs: You want to be alone? What about Rebecca and David?

Ericka:

Dr. Saynurs: Give me an interview, and I'll leave. Okay? Can you do that?

Ericka: Ask.

Dr. Saynurs: Alright, please tell me your name, date of birth, and the city where you went to college.

Ericka: None remind.

Dr. Saynurs: You don't remember any of that? You're not in trouble, Ericka. I know you think you might be, but you didn't kill Deacon, and your fight with him was in self defense.

Ericka: None remind.

-Subject turns around in cage to face away from him

Dr. Saynurs: What's that mean? You don't remember any of it?

Ericka: Go.

Dr. Saynurs: One question isn't an interview, Ericka. I need more from you.

Ericka: More. Ask three, not one. Go.

Dr. Saynurs: So you can count. You can tell that I asked you three questions. How high can you count?

-She looks over her shoulder and scowls at him.

Dr. Saynurs: Did I insult your intelligence? Ya know, you... are actually very brilliant. Your thesis on Dennstaedtia-Mutatio was spot on. It's helped us tremendously! I would like to know just how much of that brilliant mind has been preserved, though.

-Subject's ears splay and she looks back at the wall, resting her head on her paws.

Dr. Saynurs: We can cure you, ya know. You don't have to stay like this. You could become an employee in our lab. I could help you a lot, if you'd let me inject you with an antidote. It'll clear your mind and help you t-

Ericka: No remind. Bad.

Dr. Saynurs: Dealing with the past is how we heal. I know you don't want to remember, but you've done nothing wrong.

Ericka: Hikers. Rebecca, David. Lie.

Dr. Saynurs: There won't be any repercussions for that. You weren't thinking rationally. Let me give you an injection so that we can have a better conversation, okay?

-Subject does not respond. Dr. Saynurs moves in to administer 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 at 16:13hrs

-Subject snaps at doctor and growls defensively.

Dr. Saynurs: Please. This won't hurt you, alright? I understand some of these memories might be painful, but it will help us help you.

-Subject looks away again, ears splayed back, prepared to react again.

Dr. Saynurs: Listen, you can't go back, alright? You're not going back to that train tunnel. You're not going to get to continue to cast off your person's shell.

Ericka: Do. Quickly.

-Dosage 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 administered.- 16:31hrs

Dr. Saynurs: There, was that so bad?

Ericka: Not a child.

Dr. Saynurs: No, you're not. You're a 40 year old woman.

-Subject stands, turns around in cage and lays to face him

Ericka: 40? How?

Dr. Saynurs: You spent 19 years living in that train tunnel. It's 2023.

Ericka: Why? So easy. Let go. No remind, no write. No read. Go back.

Dr. Saynurs: Can you form more complete sentences? It's difficult to understand what you're trying to say.

Ericka: I... want to go back. Take Rebecca, Take David, my family. I do not need your world anymore. No remind. No write. Let it fade. You try to bring back! I let it fade! I don't want to remember!

Dr. Saynurs: Because of your fight with Deacon? You didn't kill him. He was a criminal, selling and pushing Sylin on women. If anything, your fight saved yourself and your roommates from being taken into a trafficking ring. For the longest time they were searching for you under the belief that you'd been taken, not that you'd ran away, and certainly not because anyone thought you'd done something wrong.

Ericka: Nothing wrong? Doesn't matter. Give me Rebecca and David. We'll go back to our home. We are family. Rebecca has pups soon. Mates with David.

Dr. Saynurs: I talked to them already, they said they hadn't mated.

Ericka: Not yet. Not enough change. Wasn't ready. Take back home now. Change will make ready. Ferns make change.

Dr. Saynurs: So you realized that it was the Dennstaedtia-Mutatio lectin that was causing the transformation?

-Subject looks at lab equipment on the side of room

Ericka; Not at first. Too far before realize. Could not stop. Life was better anyway. We are part of nature. We return to nature. Fern allows it. No more doldrums of intelligent society.

Dr. Saynurs; Why don't you let me take you out of that cage? Give you something more comfortable to rest on? That way I can give you an IV drip and help guide you back?

Ericka: No back. I am an animal. I do not want to remember.

Dr. Saynurs: Ericka, please don't fight this. You're not an animal. We can't just take you back to the tunnel.

-Subject splays ears in aggression

Ericka: Why? Declare the area unsafe for hiker. We hunt, we stay in our territory. We live out our days as we should. Rebecca wants pups. David will provide. We are family. Pack. Make wolf sanctuary.

Dr. Saynurs: Because Rebecca and David were taken against their will. We can't just give them back to you.

Ericka: Then just me. I live alone. I die alone. Always alone anyway. What difference would it make? Alone here, alone there. At least happy there. Happy without remembering.

Dr. Saynurs: You don't have to be alone here. Once you're settled, we can re-introduce you to David and Rebecca. You can also make new friends You'd be a valuable researcher for our team. You don't have to be alone here.

Ericka: You don't know anything. You did not know me before. Why do you think I was in therapy? Why diary? Alone! No one to talk. Alone. Rather alone without remind, than alone in your world.

-Subject is alarmed by medical equipment being wheeled into the room. A restraint bed and IV stand.

Dr. Saynurs: The floor of that cage has got to be uncomfortable on your belly. This bed is soft. It will be more comfortable. If you cooperate, we can let you out some, too. We have an outdoor area for you.

-Doctor opens his hand to subject

Dr. Saynurs: Give us a chance, please? If you really don't want it, maybe... maybe we can arrange something where you live as a facility pet.

Ericka: Pet? Feels degrading.

Dr. Saynurs: I mean, you can be as you are, remember as little as you like, get along with the others. But... give our way a chance first.

Ericka: I will hold your promise. Do not lie.

August 3rd 2023

It has been one week since we began treatment using the C-Mut-551 counteragent. This substance is a derivative taken from the *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio* fern. In closed lab tests it's shown the ability to heal major injuries and in some cases, repair genetic damage, even deeply rooted genetic damage. Closed testing showed that lab mice with severe myopia were given perfect eyesight after one small dose. These effects remained and after two months have persisted. The derivative came after it was found that the lectin found within *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio* acts almost as a retro-virus. Slowly, it re-writes host DNA. By modifying this substance, we were able to adjust the instruction set that it administered.

All three subjects have shown substantial improvement in their mental faculties. It is worth noting, however, that both Rebecca Gnead and Ericka Saunders suffer from extreme mental trauma, given their experiences over the last decade, and two decades respectively. Four days into treatment, Ms. Gnead remembered her fiancé, and realized that he'd been prepared and fed to her while she healed from her wounds using the mutation fronds. She's stated limited animosity toward Ms. Saunders as a result, but has stated that she does not blame her directly for the action. We are hesitant to introduce them to one another until continued treatment yields a favorable psychological profile.

Mr. Tanibard has shown the most substantial reversion, which was to be expected. His physical changes are beginning to subside, and he has expressed interest in returning to a normal life. Mental evaluation still shows deep connection to the two females, and an unusual desire to mate with Ms. Gnead, but when distracted with modern interests, such as sports, automobiles, beer, food, he will return to an almost 'normal' state.

Ms. Gnead follows a similar vein. Her attachment to Mr. Tanibard and Ms. Saunders remains surprisingly high. Physical changes have been minimal, if any, but our team believes that sustained exposure to the *Mutatio* lectin may make reversion more difficult. Mentally she presents herself largely stable, so long as the topic of her fiancé is avoided. Some of her memories revolving around her previous life have started to return, though, there almost seems to be a willful blockage preventing her from some aspects.

Ms. Saunders continues to be difficult. She has at least engaged further with me in conversation, though. There have been no physical changes noted, blood tests and tissue samples show slight genetic reversion, but it will take some time before we start to see the person she used to be. What's interesting is that the gray on her muzzle has faded with daily treatments. This makes sense, as a forty-year-old would not normally begin to exhibit such a symptom under most conditions. It is worth noting in that context however, that wild, feral wolves do not live as long as their anthro counterparts.

In conversation, she is avoidant, aggressive, and in some cases timid. Memories are willfully blocked, as with Ms. Gnead. There's a great deal of guilt and fear left over from her self-defense event in 2004, and her feelings of social isolation that sparked her divorce from society on that night. Even if she should make a full physical recovery, I fear that she will need psychotherapy for the remainder of her life.

Interview transcript with David Tanibard:

Preface: Subject is not restrained, and has shown no aggression toward staff

Dr. Saynurs: Good morning, David! How are you feeling?

David: Hey, doc! Not too bad! I think I'm starting to get some movement out of my thumbs again. Maybe soon we can have a beer together, huh?

Dr. Saynurs: I don't drink while I'm on the job, but if there comes a day where you and I can sit down as peers and have a drink, I'll certainly take you up on that. How's your memory?

David: Well, I think it's coming along? I remember what my house looks like, but not the address. I also... think... I drive a red SUV? Like... an older one. Four door. It has this annoying squeak in the dash I could never find.

Dr. Saynurs: That's good! Little details like that are progress. Do you have time to go over the basics?

David: Yea, uh... sure! I mean, what else am I gonna do? Doc ya know, before we start though... it's really hard to stand on my hind legs, and it's even harder to... ya know use the toilet. I've just been going in the shower but it's making the staff mad. You think there's somethin' we can do?

Dr. Saynurs: *chuckling* I'm sure we can help you with that, so long as you don't mind our veterinarian getting involved.

David: Well I mean, I'm changing, right? So, hopefully it won't be forever. A little humiliation now for a normal life later.

Dr. Saynurs; Is that what you want? A normal life? Back to society?

David: Yea! I mean... so long as Rebecca and Ericka are a part of it. I really wish you'd let me see them.

Dr. Saynurs: In time. It's only been a week since we started your treatment. Do you... miss them? You were only around them a few days.

David: Those were a pretty intense couple of days though, doc. Lotta time to make connections.

Dr. Saynurs: Despite their limited vocabulary?

David: See, that's the thing. People like you communicate a lot more with your mouth than any other part of you. You rely too much on speech. You start seeing it fall away, start... forgetting words... you have to learn to compensate.

Dr. Saynurs: By people like me you mean...?

David: Normal people. Uh... I dunno how else to say it. So when can I see the girls?

Dr. Saynurs: I just told you. In time. It's only been a week.

David: Feels like a lot longer.

Dr. Saynurs: I've noticed that since you've been given access to the internet and television that you spend most of your time watching nature documentaries and, on the internet, looking at... well... shall we say... wolf mating behavior?

-Subject avoids eye contact

David: You been spyin' on me? I shoulda known.

Dr. Saynurs: To understand your mental state, nothing more. Can you explain why those topics interest you?

-Dosage 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 administered.- 09:17hrs

David: Doc, I... more?

Dr. Saynurs: Every day. It's helping you get better, Mr. Tanibard.

David: Yea... yea ok. But uh, I mean, I guess I kind of identify with it, ya know? Hunting for prey? M...mating... pups... it's still something that kinda lingers in my mind.

Dr. Saynurs: Even though you never hunted with Ms. Saunders or Ms. Gnead, your mind still gives you the desire to do so?

David: So far it does. Maybe that'll fade. I mean... I also kinda want to work on my truck. Get back to the house... I bet the lawn's gone to shit. Hey... you guys didn't stop paying me did you? All my bills are auto-pay.

Dr. Saynurs: I'll check, but I don't see any reason as to why they would have. Do you want us to contact someone to look over your home?

David: Yea, but... I still don't remember the address. Or... or any of the names of my friends. Faces I got, but names still aren't clicking for me.

Dr. Saynurs: I'll see what I can find out. For now, can you tell me your name, birthday, and birth location?

David: Yea... David Tanibard, field op for New Realms Pharmaceuticals, born March 3rd 1989 in Nampa Idaho.

Dr. Saynurs: Good job! You're coming along. Keep up the great work, Mr. Tanibard. We'll talk again soon.

Interview transcript with Rebecca Gnead:

Preface: Subject wears a restraint collar, but has shown minimal resistance to staff. Most disagreement has come from limited freedom of movement. She wants to explore the facility, and has not appreciated being told no.

-Subject appears to be asleep, but raises her ears and lifts her head as the door to her room opens.

Dr. Saynurs: Ms. Gnead, did I wake you?

Rebecca: Yes.

Dr. Saynurs: Sorry about that. Have they brought you breakfast yet? They should be along shortly if not.

Rebecca: I wanted to get my own breakfast, but they leashed me to the bed again. I wish they would stop. I'm not going to hurt them. I just need to see my new territory.

Dr. Saynurs: Are you trying to... mark... your territory? That could be one major reason that you've been confined.

-Subject appears avoidant and embarrassed.

Rebecca: I mean I have to let other wolves know that this is ours. They can't have it.

Dr. Saynurs: You never had to do that before. Why do it now? This is just a laboratory. Your home is elsewhere. Do you remember where that is?

Rebecca: When can I see Ericka and David?

-Dosage 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 administered.- 10:23hrs

Rebecca: That stuff makes my head feel funny.

Dr. Saynurs: It's helping you become yourself again. Can you answer my question, please?

Rebecca: I think... Syracuse? Apartment, I think. Oh god, what happened to our housecat? Oh shit. We left her with someone. Family? Friend? Not petcare. She's probably dead. It's been a decade. Aw...

[Subject's ears splay]

Dr. Saynurs: Do you remember the cat's name?

Rebecca: Uh... n... no. Sorry. Patrick and I were sharing an apartment at the time. I think the cat was his? I don't guess it matters. Cats are good hunters, she could take care of herself. When do I get to see David?

Dr. Saynurs: Do you miss Patrick at all? Do you know your full name, birthday, and place of birth?

Rebecca: I didn't ask about Patrick. He's dead. I ate him. I asked about David. I want to have his pups.

Dr. Saynurs: Answer my questions and then we'll talk about David.

[Subject appears to pout, splaying back her ears and looking away.]

Rebecca: Rebecca Gnead, August 13th 1991, Peoria, Illinois. And... I don't remember enough about Patrick to miss him. I don't know how or when we met, how long we dated... who asked who to get married... I know none of this. I must've liked him, though. He wasn't even a wolf and yet I still agreed to have a life with him.

Dr. Saynurs: Is species important to you? Was it before?

[Subject pauses and appears to think deeply on the topic.]

Rebecca: I think... it didn't matter as much to me before as it does now. I want to have David's pups.

Dr. Saynurs: You've made that abundantly clear. Do you have any inclination as to why, though? Is there a biological drive, perhaps?

Rebecca: I... barely know him. So... that has to be it. Why would I want to mate with a stranger? Why would I want... I'm too young for this. Or... I was. Maybe that's why? But then... I have no plans to raise them in *your* world. They'd be *our* pups. Our pack's pups. Family. Do we get to go back to our home?

Dr. Saynurs: I'm sorry, no.

Rebecca: I guess I have some thinking to do, then.

Dr. Saynurs: Well, I'll leave you to that. Thank you for your time today, Rebecca.

Rebecca: Hey, when do I... can they let me walk if I'm good? If I have to stay on a leash that's okay. At least I'll get to sniff things out.

Dr. Saynurs: I'll talk to my staff.

Interview transcript with Ericka Saunders:

Preface: Subject remains restrained to a medical bed. She has shown increased interest in exploration, but aggression suggests more time is needed before this can be facilitated.

Dr. Saynurs: Good morning, Ms. Saunders.

[Subject looks up at him, then lays her head back into the soft cushion.]

Dr. Saynurs: Having a lazy morning?

Ericka: Why not? You chain me here. What to do? Wag my tail as your pet? I am prisoner.

Dr. Saynurs: You're kept tied down because you fight my staff. If you would cooperate, you'd be able to walk around some and explore. Can you tell me your name, date of birth, and birthplace, please?

[Subject looks away, splaying back her ears in a pout.]

Dr. Saynurs: Ericka?

Ericka: You owed nothing. Take us home. The tunnel is home. We won't hurt people. I already said. Hikers away, and we'll stay to our territory.

Dr. Saynurs: You know that can't happen. You need to stop avoiding your life. Tell me about college.

[Subject looks away even when Dr. Saynurs moves into her vision.]

Ericka: I don't want to.

Dr. Saynurs: I know, but you were doing well, and it's a major part of your future. Talk to me.

Ericka: [Confrontational, baring fangs] You do not determine my future. I determine my future.

Dr. Saynurs: When you've returned to normal, you'll be free to do as you wish. Until then, I very much do determine your future. Now talk to me.

Ericka: Fine. Ericka Saunders, May 3rd 1983, Lindale, Texas. I attended the University of Albany. I studied under Dr. Edward Farric, who is NOT a ferret, but a mouse, as a botany student. My grades were fine until my 4th and 5th year. My thesis on *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio lectin* and it's healing properties was rejected multiple times despite many studies proving that I was right, and then... and then it was all gone.

Dr. Saynurs: You remember a lot. You spoke that very eloquently. Don't you want to go back? Dr. Farric is still alive. Don't you want to look him in the eye, shove your studies in his face and prove to him that he was wrong? Your thesis was not only well prepared and documented, but your findings were world changing. Why do you want to live as this... wild animal?

[Subject appear to be avoidant.]

Ericka: [after a pause of nearly two minutes] wild animals don't try to rape you and inject you with drugs to make you forget. They do what they do because it is what they're driven to do. They are pure. You are not.

Dr. Saynurs: So, you just cast it off? Just give up on society because of one bad apple? Seems kind of weak, doesn't it?

[Subject growls, baring fangs and reaching the limit of the neck leash to lunge at him.]

Ericka: You know nothing of weakness! Soft world for you. You cannot hunt. Fox. I have hunt your kind. I have eaten. Hiker and prey. You know NOTHING!

[Dr. Saynurs sits with a sigh just out of her range, making her growl at his defiance.]

Dr. Saynurs: You did nothing wrong, you know that, right? Had you given that thesis to anyone else, you'd have graduated top of your class within the first four years. No repeating, no extra time in your apartment... no Deacon. Society is not to blame, so much as it is one myopic mouse that misjudged the value of your work. Everything that you wanted is waiting for you. In fact, I'll tell you right now, you get out of this, I'll offer you a job on my staff. Half a million credits a year, with benefits. And you'll be here, close to nature. You... are... valuable... Ericka. Or maybe I should start calling you Dr. Saunders.

[Subject recoils shamefully, looking away and laying down on the bed.]

Ericka: Title not earned. More school. Failure again.

Dr. Saynurs: You could work your way through it. NRP would even pay your tuition. No student debt, we could provide you with private housing.

Ericka: With Rebecca and David?

Dr. Saynurs: That's... up to them.

Ericka: It is not. I am alpha. They stay with me.

[Dr Saynurs sighs and rises to his feet.]

-Dosage 200mcg Counter-agent C.Mut-551 administered.- 11:57hrs

[Subject flinches, starts to lash out, but stops herself.]

Ericka: Warn me next time, please. No need to force. I am accepting your treatment.

Dr. Saynurs: You don't act like it.

Ericka: 19 years, doctor. Shame and fear, liberation, your world faded, mine grew. Returning to your world... uncertain.

[Dr. Saynurs pats subject on the back affectionately. She allows it.]

Dr. Saynurs: We're going to guide you through it, Ms. Saunders. You're not alone.

September 15th 2023

Subjects have shown continued, predictable improvement, with physical normalization working in earnest for Mr. Tanibard. Subject is now walking upright, and wearing a medical gown, though he shows some awkwardness in his mobility. This is of particular interest, because the subject was dressed and perfectly maneuverable at rescue. Degradation and subsequent reconstruction has taken a far deeper toll than initially anticipated. David continues to express desire and interest to see, and mate with Ms. Gnead. Despite his previous mental growth, it seems that there's been some mental regression once more. His communication is stiffer, and his memory has faded. Physically however, he is 85% of normal, by my estimation.

For Ms. Gnead, her anthro secondary sex characteristics have begun to emerge, beginning primarily with her genitalia, and moving to the re-emergence of two breasts, and the atrophy of the remaining six. She begins to resemble a woman, surprisingly still of her early 20s that prefers to move about on four legs, than an animal. Attempts to walk on two legs have shown that her strength, and the form of her legs themselves, have not yet reached this point, but when doing so, her anthro form is certainly evident. She has shown no modesty, but has not rejected our attempts to clothe her in a hospital gown. Mentally, she lags behind Mr. Tanibard, as would be expected. Like him, her mind seemed to improve, then degrade slightly. She has shown little memory of her past life, but seems uninterested by in large. Her interests instead seem to point forward. Her desire to mate with Mr. Tanibard has decreased, stating many times that she wishes to get to know him before making such a commitment. Recently, she has begun to request a very specific coffee every morning. I've asked my staff to oblige her, forcing them to make runs to the Haxwell's across the street. The problem is that her thumbs are not yet functioning, forcing her to drink with a straw. She does not seem to mind, however.

Surprisingly, Ms. Saunders has seen significant positive mental development. She still remains somewhat aggressive, but has begun to express interest in my research, and in the breakthroughs that originated from the ferns that she isolated in her thesis. This interest seems to have pushed many of her negative perspectives of society aside, and though she's seen almost no physical change, she's begun to express frustration at this fact. She cannot adequately study my research without access to my lab equipment. We've used this as an opportunity to begin to socialize her with the staff, and allow her to roam the building. She's found the scent markings that Rebecca has left behind, despite our efforts to clean them up. She commented on it, stating that it proves this lab is her territory. There is still some work to do in that area.

Today, I've proposed to them all that they meet one another. The responses have been interesting. David has expressed excitement, especially in meeting with Rebecca. He did not mask his continued interest in mating with her, but accepted the condition that he must dress and behave as he would have done before. In honesty, he was excited at the prospect of wearing normal clothing once more, though, we don't have jeans or a t-shirt to offer him. The best we can do at this time are medical scrubs. Hopefully this will be sufficient.

Rebecca has also expressed interest in meeting with the pair, but has hesitated to be close to David. I assured her that there will be no issues regarding any coupling, consensual or otherwise, and that we will intervene should either party initiate.

Ericka seems ambivalent to the issue of mating, but did express interest in seeing 'her pack' again. I cautioned her on aggression with staff, but, honestly in the last week she's not expressed very much toward them. Most of it's come from unwanted touch, which... is an unfortunate byproduct of being a lab subject. She says she understands this, but behaves as if she doesn't.

Introduction of subjects -transcript

09/15/2023 – 10:05hrs

David is introduced to the room first. The enclosure is 15'x20' with 10' glass observation window, double sided mirror on one wall and reinforced metal door. Walls are cinderblock, painted white with overhead fluorescent lighting. Mr. Tanibard is dressed in light blue medical scrubs and is able to stand and walk bipedally. 5 minutes before introduction a 200mcg dosage of Counter-agent C.Mut-551 was administered.

Subject appears nervous, pacing the room with his hands in his pockets. He is muttering to himself, seemingly, rehearsing lines to speak to Ms. Gnead.

9/15/2023 – 10:20hrs

Rebecca is introduced to the room. David is asked to approach the far side of the room opposite the door. He complies prior to her entrance. Rebecca, upon seeing him, attempts to stand on her hind legs, but needs to stabilize herself by placing her paw on the wall. Walking is awkward. She is wearing a medical gown, tied in the back. 5 minutes before introduction a 200mcg dosage of Counter-agent C.Mut-551 was administered.

Rebecca: David... You... look good.

David: You're speaking much clearer than when we last talked.

Rebecca: I am... returning to normal. My legs... have not, yet. My body is still adjusting. My hair has started to regrow. I had shoulder length hair before.

David: That is... good.

-Subjects remain separated by great distance. Rebecca is obviously labored standing on two legs, but seems to feel that it is necessary for attraction. Their communication is notably stiff, though it is not clear if this is because of their condition, or general awkwardness, considering this could be seen as their first meeting.

Rebecca: [chuckling] It is! I'm glad to see it coming back. I do not know what happened to it.

David: It likely fell out. We... did not need it as we were.

Rebecca: I hope that... you were pleased with the meals that I brought you. I... have never been a cook, but I was proud of my hunting. Ericka taught me well. Though, I will never be as adept as her.

David: You did well.

Rebecca: I am sorry about your coworkers. I... did not want to waste the meat.

-Subjects are informed to please stand away from the door. Ericka will be introduced. Rebecca complies, choosing the opposite corner from David, facing the door. She attempts to walk on two legs, but stumbles and walks on four to the corner before rising again.

9/15/2023 – 10:35hrs

Ericka is introduced to the room. She is not dressed, as her body has not changed to any substantial degree that it is needed. She enters the room and sits in front of the door, silently eyeing the pair. 5 minutes before introduction a 200mcg dosage of Counter-agent C.Mut-551 was administered.

David: Ericka...

Rebecca: [splaying her ears and curling her tail] It is good to see you again.

Ericka: As you. Both. You stand on two. You change. I am changing, but slowly.

David: 19 years is a long time. I'm sure that the ferns have left their mark.

Ericka: Dr. Saynurs has interesting research. I wish to see it, but my body has not yet allowed.

Rebecca: Do you wish to return?

Ericka: [standing] Necessity.

[Subject traverses the room, nuzzling under Rebecca's hand-paw.]

Ericka: I am sorry. A price has been paid. Hiker prey. Patrick. Fed to you. I saw no connection. Not wolf. Not family.

[Rebecca falls to all fours and nuzzles Ericka.]

Rebecca: Forgive. Many hiker prey, they trespass. We did what we thought was right. Even here I marked our territory.

Ericka: I found. You did well.

David: They bring us back to their world. I barely left and yet... I feel detached from it. Are we making the right decision?

Ericka: It is not our choice. They force this on us. Perhaps... it is correct. If I am to study what has happened to us, I must return. I wish not, but... we will never see the tunnel as our home again.

Rebecca: I wonder if I will ever be the same person. I feel our interaction is... sterile. Is it just me?

Ericka: Not just you. Perhaps we are too uptight. We should try to relax.

David: [sitting cross legged on the floor] Well, I can't walk on all fours easily anymore, but I can still be on your level.

Rebecca: [Walking to him to nuzzle him.] When did you walk on all fours? You'd barely changed when we were captured.

David: I changed after we arrived, actually. Even without the fern. I guess it has a delayed effect.

Rebecca: [Sitting down near him.] We should get to know each other. I know that... my goal with you was pretty clear when you came into the pack. I wanted to mate with you and have pups... to expand our numbers. Now that I'm feeling a bit more coherent, I'm still interested in you, but I think that we should try to date first. What do you think?

David [Chuckling] I think that's a good idea, though, you might have a little bit of culture and tech shock coming out of 2013. You obviously like the outdoors. So do I! That's why I work in the field that I work. Or... did work? It's not clear if I'm still employed yet. I think, maybe I like being outside even more now. This room is so... uncomfortable and sterile. I miss the dirt beneath my paws.

Ericka: Absolutely. I feel an opportunity was missed by my change. But the action taken was mine. I was afraid of Deacon. I was afraid of jail. I lost myself to wilderness.

Rebecca: Same. I do not remember Patrick well enough to mourn him. I wonder if... going home will change that.

David: I hate to say it but uh... after 10 years, your home is probably gone. You'll need NRP's help to get back on your feet.

Rebecca: Oh gods, you're right! All my stuff is gone! Shit... I don't even remember what I had!

Ericka: Then it doesn't really matter, does it? Out of sight, out of mind. We start over. You and I, anyway. A fresh life. NRP has offered work. I will accept, when my body allows.

David: We are a family, right? A pack?

Rebecca: A pack, but not family. Not yet. If you and I are going to be a family, we have to make sure we're right for each other. It makes no sense to commit to someone you don't truly know.

-The subjects are interacting in a rather predictable manner, but the sterile communication is surprising. It may be that their verbal social skills are still lacking, but individually they communicate more fluidly. I'm not certain why this might be the case.

David: So uh... I suppose... we should get to know each other, right? So... I'm David Tanibard, I'm uh... mid 30s? I think? I guess from memory I'm... pretty typical, I guess? Obviously, I like hiking and the outdoors. I'm... qualified for my job but I don't really remember how. I got a degree, but... in what I don't really remember. I like to uhm... well I drive a red SUV that I like to work on? I think? It has to be rugged to reach deep forest trails and find rare plants, which... is something I really like. Outside of that I don't remember much, but... I have a feeling going out in the world... I probably will.

Rebecca: Yea... uhm... well obviously I feel the same. I don't know what I did for work, or where I lived. I don't know my education or what... what I enjoyed doing. I like nature, and... I obviously

saw something in Patrick that led us together. I can't remember what, though. [She seems alarmed.] Gods... I've forgotten everything.

Ericka: Those with no past can make their own future. I remember very little. It seems however that I am a loner, and a lesbian, though I didn't need to be told the latter. I... admittedly chose you because of that fact, Rebecca.

David: [laughing] Well, I guess that's all we know, huh?

Rebecca: [Chuckling] Yup. Sooo... now what? [Looks at the reflective glass.] We're watched. I guess, all we can do is wait.

Ericka: Agreed. Wait. I... do like being near my pack again, though. I wish to have more of these. Even if we simply lounge and sleep. Being near you makes me feel complete.

Part 5

Dr. Saynurs's medical journal:

January 3rd 2024

Substantial time has passed since my previous entry, and though we have records documenting the further development of our subjects, I did not feel it relevant to record it in my personal journals.

Continued treatment with the C.Mut-551 counter-agent yielded predictable results, enabling all three members of the 'pack' to return to their previous physical forms. Their mental faculties have returned, but there are anomalies in their behaviors and thought processes that show that they are irrevocably changed.

Of largest note is the loss of memory. Mr. Tanibard has never been able to retrieve the memories of his home address, any contacts that he knew, his educational or employment background, nor even the names or existence of family members. Even when taken to his home and allowed to explore, he looked upon it as if it were entirely foreign to him, and said that he had no memory of even the smallest intimacy. This puzzles me the most, since he stated early on that he did remember how it looked. Now, he says that he doesn't. It's troubling since Mr. Tanibard was only absent a few days, yet suffered as much memory loss, if not more, than Ms. Saunders or Ms. Gnead.

With their restorations, came their youth. While I did not know what to expect with Ms. Saunder's return to form, I most certainly did not anticipate her returning to her 21-year-old appearance. In this way, she is no worse for wear, nor is Ms. Gnead, who has equally maintained her age in accordance with her disappearance. It is as if they'd left only the day prior.

Like Mr. Tanibard, the ladies have experienced a slight regression in their social intelligence and memories, and have expressed little interest in memory, aside from Ms. Saunder's desire to continue her research, and Ms. Gnead's desire to... court him.

For lack of a better word, it is as if the three of them wander through their lives in a daze. Their interactions with one another have become more feral in nature, with Ericka re-taking the role of alpha. This has stifled David and Rebecca's expression when they are together, leading them to be sterile and cold, even though with myself and other members of the staff, they are passionate and friendly. On our separated expeditions into public life, Ms. Gnead, and especially Ms. Saunders, have expressed interest and awe at the technological advancements that've been made in their isolation from the civilized world. Is this interest an act? Which form of interaction is sincere?

To answer my question, I allowed the three of them unabated leisure time in one of the larger domicile facilities we have here on our campus. Much like the apartment that Ms. Saunders found herself in so long ago, it is a four-bedroom, four-bathroom unit with a single common space. I've placed hidden cameras throughout. In this way, it is my hope that I can capture their... sincere interaction with one another, in order to determine whether or not their behavior with us is an act, or if they are acting out with one another in our presence.

Transcript of Apartment interior – subject observation.

12/31/2023 20:05hrs

[All three enter, with Ericka stepping forward first. She removes her coat and places it neatly on the rack beside the door, with the other two following her motions.]

David: It's cold today. Was it always so cold here? Why do we not grow winter coats?

Ericka: We did formerly. You failed to do so as you hadn't changed, but Rebecca and I had winter coats and rarely felt the cold. In this shape, we do not seem to grow as much extra fur for the winter. This den is nice and warm, though.

Rebecca: It's nice to have our own place. I feel like their eyes are always on us at the lab. It's exhausting.

David: You can say that again, gods, it's like I'm a lab rat. I can't really remember what it was like before but... I can certainly tell that how they've been treating us is not it.

[David sits down on the couch with a huff, propping his feet on the ottoman.]

David: Pretty nice place! They decorated it really well. Must be a corporate deal.

Ericka: [Sighing] It reminds me of the few things I remember. I wish it had a different layout. I wonder if it was the same builder.

[Rebecca joins David on the couch and the pair cuddle while Ericka inspects the kitchen cabinets and refrigerator. She finds a bag of chips that interests her and takes it. She does not offer anything to the others.]

Rebecca: Your old place was like this? Kinda beats the old tunnel, doesn't it?

[Ericka joins them, sitting on the far end of the couch. She crunches loudly on the chips as she looks at them casually.]

Ericka: The tunnel was our home. This is just a roof. It has its advantages, though.

Rebecca: Yea, I know what you mean. That was our territory! We shouldn't... I dunno. I still feel bad about all the hiker prey.

David: You mean the hikers you killed and ate? Calling them 'hiker prey' feels a bit strange now.

Ericka: [Assertively.] They *were* hiker prey. Why call them anything else? They invaded our territory, and they were no different than any deer or boar or other form of prey that intruded on us. [She points a potato chip at him.] And before you say it, no, the 'person factor' has no bearing. It was our territory and they stepped into it. They suffered the consequences. We claimed our feasts.

[Rebecca seems to show remorse and silently disagrees with Ericka, but makes no attempt to vocalize her feelings. She cuddles closer to David, who puts his arm around her and attempts to calm her by rubbing her shoulder.]

[They remain quiet for a time, watching the television as the announcer discusses the plans to ring in the new year, showing the celebration going on behind her with loud music and flashing lights.]

David: What if... we wound up in someone else's territory? Should we suffer that fate?

Ericka: If they would've followed the markings, they would've known. I avoid spaces where it feels that I'm out numbered. Don't you do the same? [She bites into a chip and continues with her mouth full, transcript may be inaccurate.] I mean a housecat is one thing, but a bear? We should steer clear of bears.

Rebecca: [Speaking with her ears splayed submissive.] I just... people don't smell those things. I can barely pick up scents anymore. They didn't know what they were getting into and... I mean... I certainly didn't! The only reason you spared me was because I was a female wolf!

[Ericka does not respond, instead, she picks up the remote and turns the volume louder.]

Ericka: The more things change the more they stay the same. For some reason I remember these things on TV from decades ago.

David: The countdown is as old as time. I don't know how it started, but I think even as a pup I watched it.

-It is interesting to note Ericka's lack of remorse, and her commanding presence in our absence. When observed, her leadership role isn't as noticeable, and their behavior is far more stiff. I don't yet understand why they filter themselves.

-My conclusion from just this short transcript is that their individual behavior around us is sincere, but the stiff, robotic behavior around one another in our presence is... sterilized because of Ericka's rank within their pack.

Rebecca: [Looking to the kitchen, then back to Ericka.] Can I have some chips? Are there more?

Ericka: Yea, go check the kitchen, there's plenty of food for all of us. You can help yourself. You catch it, you eat it. We don't need to ration here.

[Rebecca and David rise from the couch. The pair begin to explore the kitchen. David finds a beer that he seems to enjoy and opens it, placing the cap in the trash. Rebecca finds the chips, but after exploring, settles on beef jerky instead. Candy was also available, but none of them expressed interest.]

David: [Looking to Ericka] Want a beer?

[Ericka shakes her head.]

[The pair return to the couch and resume cuddling.]

-Neither female retrieved anything to drink at first, while David opted not to eat anything.

-Of note as well is that during this time, none of them have used another's name. Perhaps this is simply an over-analysis.

David: So, we gonna stay up all night and watch the countdown?

Ericka: I'm not interested. Frankly I'm tired. Having my own bed to sleep in, in my own room... that's something I haven't had in ages.

Rebecca: [Her ears splayed.] I... haven't enjoyed sleeping alone in the lab. It's felt cold and lonely. I miss sleeping close with you.

Ericka: Sleep with him. I'm taking my own space tonight. I need it.

-Still, she refuses to speak a name.

-Ericka's presence with the other two obviously shows dominance, to a greater degree than I even expected. Asking permission to sleep and direction on the night's events is... interesting. I'd quite like to know how the three would behave when paired in different ways.

-I'm hoping that David and Rebecca don't mate.

[22:31 – Ericka decides that it's time for bed. David and Rebecca wait for her to inspect each room until she chooses one to her liking, then they inspect the remaining three. Rebecca finds one she likes, but continues to look with David for his choice. After he chooses, they return to her room, where the pair undress completely and go to bed.]

[Ericka, like the others, undressed completely before climbing into the bed and sleeping.]

-They missed the countdown by less than 2 hours. They were completely uninterested. I'll try to find a way to ask them their thoughts on it tomorrow to get their explanation.

Dr. Saynurs's medical journal:

January 1st, 2024.

My coffee was bitter this morning. I'm not sure why. I wish they'd fix these stupid coffee makers. It probably wasn't cleaned again. With so much staff out for the holiday, it figures they'd leave it dirty like this. Perhaps my staff should be running across the street for *me*, rather than Rebecca.

I asked each of the subjects casually when I came in on the 1st how they'd celebrated the new year, starting with Ericka, since she was working in the lab when I arrived. Most of my staff was off that day, but from what I've learned of Ms. Saunder's past, it didn't surprise me to find her here. Despite her collegiate delay, her grades had always been excellent in her educational career, and her penchant for study bordered on obsession.

- POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT: R-44-46 were allowed free roam of the campus after being placed into an apartment.

When I asked her if she'd watched the countdown, she quickly said no, then changed the topic. Apparently she is concerned that her daily dosage of C.Mut-551 is the only thing keeping her from returning to her 'less effective' form, as she called it. I pressed her on why she might believe that to be the case, but she simply called it a hunch. Her... solution to this dilemma was to request that a new subject be brought in and be subjected to the fern. When I pressed her on the ethics of such a thing... taking an individual, subjecting them to a devolving substance, then re-evolving them and experimenting with dosage and continued coverage, I only drew a blank stare. She saw no reason as to why such a thing would be wrong.

I started to suggest that perhaps we should simply stop giving her, or one of the others the injections, but I felt the ire of hostility just beneath the surface when I'd challenged her on this, and I wasn't about to press the issue with no staff here to pull her off of me should she engage. I hate to admit that I'm afraid of her, but... well after her unrepentant display the night before in the apartment, I will say that I am. I've only really seen Ericka smile a few times since her return to form. She's an extremely serious individual. She's not usually imposing, perhaps I'm simply projecting my fear onto her.

- POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT: Potential vector event noted here. Behavior evident.

Speaking with Rebecca and David individually on the countdown to the new year, they both dodged my question. I asked in the same way that did with Ericka, but I followed up, pressing for more information as to why they might've given up so close to the new year. David said that he was tired from a long day, but Rebecca was a bit more honest in her answer, stating that 'the others' had wanted to go to bed early, and she didn't want to sit up alone. I find this behavior to be extremely odd. Why would they obfuscate? What's the point in hiding these behaviors? I've reached out to a colleague to see if we can gather more information.

David is set to return to field work soon. I've been doing some digging into Ms. Gnead's past and found that she was an early childhood math teacher by trade. This isn't a skill that we could use here at the facility, save perhaps for our staff daycare, but I very much hesitate to leave her in a room alone with children. It's not that I believe that she would hurt them, but that she might... teach them unusual things. For now, I've asked that she travel with David, and the other four members of their crew on an expedition. There's a rare blue flower that grows in the hills to the east of the falls. We've been working to preserve it for some time, but we've had issues getting proper germination. I need more samples, and I think this would be a perfect opportunity. I've asked the expedition head, Robert Highes to record any and all interaction with the pair, and report it to me personally.

- POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT: R-45 and R-46 allowed off-campus.

Transcript with Robert Highes, field expedition.

January 3rd, 2024

[Crunching noises in the snow, grunting, heavy breathing]

David: I've done this before, right? This was my job?

Robert: Yea, you don't remember? Damn, that fern really did a number on you, huh?

David: I remember very little. So we're out here for *S. Hyems caerulea*, right? Blue winter Asters? There's a problem with germination, right?

[A whimpering, seems to come from Rebecca, but it's not addressed. No video feed is available.]

David: It's okay. We're not too far out.

Robert: So, you remember the blue-winter but not your parents? Why the selective memory?

Rebecca: This isn't our territory, we shouldn't be here.

David: I know. I smell it, too. We'll be in and out. Let's just keep moving.

David: [to Robert] If I had the answers I'd write a book, get rich, and buy this entire forest. I don't know why I only remember specific things. I'm not sure how relevant it is, though.

Rebecca: I smell other wolves. Recent wolves. See those tracks? We shouldn't be here!

Robert: Ms. Gnead, we have tranquilizer guns if we need them. Try to relax. We go through these woods all the time.

Rebecca: All the more reason you shouldn't be here. You're a trespasser in their territory. You're Hiker prey. *We're* hiker prey. Oh gods... not again.

David: We're not prey, relax. There's four hikers here with us and they all have tranquilizers.

Rebecca: Didn't *you* have a tranquilizer gun when we took you to the tunnel?

David: Me personally? No. The others did, but... Ericka's a skilled hunter. More skilled than any wolf here. I trust the hikers we're with.

Robert: How'd you let a wolf drag you off like that, anyway? We've dealt with wolves before. You had bear mace, the other guys had tranqs... but it still took you out? Shameful man.

David: [growling] Don't disrespect Ericka.

Robert: [Stopping suddenly in the snow] What?

David: You really think some hiker prey that has the awareness of a sleeping drunk would be able to stop her? Or... any of us? We're far better hunters than you give us credit. Especially Ericka.

Rebecca: Your aim can be thrown off when you're pulled down by the calf muscle. From there, disarmed at the wrist. The weapon drops, then you go for the shoulder to disable the front leg.

David: Arm. Disable the arm.

Rebecca: Right. None of that's fatal, but it disarms the prey. Then you can do with it as you will. Ericka knows. Don't insult her by comparing her to hiker prey. Be grateful that the wolves here are less skilled.

[Robert groans quietly. Crunching continues as they move on]

Rebecca: [More timid now] I still don't think we should be here, though. There's only two of us and there's at least six in this pack.

Robert: See that cave? That's where the flower grows, just at the entrance.

David: Send your tranq prey first. At the ready. The scent is strong here. This may be their den, and we are already trespassing.

[Crunching as the armed men climb the hill and inspect the cave.]

Guard: We're clear. This is the den, but they're not here right now.

[Whimpering from Rebecca]

David: Not even pups? Don't explore too deeply. Grab the flowers and let's go. You take too many risks.

Robert: David, this is as much risk as you used to take all the time. You're acting like it's a big problem now?

David: There are things I understand now that I did not before. Grab the flower and let's go.

Robert: Come up here and help me, then.

[David seems to assist Robert while others stand watch. Not much is said until they begin their descent down the mountain.]

Robert: How long were you with those things again?

Rebecca: Things? I'm right here.

Robert: Yea, but you weren't... you. You were a sorta... feral wolf... thing.

David: Only a few days.

Rebecca: Feral wolf... thing. It insults us.

David: Pay it no mind.

Robert: It? Me? Man, that fern must be somethin' else for you to act like this.

David: Let it rest, prey. Continuation is not wise, nor useful.

Robert: Prey? Dude, I'm a cat. I'm not a prey species... and even if I were, it'd be rude for you to call me such a thing. Anyway... I'm just askin' questions.

[David does not respond. Only the crunching of snow is heard until the sound of vehicle doors open.]

Robert: So you're stayin' with the other two in an on-campus apartment, right? You plan to move back to your house in town?

David: I have no memory of that house. I've decided to sell it.

Robert: Sell it? But where will you live?

David: With my pack.

Rebecca: Maybe you should wait. Maybe Ericka wants to make it our den? I can't imagine she wants to stay in that apartment. It reminds her of the past.

-David's turn to being cold to Robert doesn't seem all that unnatural, knowing what I already know. Robert hasn't interacted with David since his return. It's worth noting that he was more approachable prior to what he interpreted to be an insult for the other subjects.

-Obvious element as well is his behavior and approach regarding the wolf den, and the re-emergence of this phrase they keep using. Hiker prey. They obviously mean this as a person that they believe can be killed and treated as any animal. Or at least, that's what I see. I'm not entirely convinced that they're safe to be around others unsupervised. Had Robert's team not had tranquilizer guns, I wouldn't have sent them out.

Once the crew returned, I interviewed Robert on his take of the situation. He admitted that he felt intimidated and 'weirded out' by the pair. He asked that I not send them with him again. I suggested that next time we only send David. This should allow more time to have him isolated in a normal position from his past. We can also use that as an opportunity to pair Rebecca with Ericka, and see how they interact.

January 4th, 2024

Ericka came in this morning as she usually does and began to test a sample of her own blood that she had drawn. She wanted to see what would happen if the C.Mutt-551 is not applied. The sample is too fresh to make any judgement, but she's already dismissed the test as lacking merit. She's asked me for lab specimens, so that she can repeat the tests we did to create 551 in the first place.

Her argument is sound. When creating 551, we tested it on mice. We blinded them chemically, then used the fern lectin to heal them. Over a period of a week, the mice became larger and furrer, and began to behave in a more predatory manner. Using 551 the mice returned to their physical form and maintained their newfound sight, but, as she pointed out, we did not test the removal of regular 551 doses before terminating the specimens. I'm going to see if we can provide her with such a thing. Her persistence on this worries me. It's as if she can feel something that we've not been able to discern. The last thing we need is backsliding for her or the other subjects.

I don't know that it's been stated within my journals, but there is a common purpose to this research, and a reason for keeping the subjects alive and stable. The Dennstaedtia-Mutatio has proven itself over the last decade of research to be a 'miracle drug.' It heals wounds rapidly, it circumvents magic resistance, and it's far more widely available than other forms of non-magic healing salve ingredients. The major drawback, is in the name itself. Mutatio. It changes the subject, devolves them into a feral, predatory state. C.Mut-551 is derived from the same substance, but with additives. If we can make this work, combine the benefits of D.Mutatio and C.Mut-551, we will see a major medical breakthrough for those who are magic resistant, and/or technology avoidant. We just need to get over this ledge, and I'm hoping that our subjects here can help us achieve it.

I opted to use this as an excuse to keep Ericka and Rebecca away from David for the day. With enough encouragement, I was able to convince Robert to take David on another expedition this morning. He's bringing the tranqs, just in case, but they're going out into the field, this time for some algae near Niagara. I checked the security cameras, hid a pen mic in my coat, and took the ladies with me to source the subjects.

Transcript with Ericka Saunders, Rebecca Gnead, and Dr. Bradley Saynurs

January 4th, 2024 09:35hrs

[Corridor B, connecting warehousing and laboratories 100-330.]

Ericka: I'm very happy that you're doing this, Dr. Saynurs. I have concern that we are dependent on the C.Mut-551 injections to maintain our physical and mental state, and barring my request for an intelligent specimen, this is the next best thing.

Bardley: You understand *why* I denied your request, right?

[Ericka does not respond after two minutes.]

Bradley: Right?

Ericka: No. I don't understand. Surely you have someone on your staff that could be used?

Bradley: How would you feel if you were a test subject against your will? They're not prisoners, they're employees. I can't just enlist them into your experimentations.

Ericka: Do you *have* prisoners? There is a prison system under the FedGovs leadership. You could source one from there.

Bradley: Person testing is not authorized by the FedGov. The only exception would be someone who lost their citizenship under the CPA, and... well New Realms doesn't do that. We do not do person testing, it's on every label of every product we sell.

[Rebecca has been walking silently behind Ericka during the entire conversation. I turned to her to try to bring her in.]

Bradley: What do you think, Ms. Gnead?

Rebecca: [Hastily and timidly.] I'm no scientist. I wouldn't know how to answer.

Bradley: But you know right from wrong. You know that testing on a random person without their consent is unethical, right?

[Rebecca doesn't respond to my question. Regardless of how she feels, she won't say anything against Ericka.]

Bradley: The doors just up here. I think two mice should be fine?

Ericka: Perhaps three? Two to test and a third as a control?

[I nod and enter the access code so that we can open the door.]

-The specimen warehouse is filled with mice, foxes, birds, bats, rabbits, and pigs. I'm not happy about testing on foxes especially, but there are times when a larger mammal is required, and for lack of proper access, this is all we're given.

Rebecca: So many scents...

Ericka: Hard to keep up with all this. How do we gather them?

Rebecca: Perhaps we could have some for lunch?

Bradley: [Hesitating...] What? Are you joking?

[Rebecca looks scolded and splay her ears, as if she'd done something wrong. It's obvious from her response that she was not joking.]

-I had to contemplate my response to this. I nearly agreed! I'm not sure why.

Ericka: We don't need them for lunch. They're too small and boney. The rabbits might work, though.

Bradley: [Grabbing a specimen box and putting on gloves] Do you want to test with mice, or rabbits?

Ericka: I meant the rabbits for eating. Testing on mice should be fine.

[I gather three mice in the box while the subjects explore the room. Ericka's tail begins to wag as she inspects the rabbits.]

Ericka: These are large. Why do you not eat them?

Bradley: Because we have a cafeteria, and it's not necessary to eat animals. Besides, they cost a lot more than hamburgers and fries, and, I'd have to explain to management why I ate a live rabbit.

Ericka: You are a fox. You see no value in rabbits?

Bradley: I do, but I am a scientist, and a man that lives in a world where food is prepared and widely available. You seem rather fond of the food in the cafeteria. You'd pass that up for a rabbit?

Ericka: I did not say that.

-Admittedly this conversation and her obstinance had tested my patience. Even though we were not in a situation where I could defend myself, for reasons unknown, I felt the need to stand my ground with her on this. Somehow, I saw the appeal. There's a sort of... carnal need that's met by hunting and killing your prey, but I can't let this train of thought continue for her.

Bradley: You've changed. You know that, right? Your mind was not fully restored. The Ericka Saunders from 2004 would never stand here and contemplate eating a lab rabbit. She'd never challenge my logic on using persons testing specimens, and she'd never even *think* about eating a lab mouse, or accuse me of somehow being... inferior because I'm a fox that doesn't want to do these things. Do you see the cognitive dissonance here? You are not an animal. So why do you insist on thinking like one?

-Her response was muted. She moved away from me slightly, but otherwise showed no signs of emotion. I felt worried as soon as the gentle echo of my voice faded from the room. She's a much bigger predatory than I am. Though, I'm not sure why this thought occurred to me.

Ericka: [Peering into the container I used to gather the specimens.] Perhaps our dosage is too low. Why do think I'm looking to experiment? There is obvious cognitive abnormality in our perspective of the world when compared to persons. I'm not certain that I feel any true compulsion to rectify that, but I am at the least curious to what degree, if any, we could continue treatment to retrieve more of our... former selves. I would also like to remove our potential dependence on the substance itself. I will likely have a subject to test on soon, though.

-I was suspicious of her response. Was she talking about the mice with that last comment? Was she sincere about the rest of it? Or was she saying this to placate me? I suspected the latter, if for no other reason than her seeming comfort with her current lot in life. It was certainly true that she was seeking a way to test her reliance on the C.Mut-551, but doing so because she wanted a 20 year life back? I simply found it hard to believe. I suppose one would need to be there to see it, but her movement, her communication and the confidence with which she expresses it all simply doesn't tell me that she's seeking to... improve. Am I being paranoid? I'm not sure. Perhaps I should take some time off and let someone else monitor them for a time. I'm starting to feel worn out from all of this.

Part 6

Dr. Hwen's medical journal:

January 22rd 2024

I've been tasked with overseeing subjects R-44,45,46 and I-231. From now on, for my own convenience, I'll be identifying them by their names. R-44 refers to one Ericka Saunders, 45, Rebecca Gnead, and 46, David Tanibard, who also has the designation I-198, since he is an internally impacted individual. I-231 refers to Dr. Bradley Saynurs, a senior researcher here at NRP Buffalo. He took a leave of absence a few weeks ago, citing stress and paranoia, and asked that I monitor his subjects in his stead. I agreed, and we initiated a warm hand-off before his departure. In the following days, he returned, expressing concerns for his mental health. He noted sleep disturbances via nightmares, hyper-vigilance, and odd cravings. It wasn't until he found himself having killed his own pet rabbit that he realized just how far it'd gone.

We opted to take Dr. Saynurs in for isolated examination. There are no physical abnormalities at this time. His tests are clean and normal, but he's exhibiting animalistic behavior, and an obsession with the acquisition of samples of *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio*. He's gone so far as to attempt to injure himself in the hopes that we'll apply it to his wounds, leading to him being restrained and confined to a bed.

I've reviewed Dr. Saynurs's notes, and while I do observe some over-infatuation with the rescue subjects, I see no evidence of this behavior developing prior to his departure from the lab. We're re-running our toxicology reports to verify that he hasn't taken anything in his down time, but frankly... I'm at a loss.

I spoke with Ericka Saunders over our morning coffee. Or at least, I attempted to. She had little to say, and seemed entirely focused on her study of the lab mice she began to work with before Dr. Saynurs departed. She's confirmed her theory. The three rescue subjects require daily doses of C.mut-551 to maintain their form and their intelligence. She's again requested a specimen that is... more like her... for testing, but I categorically refused. She wants to test higher dosages of the substance, and I understand that, but she's not receiving that. Ms. Saunders is intelligent, and dedicated, but she's no doctor, and frankly, has no place even conducting tests such as this.

David Tanibard, the other internal individual, has returned to active duty, and spends most of his days with small crews looking for plant and animal life relevant to our projects. Much to my surprise, he's quite good at it, especially when it comes to tracking animals. The difficulty comes in when he finds it. Twice now, he's eaten the targets, and had to be tazed or tranquilized to stop the behavior. One of the two samples was viable, but the other was sadly unusable because of his behavior.

For Ms. Gnead, We allowed her limited, supervised time with children at the daycare, to teach them math. Her lesson actually went very well. She's very kind and affectionate to children, and very attentive to their needs. It surprised us. Bringing her into the room she almost... snapped into a different person. She responded very well. We will continue to bring her in on a limited basis for the time being. It will do her well.

Dr. Hwen's medical journal:

January 29th, 2024

Well, that was a week I hope I never have to live again. If I may be so frank. The first issue is that Dr. Saynurs has somehow been exposed to the Dennstaedtia-Mutatio lectin. His body has started to change, and his mental state has degraded. How this occurred, I don't yet know, but I would suspect after his last set of notes, that Ericka Saunders may have something to do with it. We're using 400mcg C.Mut-551 on him in an attempt to stop and reverse the changes, but thus far, it's having minimal effect. Ms. Saunders suggested, almost with a smirk on her maw, that we allow him to change, and then let her test dosages on him to see how well he comes back. This almost certainly paints her as the culprit here. I haven't made any judgement calls on *that* yet, though, because unfortunately, we have another problem.

Three days ago, there was an issue in the apartment. The dishwasher failed. I was honestly surprised that Ms. Saunders still knew how to *use* a dishwasher, but she does, and apparently put in a request to have it repaired. The problem is... she didn't tell Rebecca or David about this request. So... when Rebecca came home and found a man in her 'den'... she attacked him. He's in critical condition now in our medical lab. Fortunately, he's not magic resistant, so we should be able to heal him without the fern, thank the gods.

This act has put Rebecca into isolation until we can calm her down and assess her stability. To think we had this wolf around our children last week... not that I think she'd be a danger to them. I just wouldn't want them to see her maul someone to death if they opened the classroom door when she wasn't expecting it. We have an obvious behavior problem here. Ericka and David both protested her isolation, unbelievably saying that she did nothing wrong, and that the man was trespassing in their territory. When I explained that *they asked to be there*... they dismissed it as being his fault for entering their territory without permission. It rapidly becomes a circular argument that I simply don't have time for.

Aside from their frustrating arguments, and Ericka's constant prying to get the access panel code from me to set her 'pack member' free, there've been no real signs of aggression from them otherwise. It bewilders me to observe how they act. Distant and yet... not. It's like you're looking into someone else's funhouse mirror. They're people, and they act like people, but there's something that's just not quite right. What would she do if she managed to let Rebecca out? Honestly? Probably nothing. She'd still come to work and test on her mice, she'd still study Dr. Saynurs's transformation, and the other two would go about their business. It's almost like they forget that they're mad. They only react, and once they get back to what they consider to be a baseline, everything seems to be forgotten.

I've watched them on the cameras in the apartment after they go home in the evenings. If you took an excerpt from it, just like here at the office, you'd initially think nothing was wrong, just three roommates, two that are obviously a couple, making banter and talking about their day. It's only when you get into the weeds of what they're *saying* that it really starts to come across just how... *wrong* they are. I've included a transcript of last night's interactions to make the point.

Transcript of Apartment interior – subject observation.

1/28/24 20:14hrs

[The apartment door opens, and they enter, with Ericka first.]

Ericka: Gods, she really did a number on the trespasser. We'll need to have this carpet replaced.

David: Shame that it lived. Though, it may warn others.

Ericka: [Enters the kitchen and begins to prepare dinner for the pair. The kitchen was re-stocked with meats, vegetables and fruit. She reaches for the fish.] I'm trying to find out the code. I want her here with us. I don't like her being separated like this.

David: I miss her. [He enters the kitchen, but waits beside Ericka, only opening the refrigerator after she nods in approval.] Do you think we'll be able to mate soon? She said she wanted to get to know me. I think that we've accomplished that to the extent we can.

Ericka: As much as I would love a larger pack, I want to secure a mate for myself, first. Moreover, I do not believe the lab will accommodate cubs. They might try to take them from us.

David: I would defend our pack to the death.

Ericka: [Nodding] I know you would, but I need you, too. You can mate when we've secured our freedom. [She turns on the stove and reaches for seasoning.] Though, I don't quite yet know how we'll do that.

-Ericka seems to be an amazing cook. She moves with ease in the kitchen and seems to be a natural. I've asked her about it. She has little to say, of course, except that she used to cook for her dorm before her change.

-She also said that she wants a mate. From Dr. Saynurs's notes, she appears to be lesbian, so she's not infected him for that purpose. She's probably not looking for a fox, anyway.

David: Has the research proven anything?

Ericka: I need them to let me test on the fox. They won't let me. We have to find a way to escape our dependence on the 551 injections if we're going to move on from this place. As it stands, if we leave, we'll lose these forms again, and will struggle to find a new home. Once I have a mate, that would be more... acceptable? But, I'd prefer that we keep these shapes. I lost too many years to the wilds already.

-Neither David nor Rebecca ever really seem to give her their opinions. I feel like, in normal conversation you might hear "I agree" or "yea, me too..." but you never do with them. Ericka declares something, and the other two fall in line, or remain silent.

David: How can we gain access to the fox? Is there a way that I can help?

Ericka: No, I don't think you can. You may try, though. I won't forbid it. [She opens the oven door and places the prepared fish into it, then closes it with her paw while setting the timer.] We need to allow him time to change, that would be the best time to ask for intervention. I have a few things in the works.

[The pair leave the kitchen and sit in the living room while dinner cooks. Without Rebecca, David sits closer to Ericka, though she still remains away from him. She turns on the television, but takes little interest in the evening news.]

-They walked right through the bloodstain. They don't even care that it's there. Ericka wants the apartment clean, but seems not to be too concerned about the gory remnants of an attempted murder.

Ericka: What do they have you doing?

David: Expeditions. We set out two days ago looking for a rabbit with rare gene expression. I was able to track it down, but the hiker prey with me didn't appreciate my methods. I didn't even bite this one. I merely cornered it.

-Hiker Prey seems to be what they call anyone in the wilderness. Dr. Saynurs had to explain that one to me during my orientation. The differentiation for people in the wilderness in specific confuses me. I've asked them to explain but, of course, they don't.

Ericka: You're learning to hunt on your own. I'm proud of you. [She smiles and pets him on the head condescendingly. His tail wags and his ears splay in submission.] It frustrated me that I was not able to properly teach you to hunt, as I'd done with Rebecca. The rescue team interrupted it.

David: [Frowning] They've told me that they might take me off expeditions. I don't know what I'll do with my time if that happens.

Ericka: I will talk to them. I make no promise, though. We seem to be held with mistrust.

-Gee, I wonder if mauling an appliance repairman has anything to do with it? But I digress...

[The pair fall silent, watching the evening news. They're uninterested, but don't know what to do with themselves.]

Ericka: I'd like you to share a bed with me tonight so that you don't sleep alone. After having one trespasser in our den, we need to remain together.

David: [Using this as an invitation, he cuddles up with her, splaying his ears in loving submission.] We're stronger together.

-He almost sounds like he's brainwashed. ~~I get it, she's the pack alpha, right? But why act like such a loser? I mean there's something to be said of being a good sub to your dom, but this is just simping. If I was part of this pack, there'd be no way I'd act like that.~~ Ericka's a strong-willed woman, but she hasn't dealt with the likes of me before. I'm not giving her access to the fox.

-The remainder of the night was uneventful. They ate, with Ericka obviously eating first before giving him permission. After this, they used their freshly repaired dishwasher, at the cost of blood... to clean up, and then shortly went to bed. They shared Ericka's room, and he curled up against her almost like she was his mother. ~~It's disgusting to see, honestly. Again, I get being a sub? But this is ridiculous.~~

January 30th, 2024

Almost February already, it seems that time flies when you're dealing with anomalies. I've only been working with these subjects for about a week now, but it feels like so much more time has passed. Part of that may be the fact that I'm following them well into the evenings, though. ~~There's something captivating about them, especially Ericka.~~ Thankfully, the night of the 29th was uneventful. David shared a bed with her again, they cooked again, and pretty much spoke of the same topics. I did get some clues as to what to expect when I came in this morning, though.

As soon as I laid eyes upon Ms. Saunders, I could tell that she was... executing her plan. She had a gentle sway in her walk and an almost seductive smile on her face. She walked right up to me, took a deep breath of my scent and shifted her weight to one hip. She smiled and said good morning, like I was someone she was very interested in getting to know. As if I don't know her already. She asked me again for Rebecca's access code, saying that she wanted to check on her. I told her that she could speak through the observation window, but she just frowned and said that it wasn't enough. She needed physical contact. After I again said no, she... stepped closer to me. She embraced me and tried to kiss me on the maw! I backed away and scolded her, but she seemed unphased, almost looking at me provocatively. ~~I was obviously flustered, but this sort of behavior is... unacceptable.~~ She turned and started to saunter away, ~~swaying those hips again.~~ I honestly didn't know that she was... that she could be so... manipulative.

~~Even expecting her to try something, I have to admit I wasn't expecting that angle at all. How could she know my sexuality? I've done nothing to indicate such a thing... have I? Even hours after the interaction I feel flustered just recounting it. There's something about her that just... exudes sexual energy... when she wants to.~~

Every interaction I had with her today was like this. Her movements were more fluid and seductive, her gestures, her eyes, her speech... she's laying it on thick to try to get her way. I'm holding my ground. ~~I've seen how David simps over her and I'm not letting her trick me into doing it, too. If anything, she's the one that should be simping over me!~~ She requested access to Dr. Saynurs again. He's finally reached his new baseline, so we can start building him up. I agreed to let her administer the dosage, but we're doing all the work on our end as to what he can get, and when. In all honesty, we're sticking with the 400mcg C.Mut-551 to see if that... retrieves him faster. I'll provide a transcript of their interaction below.

Transcript- Dr. Bradley Saynurs, Ms. Ericka Saunders – subject interaction observation.

1/30/24 08:21hrs

-Dr. Saynurs, with his transformation now complete, spends most of his days sleeping. Video footage has shown him most active at night, and we've actually taken to feeding him at night to keep him from pawing at the keypad on the door. We changed the code, just to be sure, but there's only so many combinations that old system can hold. I think IT said about five.

-He is a feral fox in physical form, though, nearly as large as a person. He would dwarf an ordinary animal of his kind. Speech for him has become increasingly broken and rare, resorting more often to fox-like gestures with his maw open and chittering sounds.

-He becomes 'grumpy' when disturbed during the day but hasn't presented anyone on staff with any real concern. In the few times that he's bitten someone, they've been wearing bite gloves and it's usually very... soft. Docile, like he knows they're his staff members and doesn't want to hurt them.

-Staff have been required to wear bite suits when interacting, but, to admit a failure of protocol on my part here, I didn't even attempt to get Ericka to wear one. I already knew that she'd refuse. ~~Besides, I want to watch her bend over and interact with him. I don't know what's gotten into me.~~

[Dr. Saynurs is sleeping in the corner of the room with his tail wrapped around his maw. As Ms. Saunders opens the door, his ears perk up and he opens his eyes, looking curiously at the threshold as he waits. Upon seeing that it's her, he sits up and opens his maw, geckering angrily.]

Ericka: Well good morning to you, too. You remember me?

Bradley: You... did! You! You did!

Ericka: Still a few words in that maw, hmm? Well relax, I'm here to help.

[The fox tightens himself in the corner and his fur stands as if he's threatening to attack her. She remains calm and stays close to him.]

Ericka: Or maybe we just... won't give you 551. Maybe I'll go get a lab rabbit and you can learn to hunt. It's a skill you should learn, ya know.

Bradley: You did! You! Was you! You did!

[Dr. Saynurs skitters across the floor to the other side of the room, bunching himself up against the door. He doesn't want to be near her.]

Ericka: Calm down! It's not doing either of us any good for you to act like this. Whether or not I exposed you to the fern is irrelevant right now. The relevance is getting you back to your old self. Now, do you want that? Or not? There's nothing stopping me from just leaving you in here and letting you stay this way. I mean, if I'm honest, you might learn to like it! I did. [She squats down on her haunches and looks at him, gently tilting her head.] We can put you in a nice wildlife refuge, and you can hunt and sleep and find a den to live in... maybe we can find a vixen to change and the pair of you can have kits together. Would you like that?

[The fox starts to calm.]

-I'm surprised to hear Ericka use this as a taunt. She seemed to be pretty content with the idea for herself. Her motivation for 'curing' her need for 551, and this dialogue, makes me question her long term motives. She speaks of 'hiker prey' and makes no qualms about killing, or trying to kill, trespassers in her 'den.' She revels in being the pack alpha... wouldn't returning her previously personable faculties remove these aspects of her personality? Perhaps she subconsciously wants to do so? It's not clear to me.

Ericka: So, you *would* like that? Hmm, alright then! We'll skip the injections. No reason to change you back or-

[Bradley begins to gecker in objection.]

Bradley: No! Back! You did!

Ericka: Alright, calm down. I'll give you the injection, and maybe you'll have a moment of clarity so that we can talk, alright?

[Bradly nods and waits for her, still tightening himself in the corner as she approaches. She's ruthless in her movement as she grabs him by the nape of his neck and injects him in the shoulder. He complains, geckering more, but it only lasts for a moment before a hint of intelligence and self-awareness seems to start to wash over him.]

Bradley: You not doc. You no drug. Why... are you here?

Ericka: I know how to inject someone. It's not hard. [She squats down in front of him. He stares at her crotch.] Feeling better? How about you tell me your name?

Bradley: Heat.

Ericka: [Blushing, she stands up.] That's none of your business. I asked you question and you need to keep your cock in your sheath.

-So that's it... that explains her behavior this morning... ~~and mine.~~ She's in heat. It's a little early for that, isn't it? Ferals only experience heat once a year, but we have ours every couple of months. I should probably check myself. I don't need her using this to manipulate me.

Bradley: Doctor... Bradley Saynurs. You did this. How?

Ericka: Do you remember a few days before your vacation? Right before I asked you about getting a test subject? I was drying Dennstaedtia-Mutatio fronds right in front of you. When you denied me a specimen, I ground some up into a very, very fine powder and slipped it into your morning coffee.

Bradley: Bitch.

Ericka: Mmm.. but now I have the test subject I needed, so you can call me names all you want. Do you feel good? I gave you 400mcg C.Mut-551, rather than the 200 I've been taking. I'm curious to see what this does to you long-term.

Bradley: [Looking at reflective observation window] Alone? Supervisor! Dr. Hwen?? No subject!

Ericka: I want to test your hunting skills. I want to see if they wane as you change back. How about we take you outside and give you a nice rabbit for breakfast?

[Bradley entertains the idea. I intervene.]

Dr. Hwen: [Over intercom] No.

Ericka: No? Just like that? Aren't you interested in collecting data on his condition? It may be useful in the future, you know.

-Whats that s'posed to mean? I need to make sure I keep open containers and foods away from her. She might try to slip some to me as well. Perhaps I should put her into isolation like Rebecca. She just admitted to poisoning a researcher.

Dr. Hwen: We're not teaching him to hunt. Our goal is to restore his cognitive function and physical form to a pre-infection state. Which, I should add, you've admitted to causing. I should confine you for that.

Ericka: My research is too important. Besides, you keep telling your people to wear bite suits in here and I'm sure he hates it. Don't you, Bradley?

Bradley: They scare me, but I understand. Rather them than you. You abuse. You did this! Why? What goal??

Ericka: I want to ween my pack off of the C.Mut-551 so that we can leave this lab. Right now, we're tied to daily doses, and therefore, this facility.

Bradley: What about go back? You wanted go back. No remember, no write, no read...no person world. Why stay?

Ericka: [Sighing, she sits down on the floor this time with her legs apart.] Because there's no place left where we'll be free. We either live in your world, or hiker prey continually intrudes upon our territory, and we kill it until we're culled for being too dangerous.

Bradley: [Staring between her legs.] So, go back if safe?

Ericka: What do *you* want? You find yourself here, now... do you think you'll ever be the same? Do you think *we'll* ever be the same?

Bradley: You not same. Diary show. Sleepy. Go away.

Ericka: Just like-

Bradley: GO AWAY!

[Ericka rises to her feet, then steps to the door. Looks down at him, then to the camera to be let out.]

-Of sorts, he dodged her question. Whether or not that was because he was genuinely tired and didn't feel like trying to understand, or if he was legitimately avoiding her, it's yet to be seen.

-I'm going to press her on this perspective. She only wants to be a person again because she thinks she can't find a safe place to live? We can certainly arrange to place her and her 'pack' into a refuge, if that's what's required. I somehow think this was dishonesty about her motivation. ~~I really hope she doesn't go back, though. She's very attractive like this.~~

January 30th, 2024 Cont.

I approached Ericka after her interaction with Dr. Saynurs. I wanted to confront her about his intentional infection. The response from her was... predictable. She took no blame, instead blaming *him* for refusing to allow her to have a test subject. I don't have enough to go on to really understand what her pre-transformation personality was like, but she's certainly a narcissist now. She accepts blame for nothing. ~~She must be brought to heel.~~

I could take action to isolate her, and considered doing so, but given that she has what she already wants... I don't see a need. More than anything, she needs to be monitored. ~~Her scent intoxicates me. I think I'm in heat, too.~~ I'll work with her closely, and keep an eye on my food. The last thing I need is to lose it before Dr. Saynurs can take over again.

David returned by noon with blood on his clothes and an angry supervisor. The man, whom I've frankly never seen before in my life, demanded that I take David out of circulation for field expeditions. He said that, during an expedition looking for a rare flower in the fields near Seneca lake, he attacked a farmer's newborn calf. We've since had to compensate the farmer and buy his silence so that he won't press charges. When I asked Mr. Tanibard about this, he proudly said that he'd isolated the weakling from the pack.

Ericka was within earshot as this conversation was taking place, and when he noted the calf as being a weakling, she chided *him* for being weak. She said that prey that can barely walk was no challenge. She turned to me and demanded that she be given the opportunity to show him the proper way to chase down a herd. I flatly denied her request. The supervisor, having never met Ericka, called her insane, which made her growl at him. ~~This was my chance to step in. I interjected and forced Ericka to yield by calling her a bad girl and demanding that she take a seat. She obeyed me. Who's the alpha now, bitch?~~ David's supervisor then called us *all* insane and resigned on the spot. I worry how this will affect my career. I need to get some air.

POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT:

Personal Diary of Dr. Amy Hwen

1/30/24

Oh gods, why am I like this? Has Fernia cursed me!? That wolf's scent, her movements, her body... it's all I can think about! Ok, she's in heat, I get it. And so am I, according to my test. I mean, sure I guess that happens around the same time for a lot of us, but I'm seriously into her.

How the fuck can I be into such a bitch tho? She's rude, narcissistic, self-important... she thinks she's an alpha. Ha! Putting her in her place like that was the hottest thing I've done in months. Those splayed ears... she just needs a pretty black collar around her neck to look up at me with those beautiful scolded eyes.

Fuck, even writing this about her makes me wet...

Okay Amy... focus. Why's she making you this horny? Is it because she's a challenge? Is it because she said she's looking for a mate and you know she's into other wolf girls? Is her scent stronger somehow because she's been exposed to the fern? Maybe it's that wild, dangerous side of her.

She's obviously laying it on trying to manipulate me to get her way, but all I see is a challenge. She doesn't know me. Maybe she should? Shit, I wonder if I could pass that off? Tell them it's for research. *Hey, Ericka, wanna go out?* Yea.... I'll take her somewhere safe so that I can study how she acts in a public setting! Useful and educational. Then if it takes a bit longer to bring her back to the apartment than expected, nobody will be the wiser. I know she wants in my pants... fuck... and I want in hers, too.

Gods dammit Amy! She's fucked in the head! What's wrong with you?? You're basically fucking a wild animal if you fuck her, you know that!

No, I'm not. She's not a wild animal. She's wild *minded*. She's an intelligent woman that sees the world through the eyes of a beast given intelligence. If anything, that'd probably make her even *better* in bed.

I'm living dangerously with this. She wants a mate for her pack. If I get involved, she might try to infect me. I need to give her more access. Let Rebecca out, let her experiment on Saynurs... I get her really cured, I'll find the woman underneath that beast, and she can learn how a real alpha lives!

END POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT

Dr. Hwen's medical journal Cont.:

January 31st 2024

I've decided, after studying the subjects in a medical environment, that it may be useful to... take them into a social environment and expose them to that as well. I don't feel comfortable doing that with all three, so I've opted to simply ask Ericka to join me. The premise is simple, I sweeten the deal with her by allowing Rebecca to be released, and in exchange, she goes to dinner with me.

I proposed the idea to her this morning, and she agreed, really without any hesitation. It makes me wonder if I even needed to release Rebecca to get her to go along. It's really of no major consequence, though. Rebecca has expressed confusion on her confinement, she truly did not seem to understand why she was being kept away from the others. I'll press on Ericka this evening to see if I can get a moment of honesty out of her. There's just no way that she can't at least tell that these sorts of things are wrong. Whether she cares about them or not, she should be able to discern the morality of an act compared to the community she's within.

Dr. Saynurs has continued to improve. I allowed Ericka to enter the room again and administer his daily dosage. She's using 400mcg consistently. He can already wiggle his paw-fingers, and he's forming complete sentences. It seems, from her questioning as well, that he remembers most everything, even the smallest personal detail. It is important to note, though, that I do not see a behavioral change in him, though. His communication and his form are reverting, his memory is good, but like Ericka, Rebecca, and David, his perspective on the world is still quite different. If we fail to see this improve, we could try increasing to 600mg, but I have a feeling that we're only seeing faster results, rather than better with the increased dosage. What's lost might just truly be lost. That'll have an unfortunate impact on his career. I'm not sure if the director is keeping tabs on what's happening here, but, well if the higher-ups learn that one of their researchers is eating the lab mice, that might turn their heads.

I wish I was kidding when I said that. Unbeknownst to me, Ericka managed to gain access to the specimen warehouse. She brought three mice into the room with Bradley, and after a moment, she released them. He chased them down without hesitation and ate them all. After giving him the C.Mut-551 injection, he didn't seem to think that what he'd done was even out of the ordinary. I have to say, the precedent is decidedly concerning.

I did some research today as well, digging through the archives for Northwestern Albany. The railroad tunnel itself is ancient, originally carved during the late FCE, so... it's thousands of years old! It was re-excavated in 1702 when the railroads were finally making their way to the north American continent after the first sovereignty war. Back in those days, most everyone in this area was wolf, because of the tribe that'd settled here. I guess that explains the name. Wolf's Howl Pass. Not a whole lot is on file from back then, but there are a few accounts, starting just after the war of people going missing, and some high tales of men becoming beasts. They called it the dragon's fern. Gain your health, lose yourself. From what I can tell it harkens back to the age of the dragons. They'd apparently make deals that were one sided, I guess? I really have no idea. I've reached out to a botanist in South America; Brazil, I believe, that should be able to give me some clues as to what this may be about. She's done some work with NRP in the past. A bit of a recluse, but if anyone knows this stuff, it'll certainly be her.

Why the fern only grows in this region is beyond me. There isn't even a record that I can find of its scientific name. *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio*. It's listed, but the authorship and history are all marked as unknown. Maybe... we weren't supposed to find this? On the status page, it's listed as extinct. I don't have any more access than that. Everything else is access denied. I guess that's what I get for being a junior researcher, if only they would've considered the "your boss turned into a fox" clause....

January 31st 2024 Evening.

I picked up Ericka from the apartment at 19:00hrs. She was prompt and came out dressed surprisingly well. I don't know where she got it, but she was wearing a well-fitted black dress with a low cut, and silver necklace. Apparently, she picked it up when shopping with Dr. Saynurs. Now that I re-read his entries, I see that he did mention in passing that they'd gone out into the world. It's a shame that he didn't document it better.

Her attitude this evening was different, she had a smile on her face, sat politely in the car, and complimented me on my hair. If I didn't know better, I'd say this was a date.

We arrived at the restaurant about 20 minutes down the road. It wasn't too crowded, but there were more people there than I would have hoped. We wound up sitting in the waiting area until the buzzer they'd given us went off. During that time, I tried to make small talk, but all of the motion and activity near the door kept the subject too distracted. She seemed acutely interested in watching people come in, occasionally sniffing at them, conspicuously. It got us a few looks, but no one said anything. I asked her to stop, and she did. Much to my surprise, she apologized for it, stating that she'd not been in a location so compact and crowded in an extremely long time, so her senses were on overdrive.

We took our seats after about 45 minutes, and finally found ourselves alone in a booth where I could have a social conversation with her, away from the sterile lab and the influences of that world. She knew that I was recording, but she was surprisingly candid.

Audio Transcript of Subject interaction – Ericka Saunders – Restaurant public social interaction.

Ericka: There are still a lot of people here. Thank you for taking me here.

Amy: Of course! I thought... well it's a steakhouse, so I figured that might interest you.

Ericka: [Chuckling.] Am I so transparent?

Amy: Not entirely, no. A lot of what you do I can see rather easily, but you're still quite the enigma to me. My hope was that putting you into a situation like this would open you up!

Ericka: [A suggestive tone.] You want to... *open me up*... do you?

Amy: [Suggestive chuckling] You know what I mean. I want to get you to talk. I feel like there's a lot of things you don't say, and I don't know why. Now, you agreed to this dinner, and you agreed to discuss things with me, right?

Ericka: I agreed to this discussion, and if you play your cards right, you might get me to howl. I suppose that depends on how experienced you are and how much... *foreplay*... there is.

Amy: [Nervous and dismissive chuckle.] Let's... not go there. We *are* recording this, remember? Now, why don't we cut right to the chase. Why did force Rebecca and David to change?

~~This is a verbatim quote on my part. 'Why did force?' What's... that all about?~~

Ericka: Well, I think Rebecca's an easy answer, isn't she? She's a sweet girl; friendly, empathetic, obedient... I took her to be my partner. Though, at the time, I wasn't really able to discern who was... aligned in that way. Ya know? It wasn't until later that it dawned on me that she'd be happier with a male mate. So... that's why I took David... to make Rebecca happy. [She hesitates...] But do we really have to be so sterile in our conversation? We're on a date! Let's talk about date things. Tell me about yourself, Amy! I'm *very* interested to know you.

-I never used the word "date" when proposing this to her. It's something she's inserted into the situation all her own. I Believed it'd get her to open up, so I went along with it.

Amy: Ah, well... you already know I'm Dr. Amy Hwen, I uh... live here in Buffalo, I'm a wolf... obviously... I actually went to *your* school... U of A. Majored in general research studies. I'm not specialized.

Ericka: So, the woman in charge of my life is a *junior* researcher?

Amy: [A suggestive tone to her voice.] That's right. I *am* in charge of your life. [She sighs and takes a more serious tone.] But yea, I'm a Junior researcher. You... turned my boss into a fox. You... know what you did to him was wrong... right?

Ericka: Mmm... but look at it from my perspective. Right now, I'm tied to your lab with daily injections. If I tried to leave, I'd go back to the way I was in the Catskills. I asked him for a subject that I could test on, and he said no. So... I made one. I knew that there was no way otherwise. And before you ask, yes... I know that taking someone else would've been unethical, too. It comes down to a 'them or me' sort of thing, ya know?

Amy: I guess so, but, like, according to Dr. Saynurs's notes, you wanted to go back after you were rescued. Are you saying you don't want to do that anymore?

Ericka: I wasn't born like that. That wasn't... I mean.... It's hard to say. I knew when I started to change back that it wasn't a long-term viable solution to stay up there. I knew that staying there would never give me a mate, and that despite being... middle-aged... I was a gray-nose. Kinda seems to me that being rescued saved my life. You guys kept coming up there looking for the ferns, and other people came up there to see the tunnel that we called our den. We can't just leave a trail of bodies and expect people to just accept it. This is the only viable way forward. [She chuckles.] Besides, if I find a partner, I think she'll find that I can do a quite a bit more with my *fingers* than I could've ever done with my paws.

Amy: What about Rebecca? You defended her, acted like you didn't understand why I isolated her. Do you really not get it?

-Before she could answer, the waiter approached our table, and we placed our orders. Ericka asked me if she could have beer. I told her just one. The last thing I need is an inebriated wolf on the loose. She ordered the filet, unsurprisingly, but to my surprise, ordered it medium rare, with steamed vegetables. Her dietary acumen continues to surprise me. She even ordered a side salad. I suppose I was expecting it blue.

Ericka: [After the waiter had left.] You think it's an act or something? A way to justify a member of my pack hurting someone? No. I understand why you think it's wrong, but you have to understand our need to defend our home. It's a fair assessment that I didn't tell her about him... so if anyone's to 'blame' for that attack, it should be me. I'm supposed to look out for my pack, and... I failed her. If you mean to ask if I feel *bad* about what happened? No. I don't. In fact, and you might find this to be disturbing, I don't feel bad about *any* of the people that we killed. We call them 'hiker prey' for a reason.

Amy: Not even Rebecca's fiancé?

Ericka: [hesitating...] I... mean... Ok so here's the thing, right? By that point... Ericka Saunders was gone. So, what I was doing with him, and her? It was entirely driven by me, and I wasn't thinking like Ericka would've ever thought, and I know that. I might've felt bad to do something like that now, but that Rebecca Gnead is gone, too. She doesn't miss him, and I don't feel remorse.

-Her commentary here was interesting. She seemed to consider that the person she'd been was gone, and that she was someone else now.

Amy: Are you not... Ericka Saunders?

Ericka: [Laughing] I'm sorry, I guess I said that in... it's hard to... maybe you should find out. You should experience it if you want to understand it. I *am* Ericka Saunders, but I'm not the same wolf that disappeared into the mountains in 2004. I'm... different. Ya know, a lot of my memories have come back lately. I remember... growing up in Maine, hanging out with my girlfriend Macey... getting in trouble for spending too much time in the woods... that one time I almost got gored by a moose... man, taking one of those down would give the pack food for a long time, huh?

Amy: What happened to Macey?

Ericka: I dunno. There's kind of a gap in my memory. Highschool, nothing, my research papers, Deacon, tunnel, and... everything since. Weird, right? But then David says he can't remember things, either, so I've just kind of accepted it as normal.

-She was surprisingly easy to talk to. Far less stiff, but our topics are still very... sterile in nature. I wanted to see if I could spice it up a little. I just had to wait for the right time.

Amy: So... outside of your... work, and us constantly giving you a hard time, what're you into these days?

[A long pause followed by quiet thanks and the rattling of plates as food is placed on the table.]

Ericka: I don't know, actually! I'm still trying to... get used to this. If I'm honest, I'm bothered by the fact that you guys hold the keys to my identity, and that's become somewhat of an obsession to escape. I don't... really do much else, ya know? [A smile seems to form on her voice.] I am finding myself rather... interested in getting to know *you* more, though.

-I opted to take the initiative here. Assert dominance.

Amy: Yea, you're in heat. I can tell. Is that the only reason you're into me?

Ericka: [stammering] I... um... well... I don't... I don't know. I don't think so? I mean, you're a wolf, so... you could be a part of my pack, if you wanted.

Amy: Or... you could be a part of *mine*.

Ericka: What're you saying?

Amy: I'm saying you're a big fish in a small pond. You think you're an alpha, but you're not.

Ericka: [Flirtatious.] Oh... so this is your game huh? You like to grab your girls by the collar...

Amy: Mmmhmm... I do. And I think you're the kinda girl to go for that, too.

Ericka: [seductively chuckling] Well aren't you interesting. Ya know, I'm not the only one in heat here. Perhaps that's why you asked me out on a date, huh? Maybe you plan to take the long way home? Show me some of your toys?

Amy: [Sound of movement, as if she's leaning in.] Honest question. Could you have someone like me as part of your pack? Unchanged? Untouched by the ferns? Or would you insist that everyone be like you?

Ericka: When I was in the tunnel, subduing someone and then using the ferns to heal them was the only way to keep them from running off. It was also the only way to make them understand me. If someone can understand me *without* it, I don't see a reason to do it. Dr. Saynurs was an experiment, not an act of malice, or an act to get him on my side. I just want to break my dependence and get away from the lab.

-Is she being sincere? My question was direct, I didn't try to obfuscate what I meant. I wanted to know if she would let someone like me be in her life, and if so, what that would look like. Is she capable of living a normal life? If Rebecca and David had pups, would they be able to go to school? Would Rebecca be able to be involved with other mothers? What would this 'pack' be like?

-She seems to think that 551 is the only thing holding her in our custody. She's incorrect about that. Technically, all three of them are property of New Realms Pharmaceuticals, though I wouldn't tell her that now. Her release really isn't up to me in the long run.

Amy: What would it be like? Let's say you figure it out tomorrow. Dr. Saynurs is in good shape again, you don't need 551 anymore, NRP gives you release papers, and you go out into the world with your pack... what would that be like?

Ericka: Well, I guess I'd go back to trying to finish my degree. Write that paper under a new professor. You and I both know that D.Mutatio is valuable, and using 551 to reverse the change process would effectively render it inert. So... I'd do that and... get a job in the field. Maybe even with your company? I mean, you're basically saying you want to be a part of my pack here, so I'm assuming you'd be a part of this plan.

Amy: *You'd be a part of my pack.* And... you really don't think the change process would be important?

Ericka: You've said that twice now. A part of *your* pack... what do you mean by that?

~~I mean I want to see you on your knees with your muzzle on my pussy begging me as your mistress while I hold your collar! Soth's Cock but this girl makes me horny!~~

Amy: I mean that I'd have to guide you. You've been through a lot, you're not the same people you used to be. You'd need my help to get on in the world.

Ericka: Oh, see I thought you meant you wanted to be my dom-.

Amy: [Chokes and coughs.] I... well... are you into that sorta thing?

Ericka: The one thing a strong woman needs... is another strong woman. I can smell that energy on you. ~~The very idea makes you wet. Let's not play games here. You wanna have some fun, and I'm here for it. Any mate of mine needs that quality. A submissive like Rebecca would never work as the mate of an alpha.~~ It takes two alphas to lead.

~~It was... hard to contain my excitement. I didn't wear anything to mask my heat. I wanted her to know about it. I guess I forgot her nose is stronger than others.~~

[A long silence]

Ericka: What? Now you're backing down?

Amy: No! Not at all I-

Ericka: Good. Because I wanna see what you can do.

Amy: [Sighs.] This is gonna get weird, isn't it?

Ericka: As weird as you wanna make it. You're the one with all this sexual energy goin on. I smell it on you. You invited me out to proposition me, on the auspices of a subject interaction study. Don't act like I don't know.

[A long silence]

Amy: How did you... figure it out?

Ericka: Little things. You like putting me in my place. You get this tiny little smile at the edges of your mouth when you get to tell me no. When you called me a bad girl earlier today, you were dripping with excitement when I gave you what you wanted. Those scolded eyes and splayed ears... you get off on taming the beast. I get it.

Amy: Do you... like that?

Ericka: Girl, are you gonna dom me or not? You keep asking me if I like it. You want it, you take it. Stop acting weak.

Amy: Fine. Then when we finish here, I'm gonna take you home and fuck your brains out, and you're gonna love it and beg for more.

Ericka: [quiet laughing.] Gods damn it's a long dry spell.

-There's too much to redact here. I decided to go with it, even though I had no such plans. I probably shouldn't've told her that, since no such thing happened. After dinner, I took her back to her apartment.

POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT:

Personal Diary of Dr. Amy Hwen

2/1/24

Mother of all fucks... I woke up this morning with Ericka sleeping at my side, still wearing her collar. Gods but that was amazing! She knows *exactly* how to push my buttons. It takes a good sub to make a good dom and she steered me exactly where we both needed to go. She wasn't kidding about her fingers either, and that tongue?

Ya know, and I think some of it too is that she's... this woman's a murderer. You can call it what it is, but she's killed people, lots of them, as a feral monster over a period of two decades! There's this sense of danger. I'm not just taming an office worker with a wild side, I'm bringing a beast to heel. I tell her to eat me out, and she does it. Those fangs've ripped the flesh from bones and yet here they are gently pressing against my pussy like.... Ngh. It's too bad we don't have time for more before I take her back to the office.

I lied on my report. I said that I took her back to her apartment. I've been getting really fuckin sloppy with personal comments in my notes. I've been trying to backpedal, but our system really doesn't fully allow them to be removed, just redacted. Someone with the proper clearance could unredact those notes and read what I wrote as a strikethrough. Let's just... hope it doesn't get that far. Once Brad's back to normal, I can try to convince him not to bring this up to the director, and hopefully that whole thing'll blow over. I really don't want to see Ericka in a cage or on all fours, unless it's because I told her to. She's part of *my* pack now. We're a family, as far as I'm concerned... and I have to protect them all.

I don't know how to talk to Rebecca or David about this. In all honesty, I don't think I have to. Ericka's not gonna act like I'm the big bitch when we get back to the office, and I know it. She'll put up her façade like she always does and the pack will fall in line. If I order them to do something, she should back me up. She'd fuckin better.

Well, I'd better get going. She can't come back to the office doing the walk of shame. I gotta get her changed and showered before she comes in.

END POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT

Dr. Hwen's medical journal Cont.:

February 1st 2024

Ericka returned to the office this morning a little later than usual, but went straight to Rebeca's holding room. She stood beside it expectantly as I unlocked it, wagging her tail as the scolded wolf inside timidly stood up from the corner of the room. They embraced, with Rebecca whimpering and licking Ericka's face. She just rubbed her back.

When Ms. Gnead seemed satisfied, she looked at me and apologized for "killing the intruder." I informed her that the man had survived, but was in critical condition, then followed up, asking if she was sorry for attacking him, or sorry for being punished. She thought for a moment, then said that she understood, but when I pressed for more we just started to go in circles again. I asked her what she would say to the family members of the man she attacked. She looked at Ericka, who nodded subtly, then told me that she would have nothing to say to them. It seems there's still a lot of work to do here.

Ericka gave me a look, almost seeming to check if she should scold her for it, but I didn't engage for now. We were just about to leave and return to the lab to see Dr. Saynurs when Rebecca stopped and sniffed at me. "I smell her on you," she told me. I was a little surprised, and asked her what she meant. A slow smile grew across her face and her tail began to wag, after which, she rushed to Ericka, sniffing her as well. When she... confirmed whatever it was she was trying to confirm, she asked her if this meant that she could have pups with David now. Ericka gave me a worried look, then said they'd talk about it later. On the walk to the lab, with Rebecca lagging behind us both, she quietly chided me for not taking a "better" shower. I honestly don't know what she means.

Dr. Saynurs is looking very good today. He's able to stand on his hind legs by stabilizing himself on the wall with his front. His shoulders are accommodating his arms to reach out, and his body shape is returning to normal. It seems that the higher dosage of C.Mut-551 work to accelerate reversion, at least in the physical sense. I waited for Ericka to prep 400mcg C.mut-551 and opened the door to enter with her. I was hoping to speak to him. Now that Ericka is... more obedient to me, I should be able to control her actions more readily. She taunted him last time. I'd prefer to avoid that.

Transcript – Dr. Saynurs interaction 2/1/2024 10:21hrs

[Dr. Hwen and Ms. Saunders enter the room. Dr. Saynurs is standing on his hind legs wearing a hospital gown fastened along his back. He looks labored as he holds himself up.]

Dr. Hwen: Good morning, sir. How are you-

Dr. Saynurs: Where the hell were you yesterday? You just let her take over? She's not a doctor! What are you even doing?? Are you doing your job?!

Ericka: Well, that's some nice clear common. You're doing well!

Dr. Saynurs: Fuck you. You did this to me. Because I wouldn't give you a subject?? So you made one. When I'm back to work I'm having them lock you up and I'm cutting you off the 551.

Dr. Hwen: Sir, I... I don't think we should do that. I understand that you're upset but-

Dr. Saynurs: [Baring his teeth] Upset?? I'm dependent on this shit now! I... I don't even know what damage this process has done to my mind! Upset doesn't define it! [He lets go of the wall and falls to all fours.] I want you to administer the dosage, not the wolf. I don't trust her.

Ericka: Bradley, our goal with this is to try to find a way to cure it. I don't want my pack to be tied to your laboratory. We need to move on. We need to move into your world and make the best of it. So long as we're dependent on...

[She's interrupted by Dr. Saynurs laughing.]

Dr. Saynurs: You think it's that easy? You just don't need the fern... uh... stuff... anymore and you're just released?? You're delusional. We're all subjects to them now! You don't just get to walk away. You're property of the company, just like I am.

Dr. Hwen: What is the company, sir?

Ericka: He's... wrong... right?

Dr. Hwen: Afraid not. I didn't want to tell you, but you're a ward for the company. Any release is going to entirely be dependent on our higher ups.

[Dr. Saynurs sneered at her as she splayed back her ears in response.]

Dr. Saynurs: We're property of NRP.

Ericka: Which stands for?

Dr. Saynurs: You tell me.

Ericka: No. That's not how this works fox boy. You're the one recovering here. I'm just maintaining.

Dr. Hwen: You're both in my care. Please, answer the question, Dr. Saynurs.

Dr. Saynurs: [Looking away from us and speaking quietly.] I don't remember.

Dr. Hwen: If I told you N stood for New?

[The fox hesitated, then shook his head.]

Ericka: Hard to act like the big bitch around here when you don't even know who you work for.

Dr. Hwen: Ericka, don't taunt him.

Dr. Saynurs: Fuck you. You did this to me! This is your fault you... why do you... [He approaches us, sniffing.]

Ericka: [Speaking to Dr. Hwen] Sorry...

Dr. Saynurs: You... you two... your scents! You heat. You wear scent!

Dr. Hwen: It's normal for a woman in heat to wear a scent masker, sir.

Dr. Saynurs: Obtuse. You know what I say. You... mated! You wear her scent and she wears yours!

Dr. Hwen: No. I took her to dinner last night to engage her in a social setting. We didn't mate.

Dr. Saynurs: Lie!

[Dr. Hwen nods at the hypodermic needle in Ms. Saunders's hand. The wolf nods back and bends down, quickly injecting Dr. Saynurs in the shoulder.]

Dr. Saynurs: [Snaps at her, growling as he backs into the corner.] For all I know that's poison. I don't want you near me! Back away, wolf!

Ericka: [Growling] You don't tell me what to do, fox.

Dr. Hwen: Ericka, stop. He's my boss. When he returns to active duty he-

Ericka: If... he returns.

Dr. Hwen: Do not interrupt me when I'm speaking. [Sighs.] Yes, if. His mental faculties have to meet the standards to return to his position.

Ericka: Seems pretty unlikely to me. What do you think, foxy? Remember where you live? Your name? Where you went to school? Where we are??

Dr. Hwen: Ericka, leave the room and wait for me in the observation area. This isn't helpful.

[The wolf looks scolded and leaves the room.]

Dr. Saynurs: You took her as your mate and now she listens to you.

Dr. Hwen: [Squatting near the floor.] I don't know what you're talking about. Can you answer the questions she asked?

Dr. Saynurs: I know I'm Dr. Bradley Saynurs, that I work for NRP, and... and that she did this to me. I can't remember my date of birth, address, where we are right now, what NRP stands for, or where I went to school, no. She's ruined my life. I wouldn't give her a test subject, so she's ruined my life! You should stop mating with her. She can't be trusted.

Dr. Hwen: I didn't mate with her I-

[Dr. Saynurs rushes up and sticks his nose between her legs. She growls and pushes him away.]

Dr. Hwen: What the fuck are you doing!?

Dr. Saynurs: [Backing away...] I know sex when I smell it! She's all over you! You mated! Stop lying! Why are you mating with test subjects??

Dr. Hwen: I'm not mating with test subjects! Sir, this interview is over for now. I'll have your lunch brought in in an hour.

[She stands up and exits the room.]

THE POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM HAS DEEMED THE FOLLOWING MEDICAL JOURNAL ENTRIES BY DR. AMY HWEN UNRELIABLE.

Dr. Hwen's Medical Journal Cont.

February 1st 2024 Cont.

Dr. Saynurs has certainly lost his manners, and it seems that he's also lost his senses. Why he thinks I've mated with Ericka is a mystery. As he noted, she's a subject, and I can't do such a thing. It could be that we were too close together when sitting at the restaurant, and in the car? I'm not sure. Certainly, our heat is noticeable by those that've been exposed. I'm wearing heat masking underwear today, no one should be the wiser, but... well I guess their noses are more sensitive. I worry how David might react.

Upon exiting the room, Ericka was sitting and talking quietly with Rebecca. When I inquired what they'd been discussing, Rebecca's ears splayed, but Ericka smiled. She told me that she was explaining the 'new way' of things, and that I needn't be concerned. She said that Rebecca and David should listen to me from now on as if she's giving them the order herself. I... have to say I'm a little confused. An alpha can just... give away her authority like that? This needs some testing.

I met with David, finding that he'd been relegated to watering the plants. He seemed decidedly unhappy, but with no expedition team willing to take him, it was apparently the only task they were willing to assign. Upon seeing us, he wagged his tail, put down the watering pitcher, and walked to Rebecca, giving her a nuzzle. When he was done, he nuzzled Ericka. After this, he turned to me and tilted his head, sniffing at me curiously. Ericka nodded to him, and he hugged me closely, whimpering and wagging his tail. I was... caught off guard. No words were spoken. Why is he behaving in this way?

I told the three of them that I wanted to look into getting them out of the on-campus apartment. In order to accomplish this, we would need to find a solution to their 551 problem, and urged all three of them to think independently about a way to find a solution. David made the first comment, observing that, aside from Ericka's rather minimal work with the substance, they don't know much about it. He suggested waiting on Dr. Saynurs to return to active duty. I opposed this idea, because his memory loss would likely lead to mistakes. We needed to learn to do this without him.

Rebecca is holding out hope that Ericka's efforts to use him as a test subject prove effective. She believes that a higher dosage of the substance will change him back completely, citing the return of some of her own memories as time has gone on. I disagreed with her assessment, simply for the fact that higher doses have only accelerated the changes, not made them more... complete? I suppose, I mean, his behavior is much the same as theirs during this stage of recovery, only more... vulpine in nature. His memory loss is the same. He's more articulate than they were, but nothing here leads me to believe that he'll just go back to normal.

Ericka asked if I knew what the substance was, and what hand I'd had in its development. I was rather ashamed to tell her that, as a junior researcher, my job was only to observe her and the others, not to intervene in such a way. I knew nothing of C.Mut-551, its origins, or application. Dr. Saynurs was the expert on that substance. This revelation... created a sense of panic among the three of them. The only person that knew was the fox in the subject observation room. I assured them that this didn't have to be the case, we simply needed to gain access to his research notes.

The problem with this is that I need to contact the facility director to access his files...and to do that... she has to review everything that's happened here. It's something that we'll have to consider after Dr. Saynurs is a bit farther along. I don't want to approach this in a way that sees Ms. Saunders locked away for her actions against him. I need her out here, with me. ~~I need her in my life.~~

POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT:

Personal Diary of Dr. Amy Hwen

2/1/2024

Two entries in one day... gods, what have I gotten myself into?

Ok, so first off, I didn't think about Rebecca or David smelling me. I took a shower! But I guess that's not enough for the super-noses the fern gives them. Ugh. Worst of all, Dr. Saynurs accused me of it too, and jumped right to the truth. I tried to deny it, but it's on tape. The walls are kind of closing in here. If they find out I'm fucking a lab specimen, I mean...

See here's the thing though, right? I fucking loved it. She was right. The idea of taming the beast makes me fucking wet. It's hot as fuck to take this potentially dangerous, untested creature by the collar and stuff her nose between my legs and order her to lick. It's just... gods... do I have a monster fetish?

It's not that she's a monster, though. Ericka's sort of like... well it's almost like dating a murderer. She's killed lots of people, shows no remorse for it, and among anyone that's not part of her inner circle, doesn't even consider them people. I'm in that inner circle now. I'm a part of her pack. I'm the alpha's alpha. I just have to keep her out of trouble and keep NRP off our case.

The fact that I didn't know anything about 551 kind of freaked her out. I guess she doesn't really know what I do here. I'm just a junior researcher. I'm barely older than her. I mean... 2004 her. Not... not 40 something her. She looks my age. My job is to study her and her pack. That's all.

Letting her work on Dr. Saynurs was a bad call...

...fucking her was probably also a bad call. At least from a company standpoint.

I'm just not sure what to do anymore. We need Brad's notes to make more of the stuff, and to get access to that I have to go over his head to the director. Up until this point... frankly... only David's field team even knows that something's up. The director's probably not even aware.

Soth's cock... what a mess. I need to get Dr. S to start working on the C.Mut when he can, and not tell the director... OR... I need to figure out a way to access his notes without the director finding out. Or I could face the music... but that won't end well. I mean... if Ericka gets locked up... and they confirm that we fucked, they might lock me up too! Even though there's nothing wrong with touching or fucking or licking... any of them. The fern's the problem, not her flower. Shit... its only now dawning on me how bad this is. How much of that stuff do we even have left?? I'd better check in the morning. Without it, all of them go back to animals, including the man that knows how to make it.

Okay.. so here's what I'll try to do... I'll see if I can show a little cleavage to that IT guy tomorrow morning. Maybe I wear my good bra, skip my heat masker, it'll give him enough of a rise to get access to Dr. S's notes. Then... I won't need him. He's gonna squeal on us, I just know it. I have to find a way to... to keep him quiet about this. Dammit, Ericka, why'd you have to go and change him??

Sitting here alone in my room writing this is lonely. I can still smell her on my sheets. I miss her. She's just... intoxicating. I need that sexy savage beast in my life. I need to fix this... like... yesterday.

Part 7

From the desk of Director Susan Nombs – New Realms Pharmaceuticals – New York Region

January 21st 2023:

It has come to my attention that something strange is happening in our Buffalo research facility. I was notified in late June that Dr. Bradley Saynurs had several of his field scavenging agents go missing. After a time, one of them was rescued, and two anomalous subjects retrieved, along the old Wolf's Howl Pass railway tunnel near Albany in the Catskills. His team had been searching for *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio*, a fern with unusual healing properties, that has largely been the focus of his work over the last decade. According to his documentation, the fern is classified as extinct by the FedGov conservation authority, but that's obviously not the case. He did some digging, and found that not only was it not extinct, but that it was growing in abundance anywhere where high iron content soil and temperate climates can be found. Like... old railways, for instance. This prompted him to contact the University of Albany, and one Alphonso Farric, a mouse in the botany department. When he mentioned the plant, the mouse became avoidant. It took the dean getting involved to finally learn the truth. The fern is dangerous, and the United States government had tried to terminate it before the unification following the end of the Jagdfrei. They failed, so it's just been kept under wraps on the obscure occasion that it turns up.

Dr. Saynurs took the samples we had and began to work with them, testing it on lab mice, and found tht it had amazing restorative properties... that came with a cost. The animal seemed to devolve. Or, perhaps... change in a way that rendered it something that it previously was not. The mouse, in this case, would grow larger and begin to take on more predatory behavior.

It took him considerable time, but he was finally able to develop a working 'antidote.' C.Mut-551. Short in his terms for cure-mutatio-formula 551. That would be his 551st revision of the substance. I have to say he's quite dedicated to his work. I'm not up on details for the substance, but as I understand it, it's a derivative of the fern lectin, and, has limited effects. Once the subject receives this... cure... they'll experience physical and limited mental reversion to their previous state, but they become dependent on the substance to maintain it.

That brings us to our current situation and... something that I believe is... escalating. In my opinion, Dr. Saynurs has given subject R-44, Ericka Saunders, far too much leeway. After her form was reverted, she was essentially allowed to roam freely in the facility. She began to work on the *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio* fronds to complete the work she started before becoming afflicted by the plants effects some 20 years ago. She has no qualifications to work in a laboratory, but because she showed the acumen, Dr. Saynurs allowed it. Or at least, that's my theory. His rationale behind it is not clearly stated. She showed dedication to the task, but also a self-obsession with the 551 derivative. It makes sense, because in essence she's trying to ween herself from it, but allowing *her* to do this research on her own is what's lead us to our present predicament.

On or around January 4th 2024, Dr. Saynurs began to act strangely and abruptly took a leave of absence. A few weeks later he returned citing general sleep disruption, and shortly after, began to exhibit animalistic behavior. By that I mean... he was acting like a fox. General avoidance of others, nocturnal hours, a desire to "curl up" and a nesting behavior in his observation room that saw him shredding his bedding to make a sort of... den... so that he could rest out of sight. His tests still show that he's healthy, but based on previous information, I believe he's been exposed.

Prior to his departure, he appointed Dr. Amy Hwen, a junior researcher, to study R-44-46. She is... not qualified for this task, and had I known that she'd been assigned, would've intervened. Now that she's acting in shit role however, I am... remaining in silent observation. We will be monitoring her medical journals and transcripts, but her professionalism as an NRP researcher was already in question prior to this assignment. To put it lightly, she is... easily excited. I do not believe that she can continue this task without becoming emotionally involved with the subjects in question.

February 2nd, 2024

My concerns have been validated, tenfold. Not only has Dr. Saynurs suffered an infection from the *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio*, but Dr. Hwen is allowing R-44 to test C.Mut-551 dosage levels on him without proper supervision. It was discovered that Ms. Saunders intentionally infected him with a powdered version of the Mutation lectin when he refused to provide her with a person to experiment with. He is recovering, but given the... unusual behavior of the rescued subjects, it's unlikely that he'll ever truly return to his previous state. A few more days should prove to restore his physical form, but his mental faculties are yet to be truly established.

More than this is the fact that Dr. Hwen, as expected, has developed a personal, and seemingly, sexual relationship with R-44. This is troubling, but also... fascinating. Ms. Saunders is more controlled now than she was previously. This fact alone gives me hope, but the fact that a repairman is in critical condition in the medical wing after being attacked by R-45, leaves me with more concern.

IT informed me this morning that Dr. Hwen was flirtatiously attempting to force her way into Dr. Saynurs's research notes, circumventing my intervention. I suppose this means that she's not aware of my... awareness of the situation. I'm concerned that this action signifies that she feels cornered because of her sexual and romantic relationship with R-44, and may lead to violence against Dr. Saynurs as an effort to silence him. I need to intervene.

What I haven't yet determined is *how* to intervene. I could simply have Dr. Hwen incarcerated in the observation facility and isolate R44-46, but I'm not certain that this will lead to favorable results. Dr. Saynurs, as well as the rest of this... unqualified 'pack' have a vested interest in making C.Mut-551 work. I've ordered a senior researcher to step in, Dr. Leevi Ahonen. He should be able to bring order to this mess. He'll be making audio recordings of every interaction, so we should have a good handle on the situation.

I've... also asked IT to do a little bit of intrusion. Dr. Hwen's house is being fitted with recording devices, audio and visual, to make sure that she doesn't start taking the subjects off campus to escape the cameras she knows are set up in the on-campus apartment. It's not technically a violation of her privacy, since her contract stipulates that we reserve the right to total surveillance on the suspicion of behavior that goes against company policy. He should have that done today while Dr. Hwen is here in the office. Let's see if we can find out what's really going on here.

Audio transcript Dr. Leevi Ahonen

2/2/2024 Beginning 11:32hrs

[Door opening]

[Indecipherable conversation that stops abruptly.]

Dr. Ahonen: Dr. Hwen! Good morning.

Dr. Hwen: Uh... g... good morning! Who are-

Dr. Ahonen: Dr. Leevi Ahonen. I'm a senior researcher here at NRP Buffalo. I'm surprised we haven't met! The director asked me to check in on you, Dr. Saynurs, and the other subjects. Can you give me a rundown?

Dr. Hwen: Uh... sure! So, this is R-44, Ericka Saunders. This is R-45, Rebecca Gnead, and R-46, David Tanibard. He's also a current employee here at NRP. Former field agent. Right now he takes care of the samples we have here in the lab.

[Quite, cautious greetings from the subjects are heard.]

Dr. Ahonen: I see! And... can you tell me why they've been released?

Dr. Hwen: Um... well Dr. Saynurs deemed them safe for release so long as they remain in our care. They mostly spend time here on campus, save for a few outings, which have proven to be reasonable excursions, in my opinion.

Dr. Ahonen: Even after the event involving the repairman?

Dr. Hwen: He... was...

Dr. Ahonen: He's still struggling. You know that right? He may not survive.

Ericka: Why have you not treated him with the fern lectin?

Dr. Ahonen: Because we're trying to save his life, not make more subjects. If we use that to heal him, the amount of exposure he'll need will send him right into feralhood, and we'll have to use 551 to bring him back, as you're doing with Dr. Saynurs. How... is he by the way?

Dr. Hwen: He's doing very well. He's able to stand on two legs today with minimal stabilization assistance, and he's... well his mind isn't quite there. He's making assertions that are untrue based on what he perceives from scents, it seems.

Dr. Ahonen: And... what would those assertions be?

Dr. Hwen: [Heavy, quick sigh.] Well, he's correct in noting that Ms. Saunders and myself are in heat. He's pointed that out several times, but he's also alleged that the pair of us have... had intimate relations, and that's simply not true.

Dr. Ahonen: Is it... Ms. Saunders?

Ericka: It is not. I respect Dr. Hwen, but I do not... we have not... had such an interaction.

Dr. Ahonen: Ms. Gnead? Mr. Tanibard?

Ericka: [Growling.] Why are you asking our pack the same question? I just told you! We've had no such interaction! You do not get to go around me. You are not my kin, and you have no right to step around me and assert dominance like that!

Dr. Hwen: Ericka... don't. Rebecca, David... answer his question.

[Long silence.]

David: I... don't know anything about that. They were not... they haven't around us.

Rebecca: I defer to Ericka and Amy. It's not for me to answer.

Dr. Ahonen: But you're an individual. You have thoughts of your own, right? You have a sense of ethics. Is it ethical to lie to me?

Ericka: [Growling again.] Shut your mouth prey! This is our pack! You have no right to step in! Do that again and I'll rip out your throat!

Dr. Hwen: Ericka! No! Bad. Stop being aggressive with him. [Sigh.] Dr. Ahonen, I suggest you review the case notes for our subjects. There are significant differences in how they approach the world from how someone like yourself might see it. There is a clear and coherent rank among these individuals. You will get your best answer from the pack alphas.

Dr. Ahonen: [Pausing.] You keep using the plural. Alphas... Our pack... who are the alphas here?

Dr. Hwen; Myself and Ericka. It was... important to establish dominance to better control them. After the attack I felt it was necessary to reign them in. Rebecca will not attack anyone unprovoked again. Will you?

Rebecca: N... no. I'm sorry. I was defending... I thought it was right. I'm sorry the prey got hurt.

Dr. Ahonen: Hurt? He might die. Do you not see the impact of your actions?

Dr. Hwen: I've already been through this with her. There's no reason to keep pressing on it. She doesn't understand why it was wrong.

Dr. Ahonen: And yet you and Dr. Saynurs think this... thing should be walking free, when it doesn't consider attempted homicide to be wrong. You've tolerated attempted murder, you've tolerated intentional infection... what else will you tolerate? Do you not see the risk of having individuals like this roaming the facility freely??

[Sound of the observation room door sliding open.]

Dr. Saynurs: Dr... Ahonen...

Dr. Ahonen: How did you...?

Dr. Saynurs: This door only supports 5 different codes. I guessed. Why... are you here?

Dr. Ahonen: Sir, please step back into the room. We'll change the code. You shouldn't be-

Dr. Saynurs: I... am not... your fucking subject. I am... an employee at... this... this place. I think. I am not willfully- You will not- I am unhappy. Food... is late. No injection yet, either. Are you trying to regress me?

Ericka: I'll prep it for you. We need to take ours as well. We've had a busy morning.

Dr. Saynurs: And food?

Dr. Ahonen: That's your concern? Food? Dr. Saynurs, are you aware of anything that's going on around here?? The way you've been running this research line is abysmal.

Dr. Saynurs: S...shut up. This is my... my territory. You have no right to... you're a rabbit! You're prey! What right do you have?

Ericka: Finally, something we agree on.

Dr. Hwen: Ericka, I already told you not to do that.

Ericka: Sorry. Here, stand still, fox. I'll give you your 551.

Dr. Saynurs: 400... still? You're going to run out if you... it's too much.

Dr. Hwen: I'm glad you said that. Sir, we need you to unlock your research notes on 551. Can you-

Dr. Saynurs: No. You... you don't get that. I get that. It's mine. You can't have it. Mine. I'll take it.

Ericka: Why? If we run out, we'll change back. Including you. We need to know how to make more of it.

Dr. Saynurs: Because it's mine. Mine.

Dr. Ahonen: I'll handle all that and make sure that the product is synthesized for your needs. None of you are going to have access to that data.

Dr. Saynurs: No! It's mine! You... no take! Mine! Are you sure that's 400mcg, Ericka? I... feel like I'm not... this thought process isn't helpful.

Ericka: I know how to measure dosage, fox. This is 400.

Dr. Saynurs: Perhaps it was just a delay. Listen, Dr. Ahonen, I understand your concern, but... why are you here? This is my territory. You're prey in my territory. You're being irresponsible as a rabbit to be here.

Dr. Ahonen: Because the director has taken an interest in all of this, and you need someone to take the reins. You're out of pocket, and Dr. Hwen is frankly not qualified. We have dangerous subjects wandering the facility, including you, and-

Dr. Saynurs: I'm not dangerous! What an insult!

Dr. Ahonen: You just called me prey and told me I was irresponsible to be here! You're judging me because I'm a rabbit. I would classify that as a threat, considering what the other subjects have done. We found over 65 unique sets of remains at Wolf's Howl Pass. We're still uncovering them.

Ericka: We ate most of the bones. You won't find everyone. Look for skulls, probably near the waste area. We didn't count the hiker prey, we took it. No real sport, but it was good eating. Plentiful.

Dr. Ahonen: [Sighs.] Okay... that's enough. After you're done with your dosage, I'm putting you all into confinement.

Dr. Hwen: Sir! I... I have to object! They won't do well in confinement! The best path forward for them is social normalization! They'll learn! I... I can promise you. They're already learning. They need more time around other people, not less!

Dr. Saynurs: I... agree... all of us should have more social time... to... remember what it's supposed to be. Re-learn society.

Dr. Hwen: Sir, I take personal responsibility for anything that happens going forward.

[Long Silence.]

Dr. Ahonen: Fine. But you will document *everything*. Understand? And if something happens... you will be held responsible to the highest accord. *Understand??*

Dr. Hwen: Yes sir. I... I understand, sir.

[Dr. Ahonen departs the room. Transcript continues as security camera footage.]

[Dr. Saynurs sits in an office chair. He is awkward, but more anthro than before. Another day and he should be able to wear normal scrubs.]

Dr. Saynurs: That... is a problem. Taking my research. Prey invading my space.

Ericka: Our space, technically. I'll tolerate you.

Dr. Hwen: Yes, you will.

Dr. Saynurs: So you mated with her to gain pack leadership. That's smart, Dr. Hwen.

Dr. Hwen: I did not mate with her! Stop saying that!

Dr. Saynurs: This nose doesn't lie. Her scent was all over you yesterday. It was between your legs. Your sex is needy. You are in heat. You need breeding.

Dr. Hwen: Stop it! That's... disgusting. You're my boss.

Dr. Saynurs: Was... your boss. I doubt that they're going to let me continue to have such authority now. Dr. Ahonen is running the show. He will not show leniency like I did. We will be relegated to cells, we will be forced to go back. Because of you! [Points at Ericka.] You discover! You use! You change! You hurt... you... you infect me! All of this is your fault!

Ericka: How was I supposed to know?? I've read the journal just like you did. I obviously didn't know what was happening to me!

Dr. Saynurs: You did! And you let it happen!

Ericka: It was good to happen! She thought... I thought I was being hunted for murder!

-The subject identifies herself as someone else in the journal.

Dr. Saynurs: You took from me! Force me into this! I don't remember my den! Am I married? Kits? Don't know! Where do we work?

Dr. Hwen: Guys, stop! This isn't helpful.

Dr. Saynurs: You stop! You! You take from me! Everything! Who am I?? I barely know!

Ericka: [Growling and baring her teeth.] She said to shut up, fox! I suggest you do it!

[David and Rebecca join Ericka in growling, following her lead.]

[Dr. Saynurs chitters at her like an animal, opening his maw and curling tightly into himself in the chair. He falls out, then quickly backs into the corner, continuing the behavior.]

Dr. Hwen: [Sighing] STOP IT!

[The room falls silent.]

Dr. Hwen: We don't have time for you to be a bunch of animals right now. If the director's involved that means... [sighs] that means my efforts to keep this under control have failed. That's why Dr. Ahonen is here. Instead of keeping this under control, I've apparently tipped them off, and they're reviewing everything. That could have far reaching implications for all of us.

Dr. Saynurs: You... are not exposed. You... have nothing to worry. What will they do? Fire you? You're only a junior researcher, you can find a new job. Our persons lives are over if they cut us off.

Ericka: Our alpha would never abandon us. You really think she'd just find a new job?

Dr. Saynurs: What do you think she'd do? Sacrifice herself and drink fern powder like you forced me to do? Just so she could stay with you??

Ericka: Yes! I think she would.

Dr. Hwen: [Nervously.] I... don't think that's necessary. We're not... we're not going there. Besides, my job isn't part of the problem here. The problem is how they plan to treat *you*.

David: [His ears splaying submissively.] You'd... leave us behind? You'd rather just walk away than to go through it?

Dr. Hwen: I didn't say that! Let's just move on, okay? Let's focus. You need to get yourselves under control. No more threatening prey, no more attacking trespassers, no more clamoring to own everything you see. If you want to be people, you have to show them that you can be. You have to put all this other shit that's happened behind you. Whether or not you fix the dependency or not, you have to prove to the company that you can live a normal life if you want to get out of this place.

[A long pause of silence. Rebecca nuzzles David with a quiet whimper, Dr. Saynurs sits in the corner with his ears splayed.]

Ericka: And... if we can't? I mean, Amy, you have to know... those people... in that diary? I mean, I can only speak for myself, I suppose, but they aren't us. This fox isn't the same man that we knew before, either. It's not likely that we can just go back to those lives.

Dr. Hwen: I'm not asking you to. I'm asking you to make a new one. What you do or don't remember isn't important. What's important is what you do going forward. The company will help you find a skillset and keep you close, but you'll be able to find some sense of normalcy if you just... just try.

Dr. Saynurs: [Rising to his feet.] From what I do remember about C.Mut-551... a permanent solution isn't likely. We'll be dependent on it for the rest of our lives.

Dr. Hwen: That doesn't mean you have to be in this lab all the time. It doesn't need anything special. You can treat yourselves with it. All they'd have to do is make sure you get it. Either you come here, they send it to you... ship it... whatever it takes.

Dr. Saynurs: You're naïve, Dr. Hwen. I may not remember the company name, location... but I remember the sentiment. A subject is a subject. It's not a person. The best we can hope for is on campus housing and a job, but the most likely outcome will be living in a controlled refuge without 551, or being flat out put to sleep.

Rebecca: [Her ears splaying as she embraces David.] But I wanna have pups! I... just need permission and time and... maybe if I have them like this, they can be people! And... can go to school and... all that stuff.

-As an interesting note, not documented in this file is that her pre-change position was that she did not want to have children, and had actually gone out of her way not to date other wolves. This change from a social standpoint is interesting, as it drives home the idea that she, like the others, is driven more by her instinct than the social aspects of the world around her, and how that might impact her. It's entirely possible that this perspective might change if she were to re-enter society and have more exposure to the world, though.

Dr. Saynurs: They'll probably neuter David. Can't have that happening with either of you.

David: Are you out of your mind?! I'm not a fucking animal! They don't get to just cut my balls off!

Dr. Hwen: This is all cynical hyperbole. We don't know any of this. Focus on 551, and on getting better. I'll try to appeal to Dr. Ahonen to make sure that all of you get more social time, but you have to put in the work, too. I'm demanding it from you as your alpha.

POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT:

Personal Diary of Dr. Amy Hwen

2/2/24

...What do I do? Should I just leave? If I quit my job now, can I just walk away? Can I get a job as a researcher somewhere else? I had to sign an NDA to get this job. It's very likely that they wouldn't tell any other employers about what's happened here.

When David asked me if I was willing to join them in their curse... my heart skipped a beat. They want me to lose myself?? Intentionally?? It doesn't make any sense. It wasn't just him. Ericka was the one that brought it up. She fully expects me to sacrifice myself for the pack. My fucking *personhood*! I don't think so. She's hot, really hot. Her sub game is beautiful, but that doesn't make her worth giving up my entire life for! Does it?

She's gonna try to do her best to act like a person. She'll fake it, but... somehow, I feel like it's just gonna fail. She doesn't understand what she's doing wrong. She'll always come across as... alien... to any observant person.

Maybe my time with 'the beast' has been slated to fail all along. It's a fun fling. I mean, I honestly do think I'd like her, with a bit more time. Getting her to laugh is challenging but when you do she has the brightest eyes. There's a person in there, it's just... missing pieces. I dunno if that's the right way to describe it. Ya know, during a discussion today she actually identified herself in her diary as a third person. Like... it wasn't her. Does that mean that they all consider their former selves dead? That they think of themselves as someone else but just won't admit it? I really don't know what to think.

I really thought Brad would rat on me, but I guess the IT guy just didn't think I was hot enough to get through. He must've told the director about all this, instead of helping me. Well... I knew it was a risk. Maybe the fact that he's not a canine made my heat... bad for him or something. I dunno. I mean it doesn't really matter the species to me. When I get a scent like that, I'm all over it, but... maybe it's not like that for cats? Maybe he's gay or something... maybe... he just doesn't like me. Fuck I dunno. Fact is, he didn't help. I tried to sexy my way into a favor, and I got ratted on instead. Sucks to suck, right?

So now I've got Brad being captain cynical... neutering David?? Come on dude, seriously?? He actually proposed that. He honest to Soth said that he thought NRP would cut David's balls off so that he wouldn't have pups with Becky. What kind of company do I work for if they'd do a thing like that??

Ahonen's a dick. I really don't like that guy. Threatening to lock them up right away. That can't happen! Not only would I lose my... plaything... it'd also hurt their social development. They need more time around people, not less! I told him I'd take the blame if they do something stupid. I honestly... I honestly kind of regret saying that now.

I know if I leave, Ericka's gone. She's out of my life. I'll have abandoned her. My sweet little sub. My cold-hearted killer wolf monster. Would she hate me for it? Would she hunt me down? Could I even do something like that? I mean, I bet she'd leave me behind... wouldn't she? Probably. Survival of the fittest or whatever. Isn't that how animals live? She certainly felt nothing about all the people she killed. Dude, over 65! And she says that's not even 'most' of them! I mean I guess she *was* alone for like a decade, and then with Becky for another decade. 20 years of killing hikers... she probably doesn't even remember most of them. What must that be like? She seriously has no empathy for the terror and pain she gave those people? Gods... why does the danger in that thought make me wet? Fuck I need to get those new pills that suppress your urges. Ya know, it's almost like she gives off some kind of pheromone that makes me this way. It's like she's a drug to me. Being around her gives me almost a contact high. Could there be something to that?

Maybe I'm not a monster fucker after all... maybe I'm just under her spell. Heh... yea... sure. I think my porn collection says otherwise. My diary knows me too well to lie to it.

I did this to myself. Dr. Saynurs might've opened the door but I'm the one that dropped my panties. Mistakes were made.

I think tomorrow... well... I dunno. I'm gonna try to find a way to get them all here at the house, so that we can talk about this stuff without the others listening in. My pack, not... not Brad. He can just deal. I don't care about a fox any more than the others do. I'm not sure why, though? Am I just mirroring again? Oh that's a bad precedent to set. Mirroring on a pack of semi-feral cursed wolves... I should probably talk to my therapist again soon. "So... hey dock, I fucked a girl that's kind of like... worse than an actual werewolf? Like... yea she's actually like the stereotypes rather than the actual wolves which aren't bad people at all. Yeeaa and I kinda wanna keep doing it. Can you help?" Sure. He'll love that one.

I wonder if Ahonen plans to continue the research on 551 as a cure, or if he just wants to keep giving it to them as is. I wonder if he'll try to revert one by stopping their treatment? Better not be *my* blue-eyed demon. Saynurs is already a wreck, just... go through with what Ericka wanted and let him slip. At least it'll prove a point.

Then again... he *made* 551. We might be fucking ourselves if we do that. ARGH! I don't know what to do! I just... I just want... I don't even know what I want. I found someone special, and I want *her*. All this shit is just getting in the way.

2/3/24

I woke up super early in a cold sweat. Nightmare. My hair was calling out and when I tried to run my hands through it I pulled back paws. This shit is getting to me. I should walk away, now. Don't even tell Ericka goodbye. Just... go to the office, walk straight up to Director Nombs and say, ma'am.. I'm sorry but this place is banana fucks and I'm done. I'm gonna go mop the floors at BioSyn. At least then I'd be able to sleep at night. If weird shit happens at the company, I won't know about it. Who knows, maybe I can meet a werewolf chick and we can live together. I mean, they can fuck without turning you, right? So long as they don't draw blood? I... have no idea how that works. Maybe a vampire? Ah but then eventually she'd look like my daughter or something. Fuck I dunno.

I'm wracking my brain over all this Why? Why why why?? What's got me so into this stupid wolf? She's just one person! Just some random nobody that fucked up and wiped her ass with a cursed fern a few dozen times. She doesn't matter! I'm still young! I can find another woman to lay by my side in that pretty black collar. I can find another with beautiful light blue eyes and sandy brown hair and... warm welcoming fur and... ya know, one that hasn't killed anyone before. Someone normal.

...Someone boring.

I think I need to do it, though. I need to quit. I'm gonna go in there and do it. Dr. Ahonen can do whatever he wants with them. I can't be their alpha. This is beyond my ability.

From the desk of Director Susan Nombs – New Realms Pharmaceuticals – New York Region

February 3rd, 2024

Dr. Hwen came to me this morning, knocking on my door timidly. I asked her to come in and take a seat. She started out professional, saying that she'd been considering her career path and her options here at NRP, and stated that it was her desire to resign, so that she could seek other opportunities. When I pressed her for her reasoning, she specifically cited R-44, Ericka Saunders, as the cause. She said that the wolf made her 'nervous' and that she was afraid that being around her might cause her to become infected. She'd tried to work with the pack for quite a while now, but her efforts have been a constant battle between the will of the wolves, and their erratic, animalistic tendencies. She's trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

I questioned her more, alluding to the fact that I've been following the details of their interactions, and she finally broke down, sobbing at my desk and telling me everything. Her lust for the wolf, her intimacy, and her insatiable desire for more. She's fallen in love with a specimen, or at least, she thinks it's love. She's so afraid that she'll be on the hook, or that she'll be injured or changed because of them, that she's starting to experience nightmares. I can think of someone else who worked with this wolf that experienced nightmares. For her sake, I hope it's just the stress.

Her citation of a nightmare prompted me to reject her resignation for now, instead offering her two weeks paid vacation so that she can think it over. It won't go toward her total PTO, so if she wants to take time off later, she's free to do so. She hesitated, but ultimately decided to accept, asking only as she started to leave what would ultimately become of R-44 and her extended family. I told her not to worry, despite Dr. Ahonen's blustering, I have no plans to lock the pack away; I simply need them to be brought in line.

If I'm honest, I'm a little disappointed to see the girl give up so easily. She wanted to be the alpha's alpha, and she's done it, yet here she is, turning her tail like a little coward. Perhaps she's better as a submissive after all. With her position, she has something that Dr. Ahonen doesn't. She can rein that wolf in. She can command her, and therefore her pack, to behave. With enough work, I think she'd be able to truly bring them in line, 551 or not. I suppose I've been too heavy handed.

I offered her an olive branch, reminding her as she put her hand on the door that I don't hold anything that's happened against her. I complimented her on her handling of the situation, but reminded her that she needs to be careful. I... basically gave her permission to have more relations with R-44, I hate to admit. There's cameras in her house now. If she tries anything and we need to step in, we'll have the proof that we need. She dried her tears a bit and smiled at me.

Just before she stepped out, she asked for something that surprised me. Instead of two weeks paid leave, she wants to take one. A week with the pack, in her home. I hesitated to allow this, even with the cameras, but a week's worth of 551 and separation from this sterile, medical environment may be just what they all need. I told her she'd have to document everything, and she agreed. This'll get them away from Dr. Saynurs, and allow him some peace. I suspect that his cynicism is coming from Ericka's presence. He feels like we've failed him by allowing her to run his life. Without her, Dr. Ahonen can properly care for him and nurse him back to a stable condition. Gods don't make me regret this.

Video transcript: Laboratory A

2/3/2024 Beginning 9:46hrs

[Dr. Hwen enters. R-44,45, and 46 are already present in the room. Ericka (R-44) is prepping their daily dose of 551.]

Ericka: Morning, Amy.

Dr. Hwen: [Yawning, still slightly red eyed from crying.] Morning.

Ericka: [Ears splaying.] Something wrong? You look like you've been upset, and tired.

[Dr. Hwen seems nervous and sits by the door in a rolling chair, fidgeting with her tablet.]

Dr. Hwen: I um... I came clean. I told Directory Nombs everything. Even about the sex, and my... our relationship.

Ericka: I take it from the tear ruts in your fur that she didn't take it well?

Dr. Hwen: No... she... she did, honestly. I uhm... I actually tried to resign, but... wouldn't let me. She said that I didn't have to... to give up... us, that I could... continue to work with you on that.

[Ericka's reaction is subtle, and can't be discerned at first. Subsequent study finds that there's a slight flash of anger, her ears splaying back only for a second before she forces a smile. She nods, then looks back down at her work.]

Ericka: So you tried to abandon us... and... she wouldn't let you.

Dr. Hwen: Not abandon! J...just... Ericka, I'm afraid... and I know you are, too. Whether you admit it or not... you're afraid.

Ericka: [Not looking at her.] You're supposed to be the alpha here. An Alpha doesn't just walk away from her pack. She defends it to the death. Otherwise, she's no more than a member. [She looks up at her.] You're gonna have to prove to me that you're still worthy of your rank.

Dr. Hwen: How? You gonna challenge me to a fight?

Ericka: Well I could try to put you over. I'd win... but if our goal is to be more like you then... I... have to defer to you on that. How does a... person... assert dominance?

Dr. Hwen: I mean... I already did once.

Ericka: [Smirking as she looks back at her work, then turns to give Rebecca her shot.] I let you do that, ya know. I didn't have to go along.

Dr. Hwen: Then... you *want* me to be in charge. You *want* me to take control. So... I do. I'm not abandoning you. I'm staying right here. In fact... after talking with the director, she suggested that the four of us take a week off. We'll get a supply of 551 for you to administer, and you can stay at my house and we can do... person things.

David: We can stay in your den?? Oh that sounds interesting!

Rebecca: Time away from this horrible smelly place.

Ericka: [Skeptically.] Just like that? She's letting us leave after what we've done? All is forgiven? I thought people took offense to those sorts of things. Dr. Ahonen certainly seemed to.

Dr. Hwen: It's... just for a week. She's seen that I'm able to bring you to heel and she thinks that that'll help me teach you.

Ericka: She's seen that, hmm? [Smirking as she gives David his shot.] Well, I guess I'd better play along then.

Dr. Hwen: You'll do more than play along. You'll do exactly as you're told. You want my tongue, you have to do what I say. You'll get nothing otherwise.

Ericka: [laughing flirtatiously.] Oh yes mistress. I'll certainly be a good girl, then.

David: Does this mean we... get to mate? There's heat all around me. It is... hard to concentrate.

Dr. Hwen: I... David you know I'd love to let you do that but-

David: I'll wear... uh... a thing! A covering! We'll apply the... she can take the pill that... please?

Rebecca: Please?

Ericka: Begging for it, huh? I think the words you're looking for are condom, spermicide, and... uh... I don't know the pill.

Dr. Hwen: Morning after pill. It may not be the best decision but if I'm gonna fuck my girl all week then you two should be allowed to have fun as well. Just... with safeguards. You must... keep those safeguards in place. I don't even know what'll happen if you two have pups without authorization.

Ericka: [Sighing as she gives herself a shot.] Funny how you're our alpha, but you're so low on the food chain below prey. The very idea that a rabbit is above you is... disturbing.

Dr. Hwen: That's specist. People don't think less of other people just because of their species. It's wrong. At the very least, keep those thoughts to yourself. Referring to someone as prey is... problematic.

Rebecca: I remember that. It feels strange, but... doesn't.

Dr. Hwen: Honest question... yesterday you referred to the person in your journal in the third person. Does that mean that... you don't consider yourself the same Ericka Saunders that you used to be?

Ericka: I don't remember what she was like. [Sitting down, she seems ambivalent, showing no emotion in her response.] Was she me? Yes. Do I remember what she was like? How she felt, thought... what she cared about? For the most part... no. If you have such a disconnect from someone you used to be..., are you still that person?

-More insightful than I would've expected from her. Maybe there's hope here after all. I'll continue to monitor Dr. Hwen's activity over the next week.

Dr. Hwen: I dunno. I... I'd like to think so.

David: When you lose so much, and you don't think the same... it's hard to see that person as you. I came back barely even exposed, but I still changed, and I know that it took a lot of who I was with it. I gained more than I lost, though. I gained a mate, and a family.

Rebecca: [Nodding.] When you don't know what you lost... you don't miss it. I'm sure... I felt something for...uh... the person I was with. If I was going to be his mate then... obviously I cared about him, but... I don't remember him at all. I don't even remember his species. So what have I lost? I gained a new mate, and a family, like David said.

-It disturbs me that she looks at the death of her fiancé with such objectivity. Would she feel differently if it was David? How would she have felt before all this?

Dr. Hwen: I... see.

Ericka: Is there anyone you would miss? [Tilting her head.] If you went through it, that is.

Dr. Hwen: I don't wanna go through it. I can't imagine anyone would. Losing yourself and... temporarily losing your body... becoming dependent on 551...

Ericka: [Nods.] Right, but do you have family? People that would miss you?

Dr. Hwen: Why are you asking me this? Did you do something to me?

Ericka: Why would I do something to you? You're our ticket out. You're our pack alpha. I'm just trying to learn more about you.

Dr. Hwen: Because... because you thought I might abandon you. Because you feel like I need to think like you to be part of the pack. Because you ... you doubt that I'm a true alpha.

[Ericka doesn't respond verbally, simply shaking her head. She sighs and rises to her feet, then walks to the observation room.]

Ericka: Alright fox, time for your dose. You should probably get to come out pretty soon.

[David and Rebecca look at Dr. Hwen curiously, their ears pointed forward eagerly as they tilt their heads.]

Dr. Hwen: Dad's... gone. Mom and I don't really talk. She never really liked the lesbian thing. Couldn't accept it. Even in this day n age people still have hang-ups. It's kinda stupid. I got a brother, lives out west in the North California region. We haven't talked in years. Outside'a that I... don't guess anyone would... would know I was gone.

David: No one's changing you. We trust you, you have to trust us. We're your pack.

Rebecca: Do you feel it unearned?

Dr. Hwen: [Nodding with a gentle sigh.] I fucked Ericka one time. I took that beast for my own. I forced her muzzle into my loins, and I demanded her to service me. She obliged, but she didn't have to. Did I really size the reins?

David: There are more ways than just violence to win someone over. She says you are over us, so you are.

Dr. Hwen: and if she tells you I'm not, then what?

Rebecca: We would look to you to challenge her. Your dominance is yet to really be seen, if I'm... if I'm allowed to say that. [Her ears droop.]

Dr. Hwen: No, this is good! You two often stay pretty quiet. I want to get to know more about you... what you think about, how you look at things... ya know? Ericka may not tolerate disagreement, but if you have an opinion, I want to hear it. I'll tell her as much, too.

Ericka: [Exiting the room.] Tell me what?

Dr. Hwen: that I want David and Rebecca's opinions on things.

Ericka: Going soft?

Dr. Hwen: Did I ask your opinion of my statement?

Ericka: [Chuckling.] No, you did not.

Dr. Hwen: [To Rebecca and David.] What do you think of spending the week at my place? Going out to restaurants, maybe doing something silly like playing mini-golf or some other touristy junk?

David: It's winter. There's snow. Where would you find mini golf?

Dr. Hwen: Oh, there's a place near Woodland. Kinda small but still a lot of fun. We should try it out!

Rebecca: [Her tail wagging.] Can we... oh can we see a movie? I haven't seen... I don't remember.

Ericka: Are you sure you want to see a movie? If the television in the apartments any indicator, we might be better off staying home and ordering in. Pizza, or something.

Dr. Hwen: TV at home?

David: For whatever reason, it's never interesting. She's right, we might get bored of a movie.

Dr. Hwen: How about a movie night at home right, then if you like it, we can go to the whole popcorn and overpriced soda thing.

[Rebecca's tail wags and she quietly squeaks in excitement.]

Ericka: So, when do we leave? Tired of this place, but we need to get some stuff from the apartment. Clothes and things.

Dr. Hwen: As soon as we get our doses in order, we can head out.

Part 8

2/3/2024 15:41hrs

Dr. Hwen's home video transcript

[Dr. Hwen (henceforth referred to as Amy in this transcript) enters the home first, followed by Ericka, Rebecca and David. The three subjects are carrying small suitcases.]

Amy: Here we are... home sweet home, such as it is.

Ericka: [Placing her bag just past the door and sniffing the air with her muzzle raised.] It's a cozy den. I was pleasantly surprised when you took me here the first time.

Amy: What were you expecting?

Ericka: I'm not sure. Perhaps something sterile and... scientific? It's much more lived in than I expected.

Amy: Well, my time at the office isn't my entire being. It's just what I do for work.

Rebecca: [Sniffing the room.] I smell your scents. [She wanders into the bedroom.] It's the strongest in here. [She climbs onto the bed and sniffs the sheets, then rolls onto her back, squirming on the bed.]

Amy: [Following her.] What... are you doing?

Rebecca: [Adding my scent to yours. This is our den, right?]

[David lingers in the doorway behind Amy. She doesn't seem to realize he's there.]

Amy: Only for a week. You have your own room with David. Stop wallowing on my bed and let me show you.

[Rebecca stops, her ears pointed forward. She sits up and splays them submissively, nuzzling under Amy's chin and wagging her tail as it curls between her legs.]

Amy: This behavior is fine here in the den, er... house, but in public, you need to not do that, understand?

Rebecca: Yes ma'am.

[Amy turns to leave, but bumps into David.]

Amy: Ngh... David, what're you doing??

David: Sorry. I was... sorry. Should I go with you to see the room?

Amy: [Sighs.] Yes. Follow me.

[She leads the pair down a short hallway to a smaller room and turns on the light. It has boxes in the corner and on the bed.]

Amy: This will... be your room. Sorry about the boxes. If you can put them in the closet, I'd very much appreciate it.

David: [Sniffing.] There is almost no scent in here for anyone. It is unused?

Amy: [Nodding.] Unused. Just don't... don't pee in here, okay? Don't pee anywhere that isn't the toilet or the shower. Just... no scent marking.

Rebecca: We got in trouble for that at the lab. We don't do it anymore. [She walks to the bed and begins to move boxes.] Can we mate here?

Amy: Remember what I said, multiple forms of protection. No mating without telling me. And... don't tell me in public, okay?

David: We wouldn't mate in public.

Amy: That's not what I... just... when you're in public you need to be in person mode, understand? Minimize the nuzzling, no licking, no inappropriate comments. Don't call anyone prey, don't assert dominance, say please, thank you, excuse me and other things. Be polite. Don't worry about territory.

[Rebecca and David's ears splay as Ericka enters the room.]

Ericka: Sounds daunting. You think we can remember all that?

Amy: It's... basic stuff. People don't even think about those sorts of things.

Ericka: Well for us, those are going to be deliberate acts. Just... give us some slack if we mess up, okay?

Amy: No. You need to learn. You do this, and these animalistic behaviors will fade. Those fade, and you'll be able to function more in society and get your lives back.

David: Won't that change who we are? What's in these boxes, anyway? They smell of a scent long faded. Only you and a male are stronger.

Amy: The male was probably the movers. The contents are... none of your business. And no, it won't change who you are, just how you present yourself in public. You have to blend in.

Ericka: Hunt the prey as prey. Blend in with the prey. A solid tactic.

Rebecca: I miss hunting. Can we hunt at some point?

Amy: No hunting. And... I mean this isn't technically blending in with prey, but if that helps you to think about it, that's fine. Just understand that you aren't there to *catch* any of this prey.

Rebecca: [Lifting a box.] I smell blood in this one.

Amy: You... you do? Put it down for a minute. Let me look.

[Rebecca puts the box down and Amy opens it. Looking through the contents she finds a framed picture. She sighs at it and puts it aside. There are other personal effects inside the box.]

Rebecca: [Picking up the framed picture.] The blood is here. On this. You are with someone. Who is it?

[Video is not clear but appear to show two women standing together in the photo at Niagara Falls.]

Amy: [Holding out her hand.] Give it to me. [She takes it and puts it back in the box without explanation.] Finish moving the boxes and the bed is yours. You want something to drink? Tea, water, soda? Beer?

David: Water would be nice, thank you.

Amy: [Wagging her tail gently.] See, you're already catching on. I'll get some for you.

[Amy and Ericka leave the room. The subject follows her closely, like a pet hoping for attention.]

Ericka: Who was that? Why was there blood? She was a wolf, but not related to you.

Amy: [Opening a cabinet to grab glasses.] How can you tell she wasn't related?

Ericka: Not of your scent. Not of your kin. The scent was wolf, though. Matches the photo. Someone important to you?

Amy: [Sighing as she opens a bottle of water and spreads it out among the glasses.] You're not the only one that had a girlfriend in the past.

Ericka: You didn't kill her, did you? Assert dominance too aggressively? I... would prefer not to draw blood in our sessions.

Amy: [Shaking her head, takes a heavy drink from the bottle of water and nods Ericka to a glass to take for herself.] Her name was Carol. I met her in middle school. Strangers to friends to more than friends, to... way more than friends. Partners. She always had... she had issues. Everyone does, ya know? But... hers were pretty deep. About seven years ago those... those issues caught up with her while I was on campus taking an exam. I came home to a mess.

Ericka: She... ended herself?

Amy: [Nodding as she drinks more water. She looks tense, and seems to be using the water as a diversion for herself.] Bleeding out is a hell of a way to go. I hope her soul found clarity in the void. I hope she's been reborn somewhere and she's a happy little 7-year-old.

[Ericka seems to reflect on the situation, her ears slowly splaying. She turns and leaves the kitchen, sitting down on the couch in the adjacent living room. Silently, she sips some of her water.]

Ericka: [Looking up at Amy as she appears in the doorway to silently observe.] I remember why I started therapy. [She cups her glass with both hands.] It was mandatory. Court ordered as part of my release. I'd been there for years before trying to finish my degree. The mounting stress prompted my therapist to recommend the diary. I had forgotten this. How far away that feels now. She is so distant.

Amy: [Sits beside her.] You attempted? You don't feel that way now, right?

Ericka: She did. During the summer between school and college. Macey was going to another school, and she felt alone. She eventually found that alone was viable, but it took time. [She looks up and nuzzles Amy.] I'm glad that I'm not alone like she was.

-R-44 separates herself intentionally here from her previous life. Shielding herself from it? Or does she truly not identify? From the conversation, it seems that she does, but feels more complete with her pack around her. These subjects will have to be kept together. I-232 will have to be relegated to this role.

Amy: Well... I'm glad you're still around. Those sorts of things are- ... I... I couldn't help her. I don't want to be... close in this same way with anyone again.

Ericka: We don't need to be close in that way. Our attachment is different. It's easier. Person relationships are complex. Ours are not.

Amy: [Rising to her feet.] Just don't go hurting yourself, okay? [She walks to the kitchen as David and Rebecca enter, seeking water.] I failed someone once, I'd probably do it again. So don't put me in that situation.

Ericka: [Too softly to be heard from the kitchen, but picked up by local microphone.] You would abandon *us* before we'd ever abandon you.

Amy: What? Sorry, I didn't hear.

Ericka: Don't sorry me. That's weakness. If you're my alpha, be my alpha.

Amy: [Sighs.] Alright.

[The four of them return to the living room. Ericka snuggles up with Amy as she sits down. The wolf responds by placing her arm around her and keeping her close. Rebecca and David sit apart from them on the other side of the couch and do much the same. Amy turns on the television and finds a movie. The subjects appear interested at first, but quickly lose focus.]

Rebecca: Can we have phones?

Amy: Why? Who would you call? You're with your family all the time.

Rebecca: I... want the internet. I want to read about the world.

Amy: I have a tablet you can use. Go to my desk over there. [Nodding over her shoulder.] It's beside my diary.

Ericka: So, you keep a diary too, huh? Maybe it can document who you used to be.

Amy: What's *that* supposed to mean?

Ericka: Now that you have us you are different. You are a part of the pack. You are not who you were.

Amy: If you slip that fern powder into my drink, I swear to the gods I'll put you on your side.

Ericka: [Chuckling flirtatiously.] Ooh I'd like that.

Amy: Seriously. Don't do it. I don't want that.

[Ericka seems to dodge responding, instead nuzzling the wolf. She nudges her away.]

Amy: Do you understand me? I'm not fucking around. You do this to me, I'll never forgive you.

Ericka: [Her ears splay for only a second, but snap back as she nods.] I understand.

[Amy stares at her for a moment, distracted as Rebecca returns wagging her tail and shoves the tablet into her face.]

Rebecca: It's locked.

[Amy unlocks it for her, then gives it back. The wolf squeaks excitedly, then plops down beside David, snuggling with him as she tries to remember how to use the internet. Amy returns her gaze to Ericka.]

Amy: Don't dodge this. I'm dead serious here. Do NOT under any circumstances infect me with-

Ericka: I won't. Not... not any more than you already have.

Amy: What's that supposed to mean?

[Ericka looks guilty and avoids eye contact with her.]

Amy: Ericka, fucking answer me.

Ericka: [Looking back with her ears splayed in submission.] The first day I met you, I... very lightly powdered your coffee. Just a tiny bit. Dr. Saynurs had a lot, but you only-

Amy: WHAT THE FUCK!? [She stands up and pushes the wolf back on the couch.] You infected me with Mutatio lectin?? Are you out of your godsdamned mind??

Ericka: I didn't know you! I wanted... you're a wolf and... I wanted you to be a part of my pack.

Amy: Well, you wanted the bull and you got the fucking horns you little subby bitch! What is... how much of my mind- Am I going to turn like you did??

Rebecca: It's been a long time. Almost two weeks.

Amy: Your journal clearly shows that it took you more than two weeks to change! How do I know it's not... what the fuck is *wrong* with you?? Soth's Cock! No wonder I've been out of fucking control with my libido! You've been fucking with my brain!

Ericka: [Leaning away and whimpering.] I thought... I... I thought-

Amy: You thought nothing! You thought you could just slip this shit into my drink and make me like you and you'd fucking live happily ever after! You Naïve, stupid, animal minded shit! How fucking dare you do this to me after- I didn't- how could you?? I love you! I care for you! And this is how you treat me??

Ericka: [Whining, tears running down her cheeks.] I didn't know! I didn't know you! I thought it was the only way! I didn't know you'd be so good to us. I didn't know you'd... take control!

-Subject Dr. Amy Hwen, designated I-232. We will monitor for any changes.

[Amy starts to calm down, inspecting her hands carefully.]

Amy: There's... nothing to do now. I'll... keep an eye out.

Ericka: It takes more than one treatment to change. Dr. Saynurs had a large dose. Rebecca, David and I had multiple doses through fern fronts before we changed. You literally only received a dusting from the remainder of the powder in the vial. It was barely anything.

Amy: [Sitting back down, but pushing the wolf away to forcibly deny her affection.] I ingested it. That may have stronger results. How much did you give Dr. Saynurs?

Ericka: Four entire fronds. It was... it nearly discolored his coffee. He had to add more sugar. He could tell it was bitter. I'm surprised it took as long as it did for him.

Amy: Dr. Saynurs reported nightmares and other sleep disturbances early on. I... experienced one last night. I'm nearly two weeks in and I'm experiencing early symptoms. Gods... I swear if I turn, I'll be the only alpha in this family. I'll fucking kill you I Swear to Kalu.

Ericka: [Begging and whimpering.] Please. W... we can be a family if it happens. 551 will turn you back and we can still be together. This isn't... you won't die.

Amy: You think of your past self as someone else. In your eyes Ericka Saunders from 2004 is dead. You're someone else. You're a new Ericka Saunders. How can you say that I won't die if I go through the same thing?

Ericka: [Whimpering.] I don't know. Y... you are not- I don't know!

-This explains a lot of her behavior, and the information we've gathered so far on her personal notes. I-232 has exhibited behaviors consistent with I-231, and R-46 upon arrival. It will be interesting to observe if there are any further changes. With light exposure, the substance may simply act as an irritant to the exposed individual's mental state. As noted by R-44-46 in their personal entries, light exposure seemed to cause no change in physical form, but it is not clear from R-44's entries or personal declarations as to how, if at all, the first application altered her perception.

[I-232 quietly watches television. Any time R-44 tries to get close to her, she growls, forcing her to back away. R-44 has become entirely submissive, showing behaviors consistent with intense guilt.]

[They watch television in silence for about an hour. Rebecca and David stay close together, but obviously feel the emotion of the moment, intentionally avoiding eye contact with Amy. Occasionally they glance at her and wag their tails hopefully, but never looking her in the eye.]

[Abruptly, Amy rises from her seat and enters the bathroom. While she's away, the others seem to relax slightly, with Rebecca looking at the internet on the tablet again.]

Rebecca: So, it seems that... something weird happened in 2017. An old TV repair place in Seattle exploded when two dragons burst out of it and started fighting in the sky. Apparently, it was part of some underground facility ran by something called the MPRS.

Ericka: That would've been interesting to see.

David: It also mentions something called the night of the false gods, and the vampire riots. I... I actually think I remember some of that. Apparently, a black magic coven was trying to revive a witch who's soul had been taken by Soth, and they did it by causing the gods to tell their followers to... cause havoc. A lot of people died. Loooots of people. A stadium collapsed, cities burned... tons of vampires and werewolves were murdered by rouge hunters... the whole world was destabilized for months.

Rebecca: Are we werewolves?

[Amy exits the bathroom and sits down, still apart from Ericka.]

Amy: You're not werewolves, no. A werewolf has two souls. A person's soul and a wolf's soul. When they're in harmony they function normally in society and can voluntarily shift between forms. Silver makes them change by force, and the full moon makes them want to change. We're dealing with something entirely different.

David: Are our souls still people? Will they remember our lives when we die?

Amy: I'm a researcher. I don't know anything about souls.

Rebecca: If our souls remember, maybe our husks can remember. Maybe we should find a way to ask them.

David: How do you ask your soul about something? How can we even be disconnected?

Rebecca: [Whining.] I don't know.

Amy: Meditation? I dunno. I can imagine that mindfulness would be a good practice for us all right now.

-A trauma recovery therapist will be assigned to R-44-46, and I-231-232.

[Amy stews, continuing to sit for another hour with her ears splayed back and her arms crossed. The other wolves do not move, keeping their eyes on her, though not making eye contact.]

Amy: Ya know, in times like this, a person would try to make small talk.

Ericka: But-

Amy: Not you. David and Rebecca. You're in the doghouse. You stay...y..ya know what... [She rises from the couch and returns, carrying a black collar.] Lift your head. [The wolf complies, and Amy fastens the collar around Ericka's neck.] You've been a bad girl and you're gonna know your place. I'll... I'll punish you later this evening.

David: So... uh... should we start thinking about dinner?

Amy: Ericka, you'll do the cooking. Go look in the kitchen and tell me what you can make with what I have.

[The wolf nods and rises from the couch. Once in the kitchen, she looks through the cabinets and refrigerator. She returns a moment later.]

Ericka: I can make spaghetti with meat sauce, macaroni and cheese, hamburgers, grilled chicken, mashed potatoes, Steamed rice, honey'd carrots, garlic roasted asparagus, you... have a lot of food.

Amy: David, Rebecca... what sounds good to you from that list?

Rebecca: [Hesitating.] Grilled chicken, mashed potatoes, rice and asparagus.

David: A good mix, I agree with her.

Amy: Ericka... cook. No fern lectin. You try that shit I'll put you on your side. Even without changing I have the fangs to do it.

Ericka: Yes... mistress.

[The wolf enters the kitchen and begins to prep.

Amy: Rebecca, go help her. David, observe so that you can learn.

[Rebecca and David agree with affirmations and disappear into the kitchen to assist.]

[Amy sighs, taking a ragged breath as her ears splay. She appears to fight back tears.]

[After dinner is prepared, Ericka ensures that Amy is served and eats first before anyone else. The food seems to calm I-232, and she compliments R-44 on her work. Rebecca discusses the events she read about on the tablet over dinner, prompting a fairly average conversation amongst the group about the world around them. David remembers many of the events, but seems to see them through the same lense that he views the rest of the world, feeling no remorse or sympathy for those afflicted by the night of the false gods, and lauding the 'liberation' to hunt prey as many werewolves did. Amy rejects his assertion, appealing to rationality and compassion, and gently scolding him on his perspective. He attempts to understand, but his words come across as empty. He still feels nothing for those who suffered, and expresses muted joy for the newly afflicted. He states that he wishes to meet a werewolf one day, but Ericka asserts that such a thing would only make their curse worse. They'd likely give up on personhood entirely. Rebecca agrees with the assertion.]

[The discussion falls off as Amy expresses worry that she's going to change. Ericka remains silent while Rebecca asserts again that it's unlikely, given that she had to be exposed for several days. I-232 reminds her of her sleep disturbance, which tracks with Dr. Saynurs. Rebeca notes that she's only had one, and it could be stress-related due to Dr. Ahonen and Dr. Saynurs 551 research. Amy concedes that it's possible, then asks if they'd like to watch a movie. Rebecca's tail wags and she enthusiastically agrees, while the others agree more hesitantly. Satisfied with the answer, Amy queues up a movie, then enters the kitchen, returning a few minutes later with popcorn for them all.]

[They watch the movie, the wolves surprisingly interested in what they're seeing. It's an action flick, and the constant motion and movement seem to keep them going. In slower dialogue scenes, they start to quickly lose interest.]

-The subjects require constant visual stimulation to remain interested in a movie. Worth noting here, I-232 shows equal distraction during dialogue. It is unclear if this a new behavior for her.

[After the movie's conclusion, the time is 21:05. Early, but Amy states that she is ready. She orders Ericka to the bedroom, with which she complies. Amy then gives David and Rebecca free reign to watch movies, use the internet or entertain themselves in the bedroom, so long as they use protection. They choose the latter.]

-Watching I-232 and R-44 mate is... fascinating. There is a strong power dynamic complete with a safe word. Ericka assumes complete submission to the far more aggressive Amy, who very much seems to enjoy ordering the wolf around. Name calling, light slapping and aggressive... servicing occur. Amy is allowed to climax first before servicing Ericka. Afterward, the pair cuddle in bed affectionately, with Ericka still wearing the collar.

-Rebecca and David mate far more as one might expect for animal minded individuals, at least at first. After a few minutes of 'doggy style' they switch, with David facing Rebecca on top of her, then with her riding him. Ultimately, she is knotted, and the pair cuddle while he waits for things to calm.

-I will admit, watching two groups have sex back to back was... probably unprofessionally invigorating on my part, but for the sake of disclosure I will note it here.

-After mating, both parties engage in discussion.

Video transcript – Ericka Saunders (R-44) and Dr. Amy Hwen (I-232) Post coitus.

2/3/2024

[Amy lays on her side, facing Ericka, who does the same.]

Amy: What's it like? Being... being like this, I mean.

Ericka: I think anyone would tell you that their experience in life is entirely normal to them. What normal means, though, varies from person to person. Having... recovered... from a previous life, though, I can tell you that it's... difficult. There seem to be social pitfalls everywhere that I struggle to understand. I want to... please you, and I want to fit in with the world around me. I find both tasks very difficult.

Amy: You find pleasing me to be difficult? You did very well tonight.

Ericka: I hurt you. By dusting your drink with powder, I hurt you. I fear for you. You're... a connection to the world of people. You're a window into what's right and wrong. If I've tainted that, it'll make my journey more difficult. It... it also causes you pain, and I don't want to cause my mate pain. I also seem to run against your sensibilities a lot. I don't know when I'm doing wrong. I can't tell what society expects of me.

Amy: That's why you're here in my home on this vacation. You're here to learn. You'll be exposed to the world, and I'll guide you. You can do this. For all your instinctual behavior, you're very intelligent, and you can use that intelligence to be proactive, rather than reactive.

Ericka: Can I, though? The old me is dead and gone. I lived in the wilderness for 20 years. It was my way of life. You talk of nightmares, I experience them too. Even though I wanted initially to return to that life, I feel terror at the idea of it now. I regained something that was lost, and with it, I found you. [She hesitates.] You told us this morning that you were prepared to walk away. You'd abandon us. The only reason you didn't was because the director asked you not to. If we lose ourselves again... I'm afraid you'll leave us.

Amy: I was scared, Ericka. Just like you were when you ran from the attack with Deacon. I wanted to wash my hands of it because I knew that I was in too deep. If I continued there was a possibility that... well... that you'd expose me like you did Dr. Saynurs. And now I find you already did. This is the very thing that scared me into trying to leave.

Ericka: I don't know what else to say about that. I'm sorry. I'll... be there for you if you change, and when you come back, I'll be there for you then, too.

Amy: Well, maybe Rebecca's right and I won't change. At least... not physically. I know that I've changed slightly in the mind. This whole alpha thing is a part of it. I've always been a fan of the dom/sub thing, but never quite as intensely as this.

Ericka: Well, I love the intensity. You have a fire in you that I can truly feel. You dominate me like a wolf, and it's just... in that moment it's so right. [She hesitates, then nuzzles her.] If... if I'm allowed to say... Amy... I love you.

Amy: [Returns the nuzzle.] You are allowed to say. I love you too, you silly wolf.

Video transcript – Rebecca Gnead (R-45) and David Tanibard (R-46) Post coitus.

2/3/2024

[David lays, spooning with Rebecca. It's not clear if she's still knotted. He gently strokes her ear and nuzzles her cheek.]

Rebecca: [A soft, loving whimper.] I'm worried about Amy.

David: Why? Afraid she'll change?

Rebecca: Yea, like... what will do? She's our leader. Will the lab people punish us?

David: I was exposed to that stuff for what... 3 days I think it said? She barely got a dusting of it. I doubt she'll change.

Rebecca: [Looking up at him.] We don't know, though. We don't know anything about this stuff. She might still change, and then she might lose herself and be one of us, but... then she won't be able to teach us how to be a person again. The lab might lock us all up and stop giving us the injections. We might wind up stupid again.

David: I wouldn't worry. What comes, comes. I think a complete change is unlikely with her. She might have already seen mental changes, but her physical changes likely just... won't happen.

Rebecca: Mental is a problem too, though. She won't know when to tell us we're being bad. She might be bad, too. I'm scared, David.

David: It's normal to be scared in times like this. Let's try not to worry. Amy and Ericka are our alphas. They'll know what to do if something happens.

Rebecca: [Looking back away and trembling.] 10 years I was in that tunnel. I let everything go. I'd resumed myself to just give in, to just... be an animal. We didn't talk anymore, didn't read or write in the diary... every time hiker prey... hikers... came around, we'd injure them and drag them off to eat, then toss the bones we couldn't break and chew into the waste. So many people that died, and... I mean, that's wrong. Amy says it's wrong. We should feel bad for them. [She calms as she feels him lean in tighter and hug her from behind.] I don't even know many died. Their screams meant nothing. They... they still don't. I really don't wanna go back. I want to know what I'm doing. I Want to learn the cost.

David: Ya know, I still remember that day when I woke up and found you sitting outside the tunnel. You had this playful, curious look in your face and a rabbit carcass in your mouth, with your head cocked slightly to the side and your ears pointed hopefully toward me. When I looked at you, you splayed your ears and wagged your tail gently, then placed the rabbit on the ground, and in the sweetest voice you said... 'sorry, no cook.' Do you remember that?

Rebecca: I do. Ericka was mad at me that day. I was afraid that... if she caught me cooking food for you I'd get in trouble. She wanted you to change so that you'd be my mate, and she felt that cooking the food would somehow keep you a person. I still had my lighter, and I could use it with my paws... even though it wasn't easy. I just... didn't think I could get away with it.

David: You were comfortable otherwise, right?

Rebecca: [Nodding.] It was life. Life was simple. Hunt, sleep, mate sometimes... hunting was fun, and Ericka rarely got mad at me until you came along. If she did it was because I hunted poorly and the prey got away. Even still, though... I don't wanna go back.

David: I didn't really get a chance to be a wolf in the wild. I don't know what that's like. I was... kind of surprised that I changed. I'd apparently expected the rescue team to help me, but... it didn't work out that way.

Rebecca: [Shaking her head.] You were exposed for days because you kept trying to get away. You were gonna change, there was nothing you could do. You were already starting to think like us when the people came. [She sighs.] I don't want Amy to go through that.

David: Let's get some rest. Tomorrow's a new day. We'll get through this. Hell or... high water, I think the expression goes.

2/4/2024 03:21hrs

Dr. Hwen's home video transcript

[Dr. Hwen awakes abruptly, breathing heavily. She looks at her hands, frantically studying them for any defect. It seems she's had another nightmare. She checks her mouth, looking for something by checking her hands. When she seems to not find it, she slowly starts to calm.]

[Ericka, sleeping soundly, abruptly opens her eyes and sits up, looking around, then focuses on Amy, tilting her head silently.]

Amy: N...nightmare... sorry.

Ericka: It's okay. What was it about?

Amy: I was hunting. I was... a wolf and I was hunting. I killed someone. They screamed and begged, and I kept attacking. There was blood all over my mouth and their flesh in my maw and I couldn't stop myself. I just... I knew it was a horror, but it felt so good and I just... couldn't stop.

Ericka: [Nodding, cuddles up to her.] It was just a dream. Don't worry yourself. [She nuzzles and stays close to Amy as she slowly calms.] I lived like that. I think... maybe the first time, it felt like that? It... got easier, though. Eventually they're not like you anymore. They're something else. You are the hunter, and they are your kill.

[Amy abruptly pulls away from her and gets up.]

Amy: Ericka, that's not helping. I'm... gonna go get some water.

Ericka: I'll sit with you if you want. I can help if you'll let me.

Amy: [Still breathing heavily.] If it's more of what you just told me, I don't think that can be described as *helping*, Ericka. This was a nightmare. I was doing something I didn't want to do. I was powerless to stop myself. I don't want to give it... validity by rationalizing it. This is your doing with that powdered lectin.

[Ericka's ears splay submissively, and she whimpers, averting her eyes.]

Ericka: I know. I can't... change that. It happened. You have to take whatever comes of it. All I can do is say that I'm sorry and offer you support.

Amy: Are you really so objective? Your perspective feels so sterile. You're only warm when we're talking about mating.

Ericka: [Thinking, she tilts her head slightly.] Well... you don't want me to tell you how I really feel so...

Amy: [Sitting back down on the bed.] Tell me.

Ericka: I have dreams like that all the time, but I'm not doing it against my will. Sometimes it's an animal, and I'm rushing through the forest, chasing the herd, isolating the slow or the weak and taking my earned reward in my maw. Others, I'm stalking, my head low, quietly following an unsuspecting animal. Still others... they are... hiker prey. I take them all, and I claim my prize. In every dream that I have, I am a wolf, body and mind. To me, what you're having is not a nightmare, it is a pleasant dream. Your reluctance to indulge both puzzles me and... doesn't. [She sits up, resting her back against the headboard.] You empathize with them and see them as your kin. You put yourself in their paws and you feel the crushing and ripping of your own fangs against their flesh. I... do not do that. That is what separates us now. Maybe your reluctance will fade... or maybe your dreams. Maybe neither. Regardless of what happens, though... I love you, and I will be here for you. I will.... If nothing else, lend an ear to you and cuddle with you. As my mate, I'll give you all the love a wolf can give.

Amy: Ya know... this dream reminds me of something. Something I read a while back. I wonder if I still have it. [She stands from the bed and begins to walk away, stopping as she realizes Ericka is looking at her longingly.] Come on... we'll read it together.

[Ericka's ears splay in pleased submission, and she climbs out of the bed, still nude from their escapades, save for the collar. She pays her modesty no mind as she follows, wagging her tail between her legs.]

[Amy searches her bookcase near her personal desk in the living room, with Ericka standing close to her and watching. After a time, her partner whimpers and rests her head on her shoulder.]

Amy: Bored already?

Ericka: Sorry.

Amy: Help me look. It's a book called 'Gods and their messages.'

Ericka: You think this dream is caused by a god? It's a plant that causes it.

Amy: Every husk is born with a soul, and every soul has a connection to a god. Most souls only belong to one... Soth. Others, though, are tied to more than one god. Like a werewolf, being tied to Soth and Kalu.

Ericka: God of the hunt?

Amy: The hunt, the predator and the prey. The balance of nature. It's possible that this plant is some kind of... Kalu's curse.

Ericka: [Finding the book and waving it in her hand proudly.] Or Kalu's blessing.

[Amy takes the book, and the pair sit on the couch, reading it over.]

Amy: Yea, see here...? [Reading aloud] *The dream. All of Kalu's children experience the dream. Each night, they find themselves in a hunting ground, tracking and claiming their prey. For them it is a sweet dream that rewards and feeds their unfulfilled desires. They hunt and kill with abandon, free of the confines of their day to day lives. This is most commonly seen with werewolves and... some vampires, but may also be seen among those who follow Kalu's teachings.* [She looks up.] So... we're under Kalu now, as well as Soth. Great. That... probably means they won't fade.

Ericka: [Snuggles against her affectionately.] It's an honor. Kalu has given you his blessing.

Amy: No. *You've* given me his *curse*. I don't want this. I don't want to keep having dreams like this.

Ericka: If you do not change, consider it a treat. You get to hunt in your dreams, and stay within the world of people. You do not need 551 to remain as you are. You can feel the fresh hot bubbling of their blood in your maw and taste the copper tinge on your tongue... and during your day to day, none will be the wiser, as none will be hurt.

Amy: Okay... first... not helping. Second? We don't know that I'm not gonna change yet. This could only be the beginning. For all I know I'm... I dunno... I'm gonna start chasing prey and howling.

Ericka: [Splaying her ears.] I do not believe that is how it starts. First, you acclimate mentally. You start to feel less empathy for the prey. You no longer respect or identify with it. You are disturbed by this fact, if Rebecca's writings are any indicator. In time, as your body changes, your language breaks down and you stop thinking so much about the person's world. You throw it away and focus on what matters. Your prey, your territory, your scents, your den... and your pack.

Amy: I've already done a lot of that. I have the dream, I feel no sympathy for my boss... I... I thirst for you and take in your scent like no woman I've ever been with before in my life.

Ericka: But you were prepared to abandon your pack. You cling to the person's world, you don't care about your territory. You are far from changing, honey.

Amy: [Sighing slowly, she pulls Ericka closer and nuzzles her.] I wish I knew that for sure. I wish... I wish I could stay mad at you for doing this.

Ericka: You can't stay mad at your mate forever. It must be forgiven. Otherwise, it cannot move forward. I did something bad, and I regret it. I cannot undo it. Holding it against me won't help you move forward. It will just make you mourn the past. It's not productive for you.

[Amy shakes her head.]

Amy: You frustrate me sometimes, ya know? You're so... factual. Were you like this before? Seriously. You didn't write like you were.

Ericka: Oh come on, you're asking me to help you with a situation I can't... I can't really... understand? I'm struggling. I want to help you, I don't know how. Objectivity is the best I can do, Amy. I... I want to love you and feel your warmth and love back. I want my mate to love me.

Amy: I do... I do love you. It's not so much that I'm mad, I just can't... find a path forward. Kalu's dream is in my mind now, I don't know if I'll change, if I'll lose myself... you depend on 551 to keep your personhood, you struggle to empathize with other people... Ericka, I want things to get better, for all of us. The whole pack needs to get better. I want us to be a big, normal family. I want Rebecca and David to have pups and send those pups to school and watch them grow up and have a pack of their own and....

-She seems to realize that what she just said is an expectation not grounded in reality. If R-45 and 46 have pups, and they come out as people, and not animals, it's not likely that they'll be compelled to follow this pack mentality. It's also not recommended, in my opinion, to allow a 'pack' like this to raise children. They will teach them lessons that are antithetical to their social health.

-Her thought processes have been altered.

Ericka: Are you okay honey? [She gently nudges her.]

Amy: Yea... I... I'm fine. I think we should go back to bed.

Part 9

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical log

3/Feb/2024

Having been tasked with the research and management of Dr. Saynur's... blunder, I can't help but feel a bit embarrassed for him. A senior researcher such as himself should've never stooped to the level that he's currently found. A subject to his own subjects... poisoned by a creature that shouldn't've even been freed in the first place. Now I'm tasked to study this... animal that's he's become and supersede the unqualified junior researcher that's stepped in in his absence. Her name is Dr. Amy Hwen, she's 27 years old, and... apparently worked her way up from an intern position here at NRP Buffalo during her studies. I suppose she's doing well for herself, but that's to say nothing of her lack of qualifications to deal with anomalous individuals inflicted by unknown flora.

From what I can discern, this R-44, Ericka Saunders, found the ferns on an expedition into the Catskills and used them to heal her wounds, the subsequent and frequent exposure caused mental degradation and eventually, physical transformation. She was left as a large feral wolf in the forest, living as any such animal would live. Now... she's infected Dr. Saynurs by forcing him to ingest the substance. He's a fox. A large, feral fox. Or I should say he *was* a large feral fox. Now that I'm coming into the situation, his changes are nearly reverted at the physical level. His mind however, appears to be irrevocably altered. I understand that these are volatile chemicals, but he should've known that Ericka would try something. She lacks the basic sense of ethics and scientific background to be working with the equipment and substances she's controlled since her reversion.

There's also the matter of Dr. Hwen's relationship with the subject. Is every scientist that comes into contact with this wolf... stupid?? I'm sorry but protocol has simply been thrown out the window! To what end?? What are we accomplishing by allowing these specimens to roam free? Okay... okay the argument can be made that resocialization could be a reason, but with them poisoning my colleagues... I... I don't know. Any other situation I would categorically strip them of their freedom of movement, confine them to a cell and demand that they rehabilitate in here. Perhaps... letting them roam free with Dr. Hwen will produce more sociable results.

I question my own judgement. I let her do this. She's taking them out for her 'vacation.' Even in retrospect I can't study the situation and objectively follow through with the proper response. What's happening to us? There's no possible way this subject is swaying my opinion. So what is it, then? Would the director disagree with my judgement? I'll check with her in the morning. It's vitally important that we regain control of this situation.

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical log

4/Feb/2024

Well, I suppose checking my work didn't go as I had planned. Director Nombs was perfectly fine with allowing Dr. Hwen to take the specimens with her on her 'vacation.' She agrees with the assertion that allowing the researcher, who has an obvious bias in favor of the specimens themselves, would aid in their social rehabilitation. I questioned the logic, urging her even so far as to put the creatures to sleep. Another 15 skulls were found in the area R-44 pointed out. In a 20-year span, this 'pack' has been responsible for nearly 100 murders! We can't just let them roam free! A creature like this simply should not exist.

Her response was cryptic at first, telling me that it was vitally important to rehabilitate those who are inflicted. I questioned her logic. I demanded an explanation and... well.... I got one.

It turns out... this fern is making a comeback due to person's re-development across the globe. The high iron content in soil, especially near rail lines in temperate climates is causing a resurgence of growth. Not only are we not the first lab to encounter this, we're not the first to develop a substance akin to C.Mut-551! There are multiple trials running at multiple companies, all of them working toward the goal of isolating and... eliminating what's being called the "Wolf's howl curse." Or in some cases, "Kalu's curse." We can't simply put them to sleep because it would limit what we can learn. To date, we have the most successful subjects in the form of reintegration, and we need to keep pressing forward to... teach them to be social again. If we can do that, we can market and sell 551 to those who are afflicted as a daily dosage that keeps them... well... themselves.

This comes at what I'd consider to be an unreasonable risk. What happens if someone like Ericka Saunders is deprived of her 551 and she begins to hunt people down? What if someone gives up on their lives voluntarily and seeks to return to the wilderness? What if... like Ericka, someone afflicted begins to forcibly recruit others as mates and pack members? This could get out of hand quickly.

It is my proposal that we eliminate this fern, remove it from the wild as much as we can. Spray the area around all active railroad tracks in a 3-meter radius to kill off all plant life. We shouldn't have these things growing anywhere near our transit and cargo lines!

I don't know how you exterminate a plant. It's in the wild. I'm being unreasonable, but... so are they! Tolerating this... mess... will only lead to more problems! We need a better team working on 551. I need Dr. Saynurs back, and we need to assemble a team, and disclose all of this. We need an actual *cure* for this condition. The FedGov should be releasing a PSA on the topic as well. Why haven't they??

Dr. Saynurs is showing a lot of progress. He's now able to wear scrubs, and has limited access to the lab itself. I interviewed him today, trying to discern his mental state before we simply turn him loose on the project at hand. He was responsive, but... kept his distance from me. He expressed an unusual interest in working at night, something that I denied for the time being. When I told him no, he opened his maw and geckered at me in protest, then argued that he was tired, and needed to sleep. Before I could really respond, he returned to his room, then crawled into the den he'd made of scraps. I think we should probably provide him with some kind of enclosure that might make him more comfortable. Perhaps a tent with a bed?

He still can't tell me where he was born, when, or where he's employed, though he does know that he's a senior researcher, and that he's been working very closely with the Dennstaedtia-Mutatio lectin, and the C.Mut-551 derivative. In casual conversation on the topic, he almost seemed to return to normal, smiling and laughing for the first time since his exposure. He couldn't remember most of the events we discussed, but acutely remembered his time around the lectin, and the development of the counter-agent. This is good news, as it allows us to continue his work without having to bring in a completely new crew to reverse engineer his work. The difficulty will be assembling a team worth their salt that's willing to work with someone like him.

The problem is not so much that he's cautious, moody, or that he wants to work at night. It's more that he's... possessive, and specist now. He's very quick to snatch something away from you and simply proclaim "Mine!" We've also found that he's been hiding objects from the lab in his cell, trying to... I dunno, save them for later? He offers no explanation, simply staring blankly or changing the subject when pressed. With all this going on, I decided to test something. I grabbed a laser pointer and aimed it at the wall so that he could see it. He looked at it, then at me, asking what I was doing. I smiled and shook my head, moving the pointer around more. His ears perked up and he watched it, his eyes following intently. I moved it like an insect, quick movements, then long pauses. After almost a minute of observation, he rushed to the wall and tried to cup his hands over the dot, his head tilting as I moved it to the side. Before long, I had him chasing it around the room, veritably pouncing on it with his hands to try to hold it in place. I'm ashamed to admit that I had more fun than I should have. When I asked him what he was doing, he responded breathily that he was 'trying to catch the dot.' I told him that it was just a laser pointer, but he didn't answer. Was he not listening?

After turning off the pen, I drew his attention to the device and asked him if he knew what it was. He nodded, but couldn't think of the name. He simply said "dot maker." I followed up. 'If you know that this makes the dot, why were you chasing it?' He simply shrugged and said 'trying to catch the dot,' then changed the subject. This circular logic is frustrating. Fortunately, being easily distracted, nocturnal, and unable to think of some names or other inconsequential memories seem to be his largest limitations right now. So long as I'm able to keep him focused on his work, we should be able to get things done.

I started him off with a lengthy discussion of the C.Mut 'cure' that has proven to be so important. As has been previously noted, it's a derivative of the fern lectin, ran through a powdering process, then mixed with several chemicals. The most common is saline, unsurprisingly. It simply exists to provide a carrier for the substance. This means that the powdering process that Ericka went through was already a step toward creating this substance. Seems she's more intuitive on this than I'd previously believed. Still, the raw, powdered lectin proves to be a potent transformative agent when taken orally. We can assume that it would be as a paste as well. I guess... if NRP wanted to produce a "turn yourself into an animal" cream, we've already cornered the market. Saline, however, is the least active ingredient for this retroactive substance. What's truly doing the work for the counter-agent is *S.Hyems caerulea*, yet another rare plant that we've had trouble finding. It's a rare blue flower that grows near caves. The good news is that we've been able to cultivate it more readily than the fern itself. It seems, getting the proper PH and iron content for the fern is difficult, despite its commonality in the wild. My expertise is not botany, moreso, biological chemistry, so this aspect of the counter-agent is a unknown to me.

Video transcript – Dr. Ahonen and Dr. Saynurs – Laboratory 328

4/Feb/2024

[Dr. Saynurs stands before a dehydration machine with two chambers. In one, a Mutatio frond is drying, in the other, a Cerulea flower.]

Dr. Ahonen: So, we use the entire Cerulea flower for this process?

Dr. Saynurs: No, only the pistil and stamen, really. The petals themselves can be used, but have no true effect, from what I've been able to discern. Earlier revisions used the entire flower, but it made no difference. It simply made the dehydration process take longer. Or at least, that was my initial thought.

Dr. Ahonen: So what changed?

Dr. Saynurs: I found that the powdered petals could be used as a fertilizer for the existing crop of flowers. Seems to help them grow. We're going to need another expedition, though. They grow slower than we need. If I run out of 551, all four of us are going to be struggling.

Dr. Ahonen: I can easily cut off the others and focus the treatment on you, if it becomes a necessity.

[Dr. Saynurs seems to agree with the sentiment, his ears splaying back at the prospect. There's a muted anger in his expression.]

Dr. Saynurs: For now, we're good. We just need to get an expedition out there to gather more.

Dr. Ahonen: Do you remember where it grows?

Dr. Saynurs: Not at all. Dr. Ahonen, I don't even know where we are. The only reason I know that I work for New Realms Pharmaceuticals is because of the template header on my previous journal entries, and my signature block on my email. It said we're in... Buffalo? But I don't know where Buffalo is located.

Dr. Ahonen: New York region. Middle north of the North American continent, western hemisphere.

Dr. Saynurs: I wish I could remember what any of that means. [Sighs.] I'm grateful that my memory is in-tact when it comes to the counter-agent, and the research around it, but outside of it... I remember very little. [He pauses for a moment, seeming to grow increasingly impatient at the dehydration machine.] I never did catch that dot. That makes me unhappy.

Dr. Ahonen: It was just the laser pointer. I was making the dot on the wall. It didn't actually exist. You couldn't catch it.

Dr. Saynurs: Don't tell me what I can and can't catch. It was mine and I wanted it. Maybe I'll find it later and I can try again.

Dr. Ahonen: [Sighs.] I made it. It didn't exist!

[He is interrupted as the dehydration machine dings.]

Dr. Saynurs: From here, we have to powder them. I generally pull the flower apart from this point, then place them into separate machines. Always use gloves when handling the mutation. The last thing we need is a feral rabbit. I... don't think that would work well with you and I.

Dr. Ahonen: [Jokingly.] What, you don't think I could outrun you?

Dr. Saynurs: Please, don't engage in this conversation. It won't be healthy for either of us. And no, I don't think you could, and I fear that we might lose a researcher in the process. I need you, as well as my team, which... I'm hoping will report in on their status shortly.

[Dr. Saynurs preps the Cerulean, using a scalpel to separate the dehydrated components. From there, he places it into the machine that will further dehydrate it and turn it into a powder. After this, he changes his gloves, then begins to work with the Mutatio fern.]

Dr. Ahonen: Have you ever considered using the powdered Cerulean petals as a fertilizer for the Mutatio fern?

Dr. Saynurs: Considered, yes. I haven't attempted it, though. I'm glad that you're thinking along these lines, rabbit. ... Dr. Ahonen. Apologies. You shouldn't've brought that up. I see you as your species now. [He looks up from the machine, looking Dr. Ahonen over before sniffing the air.] If we can get a good harvest from an expedition, for both Mutatio and Cerulean, I'd like to experiment on that. It may take a month or more for the two to grow, however. A nullified Mutatio fern might be useful. It might lead to 552, especially if we can get the fern to germinate. A self-growing fern that only needs to be dried and processed with Saline would greatly improve the workflow and availability.

Dr. Ahonen: That would be something, for sure. It... won't help your memory or thinking though, will it? And you're still going to be dependent on it?

Dr. Saynurs: I tasked my team before my exposure to study the subjects blood samples on 551. They have a digital analysis and a... uh... computer... thing, Um...

Dr. Ahonen: Model? Simulation?

Dr. Saynurs: Both. They have those... things... doing whatever they do, to isolate just what's happening to us. Educated guess is that we still have components of the lectin in our systems that can 'enforce' this change within our minds and bodies. By taking 551, we're counteracting this by suppressing what's already there, rather than removing it from our systems. [He pauses, his tail wagging eagerly as the powdering machine begins to work. It'll still be nearly an hour before it's completed.] Frankly, I wish that we could harvest that bitch Ericka's organs and test them. I want to see her brain in a jar for what she did to me.

Dr. Ahonen: I... don't think we'll ever be authorized to take a functional person and dissect them. We have tools that don't involve ending their lives to gather this information, and your stated vendetta would negate any benefit you might of a doubt that the director might give you. Remember, you're still designated I-231. You're valued for what you can do and your past experience with the company, but you're not considered a citizen anymore. You're a ward of NRP, just like R-44,45,46, and I-232.

Dr. Saynurs: I-232? Who is that?

Dr. Ahonen: Dr. Hwen. She's... having intimate relations with R-44 and has obviously been affected in some way. We're trying to understand. For now, she's been given the designation I-232. She was also exposed to a dusting of powdered Mutatio lectin, shortly after you were. The dosage was nearly insignificant. With her behavior, though, we felt it necessary to keep a closer eye on her, just in case.

Dr. Saynurs: She roams free while I'm a prisoner in this lab. I want to hunt. There is snow outside. Mice burrow under the snow. I can catch them.

Dr. Ahonen: You're fed three meals a day. You don't need to catch any mice.

[Dr. Saynurs yawns, then glances up at the clock above the laboratory door.]

Dr. Saynurs: When this process is complete, I want you to make some of your own. I'll... go to bed. It's getting to be late morning.

Dr. Ahonen: You should try to force yourself not to be nocturnal. It's limiting our ability to work with you.

Dr. Saynurs: You should learn to be... you should... you're a rabbit. Don't tell me what to do, prey. I... sleep soon. Tired.

-I wasn't sure at the time if what he'd said was a degradation of his speech, or if he was simply being overly casual. I felt that I was responsible for his change in behavior. He was on topic and behaving normally until I entertained his off-handed comments about the laser pointer.

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical log Cont.

4/Feb/2024

After Dr. Saynurs returned to his room, he crawled into the nest he'd made and promptly went to sleep, leaving me on the hook to synthesize more 551. His lack of patience on the matter was frustrating, but it was difficult once we followed the... rabbit hole, so to speak, to bring him back to task. The fact that he knows so little about the world now is frankly alarming. I wonder, though, do the wolves know such things? I'm fairly sure that they haven't been asked. It would be worthwhile to found out for certain. In the meantime, I'm going to continue my work on the 551 product creation, and dispatch a pair of expedition teams to retrieve the Mutatio and Cerulean plants for this project. If we can fertilize the Mutatio with Cerulean, or, hybridize the pair, we might be able to skip this process all together and save time. There's no way to know for sure right now, though. A cure is looking less and less likely.

While all this was taking place, I decided to turn my attention to Dr. Hwen and her afflicted family. She'd been up late that evening with Ms. Saunders, from what I can tell, though it wasn't entirely clear why. From what the cameras picked up, it seems that she's having sleep disturbances again, and in specific, having one about Kalu's hunt. I... don't know if it's prudent to disclose this, but director Nombs is... well versed in Kalu's hunt. She may have valuable insight on this topic. I will include an audio transcript here only if she allows me to append.

Audio transcript – Dr. Ahonen and Director Nombs

4/Feb/2024 - afternoon

Director Susan Nombs: Leevi, come in!

Leevi: Thank you for seeing me on such short notice. I know your time is valuable.

Susan: It's no trouble at all. How can I help?

Leevi: After Dr. Saynurs laid down for his... daytime sleep, I reviewed last night's video feed from Dr. Hwen's home. She's still experiencing sleep disturbances, but this time, she elaborated with Ms. Saunders. From the sound of things... she's experiencing Kalu's hunt.

Susan: Ah. So... you're here to discuss the hunt?

Leevi: I apologize for bringing it up. I know your condition is a personal matter. I should disclose, I am recording, but I will only maintain and publish the record if you will it so.

Susan: My... condition... is no secret, Leevi. I've worked for NRP for 30 years. The fact that I still appear to be in my early 30s makes it an unavoidable topic of discussion. Thankfully, the company is accommodating to this fact. So please, ask away.

Leevi: [Clearing his throat.] Yes, ma'am. So, the hunt is a dream that all the uh... children of Kalu experience, right?

Susan: Yes. Werewolves, Scorned vampires, and assumingly, feral predators. The fact that our afflicted individuals are experiencing it is quite interesting. It means that Kalu has taken them as his children. Which... if I may say... does not bode well for them in obtaining a permanent cure to their condition.

Leevi: And... for the sake of my transcript... you speak with authority on the dream because you are-

Susan: A werewolf, yes. I have the dream every night. I hunt prey, I feast on my reward. It's comforting. [Creaking of a chair.] I was born this way. My parents were werewolves, too. Unfortunately, hunters took them both long ago.

Leevi: Do you have a pack?

Susan: I do, actually, though our social structure isn't quite as stringent as what you might find in the wild. We have a pack elder, and an alpha. You know Sainsbury Walk? The neighborhood off of Falls view Drive? That neighborhood is our pack. We own the whole thing.

Leevi: So, being like this doesn't impact your life at all?

Susan: [Chuckles.] As a pup it did. Took me a few years to find out that I was more than just a little fluff. I had a person in here. Took about a year to realize, then another to take my own form. Walking on two legs was something to get used to. Working together as a blended soul was, too. Still, it was a way of life, and with perseverance, I've managed just fine. I have four pups of my own, ya know.

Leevi: Really? I didn't know that. You spend a lot of time here. How do-

Susan: For a pack, it's more than just the mother that raises the young. We all have jobs, busy lives... just like anyone else. The pups learn a little bit from all of us, but they're never alone. Most of them are in school right now. Taylor's taking a wolf day, though. He got too stressed after that last exam of his.

Leevi: I see. So... as you said, if the others are having the dream, then they're children of Kalu? Would that include Dr. Saynurs?

Susan: Very likely, yes. He's a predator. Has he mentioned any such thing?

Leevi: Dr. Hwen did not record the details of his dream, it seems, but I'd surmise that it is the case, yes.

Susan: Then yes, they are children of Kalu, and it's not likely that he'll let them go. They've taken into his embrace through the Mutatio fern.

Leevi: Is there any way to... speak... to Kalu?

Susan: [Laughing.] You want to speak to a god? Who are you to do such a thing? No. We are nothing. He wouldn't speak to me, and he certainly wouldn't speak to you. If he's claimed them, he's claimed them. Next you'll be asking if you can beg Sanguine to make a vampire mortal. It doesn't work that way. Have you not read up on the gods at all?

Leevi: [Embarrassed.] I... no ma'am. I'm... I'm not well versed in such things. They don't affect me directly.

Susan: Soth does not intervene in the world of the mortal, so... you're right. I guess that makes sense. The point is, all of them are Kalu's children, they're having the dream. They hunt their prey, they kill their prey, and they feast upon it. What else is there to say?

Leevi: Well, Dr. Hwen has expressed... disdain for it. Ms. Saunders tried to comfort her by saying that she should embrace it, but she doesn't want to. Apparently, she's killing *people* in this dream.

Susan: Hmm... that's troubling. I wonder if the other members of her pack experience the same. Normally only the scorned have a dream where they're slaughtering mortals, and honestly, I've only heard about that in passing. Scorned are generally uncontrollable, so they're usually locked away. I've never met one.

[Leevi sighs heavily and a squeak from his chair is heard.]

Leevi: From a plant to the gods... what have we gotten ourselves into?

Susan: It seems to me, based on the sudden resurgence of the Mutatio fern, that we're being challenged. Perhaps Mimi is fueling its growth. We can't understand the gods, but we can understand the science behind what they create. Focus on the counteragent. We can treat anyone that's afflicted if we can make a stable, reliable product.

Leevi: And the memory loss? The animalistic tendencies? If they're dreaming about killing people, and they're unrepentant in their assault... we're potentially allowing psychopaths to wander the streets. Dr. Saynurs called me prey this morning and can't even remember where the New York region is located. I tried to explain it, but he can't even visualize a globe.

Susan: That's why R-44-46 are on vacation with Dr. Hwen. They'll have to re-learn what it means to be a person. NRP could profit with retraining centers, if we can use those three as a proof of concept.

Leevi: You're really in on this, huh?

Susan: Dr. Ahonen, what else are we supposed to do? We can't completely destroy the ferns and the FedGov is yet to respond to our request to discuss the matter. Spraying growth inhibitors around high iron locations should be helpful, but it's not likely that we can truly eradicate this threat. The Mutatio fern is here to stay. How much of it remains is up to the FedGov and the Nature Ministry. We can take no legal action, other than gathering, and studying the plant. Continue your work with the counteragent, and continue to monitor Dr. Hwen and her pack. That's all the advice I can give you at this time.

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical log Cont.

4/Feb/2024

I left Director Nomb's office feeling a bit dejected. I am a man of science, not mysticism. We know that the gods are real, we know that they have these powers, but I cannot for the life of me understand why this would be allowed to take place. Our history has shown that we have always been a dominant, intelligent class apart from our feral counterparts. Though we are still considered mamalia, at least in my case, we are s.mamalia. Sapient mammals. The gods represent us as that class, not as simple ferals... right? I simply don't understand.

I'm going to do my best to ignore this. The dream may show us data on what's happening, but as a scientist I cannot stand idly by and let the gods dictate my actions. Dr. Saynurs has a working counteragent. We can improve its functionality, and offer services to those afflicted. If we can get the FedGov to approve, they can also introduce PSAs to limit exposure to the Mutatio fern to begin with. We *can* control this, we just need a bit more help.

For now, I'm going to spend the remainder of my workday reviewing Dr. Hwen's activities. She'd agreed to bring a mic with her if they should go on any outings. With her cooperation, we should be able to collect a lot of useful data on subject reintegration.

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical log Cont.

8/Feb/2024

I've been watching and listening to the video and audio recordings from Dr. Hwen's vacation for the last few days. Dr. Saynurs has continued his work on the production of 551, while his team cultivates the newly acquired ferns and flowers. By in large, he's struggling to work with them, constantly getting in their way when they try to use equipment that's deemed to be his own. He'll often stand in the way and declare 'mine!' repeatedly until they back away. So long as he's left to his own devices, he can be approached and talked to like anyone else, but from the reports I'm getting, his behavior is stalling our progress. I'll let them deal with that, for now.

So far, Dr. Hwen has had sleep disturbances every time she rests. Even if it's just a nap, she awakens in horror. Ericka has done her best to comfort her, but... Ericka's method of comforting leaves much to be desired and doesn't seem really help. She's simply encouraging her to embrace it. I almost feel like she's right, though. If this dream is coming from Kalu, there's nothing she can do. Embracing it might be the only way she can get sleep. She's starting to get run down.

On a more positive note, for the pack, they've had an outing every day this week. On Sunday they went to a minigolf and arcade. I only have audio, but from the sound of things, they got along very well. Rebecca seems to be quite good at it, even though she has no memory of playing before. She won by a longshot. After that, they played a few simple arcade games, the grabbing arm, some multiplayer shooter of some kind... there were very few comments that seemed off color. I'm hopeful that this interaction may be reintegrating them quite well. Later that evening, they stopped by a diner. David was excited for a 'big juicy burger' while Ericka inquired if they had squirrel. A bit strange, but... she easily settled for chicken when the waitress did her best to talk her down from the idea. During the meal they discussed their plans for Monday, a walk through several antique and consignment shops. Amy floated it as an opportunity to expose them to items they might recognize from their past. David chimed in by telling them all the story of an old grandfather clock his grandmother had, and how he was always afraid of it as a pup. This is good, as it shows that long term memory is being preserved, even if their adulthood is somewhat lost to them. Rebecca was much quieter than usual at dinner, seeming to spend her time listening, rather than talking. I can't be sure as to why this would be. Perhaps something non-verbal that I can't pick up on from the transcript.

Amy added to David's story by talking to them about one of the great lakes where her uncle used to live, and how she'd visit during the summer. He always wanted her to learn to water ski, but she'd simply refused. It seemed that she was afraid of the boat's propeller. It was somewhat troubling when Ericka asked her what happened to her uncle, and the lakeside home, however, as she couldn't remember, and expressed anxiety over that fact. Regardless, she still enjoyed her meal, and seemed to calm with time.

By this date, Ericka and Amy have copulated 2 times, and David and Rebecca once. It seems that their heat is slowly fading, which is much welcomed given the risk that it poses for Rebecca in specific. Amy continues to assert dominance over the pack, keeping her mantle of alpha as she educates them on the world around them. I must say she's doing a good job.

Their outing to the antique shops and consignment stores went fairly well, but they seemed to become distracted quite often. During one of the trips, they were forced to buy a wooden duck carving because Ericka had picked it up in her teeth by its neck, and had damaged it. Amy tried to play it off as a joke to the store owner, but Ericka made no such claim, saying that it looked too real, and it wasn't her fault that she reacted in the way that she did. She never takes blame for anything, so I'm honestly not surprised. By the end of the day, Ericka was expressing concern over Amy's wellbeing, asking her if they should go back to the 'den' so that she could take a nap. The wolf dismissed it, saying that she would take another caffeine pill and she'd be fine for another few hours. I don't like that she's relying on caffeine to supplant her lack of sleep. Why the dream is so unbearable to her, I simply don't know.

Video from the house shows no physical anomalies for Dr. Hwen. She spends considerable time looking herself over in the mirror every day. It's... more of the junior researcher than I feel I should see, but given that I've watched her have sex with Ms. Saunders twice, I believe I'm getting desensitized to that fact. ~~She's very attractive, and their sex is... entertaining, to say the least.~~ Regardless of her lack of physical changes, the mental impact is certainly being felt. She's quizzed herself every day, eventually turning it into a game with the rest of her pack. She's missing some key details about her life, even forgetting her own address on one occasion, but what she lacks, the others seem to recall, making their pack a cohesive unit that can share their lost memories as time goes on. I'm quite pleased with this brilliant implementation.

On the 6th, they went shopping for clothes at the mall. They've all been individually, but never all at once, so it was going to be an interesting experience for them. Sadly, this did not go as they had hoped. With Dr. Hwen being more and more run down, she wasn't able to be as forceful with the pack to keep them in line. David even drove them, which... was risky on its own, but he seems to have the muscle memory to do so. Once they arrived, things seemed fairly normal. David commented on the mall and its history, explaining that the sunken sitting area had been a water fountain when he was a child. Rebecca said that she remembered that, but when Ericka pressed her on it, she stated that she wasn't sure if it was this mall or simply a mall in general. The wolf agreed with her, saying that she too had such memories, but didn't think she'd ever been to Buffalo before. Dr. Hwen inquired about Niagara Falls. If Ericka had spent any considerable time in the New York region, it seemed all but inevitable that she'd been to Buffalo since it bordered the falls. In response, the wolf seemed to think in silence for nearly 20 minutes as they walked. Eventually, she turned to her and nodded, saying that she had been to Buffalo before, and had seen the falls. She'd even gone on the boat ride, but she couldn't remember if she was with anyone or by herself. Dr. Hwen's tail wagged happily at the wolf's confession, and she called her a 'good girl' for her efforts, saying that she'd be allowed a fruit smoothie with lunch.

It's likely something that Ms. Saunders doesn't want well known, but she has a soft spot for fruit smoothies. Giving her one as Dr. Hwen is doing here is almost the best reward she could get, aside from sex, which, seems to be leveling off. I suppose this means their heat is beginning to pass? I'm not entirely sure. Admittedly, Estrus is not something that I know much about. Even when it comes to anthro women, I just... sort of ignore it. I'm bisexual, and though I certainly find Dr. Hwen and Ms. Saunders very attractive, I mostly lean toward my own sex for relations. ~~Should that be included? I don't know if that's relevant.~~

The trouble occurred when the four of them were walking toward the second clothing store, with David holding the bags. He squeaked slightly in opposition when Rebecca asked to tour a store full of colorful flashing lights and strange moving novelties. I've been to the store myself. It's junk, but if the wolves are anything like Dr. Saynurs, motion and color are triggers for their animalistic side. The fact that David opposed it was interesting, though I supposed it was due to the bags he was carrying. Ericka gave him a scolding look, prompting an old man sitting on a bench opposite the store to laugh at them, commenting that he could 'tell which one had the bigger dick.' Ericka bared her teeth and stormed over to him, picking him up forcefully and starting to push him over the railing. He cried out in panic before Dr. Hwen sternly demanded that she put him down, calling her a bad girl and revoking her smoothie. The wolf tried to argue, saying that the 'elder prey' had insulted her, and was 'already isolated from the herd.' (The man was an elk.) As others gathered around Dr. Hwen shamelessly ramped up her demand, stating rather publicly that she wouldn't allow her to have sex, or share her bed, and that if she hurt the man, she'd be isolated in an observation room.

Begrudgingly, Ericka put the man down on the bench once more, staring him down as mall security finally arrived. He would've been long dead by then. Their response was ridiculous. The old elk said that he wanted to press charges, but Dr. Hwen intervened, discussing privately with the two security officers and the old man that Ericka was attempting social re-integration after exposure to a mind-damaging substance. The old man objected, stating that 'crazy people' shouldn't be 'wandering the mall looking to throw others off the walkway.' With enough pleading, and some over-disclosure, the old man finally settled down, accepting a payout offer from New Realms. Dr. Hwen had to speak to the director on speakerphone in front of them all. This cost the company a pretty penny. I can't say I blame the old man, though. Damages, pain and suffering... he was probably underpaid. Security ordered them to leave the mall, leaving Ericka to sit in silent shame in the back of the car. David drove once more, and again seemed to do quite well, earning tired praise from Dr. Hwen.

Once they arrived back at the house, the video feed showed me the aftermath. Dr. Hwen was furious, angrily yelling at Ericka about her impulsive behavior, and demanding that she sit in the corner of the room for the remainder of the night on the floor. The wolf whimpered and splayed her ears, looking down at the floor with her muzzle, while giving Amy pleading eyes. Eventually, she took to the corner and whined, sitting, then laying down the best she could in a feral pose. She remained there as the others had dinner and spent the evening together on the couch. David and Rebecca showed sympathy for Ericka, their ears splayed in awkwardness. Even when they ate they tried to save food to give her, but Dr. Hwen said no. At bed time, Ericka was ordered to sleep on the couch, which she obediently agreed.

It wasn't until about 03:00 that we saw activity in the house once more. Amy, yelping awake from her nightmare, tiredly stumbled into the kitchen to get something to drink. Ericka spotted her, and looked on with silent concern, but didn't speak. After a moment, Dr. Hwen sat down on the couch beside the wolf and gently began to stroke her ear, asking her if she understood why she'd been treated the way that she had. She slowly nodded, stating that she shouldn't 'go after prey just because it challenges her, even if it is weak and isolated.' The answer wasn't what Dr. Hwen had wished to hear, but accepted it. In a way, it seems that Dr. Hwen is adapting more to the pack than the pack is adapting to her. She told the wolf that she was too tired from the nightmares to go out again on the following day. She wanted them to have a quiet, comfortable day at home, but made sure to tell Ericka to think deeply about her actions, and how it could've impacted the elk and the people at the mall.

Dr. Hwen fell asleep many times during the day as the wolves found various ways to entertain themselves, but after a half hour, she would jerk awake with a yelp, shaking her head and looking at her hands. At least twice, she went to the bathroom and stripped, closely studying her body for any changes that might've occurred. She never found any. After each occurrence, Ericka would whimper from a distance, silently asking if she wanted to be comforted, but Amy always rejected it. I'm no psychologist, but multiple studies have shown that withholding love as punishment is not helpful behavior. It sews mistrust. This may be different for animals, but I still felt it to be in poor taste.

The positive of all of this is what happened at the end of the day. Dr. Hwen allowed Ericka to sit with the others and have a normal meal, during which she asked her if she'd had time to reflect, and what she'd come up with. In surprisingly honest fashion, Ericka stated that she wanted to feel empathy for the elk. She had pondered why she'd felt so bad after the incident, stating that she understood that she only felt such a thing because she'd been scolded. She added, however, that she also felt bad that she felt nothing. 'You obviously said that this is bad. I know that it is. I want to do better. I feel sick to my stomach over the fact that I felt nothing. You scolded me you taught me that it was wrong and yet I still feel nothing for him, and only for myself. Perhaps I should go to therapy? Something is wrong with me if I'm doing this. I can't hurt people anymore, prey or not. Person's society dictates that this behavior is problematic. I can't force myself to feel something that I don't, but I want to learn to do better.' Dr. Hwen accepted her answer, telling her that she could tell that she wanted to be a 'good girl' but she needed more practice. She added that therapy would be useful as well. She said that she would look into it.

The usage of these... pet words with Ericka in specific seem to be very impactful. When she's praised and referred to as a 'good girl' her ears perk and her tail wags, her world seems brighter. When she's called a 'bad girl' it almost seems to trigger something within her that forces her to back down. Perhaps it's just because she sees Dr. Hwen as her pack alpha. I'd like to find a way to test this.

Part 10

Dr. Amy Hwen – Medical Journal

2/11/24

I'm back in the lab today after my weeklong "vacation" with my pack. It feels a bit strange being back here, but not simply for the fact that I've been away from the office; many things have changed.

Firstly, Dr. Saynurs is back to work with his team. I was a part of that team, but apparently, I have been removed and assigned to work with my pack instead. That's fine by me, honestly. He's more talkative and seems normal when discussing work, but if you stray from the topic even a little, he starts to get oddly possessive and express many of the same animalistic perspectives that my pack express. I talked to Dr. Jackson, one of the other junior researchers here about the situation, he told me that Dr. Saynurs is making everyone nervous with his inconsistent moods, but they're trying their best.

Dr. Ahonen is now working on a way to hybridize the Mutatio fern and the Cerulean flower, which was apparently the second ingredient in the counteragent. If successful, he'll be able to directly make 551 (designating it 552.) We should know in a month or 2 to see if the plant starts to grow. I have to say I'm a bit optimistic about this, because we'll be able to mass produce 552 with minimal effort. Perhaps slipping it into someone's drink (Looking at you Ericka...) is all that will be necessary to reverse someone's changes.

As far as my own situation, I've apparently been designated I-232 while I was away, due to my nightmares, and what they've cited as inconsistent behavior. I'm not aware of any inconsistent behavior, but they've locked me out of the file that documents... me... so I have no way to know unless they tell me. In general, I'm exhausted, but if I'm honest, each time I have the dream, it gets a little easier to go through. I'm hunting prey, sometimes wild, sometimes not. In those moments where it's not... it's difficult. I see the terror in their eyes, feel the splash of their blood on my maw... it's so real! They're different people every time, too; people I've never seen before. The fact that I don't know them makes it easier. They're nobody. They're just prey. In many cases, dressed like they're on a hike. Hiker prey? I'm not sure.

Because of my dream, Director Nombs called me into her office as soon as I arrived. She explained to me what she thinks is happening, but I'm not quite sure how to feel about it. She explained to me that she's a werewolf (which I didn't know before, but now that she says it I can... smell it... somehow. A cat that smells like a wolf... why haven't I noticed this before?) and she experiences a similar version of the dream. According to her, all 'children of Kalu' experience it, and I shouldn't fear it. It's normal, since I've apparently been chosen by the god of the hunt as one of his children, just like the rest of my pack. I've never been one to believe much in the gods. I mean, we know that they exist and that they have these sorts of abilities, but... I guess I just always assumed that I was unimportant, just some nobody. Now here I am, chosen by Kalu to hunt in my dreams in his name? I hope it stays in my dreams...

Our conversation was also how I learned about my designation. It doesn't seem fair to me that she gets to roam free as a werewolf, but the moment I start having the dream, NRP deems me a subject. I mean, I guess I understand. I've been exposed to the Dennstaedtia-Mutatio fern. Orally... and like Dr. Saynurs I've experienced some minor changes. (The dream... I mean... there's nothing else! I don't understand their logic on this.) They want to make sure that I'm alright, I guess. That's fine. Just don't prohibit me from leaving campus or lock me in a cell. Gods, that would suck.

The pack is unhappy about being back here, they don't like the sterile smell and cold white walls. I have to say I agree. I've never noticed it before but the whole place stinks of 'science.' If... that makes any sense. Ericka tried to work on 551 prep, but Dr. Saynurs, of course, snatched it all away, declaring "Mine!" as he's taken to doing. Jackson was able to wrangle some free, and set Ericka up in another lab.

Much to my surprise, ~~my mate~~ R-44 didn't react. She stood her ground and splayed back her ears, but she said nothing to him. No taunting, no growling... she just turned and looked at me. I think she was gauging my response to the situation. When I simply looked on in interest, and slight pity, she emulated me, as best as she could. This is a good thing for sure. She may not understand the situation fully, but she can see my behavior, and copy it, and that seems to be enough.

Rebecca and David have spent the day following me around like a pet dog that wants something. I asked them both several times why they were doing it, but they simply said that they wanted to be near me. I think they're afraid, especially Rebecca, after what happened following the dishwasher event. I nuzzled them both and told them it'd be okay, that they were safe, but it did nothing to calm the behavior. Even as I type this, they're both sitting behind me, wagging their tails and looking at me eagerly.

We should be breaking for lunch soon. I have to say I'm looking forward to it quite a bit. I never look forward to food quite like this, so I'm a little puzzled. Either way, I've opted to take the pack to the cafeteria, rather than eating in the private breakroom here in the lab area. I think exposure to the general population might do them some good.

Dr. Amy Hwen – Medical Journal Cont.

2/11/24

Lunch could've gone better. The food was delicious. They had steak burgers today! I've craved that sort of thing a lot lately. Just... protein. It can't be good for my weight to stuff my face with burgers, but I digress.

David was sitting across from me, with Rebecca on one side, and Ericka on the other. Things were going well until David noticed that some of the expedition team members were looking at him and talking about him. They said that he'd lost his mind, called him a dangerous monster, and objected to the fact that he was 'roaming free.' I tilted my head to look past him at the group, scowling slightly and splaying back my ears to communicate that I didn't appreciate what they were saying, and neither did David. They responded by speaking louder, saying the same about me. I'm... afraid I proved their point. I growled at them, which indirectly gave the rest of my pack permission to do the same. As soon as I saw it, I tried to stop them, but Ericka had already stood up and was heading for their table. It forced me to call her back, drawing attention to our pack and embarrassing her in the process. I rubbed her back as she sat back down and apologized for miscommunicating with her. Nevertheless, they had nothing else to say about us after that fact. It's fairly obvious their sentiment is still there, though.

Shortly after our little outburst, I was approached by a river otter wearing business casual. He smelled of incense and calming natural oils. He introduced himself as Dr. Stefan Beyer. He's a psychologist for New Realms, and apparently flew out from our home office in Colorado for the specific purpose of meeting with the pack. I expressed surprise, but noted that I had suggested it already, so he was saving me a lot of time. ~~I... can't remember where Colorado is located. It must be far though... if he had to fly.~~

We agreed to start sessions with... me... shortly after lunch. This means that I'll have to leave my pack in the care of Dr. Ahonen. I certainly hope that he treats them properly. He doesn't want to abuse my pack and get on my bad side.

After returning to the labs, I spoke to Dr. Ahonen about this fact, and... strongly suggested that he treat them well. He responded by telling me that I was suffering more from the Mutatio lectin than I was aware, and that it might do me well to start taking the 551 injections along with the remainder of my pack. Aside from the dream, I have no idea what he means, but this is the second time someone's brought it up. I'll consider it, but as of now there's still no physical changes, and no mental changes, either. So, I think it'd just be a waste of resources.

- POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT: I-232 exhibits mental changes, but either denies them, or does not realize it. Date marked Feb. 11th 2024.

Interview with Dr. Stefan Beyer – for Dr. Amy Hwen/I-232

2/11/24 – 13:45hrs – video transcript

[Amy enters the office set up for Dr. Beyer. He has asked prior to his arrival that the room be arranged in a calming manner, with darkening curtains, a comfortable couch, rusting wall art, incense and essential oil diffusers.]

[Immediately upon entry, Amy wrinkles her nose and sniffs the room, lingering as the door closes behind her.]

Dr. Beyer: Something wrong, Dr. Hwen?

Amy: The smell is very strong in this room. Can you... extinguish the burning things?

Dr. Beyer: the incense? Of course. My apologies. In the meantime, can you take a seat?

[The wolf nods and takes a seat opposite him, watching him closely as he exterminates the incense and then puts them away.]

Amy: Thank you. My nose has become very sensitive in recent days. I have no idea why, but... well that was a little much.

Dr. Beyer: [Returning to his seat.] Are you sure?

Amy: Sure of what?

Dr. Beyer: That you don't know why your nose has become more sensitive.

Amy: Some people have sensitive noses. My muzzles larger than yours, it makes sense that I have a better sense of smell. Besides, it's winter right now. There's less around to smell.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: She's already talking down about my species, although indirectly.

Dr. Beyer: [Nodding.] I see. Well, the incense are put away. Is that better?

Amy: It is, thank you. So... where do we start?

Dr. Beyer: Let's start with your relationship with R-44,45, and 46. You consider them your... pack?

Amy: You've been reading my transcripts and medical journals? Yes. They're my pack. We're a family. I do my best to look out for them and educate them on the social world, and they... they do what they do.

Dr. Beyer: Can you expand on that? What are you trying to accomplish?

Amy: Well, for starters, I'd like them to be able to reintegrate into society. I want them to have jobs and friends and function among the other people in the world. I want to see Rebecca have those pups she keeps saying that she wants, and I want to watch them grow up.

Dr. Beyer: So you plan to stay in their lives? You want to be like an aunt to the children?

Amy: [Hesitating.] I... I do, yea.

Dr. Beyer: Can you think of a reason why? What attachment do you have to her?

Amy: I... don't understand what you're asking me. Why do I want to be a part of my pack's life?

Dr. Beyer: Correct. What binds you to these three individuals? What makes you stay?

Amy: [She thinks for a long time, starting and stopping several times.] I... they're my pack. They're my family.

-Dr Beyer's internal note: Subject engages in circular logic when pressed on her relationship.

Dr. Beyer: [Leaning back and crossing his legs.] Even after Ms. Saunders killed well over 100 people in Wolf's Howl Pass with Ms. Gnead, even after Ms. Gnead attacked the repairman, even after Ericka poisoned you, and Dr. Saynurs... you still hold them as family? You accept these events?

Amy: I don't... accept those events. They happened because they're not properly socialized. They just need to act like people again. They have to come back to society. It's a hard road. You... you can't hold them responsible for their actions the same way you hold a person responsible. They don't feel remorse for what they do in that way. I'm... I'm teaching them to emulate me. Even if they don't feel it, they can still act in the way that they've been taught to act.

Dr. Beyer: So, you're trying to 'fix' them. Save them from themselves...

Amy: I... I guess so? I mean what else am I supposed to do? Just let Dr. Ahonen lock them away? Experiment on them? Put them to sleep??

Dr. Beyer: Have you seen evidence that he might do that? Dr. Saynurs is back at work. Who's to say he wouldn't simply find a vocation for those 3 and let them work here at the facility? You're assuming the worst. You do realize that you've been designated as a subject as well, correct? I-232.

Amy: [Nodding.] Because of my exposure, yes. I don't... spite NRP for monitoring me in the wake of that event, but I've had no changes at all, save for Kalu's dream... and I'm getting used to that.

Dr. Beyer: No changes at all? Are you sure?

Amy: [Sarcastically...] Yea...? No changes at all. My body is the same, my mind is the same... What are you trying to say?

Dr. Beyer: How old are you? Where were you born?

Amy: That's not relevant.

Dr. Beyer: Please, answer the questions.

Amy: I'm... I think I'm 28? I... think I was born here in Buffalo.

Dr. Beyer: Are you sure?

Amy: [Splaying back her ears.] Yes, I'm sure.

Dr. Beyer: According to the bio, you're 27. Your birthday is in June, and though you were born here in New York, you were born in Oswego, near Syracuse. Remember? You had an uncle that had a home on the lake there?

Amy: Uncle? Who are you talking about?

-Dr Beyer's internal note: Subject does not recall a family member that she spoke fondly of only a few days prior.

Dr. Beyer: You don't... remember? Your time at the lake as a pup?

Amy: No. No that didn't happen. I didn't have an uncle that owned a house at the lake.

Dr. Beyer: What was your father's name?

Amy: Bill. He's still alive. There's no "was" here.

Dr. Beyer: And your uncle?

Amy: Ezekiel.

Dr. Beyer: and Ezekiel had a place on the lake, right?

Amy: Yea, he did.

Dr. Beyer: So, you *did* have an uncle that lived on the lake in Oswego.

Amy: ... I don't understand. Doctor, you're confusing me. I don't have an uncle

-Dr Beyer's internal note: Subject is going in circles again. She has an uncle named Ezekiel that owned a home on the lake. She knows this, but she also doesn't.

Dr. Beyer: I'm just trying to test your memory.

Amy: Well, please don't. It's giving me a headache.

Dr. Beyer: Alright, I'll change the subject. How do you feel about Ericka?

Amy: She's my mate. I love her. I'm teaching her to be a person, and it's helping. She may not understand, but she's trying, and I'm proud of her.

Dr. Beyer: So... you have sex with her,

Amy: I do, yes. Why?

Dr. Beyer: Do you have sex with Rebecca or David?

Amy: [Seeming offended.] No. Ericka's my mate. Rebecca is David's mate.

Dr. Beyer: And you and Ericka participate in... Bondage play? Dom/sub?

[Amy narrows her eyes at him and tenses up on the couch, pulling her legs to her chest before looking back out at him above her knees.]

Amy: No more questions about my sex life. What kind of therapist is so intrusive and forward? You're terrible at this.

Dr. Beyer: [Sighs and adjusts himself in his seat.] Alright, let's change gears. I'll open the floor. Talk to me!

[Amy hesitates for a long time, relaxing her posture before finally looking out the crack in the curtains at the snowy landscape beyond. She sighs, her ears splaying submissively.]

Amy: I'm afraid. [Looking back at Dr. Beyer.] I'm afraid of what's happening.

Dr. Beyer: To you?

Amy: Nothing's happening to me. I mean... in general. Ericka, Rebecca, David, Dr. Saynurs... they lost themselves to this stuff. It's in the wild. Anyone can come across it and wind up just like them. We're trying to market 551 like some kind of unethical monster. We create the problem, then create the cure. How many are afflicted by this that we don't know about? How can we resolve it? I missed it... just barely. It was enough to give me the dream, but not enough to change who I am. I'm... struggling with my pack. There's no way that they can just reintegrate. They'll always be odd in some way.

Dr. Beyer: What's the solution?

Amy: I need... I need them to relax. This morning, David and Rebecca followed me all over the office. It's like having a person sized pair of dogs. They said almost nothing, they just followed me everywhere I went, wagging their tails.

Dr. Beyer: Because Ericka was busy perhaps?

Amy: I don't know how to communicate with them in times like this. It's like they disappear into a little box and only the feral remains. They're not hostile or anything when they're like this. So long as they're with me they tend to ignore everyone else. They can't get jobs and function in the world if they do things like this. The pair of them need to be more independent. They need to be more like Ericka in that sense. She set out as soon as she got here to go back to 'work' and she's hammering away.

Dr. Beyer: I recall that David was doing expeditions before, and Rebecca was teaching children in the daycare. Perhaps they could return to that?

[Amy thought for a few minutes. The long silent pause seemed to suggest that she was struggling.]

Amy: Would you trust Rebecca with young children after what she did?

Dr. Beyer: We can give her a supervisor. She can be an assistant teacher. It'd give her something to do.

Amy: Yea... you're right. [She pauses again.] Ya know, you're really not good at this.

Dr. Beyer: You're not opening up. You're closed off. You tell me there's nothing that's changed about you, but you know it isn't true. Why do you deny it? Ms. Saunders gave you that substance the first day you met. The change in you has been slow, but progressive, mostly on your mind. You forget things, you go in circles, and through it all you've gone from studying 3 subjects to leading a pack and calling it family.

[Amy seems annoyed, looking back at the door as if she wants to leave.]

Dr. Beyer: No progress can be made unless you admit it to yourself. You're sleepless because of the dream, you're fighting to bring your 'pack' back to a world they've long forgotten... your job was to study them, not get involved. That changed over time. You became involved because of the fern.

Amy: If you know so much, why are you interviewing me? Obviously, you already have all the answers. [She sits up angrily.] What do you want me to say? I fell in love with Ericka when I first met her. She's this sexy beast, this woman with blue eyes that could rip you apart at any moment. She's dangerous, but I've tamed her. She's mine. With her came her pack, two other souls I have to look after, because if I tamed her, I tamed them. I've conquered the alpha, now it's *my* job to *be* the alpha. I have to lead the pack. I have to protect them. Without me you'd just lock them up. Without me they'd learn nothing. I am their alpha, their den mother, their family member. I love them, and I'll protect them to the death. [She throws up her arms, becoming louder and more aggressive.] Who gives a shit what she did?? That's in the past! What's important is moving forward! If I forget things, who cares? I'll just learn them again!

Dr. Beyer: So, you admit that you've forgotten things...

Amy: [Shouting.] YES! Yes, okay?? I've forgotten things! I don't know what NRP stands for, I don't know where Colorado is... I can't remember having an uncle, even though I do remember him. The dream gets easier every night. The screams aren't a horror, they're a reward! Prey calls out in terror at its fate. It runs, I chase, I capture, I feast. It's hiker prey! It knows! It trespasses. There's no harm in it because its fake! No one is getting hurt!

Dr. Beyer: How long before the dream isn't enough? How long before you need that in real life?

Amy: There's no evidence to support that being the case. You're trying to make assumptions so that you can cast judgement on me. I know how this works. I'm a wolf. I'm not a fool, otter.

Dr. Beyer: This is important, Dr. Hwen. It's for your protection. Knowing how much of a risk you are to yourself is vitally important. You recall what happened at the mall. Ericka nearly killed an elk. You stopped her, but how long will you see it as wrong? What happens if you stop sympathizing with people? Your dream already sees it fading.

Amy: [Rolling her eyes.] Fine. Whatever. You want me to say I'm getting stupider by the minute and eventually I'll advocate for killing prey in public places because reasons. Right?? Is that what you wanted me to say?

Dr. Beyer: I'm not trying to get you to say anything. I'm trying to-

Amy: Bullshit! [Jumping to her feet and growling.] Complete bullshit! You fucking otter, you sit around and eat fish and you lecture me about *my* prey?! If a person gets in the way, they get what they get! They should know better! They know how to avoid it! It's not my fault if...if... [She appears to suddenly realize what she's saying. Her ears spay and she calms, her tail curling between her legs as she sits back down on the couch.] Doc... help me. I don't... I don't know what to do. [She shakes her head and buries it in her hands.] I'm forgetting regions, company names... I forgot my address last week... I feel the dream getting easier and now... now I stand here and proclaim that killing people is okay. I'm turning into a psychopath. How... how can I lead my pack back to personhood if my personhood is slipping away?? How far is this gonna go? What if I lose language entirely?? I don't want this. I never wanted this. It... it was just a dusting! [She looks back up in denial fueled anger.] A dusting! A tiny bit of powder, and that was enough to do this to me?? To... take my mind away?

Dr. Beyer: I don't think your mind is going away, Dr. Hwen. Dr. Saynurs came through it. You might just need to start taking the counteragent to-

Amy: Oh, yea sure... he came through it, [Sarcastically yelling.] Have you spent any time with him? He acts like a stupid animal. Always snatching things away from people and saying it's his, hiding equipment in his favorite spaces, sleeping in a tent in one of the observation rooms that he calls a den... working at night because he's nocturnal. Face it, doc. Brad's gone. That... thing in there looks like him, but it's just a fox in person's clothing.

Dr. Beyer: I spoke to him this morning. There's more there than you think. Dr. Saynurs is struggling, much the same as you. You've got to work on yourself, just like he does. The more you focus on yourself, and your memories, the better off you'll be. [Sitting forward and leaning his elbows on his knees.] Here's what I want you to do... in everything... think about what a person would do. Would they call their home a den? Their partner a mate? Their family a pack? Would they call hikers in the wilderness... hiker prey? Would they growl and threaten one another over petty insults? Think before you react.

Amy: Just like I've been telling Ericka... now I have to be the one to learn to be a person again...

Dr. Beyer: You're not too far gone, Amy. Far from it. You can do this; I know you can. [He stood from his seat and walked to a bookcase, pulling from it a binder that was filled with sheets of paper.] Here, I want you to fill this out. [He hands her a stack of papers stapled together, a questionnaire.] Fill this out to the best of your ability. It'll help you figure out how much of your memory's been lost. We can review it together in your next session. Okay?

Amy: [Flipping through it.] I... can do that. Thank you doctor. I'm sorry for being so... difficult today.

Dr. Beyer: It's okay. It's what I'm here for. I'd like you to do me a favor, though. If you don't keep one already, I want you to start keeping a diary. Can you do that?

Amy: I already do. It's been a while since I made an entry but... I can start again if you want.

Dr. Beyer: I do. Thank you for time today, Dr. Hwen.

[Amy rises from her seat and walks to the door, stopping on the doorknob.]

Dr. Beyer: Please send Ericka in. Make sure the guard with her knows to enter, too.

-Dr Beyer's internal note: Dr. Hwen shows elements of mental degradation not unlike Dr. Saynurs. It is more nuanced but seems to be progressive. My recommendation is that Dr. Ahonen monitor her, unobtrusively, for additional degradation.

Interview with Dr. Stefan Beyer – for Ms. Ericka Saunders/R-44

2/11/24 – 14:52hrs – video transcript

[Ericka enters the room with a male wolf security guard. He's wearing bite sleeves and gloves, and a vest, with a tranquilizer gun on his belt.]

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: We chose a wolf for this because she is far more accepting of them.

Ericka: Does he have to be here?

Dr. Beyer: Yes, I'm sorry, he does.

Ericka: Why? What kind of psychotherapy involves a guard?

Dr. Beyer: Does an elk ring any bells? Do the murders at Wolf's Howl Pass ring any bells? The dishwasher repairman?

Ericka: That last one was Becky, not me.

Dr. Beyer: But surely you understand? It's for my safety. He's not here to listen in.

Ericka: [Crossing her arms as she takes a seat without being prompted.] Whatever. At least he's a wolf. I'm surprised an Otter like you would go out of your way to find one of us to do this.

Dr. Beyer: I... guess... is that a compliment? He told you that he'd been chosen because of his species?

Guard: I did sir, sorry.

Ericka: Yea, it's a compliment. At least one of our own is looking out for... you, I guess.

Dr. Beyer: So you think less of me because I'm an otter, is that correct?

Ericka: [Hesitating slightly and looking away. She'd been making constant eye contact prior to this moment.] I mean... yes and no. I feel like it'd be too hard to explain.

Dr. Beyer: Can you try for me?

Ericka: [Adjusting in her seat, she leans back and props her feet up on the couch.] Uh, yea I'll try. You're not a wolf, or even a canine, so that kinda makes you a lesser species. but otters are resourceful, they hunt for fish. I used to hunt for fish, so I can respect that. It's not an easy thing to do.

Dr. Beyer: Would you think poorly of me if I told you I didn't like fish?

Ericka: [Chuckling.] An otter that doesn't like fish? Oh, that's hilarious. I get it, though. Your kind don't really... I mean... personhood changes a lot. It makes your species almost irrelevant to one another.

Dr. Beyer: Do you consider yourself a person?

Ericka: Yea. [Nodding.]

Dr. Beyer: A part of society?

Ericka: I'm trying to be, yea. Amy's helping me. Or... maybe I should call her Dr. Hwen here? I'm never sure. Being... society... is hard.

Dr. Beyer: You can call her whatever you like. So, you find it difficult to integrate into society?

Ericka: It's hard. I don't understand you. As an example, the elk from the other day. He insulted my pack. I retaliated, and Amy got really mad at me. Called me a bad girl, didn't let me have a smoothie or dinner. I felt bad, but only because she was angry, not because of the elk himself.

Dr. Beyer: A smoothie?

Ericka: Yea, I'd been doing good up to that point according to her, so she was going to reward me with a smoothie. [Sighs a chuckle] I'm like her pet sometimes. I should be embarrassed by that fact. She's my alpha, though, and my mate.

Dr. Beyer: So, she provides a system of reward and punishment to help you learn how to behave, but you can't understand why you behave the way you do? Can you explain what aspect of it confuses you?

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: If Ericka and the other wolves do not understand why they're being told to behave in this way, they will always struggle. What's more, reward and punishment methodology for teaching someone to mimic behavior without understanding its purpose will simply sew discord.

Ericka: It's... well she's called it being reactive rather than proactive. I think, more like... acting instead of thinking. She wants me to consider how the other person will feel if I snatch them up and threaten to drop them to their death over a balcony. To me, he's insulted my pack, he's not a wolf, he's not one of us, he's nothing but prey that's speaking out of turn and provoking us.

Dr. Beyer: So, you see it as a provocation, an invitation to engage in aggressive behavior, rather than a simple comment?

Ericka: He insulted David. He said that women ordering him around meant that we had the "cock." Neither I, nor Amy have a penis. That within itself isn't an accusation worthy of retaliation. I'd think he'd be able to tell from our scent that we don't have such things... but to insinuate that David is not a worthy mate for Rebecca or... any wolf... is insulting to my pack and I have to defend it.

Dr. Beyer: They're just words, though. He wasn't trying to castrate David or anything. Surely you can just let it go? You remember the old 'sticks and stones' saying?

Ericka: I do. I also remember that it's bullshit. Words can hurt. Verbal and psychological abuse are real. As a psychologist you should know that.

Dr. Beyer: I *do* know that, but my point here is that his comments were not worth retaliation, and even if they were, they didn't warrant a threat to his life.

Ericka: He's prey though. It doesn't matter what happens to him. He's an elder elk from a herd that likely ostracized him for being too slow to keep up with their migration.

Dr. Beyer: You're conflating nature shows with society. Society doesn't work that way. The man was waiting for his wife while she shopped at the candle store nearby. He didn't like the smells. It has nothing to do with his age, or a herd, or migration or... anything of the sort. Where did you learn about herd migration?

Ericka: Every winter there'd be a herd of deer that'd migrate through our territory. For a while I would hunt them myself, and usually get one elder doe or buck out of it. Sometimes the buck would fight back. It was challenging. I learned how to avoid their hooves, though. Once Rebecca came along it was easier. We could easily take down bucks, elders or otherwise. We just made sure to keep some of them alive to breed for next season. I didn't get my knowledge on herd migration from your nature shows. I got it from living that life for 20 years. Don't discount my experience, otter. I'm a far better hunter than you are at evading me.

Dr. Beyer: You're threatening to hunt me and... kill me? For asking if you watched nature shows?

Ericka: No, I don't mean that actively. I see no reason to- You're an otter. You're not really prey in that sense.

Dr. Beyer: But if I was a rabbit or a buck, you might mean it literally?

Ericka: Only if you continued to provoke me. I mean, we have food here. Amy took us to the cafeteria earlier. The food is good, and the preys already been hunted and killed by another pack. Or... well I don't know if it was a pack or if it was really hunted. It probably wasn't. You don't have to really hunt a cow, it seems. They just do what they're told. They walk right into the den. Stupid things.

Dr. Beyer: Let's talk about the cafeteria. Something happened there, right?

Ericka: No? Not really.

Dr. Beyer: You didn't growl and attempt to intimidate an expedition team?

Ericka: They were insulting us. We didn't do anything to them. They were intimidated? [Laughs.] Weaklings... people back down too easily. How can you defend yourself or your pack if every animal that presents resistance makes you recoil?

Dr. Beyer: Society doesn't work that way. You only need to defend yourself from clear and present physical danger. Jeers, comments, that sort of thing... you can just ignore. You *should* just ignore. [Leaning back in his chair, he crosses his legs again.] I understand your perspective. You're 40 years old, and 20 of your years were spent as a feral wolf living in the forest. That sort of thing has to take a toll on your mind. Let me ask you this, though... *why* do you want to be a part of society?

Ericka: Well, Amy is a part of society. And... and you all say that we were bad for killing hiker prey. I also like a lot of things about society. You can be warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Your dens are far better than an old train tunnel, you have fun clothes and jewelry, and the sex in this form is just amazing. Gods is it amazing. Amy is so very talented as a dom, and an alpha. I love her. I... was born a part of your world. The fern changed that, but I'm still supposed to be a part of it. I'm supposed to be here. Who I was before... I have to find her again.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: She seems to mourn the loss of her life before the changes that resulted in her life in the forest. From other comments however, it's obvious that she'd feel far more comfortable as a feral wolf in a forest setting. She's forcing herself to live in the person's world.

Dr. Beyer: Do you think that's possible? Will you ever be *her* again?

Ericka: If I try. Maybe? I have her diary, maybe there's other things she used to own that still exists. If I can find those things too, maybe I'll learn who she was, and I can be her again.

Dr. Beyer: Do you believe you can learn to think like her? Can you learn to empathize and sympathize with people in society? Even if they're not your species, or they insult you or your pack in some way? Can you learn to co-exist with prey that might treat you poorly?

[She seems bothered by the prospect, her ears splaying as she thinks it over.]

Ericka: I want to try. I was a gray-nose in the forest. When you took me and changed me back, I became my younger self again. I got a second lease on life by being brought here. From the diary, I seemed unhappy. Why? I want to be happy. I want to make her happy. I want to be her, but happy. I have it better already. No Deacon, no college. I have a job here, working in a lab on the lectin that I was studying before. I have a partner and a family that I love. I want to keep these things. I want to learn to live again. Can... you help me? Amy tries. Amy does. Can you add?

Dr. Beyer: Wanting to get better is a major step toward accomplishing your goal. You just need to take the steps to do it. Are you ready for that? It'll take sacrifices. You'll have to let your pack be insulted, you'll have to let prey boss you around. Do you think you can do that?

Ericka: All I can do is try.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: Ms. Saunders expresses genuine interest in regaining her pre-changed state. She continues to improve while Dr. Hwen degrades. I am concerned about this fact, as Ericka uses Amy as her moral and ethical compass. If she continues her degradation, it may stymie or even reverse Ericka's progress toward successful reintegration.

Dr. Beyer: Thank you for your time today. Before you go... I'd like to ask you a favor.

Ericka: Favor?

Dr. Beyer: I want you to start keeping a diary. Just write a little something every day. Can you do that for me?

Ericka: Uh... if Amy allows it.

Dr. Beyer: She will.

Interview with Dr. Stefan Beyer – for Mr. David Tanibard/R-46

2/11/24 – 16:03hrs – video transcript

[David enters the room after being told to do so by Ericka. He seems intimidated, and lingers by the door after it closes. He takes a sniff of the air, seeming displeased, then looks at the guard.]

Dr. Beyer: Everything okay, David?

David: Smells funny in here.

Dr. Beyer: Eucalyptus oil in a diffuser. It's supposed to be calming.

David: Stinks. [He looks at the guard.] Why's he here?

Dr. Beyer: For my protection, don't worry. Come in, have a seat.

[David sits down on the couch, then stares at Dr. Beyer silently.]

Dr. Beyer: How are you today?

David: Uh... I'm fine, I guess?

Dr. Beyer: No lingering thoughts of what happened in the cafeteria?

David: Nothing happened in the cafeteria. Just some rude people, that's all.

Dr. Beyer: You growled at them. Ericka rose to her feet and was going to escalate the situation. Nothing happened?

David: No? Amy stopped Ericka. Nothing happened.

Dr. Beyer: I see. So... nothing those individuals said bothered you?

David: It's not really... I was with my pack. The pack looks out for me. I wasn't all that worried about it.

Dr. Beyer: So... had Amy and Ericka not reacted, you wouldn't have, either?

David: Not likely, no. I would if I was alone with them, but with my pack, I let Amy and Ericka make those sorts of decisions.

Dr. Beyer: Surely you have your own opinion, though?

David: I gave it to you. They were just being rude. They've kicked me around a lot on our expeditions. I can't say I'm surprised that they're still giving me a hard time. They have no idea how to hunt, and they blame me for their lack of skill. I'm not that good, either. Ericka's never trained me, but I do okay for an amateur.

Dr. Beyer: So, the reason they were making fun of you, and the reason they removed you from the team... was jealous of your ability?

David: I guess? My team was killed when Ericka and Rebecca found me. They were the good ones that appreciated me. The new ones seem to work in a strange way. If you're trying to catch prey, like... for study... you have to corner it. I admittedly got carried away a few times, but one of them survived! I'm still learning how hard to bite something like that. I'm having to learn to hunt on my own because they won't let Ericka go with me.

Dr. Beyer: Rebecca went with you, they said she was scared the whole time.

David: We were in another pack's territory. The team couldn't understand that. She was scared of them. If we had to chase prey, she could've showed me how to do it. She already proved that she can with the repairman that trespassed in our den. Or... was our den. Maybe Amy's den is our den now? It's comfortable. I like it.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: David seems a little... farther away than the others. Is he being neglected because he's not higher ranking in the pack?

Dr. Beyer: So... Amy's trying to help you reintegrate, right? How's that going for you?

David: Good! I was carrying bags at the mall. They were shopping. Little interested me, but Ericka and Rebecca found many shiny things they liked, and clothes! I was happy to help.

Dr. Beyer: You didn't find anything you wanted for yourself?

David: I don't need much. Just some clothes, really. I'm a simple man. [He chuckles] As best as I can tell, I always have been. I had a plain old SUV with no special bells or whistles, lived in a moderate den, based on what Dr. Saynurs showed me... seems like I worked a lot, too. I must've enjoyed nature.

Dr. Beyer: You don't remember? Earlier transcripts show that you had more memories of your past than you do now. Would you say that's true?

David: I dunno? Maybe. I don't really need a past, do I? I can drive, though. I'd like to keep my SUV. Did they let me keep it?

Dr. Beyer: You had no note on it, so yes. It's in the parking lot where you left it before your expedition.

David: Good. I want to show the pack. Maybe they'll like it.

Dr. Beyer: What if they don't?

David: Why... wouldn't they like it?

Dr. Beyer: They might find it unimportant, unattractive, smelly... they might tell you to get rid of it. Would you do that?

David: [Hesitating, seeming conflicted.] I... would have to. Otherwise, the pack would be mad at me.

Dr. Beyer: And, what would the pack do if they were... mad at you?

David: Deny me food, deny me entry to the den, refuse to let me get close to them. Refuse to let me mate. [He tilts his head.] Otters don't have packs, do they?

Dr. Beyer: Feral otters do, actually. It's not as clear cut as having an alpha and mixed gender pack like you have, but they do stick together. That being said, a person like myself, has no such inclination.

David: So, persons... people... don't think about pack things? How do they know what to do?

Dr. Beyer: Are you saying you wouldn't know what to do if you were alone? You wouldn't know how to hunt? You already said that you did so with the expedition team.

David: I was in charge of them because they had no leader. So, I took the role. They didn't try to fight me. I wasn't alone. If I were alone, I could survive, but I would be unhappy.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: David was never in charge of any expedition, before or after his incident. He seems to believe that he can just take charge of a group, and unless they 'fight him' he is in charge by default.

Dr. Beyer: What would fighting you have been like? How could they win?

David: You put them on their side. You hold your teeth to their neck. They know if they continue, they'll be injured or killed. You hold them on their side until they calm and accept your leadership. None of them tried to put me over.

Dr. Beyer: Are you trying to improve? To integrate into society? Are you interested in raising social pups with Rebecca that go to school and do homework, get jobs, that sort of thing? Or would you rather give all of this up and return to the forest?

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: I decided to change the topic and put him on the spot. The conversation was going nowhere, and showed little social intelligence without pushing him back to task.

[David goes silent for nearly 2 minutes. He seems to be thinking about it, but keeps looking at the door, as if longing for input from his 'superiors.']

Dr. Beyer: This is *your* answer, not theirs. It doesn't matter in this hypothetical what *they* want.

David: I didn't have a chance to get used to the wilderness. I didn't even change until I came here. I feel... out of place, but have no experience otherwise. I don't know how to be a person anymore. Part of me mourns that fact. It seems like it was so much easier before. Now I don't understand. Amy teaches us but the concepts feel abstract. The dream teaches, too. The dream feels like reality, and this feels like a dream. Here nothing makes sense. There, everything does. S... so... [He again looks to the door.]

Dr. Beyer: Without their input, remember?

David: You might be mad at me for my answer. They might be mad at me for it. Amy doesn't agree.

Dr. Beyer: You would go to the wilderness, then?

David: I don't know. Maybe the dream is just a dream. Maybe it's not really how the world would be. It's cold outside. Eventually it will be hot. The den would be wet and cold, hot and muggy. Hiker prey would come, some would attack me. I would not be at peace. I wouldn't be free of your kind. So... I have to stay here.

Dr. Beyer: Wildlife refuges exist for that reason.

David: Wildlife refuges are closely monitored. You'd tag my ear to trace my movement. If I over-hunt your populations, you would take me out. If Rebecca and I had pups you might take some of them from us. We would fight for them. We would come after the trail you leave behind, and you would attack us when we tried to take them back. It... wouldn't work. We can't go to the wilderness. We can't. [He starts to tear up.]

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: David obviously longs for a life he's never lived. It's interesting that he would feel this way. Perhaps, because he's paid so little attention to by the rest of the pack, he's let the dream drive his thoughts, rather than truly trying to integrate.

Dr. Beyer: Ericka wants to remain here. As does Amy. I've not yet spoken to Rebecca. Does that impact your decision at all?

David: [Still crying slightly.] I have to choose between the wilds alone, or being with my pack as an imposter in a world not made for me.

Dr. Beyer: Up until this last summer this world *was* made for you.

David: Made for someone else. I'm not him. Not anymore. I... I guess he died. I guess I just have his memories. I look like him, I remember some of him... am I him? I don't think I am.

Dr. Beyer: You are you. You've been you the whole time. At no point did you entirely lose yourself, David. You just need to get back into things. I'm going to recommend that Dr. Hwen spend some more time helping you reintegrate. I feel like you're sort of pushed to the back of your pack and it's hurting you.

David: You don't get to tell her what to do.

Dr. Beyer: I'm just going to make recommendations. She wants what's best for the pack. If I explain, she'll understand.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: David had almost nothing to say the remainder of our session, even when I pressed on him, all I got were single word answers. He completely shut down. His case is a bit of an enigma to me, because this wasn't at all who he was when he was rescued, nor shortly after his physical recovery. It seems that, at least in his case, constant attention is needed to focus his mind back to the "person's world."

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: I concluded his session by trying to appeal to empathy, letting him know that I care, and I want him to get better. He simply looked at the door and asked if he could leave. His ears were splayed. I agreed, and the guard escorted him out.

Interview with Dr. Stefan Beyer – for Ms. Rebecca Gnead/R-45

2/11/24 – 17:46hrs – video transcript

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: There was a slight delay in time, as the guard needed to take a break. I agreed, and opted to do the same. In that time, I reflected on my other three clients. I will prepare a formal medical journal entry after Ms. Gnead's session to outline my thoughts.

[Rebecca enters the room and immediately looks at the guard. Like the others, she seems cautious of his presence. I decide to pre-empt her question.]

Dr. Beyer: Don't worry about him. He's just here for my protection. He won't hurt you.

Rebecca: Okay... [she continues to eye him, sniffing in his direction before sitting down.]

Dr. Beyer: So, how are you today?

Rebecca: [Fidgeting with her hands.] I'm okay. I'm bored. I don't like being here. I miss teaching the kids. If I have to be here, why give me a job and then take it away? I don't understand. David and I have been following Amy around all day hoping that she'll give us some direction, but she hasn't. Does she not have that authority? We'd both love a task. We're good, we've done nothing wrong lately. We want things to do. Why is it boring?

Dr. Beyer: I can review the decision, if you'd like. I did see in the notes that you were tested for this. From memory, you did quite well. Do you like working with children?

Rebecca: They told me that's what I did before the hike. I taught early math. I can still do it. I've already proven that. Does Amy not have authority? Or is she telling me I can't?

Dr. Beyer: Amy has no authority at NRP right now. She only has authority over your pack. I'm sure she'd be more than happy to give you this opportunity.

Rebecca: I hope so. I can do this. I know I can.

Dr. Beyer: So... you're happy with being a person again? With being back in society?

Rebecca: Yes! I mean... yea, I really am. It... it takes me- sometimes I don't want it, but most of the time I do.

Dr. Beyer: Can you tell me a time when you don't want it?

Rebecca: Welll it's usually when I mess up. Like, the maintenance prey. He came into the den and Ericka didn't tell me he was coming, so I saw an intruder and I jumped on him. They put me in a cage for days and I... he was trespassing! I didn't feel like I did anything wrong. Amy says I did, and I believe her, but it's hard to follow when things are bad.

Dr. Beyer: Can you give me an example of something that you know is good, and then one that you know is bad?

Rebecca: Well... uh... eating quietly at a restaurant or having a conversation with my pack is good. Unless they don't want me to talk, then it's bad but it's usually good. Amy has invited us to speak more. Ericka didn't like it as much. Bad... is... well... attacking someone in their territory instead of mine, unless it's in self-defense, trespassing in others territory, like we did on that expedition, uuh.. apparently... attacking trespassers in our territory that... aren't openly hostile is bad, too?

Dr. Beyer: So you think what Ericka did with the elk was bad?

Rebecca: [Looks at the door, then at the guard before nodding.] Yes. We weren't in our territory. He was an elder separated from his herd, but we didn't need to eat. He wasn't our prey, he was just an old elk. He insulted the pack, but it wasn't our place to attack him for it.

Dr. Beyer: Did you tell this to Ericka?

Rebecca: I didn't have to. Amy did. [Wagging her tail.] Amy is good. She helps a lot. She's bringing us back.

Dr. Beyer: Without Amy...

Rebecca: [Splaying her ears.] Without Amy I wouldn't say a word to Ericka about it. The elk would've died. We would've been brought back and locked away.

Dr. Beyer: Would you have felt bad for the elk?

Rebecca: No. Without Amy, I wouldn't know it was wrong.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: I find it strange that they don't understand that hurting another like themselves is wrong This is more than just animalistic, it's cognitive dissonance. They know it's wrong, but they don't *care* that it's wrong. They choose not to feel empathy or sympathy. Well, *choose* is a strong word. There's something pathological here. Some elements of this resemble ASPD but not entirely. I wouldn't make that diagnosis. It's more like... they see world through the window of an animal. Obviously, that is the case, but it's an animal with person level intelligence, superseded by those thoughts and behaviors of the base instinctual behavior. How can we suppress instinct? I'll have to do some research on this.

Dr. Beyer: Do you think the old you would've felt bad for him?

Rebecca: Probably. She was a person, like you. She felt that kind of thing. I know she did. I remember it.

Dr. Beyer: Can you... emulate it?

Rebecca: [Nodding.] I've been practicing. The kids are a great way for that. I feel nothing but love for them. I'm not sure why. They're so small and vulnerable. I have to protect and help them.

Dr. Beyer: Do you think you'll ever be able to reintegrate? Do you think your pack could?

Rebecca: I hope so! [Wagging her tail again.] I want us to live together in a den with pups and raise those pups as a pack. We can teach the to hunt and teach the about persons and society. They can live in your world but understand ours.

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: I've never met a feral that could talk. I wonder though, if this is what it would be like. Her communication style makes it hard for me to follow. She sees things through... simplicity.

Dr. Beyer: I see. Well, it's good to have goals. You want to learn to live in society, you have Amy helping you... I think you're on the right track. That's all our time today. Thank you for coming Rebecca. We'll do this again in a week.

Rebecca: [Wagging as she stands up.] Okay! Thank you, Dr. Beyer!

-Dr. Beyer's internal note: ~~Soth help me. If their souls are in these bodies, make them stronger than the minds of their husks. Restore them, please. I don't know to do this on my own.~~

Part 11

POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT:

Personal Diary of Dr. Amy Hwen

2/12/24

So... I-232. Sounds like I'm named after a perimeter interstate around a city now. Too bad it doesn't come with accolades. I'm a subject now, just like Brad, and just like my pack. Just... awesome.

I have to say overall, I don't really feel different. Dr. Beyer told me to start writing in my diary again, and Dr. Ahonen told the four of us to stay in my den for the day. Or at least, don't come to the lab. I'm honestly okay with that, considering how things went yesterday. Too many people there know us from our past and try to treat us poorly, or force us into boxes that may not fit anymore. David's been treated the worst. I've just had to deal with people accusing me of 'not being yourself' repeatedly. It's fucking annoying. Again, I don't feel any different! I just have to dream! It's not a problem anymore, I'm... actually starting to look forward to it. My sleep hasn't been this good since before I met the pack. I get to lay there with my beautiful girl at my side, snuggling up against that soft fur of hers... knowing that she's there by the scent alone... who would've thought I'd meet the love of my life in the form of a rescue subject in a medical lab?

I've long forgiven her for the dusting. I said I wouldn't, I remember that much, but... I'm just not upset anymore. I'm handling it just fine. It just took an adjustment period to the dream. In a way, knowing that Soth *and* Kalu are both looking out for me gives me a bit of self-confidence. I mean, okay that's not how they work... Soth doesn't look out for anyone, and Kalu? Well, I'm still reading up on him. The book I have only has a small excerpt, so I might need to take the pack to the library with me to find out more about him. No one worships the gods, they don't like that... but the better you know what they want from you, the better you can live true to their desires. Gods... am I seriously going this route? I'm gonna start this mysticism shit? Well... I guess the dream doesn't lie. I'm a scientist, and yet here I am wanting to read about the gods... I SHOULD be reading about the mutatio fern, I should be helping Dr. Ahonen with 552... instead I'm pushed away from that smelly lab, given my own 551 injections, and told to... 'take it easy.' What's that even mean? People don't make any sense anymore. There's work to be done and I should be doing it! Why does Brad get to keep working but not me?? I'm not snatching equipment and screaming "Mine, mine, mine!" like some sort of stupid fox. I'm not even aggressive. There's no need to be!

Dr. Beyer gave me this sheet to fill out... or rather sheetS. It's this super long form with lots and lots of questions. It starts out easy enough... what's your name, what's your birthday, what's your address? Stuff like that is pretty easy to cheat. I mean my birthday and my address are on my ID card. (I had to look. I seriously didn't remember.) but then it goes into harder stuff. What was your father's name, when was he born, where does he live, if alive. Your mother? What about her previous name, if she changed it? Do you have siblings, do you have uncles and aunts...? I don't know most any of this, and frankly trying to remember it just gives me a headache. It's not really relevant, is it?? Eventually it drifts into easier questions. Math, science, word relations, that sort of thing. It reminds me of the tests you have to take to get into school. It gets to history later on, which I'm really dreading. I know that a bunch of wolves in Europe formed the Jagdfrei and tried to take over the world in the 1940s to relegate herbies (oh... bad word...) herbivores... to... slavery basically, but I don't know how that ended. I guess the 'good guy's won because that's not how the world is, and the idea of specism is looked down upon. I've gotten scolded several times now for it. I... think I'm supposed to feel bad? But I just know I'm not supposed to do it. It'd be like them talking down to me for being a wolf. So... yea, I get it. I think I'm gonna read up on some history stuff. I can cheat a little that way, and maybe it'll help me in general. I have some books on the subject. Apparently, I collect them? I have no memory of this. We have sessions every week, so I'll need to complete this before then. I'll do the best I can, I guess.

The pack seemed relieved to come back to my den, too. Ericka doesn't like the apartment den they gave her. She said it smells funny and reminds her of her time with Deacon. I get it. I want to make my family as comfortable as possible. The beds are warm, the den is well stocked... (oh, we need to go grocery shopping after the library!) and we manage to keep ourselves busy. Rebecca loves my tablet, Ericka likes to read and study... David's... well, I worry about him. David seems a bit lost. In fact, Dr. Beyer pulled me aside before we left yesterday and told me that I needed to spend more time socializing him. He's quiet and often sort of blends in with the rest of the pack, but he's important. As our only male, he's responsible for making sure that we have pups. I'm hoping that can happen during our next heat cycle. I'll... probably have to check with Dr. Ahonen if it's okay, though. Stupid rabbit. I hate having a rabbit tell me what to do. I'm sure prey like him would say no. The last thing he wants are more predators around him.

Honestly, he's not that bad of a guy... I'm just being a bitch. I have to remember that this isn't how the world works. I legitimately worry that my mind is slipping. The more I think like the pack the less useful I'll be in helping them grow and reintegrate. They need me, and I need to remember how things work.

I'm going to make sure that David does the driving today, and I want to take the girls back to the den after the library. David and I will go alone to the store, and maybe we can talk some more. He's seemed kind of down after his session with Dr. Beyer. Maybe I'll do another journal tonight, or... tomorrow morning or something. I dunno. I don't have a medical journal anymore, so this is all I have to record my thoughts. The good thing about that though, I suppose... no one's gonna read it except me.

Personal Diary of Dr. Amy Hwen

2/13/24

No second entry last night. Ericka got frisky and practically jumped my bones when we got back from the store. She wasn't dressed and practically opened the door that way. As hot as that is, I had to remind her that people generally consider nudity taboo. You CAN walk around naked if you want, but doing so in the dead of winter is going to turn some heads and get some comments. (And in her case, compliments. Gods but my girl is sexy.) I don't want her reacting to strangers doing such things, though. She might confront them. Either way, I let her naked ass help us put away the groceries, then we disappeared into my room for some fun. It wasn't as dom/sub as it has been in the past. She still wanted to play and wear the collar, but it wasn't so aggressive that we needed a safe word, she just wanted me to tell her what to do. After that, we wound up cuddling for a while and eventually went to sleep.

David and I had a very good talk at the store about his feelings. I was right, he's felt isolated from us, and feels the wilds calling him home. He struggles with society like the rest of them, and... well I feel terrible because I've not been giving him the attention he needs to get over those hurdles. I promised him I'd do better, starting today. I explained all this to Ericka, so that she won't think I'm scolding her by paying her less mind. Like I said before, he's our only male, we have to keep him a strong member if we want to grow our numbers. We won't live forever. Eventually when I become a gray-nose, I'll need someone in the pack to take over the role of alpha, and it needs to be someone of our family.

In all honesty... we should probably have more than one litter. I don't want to carry any pups. I'm lesbian, I'm not interested at all in males. Ericka's the same. Maybe we need to recruit two more? Another female and another male? Maybe a pair that are already together? Oh, but how would we get the fern? Perhaps an expedition would be in order. (What the fuck am I saying??)

At any rate, David was happy to hear that I wanted to help, and his tails been wagging every time he sees me. I got some books for him to read, old literature type stuff, and we're going to take a walk today in the park since it's a bit warmer and some of the snow's melted. Winter's not over yet, but I am certainly looking forward to spring.

Rebecca's acting jealous... I had to explain it to her. I'm not trying to steal her mate, I just want to help him get along better. We talked for a bit as well. She's very much interested in reintegration, and wants to get back to teaching. I told her to contact Dr. Ahonen to see if he'll let her teach the employee daycare like she did before. I don't know if he'll even take her call, but... she needs something to do. Social integration means having tasks to do in your day-to-day life. If we just laze around curled up on the couch panting, we're all gonna forget.

For David, I offered him a chore. Do the dishes, the laundry, and help me build a greenhouse. We can use it to grow veggies that Ericka can use in her cooking. He seemed excited about the idea, and begged to use his SUV to buy wood and things from the hardware store. I'm so happy to see him wagging his tail so sincerely. Heck, it has me wagging mine just thinking about it.

The trip to the library went surprisingly well. Ericka found a lesbian romance novel, because of course she did. How she managed to sniff that out... well... okay I know how she *sniffed* it out. It smelled of sex. Lots of ladies been getting off to it. Rebecca found a book that interested her to read to the children, and David seemed most interested at the time, in a book about gardening. I think we're on our way! My pack's gonna be the smartest pack you've ever seen! They're gonna integrate so well no one will be the wiser that they've spent their time on four legs! I couldn't be happier about that.

Dr. Beyer's test isn't any easier. The history, governmental, and geography stuff I was able to cheat from the library. The math was easy, the science was easy... but these questions about my family? I... I don't know! I have a cell phone. I'm tempted to call the one marked 'Dad' and just talk to him. I worry that doing so might tip him off that I'm having memory problems, though. How would a gray-nose react to a previous member of his pack having memory trouble? The last thing I need is getting them involved. I don't need him trying to teach me to hunt or bringing fresh kills like I'm a pup. I can take care of myself! I'm an adult, and my own pack alpha now. ... I... may need to think about what I just wrote. Do people have packs? I don't think he'd be bringing me fresh kills if he's a person. Maybe I will call him and just... see how it goes. I don't know the last time we talked. I'll do that after the day in the park, and then the trip to the hardware store. I think I'll make that last one a group trip. The girls will be interested in all the weird smells, I'm sure.

Video transcript – I-232 Dr. Amy Hwen – Home – Analysis by Dr. Leevi Ahonen

09:32hrs

[Dr. Hwen uses her phone to dial her father, based on the contacts. She seems nervous, her finger shaking slightly as she presses dial.]

-Unfortunately, we can only hear Amy's side of this conversation.

[The phone seems to ring a few times, then someone answers.]

Amy: Dad?... Kenji? Who?? Oh!... Sorry Kenji, I... you sound uh... you sound just like dad these days. Is he around? I... kinda wanted to talk to him.

[A brief pause. No visual reaction from her.]

Amy: Sick? What do you mean?... No! I don't know! Tell me! Oh... well... why haven't we given him a magic treatment for- Stop attacking m... who are you?? My brother?? You don't get to talk down to me unless you're fam.... Okay. No, I'm having... I'm just having a bad day with my memory. So... he has cancer. Magic resistant? Oh, well NRP can probably cure that but... no. No I'm not coming to- Where even are you these days?..... and where is that?... No! I don't know where we grew up! Tell me!... ugh... yes, I am Amy.... Whattya mean you don't believe me? Godsdammit, Kenji, I'm your sister, apparently! How would I even have this number? I sound the same don't I??

[A long pause follows, her ears splayed as the other person seems to really lecture her. The voice can be heard, but it's too far from the mic to be picked up.]

Amy: Why... would I have done that? They're my pack. ... Yes, my *pack*. My *family*. Just like you're my family. Would I just... ... because I don't know! I don't... remember. Kenji, I'm serious. I don't remember. Because I... I've been exposed to something. I'm forgetting a lot of my life, and... and I wanted to talk to my parents to remember them. I completely forgot you existed.

[She acts sad, shaking her head as he responds.]

Amy: I don't know how bad. It's already... it's already pretty advanced. I don't notice it until I need something like... where a region is located, the name of my company, my address, birthday... if you don't think about it these things don't matter. Yea, I'm serious. ... No, I'm honestly not all that worried about it. I have my family here, and I remember things that are important, it's just stuff that falls away, ya know? I just... guess I'd hoped I could speak dad. ... what uh... what happened to mom? Are you my only sibling? Oh... W... When did she go? Was I there? At the funeral, I mean? Well at least I did that. [Sighs] No, Kenji, I don't remember that. I don't remember what year, where, when, her name... nothing. I... I know that's hard to.... Yea... yea it's likely to get worse. No, I don't think you should come see me, I don't think it's... No, for one I don't know if I'm even allowed to talk about this. For two, by the time you get here, I probably won't know who you are. I don't know what you look like even now. ... photos on my phone? [She pulls her phone away from her ear and puts it on speaker.] Okay... what am I looking for?

Kenji: It's me and you at Uncle Zeke's cabin. We took it the last summer you came out. You're wearing a red bikini because... of course you were, and I've got my arm around you in trunks. I'm wet, you're not, and you look grossed out that I'm hugging you wet. Which... was the point.

[She flips through her photos, tilting her head at them.]

Amy: I took all these?? I don't have context for any of this stuff. Okay... I see it. You're really young!

Kenji: That was *nine years ago*, Amy. I haven't seen you in nine years. Now can I please come see you? This sounds really bad.

Amy: [Sighing] Okay so here's the thing, right. I have a pack now. My mate, Ericka, and two others, Rebecca and David. They might... I don't know how they'll treat you. I can tell them to be nice, and they'll have to, but they might freak you out in how they act..... I might freak you out in how I act.

Rebecca: Phone?? Who's on the phone?? [She rushes over and nuzzles Amy excitedly.] Hello phone!

Amy: Becky, stop. I'm talking to my brother.

Rebecca: I didn't know you had a brother. Can we meet him?? He can be part of our pack!

Amy: Neither did I, and... no. He won't be part of the pack.

Kenji: I need to see you, sis. If something's happening to you that's making you forget everything, I... is it Alzheimer's?

Amy: No, nothing like that. It's... listen, if you go out into the forest, and you see a large fern with small amber nodules on the underside of the fronds, stay the ever-loving *fuck* away from it, okay?? Don't touch it, don't eat it, don't use it to heal your wounds, don't even brush past it. Understand??

Kenji: Is that what happened to you? You got exposed in that lab you work in?

Amy: Sort of. I can't really... I don't know how much you're allowed to- look, I'll talk to the lab, see if they can let you come.

Ericka: [Entering the kitchen to start breakfast.] We shouldn't have to ask them anything. You're our alpha. [She sticks her head into the refrigerator.] Damn, no eggs. Can we go to the store?

Amy: Shit we forgot.

Ericka: I can go.

Amy: We're going to the hardware store today. David's gonna build a greenhouse. We'll stop by the store on the way back.

Kenji: Please don't forget me. Call me back, Amy. If you don't, I'll just show up.

Ericka: Who the fuck is that?

Amy: My brother, it's okay. He can say that.

Ericka: New to the pack? [She seems to try to sniff the phone, as if she can smell him.] Is that him? He's young.

Amy: Yes, but hes older now. Adult.

Ericka: Hot bikini. Gods, going swimming with you this summer... can we do that?

Amy: Are you just gonna doggie paddle?

Ericka: [Chuckling slightly.] Very funny. [She nuzzles her, then goes back to the kitchen.] Breakfast without eggs guys, bacon, sausage, milk, orangejuice.

Amy: That should be plenty

Kenji: Amy, I love you. I know you've been distant and... I... I'm sorry for laying into you about dad. I didn't know that was... gods... Amy, I've already lost mom, dad's on his way out... I don't wanna lose you, too! Please let me see you.

Amy: I'll try. Thanks... Kenji. I'll be in touch.

[The call ends. Transcript will continue for post-call conversation.]

Ericka: So a brother, huh? New pack member?

Amy: No, I don't want to expose him to it.

Ericka: All you'd need is another female wolf and that'd give us 2 pairs that can give us pups.

Rebecca: We can have pups?? When?

Amy: Not yet. We'll need to talk to the lab for-

Ericka: You bend the knee to those fucks all the time. You're the alpha, why let them-

Amy: 551. That's why. They want me to take it now, too.

Ericka: This is why I wanted to find a cure. I knew they'd hold this mess over our heads.

David: [Enters the house and takes off his coat.] SUV runs good. The roof rack is ready for the supplies. I got the tie-down straps in the back. I also checked your garage. We need to get some outdoor screws, standard 2" deck screws, and some stainless staples. Oh... and a staple gun. You don't seem to have one. Who's chop-saw is that? It's really nice.

Amy: I don't know what a chop-saw is, nor where it would've come from. If you think we need it and it's nice, then... great. Anything else we'll need?

David: Transparent break-proof sheeting for the roof and the walls. We'll also need to build shelves for the pots to sit on, uh... some piping for the irrigation, a timer valve for your hosepipe to go into the irrigation system, uh... a drill, which you have, some hinges and a latch for the door... I got it all written down. We should be good. Oooh this is so exciting!

Ericka: Sounds complicated. Think you can teach the rest of us to help?

David: Sure! Just... I'd like to be the one to use the saw. I don't want you guys getting hurt.

Amy: I agree. I'm almost afraid to let you use it, but... this sounds like something you remember.

David: It's coming back! There's so much here and I remember so many things! I even remember what aisles this stuff is on at the store! I feel great.

-Worth noting that David has an acute memory over power tools, wood, and construction. From what I understand, he used to help his friends and neighbors build things and built his own deck on the back of his house some years ago. He's extremely handy. Something to add to our knowledgebase for him. Perhaps we don't need to simply relegate him to watering plants. He can help in construction efforts. Dr. Saynurs has proven that focusing on a passionate task greatly helps the 'person side' of those that are afflicted with this.

Amy: This is great, I'm really happy. [She looks at Rebecca.] Have you had a shower yet? You don't smell it.

Rebecca: No, I was about to. Is that okay?

Amy: Let's take one together, it'll be faster.

Ericka: You... can you and I do it instead?

Amy: You've already showered, though. We can do it this afternoon.

Ericka: [Her ears splaying.] Okay.

Amy: [Chuckling,] We're just doing this to be faster. Relax. You're my mate. Becky likes males.

Rebecca: [Nodding.] just cleaning! Love you, Ericka.

Ericka: Same. I'll have breakfast on the table when you two are done. [She looks over her shoulder.] David, help me get the silverware and stuff, please? Wash your hands first.

David: Sure!

-They have a cohesive family unit sometimes. Ericka does the cooking, David does... whatever they tell him, Rebecca spends her time studying, and Amy bounces from task to task. It's like two couples that've known each other for most of their lives. Say what you will of their experience in public, their internal family unit is extremely solid.

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical log

14/Feb/2024

The information gathered yesterday was quite fascinating. The pack is truly beginning to work in unison. Dr. Beyer's assessment that David needed more time socializing has been an excellent call, and has proven to have results almost immediately. After their outing yesterday, David got right to work framing up the foundation for the greenhouse, with Rebecca chipping in. Amy was helping as well by marking measurements on the boards for David to cut.

The neighbor noticed their activity and walked to the fence to check in. Amy quickly addressed the others to be friendly, and they complied, remaining mostly silent, save for David who seemed to take an almost entirely normal persona for the entire conversation. He told the man that he was a part of Amy's family, and had recently moved in with his partner Rebecca. He was a 'field botanist' by trade (Not correct, but, it works, given his memory of himself) but also loved construction hobbies on the side. The neighbor joked about him coming over to help him work on his deck in the spring, to which David said he'd be overjoyed to help. After speaking it, he looked over his shoulder at Amy for confirmation, who tentatively agreed. Ericka remained under the porch, watching them work as she read through a book on genetics, as best as I could tell. The title was obscured on the camera.

Amy couldn't remember the man's name, or even that she had a male neighbor, but in David's conversation, she was able to pick it up, and was able to refer to him by it with ease. It seems that they're slowly learning to adapt to their limitations.

The neighbor offered to help, but Amy declined, saying that they had it under control. She did note, however, that she'd be glad to share some of the overgrowth. David didn't seem to approve of the idea, but didn't go against her.

After he left, she brought them all together for a break on the porch. She praised all of them for their behavior, especially David for his friendly, 'person' interaction, and said that she was very hopeful, given how well it went. She also thanked him for getting the man's name, since she couldn't remember. The only negative remark was from Ericka, who complained about the fact that he was a racoon, and shouldn't get any of their supplies. Amy rebutted her, stating that it would only happen if they had too much. They weren't about to cede territory to him.

Predictably, later this evening, Dr. Hwen called me. It took her some time to get to my desk, as she couldn't remember my number. In fact, she couldn't remember the lab's number at all. She had to look up the main number online, then fight her way through phone systems for nearly 2 hours before she finally reached me. She asked about her brother, who's name she'd already forgotten, and his desire to visit. She wasn't sure, but she seemed to recall that it involved her father somehow. She didn't know why he couldn't come, or where her mother was. Apparently, from her perspective, she'd tried to call to speak to her father to help with Dr. Beyer's questionnaire, but got yelled at by someone she didn't know. Somehow her brother got involved, and now he wants to see her. I've... gotten the number from her, and I'll call him myself before authorizing this. He needs to understand the severity.

I worry deeply about the way my conversation went with her this evening. There are many things she can do just fine, but details like this are quickly forgotten, and it's very stressful to see her... fading as she is. It very much resembles conditions such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease. I'm going to recommend that she come in next week for an EEG. I want to see what parts of her brain are functioning.

From the standpoint of her pack, nothing's missing. She acts the same, she tells them how to behave, and in most social situations she's fine. Her issues only crop up when it comes to memory. Why? Why are memories the problem? As of right now, I'm at a loss. How could this fern rob her of them as it has? It's done much the same to Dr. Saynurs. He remembers what's immediately relevant, but his past, his family, all of it... is simply gone. I'm not going to bring the gods into this, but it makes me wonder if this is somehow part of being a child of Kalu. Perhaps I should ask Director Nombs.

14/Feb/2024 Cont.

I managed to speak with Directory Nombs just before she left for the evening. It's been a busy day, trying to work with 552, supervising Dr. Saynurs, and monitoring 'the pack.' Fortunately, she was more than happy to speak with me.

I explained to her the situation with Dr. Hwen, which seems to upset her. She was glad that she'd refused the Junior researcher's resignation. Without her pack right now, she'd be far worse off, and perhaps even dangerous to society at large. Even without changing physically, she might've avoided society and taken up her life in the forest. She said she wouldn't be the first to do such a thing, as many werewolves have done it before. I inquired about this to help understand, and she simply told me this:

'A werewolf is a person and wolf's souls intertwined within a single, changing body. If the person gives themselves up, the wolf takes over. The person fades until the wolf is just a wolf. By itself the wolf knows nothing about the person's world, and must take its knowledge from the person's mind.'

Her argument was that, without constant reminders and existence in the social world, it's very likely that Dr. Hwen and the remainder of her pack would simply fade away. They'd give in to their feral sides and who they might've been before would just... disappear. I asked her if she thought that was something we should consider, if they express a desire to do so, but she shook her head. She actually seemed a little offended, though I'm not sure why.

Later this evening, I gave the number Amy had given me a call, and spoke with Kenji Hwen. He was surprised to hear from me, but when I introduced myself from the company his sister worked for, he started to understand. He explained to me that when Amy had called, she'd seemed so uneducated about the events of her family that he thought it was some kind of cruel joke. She's always been a little distant, according to him, though he didn't say why.

I explained to him, in basic terms, that Dr. Hwen had been exposed to a processed form of a rare fern found in the Catskills, and that she was experiencing memory loss and some... perspective changes as a result. I tried to frame it so that he might understand. She views her family as her pack, and in some ways thinks as an intelligent animal. This prompted an adamant plea to return her to normal, which... I sadly had to tell him couldn't happen. She's being treated the best that she can, but it's doubtful from the other exposed subjects that she'll ever truly be the same.

I warned him that saying or doing the wrong thing might put him in danger, and recommended that we send a guard with him, but he declined. He insisted that Amy would never hurt him. I told him in no simple terms that *Amy* was not the one that concerned me. So far, as far as post-recovery attacks or confrontations, we've had two non-fatal incidents with Ericka, and one... regrettably now fatal incident with Rebecca. I haven't informed her, but the man died from his injuries a few days ago. Gods... the idea that a person could do so much damage simply terrifies me. Despite this fact, though, Rebecca seems less likely than Ericka to initiate any sort of attack at this stage. He simply said that he would take it under advisement.

With the break in the weather, he said he's probably going to go tomorrow. I'm going to have one of our teams nearby, just to be on the safe side.

Ericka Saunders Diary

2/14/2024

Dr. Beyer said I needed to write a diary. He gave me access to my old one so that I could try to read it over and understand what's expected. I uh... don't see how what's written there has anything to do with me. Considering that she's the same person as me, though... I guess I should just say... it's me again? Literally 20 years later. I guess that's kind of funny.

So things are going well, I think. David's building a greenhouse. He's wagging so hard about it. He remembers a lot of tool things. It was Amy's idea to let him do that. She said he's been kind of ignored. I guess so? But he's always so quiet! It's not like I'm doing it. If he does something wrong, we'll tell him. Amy will tell all of us.

Becky wants to teach pups. Apparently, she used to do that before. It's good that she's good with pups. She'll make a good mother. I can't say I would, but I can at least carry them back if they try to crawl out of the den and bring her some kills while she's nursing. I wonder... if she has more than 2... how will that work? Her other teets are gone now. So are mine, I guess. But I know that Amy and I won't lactate if Becky has cubs, so... how will we feed them? Maybe the lab people will help.

Uhh... what else? Amy's good. I'm trying to help her remember things. She forgets a lot. I feel really bad that I did this to her. I don't know though, if she could've been a part of our pack without it. I didn't trust her in the beginning. She was just another person. She was a wolf, though... that was a good thing. I could trust her more, but if she... I just couldn't trust her. Not being one of them. Also, she worked for Saynurs. Stupid fox. He should've given me a specimen. He was my specimen, but they've taken him away from me now. I wanted to see what would happen if we boosted his dosage... ok he changed back faster. So what if we cut him off? No idea! They won't let me. What if we give him 400 daily instead of 200 then cut him off? Will he stay? ... I honestly think the answer is no. We're stuck on this stuff until we either die of old age, or they cut us off and I go back to the forest. It wouldn't be so bad, but considering I was a gray-nose after 20 years... I won't live all that long like that.

I mean I have almost 60 years like this, probably. I can watch my pack have pups, and watch those pups have pups before I go. If I gray-nose in just 20 years... I'll be gone in like 30 or 40.

I wonder what my life would be like now if that professor would've just accepted my paper the first time? No Deacon, no repeating class... no fern. Rebecca, David, Amy, all of them would still be just people. Honestly, I don't remember that life well enough to even guess.

Rebecca Gnead Diary

2/14/2024

So, they told me to keep a diary. Seems they told everyone to do it. We're all sitting typing away. It seems at least, that we all remember how, though. So that's something. Ericka types a lot because of her work at the lab, so I'm sure she's good. I... don't really? I haven't typed since 2013, unless you count my time on the internet with Amy's tablet, but that's not quite the same.

Dr. Beyer seems okay. Oh wait. This is for him to read, isn't it? Well... you seem okay. I didn't like the guard, though. He was a wolf, which is good, but why was he there? Okay the dishwasher guy, but, that was one time!! I haven't hurt anyone since then. Ericka didn't tell me! I mean, they say it's bad, yea, maybe it was. It was bad. Amy says I shouldn't do things to people unless they attack me first. Or... did Dr. Beyer say that? I can't remember. Either way... if Amy changes her mind on that I will, too. Amy and Ericka call the shots. More than any person.

They won't let me mate with David in a... pup making way. We can mate, but not when I'm in heat. Or we have to use protection and things, which still makes it fun, but I think, maybe less... uh... satisfying in the end? I'm not sure.

I wonder what old me was like. I've been using Amy's tablet to try to find me. I found a few things, but... they don't really seem like me, ya know? Like, the profile on socials that looked like it was mine, obviously has been inactive for 11 years. The girl was... a math teacher like I seem to be, but she didn't like, or want pups. She was dating a red panda. I forget his name now... but at one point she specifically told someone else that she could fuck him with impunity and never have pups. Am I really so different now? If I hadn't done this, I'd be in my 30s, still without pups, married to the red panda guy. Oh... I can't remember his name! I think it started with an M. I'll look it up on the tablet later.

I ate him, ya know. Ericka fed him to me. I wonder what parts of him I ate. The parts of him that... oh I don't guess I should go there. The fact is he's dead. So... he can't ever be my mate. David's my mate now. David's a wolf. We can have pups. Ericka wants us to and... so do I. Maybe it's just biology that's driving me. Gods... I wish I was smarter. Maybe I'd be more like her.

It's so frustrating to go out in public and just out of the blue be told that I'm being bad somehow. It doesn't really happen much, but this idea that I'm just constantly fucking up around these... people... like... I'm not one of them! I want to be, but... I can't be. It makes me sad that I can't be one of them and not have to worry about doing bad things.

David Tanibard Journal

2/14/2024

They want me to make a journal. Okay. So... I mean what do I even put in something like this? It's stupid. People always do things that make no sense.

Okay, I asked Amy and she said to basically just write my thoughts out loud, and my plans and things. So, I'll try that. Uh, I like the greenhouse we're building. It felt really good to do all that. It was like remembering something I'd lost. Every screw, every staple, all the framing and cutting with the saw... loading up the SUV with supplies... it felt so rewarding. It was familiar, too.

The neighbor talked to me over the fence. Amy said it was okay. I guess our territory ends at the fence. That's okay. He said he wanted my help doing something. It sounds like fun. Amy says I can trust him, so I will. When sprig comes, he wants me to help him with his deck. I seem to recall building a deck in the past, but... I don't know for sure.

When I was in Dr. Beyer's office, I was ready to just give up and go to the wilds. I felt conflicted and sad. I had to choose a life I felt apart from, or the wilds without my pack. After a few days with Amy, though, she's been helping me see the social world in a better way. We go shopping, we build people things, it's fun! So long as I'm good, I can see this working out very well!

Rebecca still wants to have pups when she's in heat again. We need permission to do that. Part of me wonders what we were like before, though. Like, did we want them before? Did she? She was dating a red panda. She can't make pups with a red panda. I just don't know.

No matter what, we'll do what Amy says we can do, and what we want to... beyond that. I don't think I have anything else to say. This is weird.

END POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT

Part 12

Video transcript: Dr. Hwen's home

16/Feb/2024 Beginning 08:14hrs – Transcript by Dr. Ahonen

[A white sedan arrives outside Dr. Hwen's home. It shuts off, and a brown furred wolf with dark hair steps out. He looks nervous, glancing at David's red SUV beside Amy's snow-covered hatchback, then walks to the door. It snowed the night before, but not enough to cause issue, just a dusting. The pathway is clean because David took it upon himself to keep it that way. He's done the same to the driveway, but not Amy's car, since they haven't been using it.]

[He rings the bell, then steps back.]

[Inside, Ericka is sitting on the couch watching the morning news with a coffee. Her ears perk and she looks at the door, but makes no effort to move, instead looking at the door to Amy's bedroom. She's taking a shower.]

[After about a minute, the wolf knocks again. By then, Amy has finished her shower and is combing her wet hair.]

Amy: Ericka, answer the door. Don't let them in.

[Ericka rises from her seat, places her coffee down and walks to the door, opening it quickly. She looks the wolf over, but says nothing.]

Male wolf: Hi, uhh... is this... Amy Hwen's house?

[Ericka splays back her ears and narrows her eyes.]

Ericka: Why are you in our territory?

Male wolf: I... uh... I'm Kenji? Amy's brother. Is she here?

Ericka: Oh, you're the one in the red bikini picture. You're older. You were just a pup before. Yes, she's getting dressed.

Kenji: Oh, okay. [He attempts to enter, but Ericka blocks him.] Uh... can I come in?

Ericka: [Shaking her head.] Wait here. She said not to let anyone in.

Kenji: [Confused, his ears opposing one another as he slightly tilts his head.] Why? She knew I was coming. We talked yesterday.

Ericka: You are not of our pack. You are not welcome in unless the alpha says you are. She said you can't come in, so you can't. [She closes the door in his face.]

[Amy exits the bedroom, nude, combing her hair. Rebecca and David are on the couch having juice and coffee, but pay Amy's nudity no mind. It's interesting how little this social norm applies to them.]

Amy: Who is it?

Ericka: The guy from the red bikini picture. Can... can I see that again?

Amy: [Laughing,] I'm naked, and you want to see me in a bikini instead?

Ericka: [Looking her over.] Good point. You uh... want to have a little fun before we talk to the wolf outside?

Amy: [Chuckling, she boops her mate's nose.] Not now my tamed beast. Maybe this evening. [She tilts her head.] I'm confused, though. Who was the guy from the bikini photo?

Ericka: He claims that he's your brother.

Amy: [Ears perking.] Oh! Oh right... him. I kinda forgot he existed. Let me finish getting dressed. Let him in but relegate him to the main room. Offer him some coffee.

Ericka: Is he family?

Amy: No. He's a guest in our den. Treat him well, but not as family.

[Amy disappears into the room as Ericka opens the door. Kenji was on his way back to the car with his phone in his hand.]

Ericka: Hey... leaving?

Kenji: I was gonna call Amy. I thought I had the wrong-

Ericka: [forcefully] Get in here. Now.

[He looks at her, but hesitates, reading her aggressive expression.]

Kenji: I think I'll stay out here until Amy-

Ericka: [Yelling] That wasn't a request! Amy said come in! Get in here or I'll drag you in with my teeth!

[From the bedroom, Amy calls out, hearing her yell.]

Amy: Ericka! Guest! Be nice!

[Ericka seems exasperated and rolls her eyes.]

Ericka: You can wait out here if you want, or you can come in. It's warmer in here, though. Amy's getting dressed.

[The wolf nods, then slowly makes his way to the house, cautiously stepping past Ericka.]

Kenji: Definitely Amy's house. I recognize that human sculpture on the desk.

Rebecca: Hi! [she wags her tail but stops as Ericka gives her a warning look.]

Kenji: Hi, I'm Kenji, Amy's brother? Who uh... who are all of you?

[Rebecca's ears splay submissively, and she declines to respond. Ericka closes the door and walks past him, sitting on the couch. David looks up and nods at him in a silent greeting. Kenji clears his throat, then finds a chair at the farthest edge of the group in which to sit. They remain like this for nearly 15 minutes until Amy emerges from her bedroom.]

Amy: Sorry about that, I was getting ready. Did Ericka offer you coffee?

Kenji: [Rising from his chair.] Amy! [He moves in for a hug, but she sharply backs away, splaying back her ears.]

Amy: Back up, asshole. Who in a hell are you and why are you here? I...know you were in a pic of me but, that doesn't mean I know who you are.

Kenji: [His ears drooping.] Amy we just talked yesterday, and the day before. You've already forgotten? I'm Kenji, your brother??

Amy: I don't have a brother. What are you talking about?

-She forgot this in 15 minutes? Interesting.

[Kenji sighs, looking away from her, trying not to tear up. His tail curls between his legs.]

Kenji: Dr. Ahonen warned me you might have some memory loss, but... he didn't tell me it'd be like this. Amy, what happened to you?? I know some kind of... plant... lectin or something but how can you just forget me?? I'm your little brother, I've known you my entire life!

Amy: [Walking past him unsympathetically.] Ericka obviously didn't offer you coffee. Would you like some? Ericka, do we have enough food for this one to add to breakfast?

Ericka: We do.

Amy: Let's share a meal with him. Maybe it'll calm him. [She looks over her shoulder at Kenji.] Ericka is an amazing cook. You will love what she makes. Take a seat, and... answer my question, please.

Kenji: Uh... Coffee please. It's cold today.

[Amy looks at Rebecca and David, who both have a keen interest in the man.]

Amy: You may speak to him. All of you.

Ericka: How you like your eggs? Want an omelet? What about hashbrowns?

Rebecca: Ericka, can... we please have cheese hashbrowns today?

Amy: that sounds great. Let's do that.

Kenji: [Taking his seat.] Scrambled well on the eggs, please.

Ericka: You got it.

David: Is it true? You're Amy's brother? Are you part of the pack now?

Amy: He's not part of the pack. As for being my brother... I'm not sure that I believe you, nor how you'd prove it.

[Kenji sighs and scrolls through his phone, showing him with her and her father. She's in a graduation gown and holding a degree. It's hard to make out in the video, but context helps.]

Kenji: You were always way smarter than me. You called me fur-brain because I struggled with things you had no trouble with. You used to help me with my math homework.

Amy: I don't remember that, but... I'll give you the shadow of a doubt. [She sits down, cuddling up with David and Rebecca, who both wag their tails and snuggle in with her.] So why are you here?

Kenji: Well... ya know mom's gone, dad's... going... and... well when you called and... and you're kind of... going, too. I felt like I had to come see you while you were still... ya know, you. I didn't know you'd lose so much between yesterday and today. I mean... how can you forget me?? I'm your brother!

Amy: [Apathetic.] I don't remember many things. I don't even know where we are anymore. Ya know, region wise. But it's not that important, so I try not to worry about it I remember the important stuff.

Kenji: [Shifting on his seat to face her] Your famioly's not that important?? Amy, how can you be okay with this?

Amy: I don't have a choice. They have me on a daily medication. I don't know that it does anything for me, but I know it does for my pack.

Rebecca: [Nodding, waiting for Amy to stop speaking.] All of us have memory problems.

David: We go back to the wilds if we stop with our medication. We don't know what'll happen to Amy.

Kenji: The wilds?

Amy: [Shaking her head.] Doesn't concern you. The fact is, I don't remember you. So... I guess if you were looking for something from me you might've wasted your time.

Kenji: [Adamant, waving his arms.] We just talked two days ago! How the fuck did you forget your entire family in two days??

Ericka: She has a family. She doesn't forget us.

Kenji: [Angrily.] I don't know who you people are, but you're *not* part of our fucking family!

Amy: [Shouting.] Hey! Don't you dare insult my pack. They *are* my family. A lot more than you are you... nothing of a wolf.

David: [Contemptuously.] What's *your* pack like? Why'd you come here alone? You know you're in our territory, right?

Kenji: I don't have a pack because I'm not an animal! And neither are any of you.

Ericka: Wouldn't be so sure of that.

Amy: [Sighing.] Let's... calm down. This isn't going to help. I don't want wolf blood in my den, and I don't want his pack coming after us for it, either.

-In only two days she forgot who he was, but retained the memory that he was coming to visit. Her aggression was sudden, but only when he threatened her pack.

Kenji: Blood in your den? How did we go from scrambled eggs to murder?

Amy: You insulted the pack in our own den. It's... don't worry about it. Everything's fine. I... apologize that we were in conflict.

Kenji: [Looking up as Ericka brings him his breakfast and gently hands it to him. She doesn't seem upset at all. She's not smiling, but still treats him cordially.] I just... when you said you were having memory issues... with dad being sick and mom being gone... ya know you're my last connection to the... to your old family. I wanted to come see you while you were still... you. I guess I'm too late.

Amy: [Nuzzling Ericka as she brings her her food.] I'm still Dr. Amy Hwen. That hasn't changed.

-Ericka brought the guest his food first. Amy said nothing of this. It's highly unusual. Usually, the alpha eats first. Then again, I've never seen how feral wolves behave when they have... guests over. From what I understand they're usually pretty curious and friendly, though.

Kenji: Yea, but... you're not the same Amy Hwen I grew up with in Oswego. You're not the same girl that used to go swimming in the lake outside uncle Zeke's cabin in the summer. You're Dr. Amy Hwen in name only at this point.

[Amy seems to remember some of the items he mentioned, her ears splaying as she whimpers softly.]

Amy: [Softly whining.] Kenji... oh gods... oh gods I really have forgotten. We... we spoke yesterday?? I don't remember that at all! [She's visibly distressed.] Why don't I remember??

Kenji: Sis, I... Dr. Ahonen wouldn't really go into detail, but he said you were exposed to some kind of processed organic compound. Your friends here are talking about the wilds... you're acting... sorta feral. What's going-

[Amy puts down her plate and stands up, rushing over to him, she barely gives him time to rise to his feet before she hugs him heavily, sobbing on his shoulder. He closes his eyes and hugs her back just as tightly.]

Amy: I'm losing everything... I can't even remember my mother's face. I don't know when she died or how... I don't know where she's buried, I don't even know where the fuck I am! Worst of all... most of the time I don't even care!

Kenji: [Gently rubbing her back.] It's okay... we're gonna get you through this. They've given you that medication, right? Does it help?

Ericka: [Bringing Rebecca and David their food.] The meds help us, we don't know if it helps her.

Amy: [Pulling back so she can look him in the eye, then nodding.] She's right... they... put me on the medication as a precaution. They're afraid I might physically change. There's been no evidence of that, though. My mind is intact, I just... forget things a lot.

-She considers her mind to be intact? Interesting.

Kenji: Physically change? What... what is this? [Stepping back.] It's not contagious, is it?

Amy: [Shaking her head with a saddened chuckle] No... no it's not contagious. It comes from a plant, a type of fern called *Dennstaedtia-Mutatio*. If you're exposed to it on your fur, it can change you after a week or so of application... physically. Also, if you ingest it in large quantities, it will change you. In small quantities, though... it seems to just affect your memory.

Kenji: So you... ingested some of it? And it's messing with your mind by... making you think like an animal, and forget things?

Amy: I don't think any differently. Memory is the problem. I still know that killing people is wrong, even if they're prey. I know that reacting aggressively in public settings is wrong... smelling people, that sort of thing. I've taught my pack to do the same.

[Kenji looks deeply worried, splaying his ears. His sister does the same, the tears still gently running down her face.]

Amy: I have these moments... where I remember what's happening to me, ya know? Or what *has* happened. There's no way for me to know if I'm still getting worse, or if I've just let so many things go that I don't use that... I'm not aware of it until I need it. The lab's labeled me as a subject. They... they have cameras and microphones everywhere. They monitor everything we do and everywhere we go. We have weekly sessions with a therapist, we have to keep diaries, they give us medication.... I don't know where it's gonna end. Maybe it won't?? Maybe I'll settle somewhere in all of this or maybe it'll just get worse and worse... maybe I'll start changing or they'll cut off the 551 for all of us or...

Kenji: Sis, you're spiraling. [Hugging her.] Slow it down, and think. What can we do to make this better?

Amy: You tell me! I don't... what even is it that you do? [She sniffs at him, but offers no explanation.] You smell like cigarettes. I thought you'd know by now not to smoke... considering what dad's going through!

Kenji: [His ears perking.] You remembered!

Amy: Remembered what? That dad has lung cancer because he smoked since he was 12?? That you started smoking when *you* were 12 and I told you again and again and again that that stuff would be the death of you?? And yet here you are smelling of cigarettes in my den?? Yes! I remember. Why are you smoking??

Kenji: [A conflicted smile on his face.] The stress of dad's situation. I just couldn't help myself. You... you remembered everything just now, though.

-What if they all remember, but it's simply being blocked somehow? Ericka easily remembers her tasks at the lab, Rebecca can easily teach young children, David can easily build structures, and Dr. Saynurs can even do his job. Amy remembers her life during a state of duress for someone she cares about. Could there be an answer here?

Amy: I... did... weird. I wonder how that works.

David: I remember how to build things. We have very specific memories, I've noticed, that center around key aspects of our former lives.

Ericka: He has a point. When I'm working on the ferns, I'm sort of... in the zone. I feel... different somehow... it's only when people interrupt me that I fall out of it.

Amy: But how do we keep these memories? I remember him now... the smoking, dad, the cancer... will I remember it tomorrow?

Rebecca: [Her ears splayed.] Probably not.

Amy: But why not? Why remember *now*? It's in my mind! It's there! So why can't I reach it?

Ericka: Maybe we don't need it, right? I mean, I know how to cook because I cook for the pack. You remember... society because you teach us people things. David builds things, so he remembers building things... [Her ears splay.] I sound stupid...

Amy: No, no! I think you're onto something, I just don't know how to... [She looks back at Kenji.] What do you do?

Kenji: I'm not as smart as you Am-

Amy: What do you do?!

Kenji: [Sighing] I... I care for animals. I work at a wildlife refuge for animals that are too domesticated to be set free.

Ericka: Awesome... we found our zookeeper when they cut us off.

Amy: Ericka, don't. We're not going to some zoo. They're not cutting us off.

Ericka: Honey, excuse me for objecting, but I think you're misjudging them. Eventually they'll lose interest in us. We can't be sustained indefinitely. Our existence in personhood is artificial.

Amy: [Splaying back her ears.] So long as you're my pack I'm protecting your wellbeing with my life. I'm not letting them do that to you unwillingly. If they try it, I'll tear them apart. You have my word on that.

Kenji: So... you're the alpha, she's the alpha mate, and these two are mates and members?

Amy: [Tilting her head.] You understand us, then?

Kenji: Now that I see what's happening, yea. I work with a bunch of semi-domesticated wolves in the refuge. Most of them are big sweeties, if you can get through their defenses.

Ericka: [Walking close to him and sniffing at him, then wrinkling her nose.] Well then, Kenji... welcome to the pack. Stop smoking.

Kenji: I... I'm not planning to stay. I have things I have to do. I need to be with dad incase... ya know.

Amy: Well... keep in touch, every day. I'm sorry to ask that of you but... please. And when... when that business is done... I'd like you to come back and help us.

Kenji: [Hugging her.] No promises, but... I'll try. [He looked back at his food.] Mind if I stay for breakfast, though?

Amy: Of course. Have... have a seat.

-The remainder of their morning went very well. Surprisingly, Mr. Hwen was able to navigate the pitfalls of their quirks with little effort, making fast friends with them all. Amy expressed relief that she could remember him, and hope that he could help the entire pack learn more, but he expressed hesitation to remain in her home, stating that the wildlife refuge needed him.

I later looked up the refuge where he works. He's not being paid very well from what I can tell. It's possible that we could offer him a position here to be close to his sister. We could also bring his ailing father into our medical ward to try to, if nothing else, ease his pain. This would allow him to remain close to her. Maybe we can make some progress here. I'll speak to him when he leaves.

18/Feb/2024 – Video transcript - Mr. Kenji Hwen's arrival Begin 07:42hrs

Notated by Dr. Leevi Ahonen

[Kenji arrives just before 8 and walks to the front door. From inside, the pack is expecting him, but Amy can't remember his name. They'd spoken just the night before. Ericka offers to go to the door, but Amy insists.]

Amy: [Opening the door, her tail wagging.] Kevin! You made it!

Kenji: [Frowns.] Kenji. You... you really already forgot? We just talked last night!

Amy: [Her ears splaying.] Sorry. Do you need help with your bags?

Kenji: [Picking up a pair he carried with him from the car.] Yea, if you don't mind, that'd be great. They're in the trunk.

[Amy looks over her shoulder and calls on David and Rebecca to help get his bags. They comply, but Rebecca stops as she passes him.]

Rebecca: [Sniffing.] No smoking! You stopped! You're a good boy.

Kenji: [Laughing.] I did! I figured it'd just cause problems here, so... I got some tongue... things... to help me stop. Never used em before but they're pretty effective so far.

[Rebecca nods, then hurries to catch up with David.]

Amy: Don't fall! The last thing we need is an injury. [She sighs as Rebecca stumbles but catches herself on the car.] Sometimes they're like pups. They get so excited. [She turns to catch up to Kenji, who is standing in the living room.] It's the room at the end of the hall.

Kenji: Aren't you glad I convinced you to get a 3 bed house? You were looking at that 1 bedroom apartment a few miles from here...

Amy: At the time it made sense. I didn't need the space, and I wasn't dating. Besides... it wasn't like we were gonna have pups.

Kenji: Has that changed? You have a pretty big family now.

Amy: For me? No. I don't want pups. I would like Rebecca to have some, though... if she wants them.

Kenji: Ms. Lone wolf over here... now with her own pack, looking at growing her family.

Amy: [Blushing slightly, or perhaps it's lighting. Difficult to tell.] Things change, Kev... Kenji. Are they moving dad still?

[The pair enter the room and Kenji looks around. It's a small room with basic furniture, but he doesn't seem bothered.]

Kenji: [Nodding.] Yea, they took him to the lab early this morning. Like... 3am. We should go see him once everything's settled.

Amy: I dunno Kevin, I'm worried he'll try to talk to me about things that happened and I won't remember! I... can't even remember his face. So, what good will it do to-

Kenji: [Jokingly] You call me Kevin again and you're not getting dinner. My name is Kenji. As far as dad you-

Amy: [Suddenly angry.] I'm sorry, did you just threaten me in my own den? You don't get to come in here and start trying to impose rewards or punishments. You understand me? You are a guest in this den. And you're surrounded by enough of us that we can tear you apart before you can say anything about it...

-It's very odd that Amy missed the rather obvious social queue that he was joking here. She took him completely seriously.

Ericka: [Hearing the commotion, appears in the doorway.] Is he causing problems?

Kenji: [Annoyed] I wasn't being serious, for one, but for two, if you want me to help you, you're going to have to let there be some sort of enforcement mechanism exist to teach you.

Amy: Enforcement mechanisms? Who do you think you are? You're not my alpha. You're not *anyone's* alpha. You got that?? You come in here like this and start barking orders you'd better be prepared to fight me for my position. [She's in his face, practically pushing on his nose with her own.] And I'll tell you right now that if you try, there'll be blood on these walls. You're here to *help*. You sure as *fuck* are not here to take over.

[Kenji backs off and lifts his hands defensively, shaking his head.]

Kenji: Sis... I'm not trying to take over. I'm here to help you, remember? I'm... a person... and I'm experienced with feral wolf care.

Amy: [Growling...] Then you should know when to back the fuck off.

Kenji: I do, and I did.

Amy: [Stares at him for a moment before gradually calming down. She looks to Ericka.] Can we get breakfast going? I think biscuits n gravy would be nice.

Ericka: Sounds great. Do you... want me to make enough for him, too?

Amy: [Looking back at her brother.] No. For his behavior, he's not eating.

Kenji: I had breakfast before I came here. I'm good.

Amy: [Growling...] Then no LUNCH! [She groans in anger.] Just... unpack your shit you insufferable animal. You can come out of your corner when we're done eating. You do it before and I'll rip out your throat!

-It's hard to tell if Amy was being serious in this moment. She's taken his apparent challenge to her dominance extremely seriously and has retaliated excessively. I'm surprised by this, but it may be the fact that she's his brother that she takes it so seriously.

[David and Rebecca bring in the rest of his bags, their ears are splayed, and they avoid eye contact with him.]

David: [As they both leave.] I'll... come get you when you're allowed to leave.

Kenji: Do you think she was serious?

David: Do what she says, please? Don't try to find out.

[Kenji sighs and begins to unpack his things. He opens his laptop and tries to connect to the internet, but didn't get her wifi information before being locked in. He opts to tether to his phone instead. He starts typing, though at the moment it's not clear what.]

[Amy joins Ericka in the kitchen and helps her prepare the biscuits. When it comes to cooking Ericka is in charge, and Amy takes direction on how to make the biscuits while her partner makes the gravy. The anger isn't carried over at all. Amy is completely normal, like it didn't happen.]

-I continue to marvel at how this group gets along in the absence of others. Wolves work together. I've wondered for a time now if Dr. Saynurs would work better together with another fox like himself, but foxes are not social in the same way. It might backfire to try.

[They gather at the table to eat. It's assumed they did so because of the mess that gravy might make. The gravy is very meat heavy.]

David: This is great! We should have this more often.

Ericka: Takes a little bit more effort, but it's worth it on special occasions. [She looks to Amy.] There's... probably enough here for him to share.

Amy: [Muted anger.] He gets none.

Rebecca: Can... I ask what he did?

Amy: He tried to challenge me. He's here five minutes and he's challenging me for alpha! Can you believe that?? The fucking nerve...

Ericka: I only caught part of it. What'd he say?

Amy: He said that if I called him Kevin again that he'd deny me dinner. This fucker... he thinks he gets to tell me when I eat in *my* den??

David: You... eat when you want to.

Amy: Exactly! Ya know, I got no problem with all of us eating at once, with you guys taking the first bite or having food before me, so long as there's enough. It's... social... but having him try to dictate how this works?? Oh, he's got a hard lesson to learn if he's gonna be part of this family.

Rebecca: Is he part of our pack now? I thought he was just a guest.

Amy: He's... *biological* family. It's yet to be seen if he's worthy of being a part of the pack. For now, he's a guest. We should... once his punishment is over, we should treat him as a guest. But don't let him control you. Don't let him tell you what to do. He tries it, you come to me.

Ericka: Honey, isn't his entire reason for being here to help us with integration? Won't that mean that he'll be telling us what to do?

Amy: Making suggestions is one thing, telling us what to do is another. Just... don't let him start doing my job or telling you things that might go against me. You should be able to tell by now what kind of pack we are.

Rebecca: [Wagging.] A good pack. A good family! I would be so lonely without you all.

David: Yea, same... I can't imagine trying to be out there alone.

-It's worth noting that in recent weeks, Amy has brought a much more open perspective into the pack. Their discourse has drifted away from the tight-lipped antagonistic pecking order that Ericka instilled in the others by herself. Amy has been a net positive in their internal behavior, which should also be a net positive for their external. Still, her mental decline has been evident, and her approach to her brother... problematic.

Amy: Before all of this I was kind of alone. I think? Kevin... Kenji says that I wasn't dating, so I guess I must've just spent time on my work. I guess I didn't really mind being alone. Now, though? Well... I like having you all around.

Ericka: I was alone for 10 years. I hunted, I slept... I defended my territory. I was lonely, but, my mind was different from what it is now. I didn't mind it. In fact, I enjoyed it. When they took me here, I started to remember so many complexities and missed my train tunnel den. Just... the slight tinge of society that lingered on the edge of my mind... taxes, jobs, housing, transportation, clothing, government... it was all too much at once. I'd given it up, ya know? I'd inadvertently walked away from it all. Suddenly I was back... trying to learn it all again... and something that I saw as so negative back then, felt like it was looming over me now. [She sighs.] Amy's changed that. There... might be a future for us here. It's daunting... especially because it's obvious that we don't think like they do, but... we can learn. Everyone in this pack is strong. If you weren't, you wouldn't be a part of it. Being with you has made all the difference in the world.

[The table is silent for a moment, with Rebecca splaying her ears. After a moment, she seems to perk up and starts to wag her tail, whining happily.]

Rebecca: [Smiling.] Rough waters lead to calm shores. We'll do our best. And... Kenji will help us, too.

Amy: Yea... I dunno how I feel about him being here.

Ericka: I urge you to give him a chance. If he can help us get back to their world, then that's good.

Amy: I mean, what do we even *want* from their world?

Rebecca: I want to blend in. Go do fun things, have a job, buy stuff, raise pups, have those pups involved in person things... expand our pack... ya know? Aren't... those good?

Ericka: I want to keep working. I want to find that ferret or whatever and shove my papers in his face, make him eat them, then make him watch me eat his intestines.

Amy: [Chuckling.] Okay maybe not to that extent, honey. I get it, though. You want to find a way to use the mutatio lectin in a positive way. You want to make a name for yourself with it.

Ericka: Yea! I... I think so.

David: I'm happy building stuff, actually. That greenhouse was some of the most fun I've had in... well as much memory as I have.

-Amy seems apart from what they're saying. She acts as if she sees more negatives than positives in the person's world. Still, she seems to overall want them to be happy, and is willing to limit herself to make that work.

-I spoke to some of Amy's former coworkers about her personality and who she was before. They mostly painted her as a 'head down' type of person. She wasn't particularly good at her job, and expressed intense anxiety quite frequently, opting to keep her head down so that she was not noticed. If this is an accurate description, even her earliest medical records show an increase in aggression and self-confidence. If true, this would mean that the mutatio lectin adversely affects one's personality, and could change those who are not violent, into those that are, and visa versa.

[Breakfast proceeds with small talk as they discuss their desired activities for the day. Amy expresses concern about seeing her father, but Ericka encourages her. Even without remembering him, she says that it's important. Amy agrees on the condition that Ericka go with her. After breakfast, Amy waits on the others to branch off, then walks to Kenji's room and opens the door without warning.]

Kenji: Ngh... Amy! What are you... didn't you learn how to knock years ago??

Amy: This is my den. You get no privacy. Get out here so we can talk about going to see dad.

Kenji: Why are you being such a-

Amy: [Shouting] Because you tried to question my authority! You tried to take over and you're not doing it! [Calmer.] You got your warning. Now get the *fuck* out here.

Kenji: [Surprisingly resisting her anger by not reacting in submission...] Can I get the wifi password? I don't have unlimited tethering.

Amy: [Much calmer] Once we get everything sorted out.

-Amy holds him almost in contempt here. She's quicker to anger than I've ever seen her, and lashing out in a way that genuinely makes me worry for his safety. He's a strong looking man, chances are he works out, and he's used to dealing with feral wolves. Holding his own as he just did may be part of his plan to deal with her. The guards are still outside during this event.

[Kenji follows Amy out into the main room, and she nods to the router, telling him dismissively that the code's on the side. He pulls out his phone to take a picture of the code.]

Amy: [Aggressively.] What the fuck are you doing?? I said you get it after we get things sorted out! Get over here.

Kenji: [Showing no emotion in response to her behavior, he walks to the couch and stands, looking at a blank seat.] Here?

Amy: [Nodding, suddenly much calmer.] Yea, sit there.

-It's going to be very interesting to get his take on all of this. I sure hope he knows what he's doing.

[Kenji sits, then quietly looks at her, his ears pointed forward.]

Amy: So... dad's all set up? Do we know?

Kenji: He should be, I texted them just before you came to my room to make sure. Once he's good, we can go visit.

Amy: And... you still think... I should do this? That it won't be awkward? I don't remember him.

-Her attitude has completely changed. One moment she's dominant and aggressive, the next she acts more like one would expect a concerned sibling to act with her brother.

Kenji: I think... seeing him will help you remember. I think there's a lot more of you in there than you're fully aware. Your behavior is entirely situational. Being around dad will help, I think. Even if he is in this state.

Amy: [Sighs.] I hate that he's magic resistant. It's so easy to cure that stuff with magic. Ya know... BioSyn has a nanobot program, too. They claim they can cure it with that, but... it's very limited in availability, and I doubt it's covered by insurance.

Kenji: We actually looked into that early on in his diagnosis. It's extremely new for them, still in alpha. Even with that though, there's a huge waiting list and... well dad probably... wouldn't make it to his turn.

Amy: [Splaying her ears and nodding.] I... kinda figured. Well, Rebecca and David are gonna go to the store to get some potting soil. Ericka and I will go with you to the lab to see dad. After that we'll come back here and make some lunch for ourselves. You... won't be having any, but you can have dinner, if you behave.

Kenji: Holding me to that, huh? What if I get something from a fast-food joint on the way back?

Amy: [Still calm] Kenji, I didn't say you couldn't have *our* food. I said no lunch. If you try to find food, I'll take it from you. You're not having lunch today.

Kenji: [Nods understandingly.] Okay. I get it. Are we ready to go?

Amy: Yea, but you'll need to drive. I don't remember how.

Kenji: Really? How do you get around?

Amy: David likes to drive that red SUV of his, so I let him do it.

Video Transcript – William Hwen’s room – Medical ward

2/18/2024 10:37hrs

[A nurse opens the door allowing Amy, Ericka, and Kenji to enter the room. Kenji had asked her in the hall if she wanted to enter first, but she wanted him to do so. Her ears were splayed, and her tail curled downward.]

Bill: Mmm... Kenji... hey son, they're... they're doing pretty good here. Nice staff, big room... and... and the TV works! [He coughs slightly.] Amy! Hey honey! C'mere... give me a hug!

[Amy hesitates, looking at him and smelling the room.]

Bill: Something wrong?

Amy: I... uh... [Ericka begins to rub her back and smiling at her, which prompts her to step forward.] It's good to see you, dad. Are you... feeling okay?

Bill: [Hugging her.] As good as I can be, given... [coughs] given the situation. [He looks over her shoulder at Ericka.] Who's this?

Amy: [Stops hugging and backs away next to Ericka.] This is... this is my mate, Ericka.

Bill: [Smiling but seeming a little confused.] Mate? Interesting... word for you. Glad to see ya found someone, though. How'd you two meet?

[Ericka looks at Amy to see if she'd like her to answer. She shakes her head, which prompts Ericka to nuzzle her.]

Amy: We work together. Here at the lab. I met her a few weeks back and it was... it just worked.

Ericka: I kinda messed up in a big way on our first meet, but... well she's... it's worked out.

Amy: So... uh....? [She seems awkward.]

Bill: Messed up? My girl come in and save the day or something?

Amy: You... could say that, yea. [Nodding.]

Bill: [Looks to the couch.] Why don't you two take a seat? Stay a while? You act like you're about to leave your old man behind.

[The pair agree, quickly walking to the couch and sitting down. Amy continues to look uncomfortable, and Ericka comforts her.]

Kenji: [Clearing his throat.] So ya know... Amy's comin up on her 5th year here at New Realms.

Bill: Really? Five years already? Time... time sure flies. Ya doin alright for yourself? Got a place to stay?

Kenji: Yea, she's got a nice 3-2 here in town.

Bill: A house, huh? Fan-see... ya know my first place was practically a walk-in closet!

Amy: Yea, it's... a good den for my pack. We have room for everyone.

Bill: Pack? You have roommates?

Ericka: Yea, my friend Becky and her partner live with us. [She looks at Amy to see if that was the right wording, wagging her tail a little.]

Amy: Helps with the rent and... and to get thigs done. [Nodding.]

[Bill has a bad coughing fit for a moment, then takes a ragged breath as if he's uncomfortable.]

Bill: I... I see. Well... so what've you been doing? It's been almost nine years hasn't it? Is Oswego really so far... so far away from here that you couldn't come see me? Your mother misses you.

Amy: [Tilting her head.] I thought mom was dead?

Bill: [Sighing.] She... she is honey. I'll be joining her in the void soon. I hope she waited for me.

Amy: When... did she die? I guess, her grave is in Oswego?

Bill: How can you not know this?

Kenji: Amy had... an accident recently... it's affected some of her memories. I actually... I had you moved out here so that I could spend some time with her and help her remember. I thought that it'd be good for her to come see you.

[Amy hesitates for a moment. She seems to dislike that he explained, but isn't letting that bother her. It's something else.]

Amy: I think... we have something to settle, don't we?

Bill: We do?

Amy: We do. You don't remember? Why I never came around? Why we stopped going to Zeke's?

[Bill sighs and nods.]

Amy: You took his side. You said he didn't do it. You even convinced *mom* that I was lying! You never... we never fixed this! That's why I've been... oh gods... how could I forget all this?

Bill: I... I don't know what to say.

Amy: Well, you can start with why. [Clenching her fist.] Why the fuck did you take his side?? Why did you convince everyone that I was lying?!

[A long, awkward silence falls over the room.]

Amy: Ya know, I'm glad that I'm forgetting all of this. In a few days, I won't even know that you exist. Or that you ever did. I won't remember Zeke, I won't remember mom, Oswego... and when Kenji leaves I'll forget him too! I don't need any of this shit! [She stands up like she's about to leave.] C'mon Erika... I'm done here.

Kenji: Amy...

[She whirls around to face him growling furiously.]

Amy: [Yelling] YOU KNEW AND YOU SAID NOTHING! Why... why didn't... [Her anger starts to shift to sadness.] Why didn't you fucking speak up?? Why did NONE OF YOU SPEAK UP?? You just let him get away with it. He just... you....

Bill: [Taking a ragged breath, partially drowned out by her sobbing.] Because that wasn't the first time he'd done something like that. [He coughs roughly a few times.] Zeke was... Zeke had always been a man with many struggles. My brother... he told me before you told me... and... he'd... Amy he'd been in so much trouble already that-

Amy: THAT YOU LET HIM RAPE ME!? [Furiously screaming, her fists clenched.]

[Security responds, entering the room and standing in the doorway, their tranquilizers at the ready.]

Amy: I left right after for college. He just... he just couldn't let me get away. You... he told me... oh you're 18 now... this is legal... IT MOST CERTAINLY WAS NOT! [Ericka stands and rubs her back, her ears splayed, trying to calm her mate. The guards don't know what to do.] I came to you... I told you.... And you... and YOU! [she suddenly turns to Kenji.] YOU SAW IT HAPPEN! YOU DIDN'T SAY A WORD!

Ericka: C'mon... let's get you out of here.

Amy: No. NO! I NEED AN ANSWER! WHY DID YOU SIDE WITH HIM??

[Bill coughs and struggles to try to speak several times.]

Bill: Because... Because Zeke was a teacher... and... and if it came back and... Amy he'd been in trouble his whole life and he'd finally gotten clean and-

Amy: Well apparently not.... [Her fists are clenched so tightly her claws are making her palms bleed and drip onto the floor.] You are... so fucking lucky right now that I'm not in here alone with you. You'd die. I'd rip you apart. I want nothing to do with you. You're PATHETIC! What kind of disgusting coward of a wolf are you to worry so much about PEOPLE?? You make me SICK!

Bill: Rip.... Rip me apart?

Ericka: We're leaving. C'mon honey. I need you to calm down.

Amy: [Moving with her.] No, I'm in charge, I leave when I... when I say I... [They leave the room, with one of the guards following.]

[Bill looks at Kenji with tears in his eyes.]

Bill: I failed my daughter... I protected my brother's reputation and... and now she'll never speak to me again. Gods.... [He starts to cough violently.]

Kenji: I... I didn't... [Sits back down on the couch.] I didn't...

Bill: [Coughing again.] Don't... don't blame yourself, son. You were just twelve. We... tried to sweep this under the rug. Your uncle... was supporting us financially at the time. We needed him and he needed his job.

Kenji: He... he told me... he told me... I'd get in trouble if I said anything. I didn't... Gods... gods why now? Why of all things did she remember this?? I just wanted...

-I did not expect this. Her restraint in this situation surprised me.

-Transcript follows Amy from here inside NRP facilities.

[Amy and Ericka walk down the hall with the guard a few steps behind them. They pay him no mind. Amy is obviously struggling, but Ericka continues to stay close to her and comfort her.]

Amy: Forgetting is a blessing... Kalu hasn't cursed me.

Ericka: Not all memories are good ones. I... hate that this happened. I didn't know.

Amy: I didn't either. I hope... I hope I forget it. I want to forget.

Ericka: Once we're free of this place, we can put it behind us. All of it is behind us now. The past is gone. Who we were is not who we are.

Amy: No, but... you still carry the trauma of Deacon with you... what if I carry this now?

Ericka: You're strong, Amy. You'll overcome this. You're a wolf, my alpha, and my mate. The person we were before is just something in our past. Our connections to that life are severed.

Amy: Not entirely. Dad's still alive, Kenji... I still work for NRP.

Ericka: Do you? Do any of us work anywhere now? We're their subjects. They study and track everything we do.

Amy: W...well... I mean I need my job. I have to pay my mortgage.

Ericka: That's our den. They're studying us. They'll let us stay. Even if you do no work for them, I'm sure they're still paying you and covering expenses.

[Amy seems to be lightening up the more they walk. They're heading to the exit slowly.]

Amy: Yea, I... I guess I should check my online banking when we get back to the den. [They reach the door, and she stands in the warm hallway looking out at the parking lot.] Where'd I park? I can't see my car. Did... How did we get here?

Ericka: Your brother drove us.

Amy: Who? Kevin?

Ericka: Kenji, and yes. He drove us. He should be done soon. I'll... can you wait here please? I'll be right back.

Amy: [Tilting her head curiously.] I... why?

Ericka: I just need... I want to look at something in the lab. It'll only take a moment. Please, wait here for me.

Amy: [Nodding, still confused in her behavior.] O... okay...

[Ericka nuzzles her, then walks back. The guard is conflicted, but opts to follow Ericka, leaving Amy alone at the door. He catches up with her and asks her what she's doing, to which she replies that she's 'saving a lot of trouble later.']

[Ericka reaches the room and quietly enters it.]

Kenji: [Standing up.] Where's Amy?

Ericka: She's at the door, waiting to leave. Listen, she's already forgotten what was said in here, and your name. So when we go back to the den, don't bring this up. Okay? If you don't, I won't, and you'll be a lot less likely to get your throat torn out.

Kenji: Do you think she'd really do that?

Ericka: Rebecca did, and she didn't even know the guy. Amy is my mate, and I need her free. She hurts you, she won't be free, so I have to keep her from hurting you. Don't bring it up. Okay? With any luck you can have dinner with us and things will form some semblance of normal. We've never had a... guest... Rebecca and David will do what they're told. Amy is the one you have to worry about. And me...

Bill: What's... what happened to her that caused her memory loss?

Kenji: Dad... probably best if-

Bill: I'm gonna die anyway, just tell me. I need to know what happened to my daughter.

Ericka: [Taking a deep breath.] I suppose that's true. You smell of death now. Time is not long for you. 20 years ago, I was exposed to a fern that changed me into a feral wolf. I lived alone in the wilderness for 10 years, then found Rebecca, killed and ate her fiancé and changed her using the same method I did. 10 years after that, I found David. Killed his pack and brought him into mine. He managed to get help before he changed too much, so we were rescued. They restored us to our forms, but our minds remain changed. Your daughter was exposed to the same fern, but she did not change physically.

[Bill stares at her blankly, his ears splaying back.]

Bill: That... that's the nonsense you're gonna... Kenji...?

Kenji: I've spoken to multiple researchers here at the facility. I'm here because of my experience dealing with feral wolves at the refuge. Amy's... designated I-232. She's... she's a specimen.

Bill: [Pauses again and struggles to sit up and look Ericka in the eye.] Just... take care of my daughter. Truth, bullshit, whatever... take care of her. Look after her... [He begins to cough.] A... and... and give her a good life.

Ericka: You should know this, given your species, but... wolves mate for life, Mr. Hwen. I'm here for her. I'll protect her with my life.

[Kenji gives his father a hug and says his goodbyes, and the pair walk back to the end of the hall where Amy is waiting.]

Kenji: Ready to go?

Amy: Yea, I... I don't even know why we're here. I can't find my car, though.

Kenji: I drove. C'mon... let's go back to the den.

[The Audio begins to fade as they leave for the parking lot.]

Kenji: So... lunch time?

Amy: Not for you. I didn't forget, Kenji. No lunch for you today.

2/18/2024 – Video transcript – Dr. Amy Hwen returns to her home 11:31hrs

[Amy steps out of the car, and waits for Ericka to join her before walking to the door. They don't wait on Kenji before entering the house and closing the door. The car ride was not recorded. As Kenji steps out, he makes eye contact with the guards and nods cautiously before proceeding to let himself into the house.]

[Inside, David and Rebecca are cuddled on the couch watching a romantic comedy. Their tails wag, but they don't get up as Ericka and Amy enter.]

-Dr. Saynurs noted early on that the wolves took little to no interest in television. Seeing them behave this way is reassuring.

Rebecca: You're back! Did you have a good day??

[Amy Says nothing, but walks over and nuzzles them both, working her way into the group. Their ears splay as they seem to sense that something's bothering her, but she doesn't want to talk about it.]

Ericka: [Watching with a quiet whine.] Want me to start making lunch?

Amy: Please, I... I'll help in a minute. I just needed a little time with... I just need a little time. [She looks up as Kenji enters the house.] But remember... he doesn't get any.

Kenji: Don't worry, I haven't forgotten. I'm not gonna try.

Amy: [nuzzling David and Rebecca continuously as they seem to bask in it] You have to understand, this is my pack and my den. I can't just go back on my word.

Kenji: I know. A lot of my coworkers are werewolves, they've explained it to me before. It helps a lot in the refuge. It'll help here, too.

Rebecca: Do we really act like feral wolves to you?

Kenji: Kind of? I mean, you act more like... when my coworkers wolves are in charge of their bodies... the ones that are less socialized act like you. I think with socialization you'll be just fine. You just have to get the hang of it.

David: I think we're doing well. The hardware store today was great. I did... run into a guy that said he knew me, though. I stumbled my way through it but, I don't remember him at all.

Rebecca: [Nodding.] The memory thing is a real problem for us.

Amy: Kinda feels like a blessing, after today. I've already forgotten what got me so upset today. I just remember that I was.

David: You got upset? You were going to the lab to-

Amy: [Interrupting by putting her finger on his nose.] No. Don't. I don't want, or need to know.

Dr. Leevi Ahonen – Medical Journal

19/Feb/24

After Mr. Hwen's eventful day at the NRP medical wing, I spoke in a conference call to him between myself and Director Nombs. Apparently, she'd been doing some research and noticed that she knew some of the werewolves that worked with him at the refuge. She wanted to be a part of the discussion to get his take on the similarities, and the differences between werewolves, feral wolves, and the individuals he was working with in Dr. Hwen's home.

The call was surprisingly eventful. Rather than summarize, I'm going to post the transcript below.

Call Transcript – Director Susan Nombs, Dr. Leevi Ahonen. Mr. Kenji Hwen

19/Feb/24. 21:03hrs

Leevi: Sounds like you had an interesting first day.

Kenji: [Chuckling with a hint of sadness in his voice.] Yea. It's... It's been different. I was able to have dinner, though. We actually had it a little early. I suspect Amy felt guilty about telling me no lunch or breakfast, but didn't want to show weakness by going back on her word.

Susan: I think that's exactly what it was. As a new alpha, she's worried about saving face and showing dominance. She thinks that changing her mind will be seen as weakness to the pack. If anything, it'd simply be seen as wisdom. She'll have to learn in time. I don't know that this is something you as a person can teach her.

Leevi: Can you, Director? Would it be worthwhile for the pack to spend time around you to learn more about what it means to be... and... excuse me if this sounds wrong but... an intelligent animal?

Susan: I'm not the alpha, elder or even someone of note in my pack. I only know how to manage this facility. So, I don't know how useful I'd really be.

Kenji: It can't be that different, can it?

Susan: Oh, it can. Trust me, when it comes to being a pack alpha, or a community elder, there are many things to think about that don't come up in the persons world. I would say the same applies in reverse but... our pack is an LLC, so... they do. [She chuckles.] At least with this I can help when it comes to paperwork and things. Sadly no, all I can offer is insight into their way of thinking. Quite honestly, I'm in a bit of a marvel at this whole situation. For Kalu to take Soth's children into the wilds like this... it's amazing. I always believed that, as a wolf, my soul was different from my person counterpart. Now I'm not so sure. Perhaps I was once a person, too.

Leevi: For the record, this is... Director Nombs's wolf we're speaking to?

Susan: Oh, I thought it'd make the most sense to speak, rather than my counterpart, yes. Sorry for not making that clear earlier. Yes. By our age, we are nearly indistinguishable from one another, but there are insights that I can better provide, rather than trying to talk through her. [The sound of a chair creaking as she seems to change positions.] The only conundrum for me is the memory loss. It's as if Kalu pulls a veil over their eyes. Is this to keep them protected as his children? Or something else?

Leevi: Could be a neurological disorder brought on by the mutatio lectin, limiting access to specific neurons responsible for long term memory storage and retrieval. I've been running some tests on Dr. Saynurs, and what I've found so far certainly seems to present that as the case. It's... suppressing memory and elevating instinctual response as a result.

Susan: So... pretty much what I just said, just in a science babble sort of way.

Leevi: Science babble?

Susan: [Laughing.] Apologies. I don't revere the science world like my counterpart. In this case in particular, it feels more like a spiritual issue than a scientific issue.

Leevi: Well, we're scientists, working for a research facility. That's my field of expertise, so that's the angle I'm taking. I've... actually given Dr. Saynurs an experimental injection... which he consented to... to see if it will help his memory. We're yet to see any results. [He pauses for a moment, hearing no response from the others.] I... hope I didn't come across as insulting, Director.

Susan: Your world is your world, mine is mine. I am not offended that we sometimes do not overlap. It is rare that I would ever have need to speak to you. I believe, directly, this is my first time.

Kenji: So... what do I do? Amy got so worked up I thought she was going to attack us in dad's room. She remembered being raped by our uncle when she was 18. We didn't... do the right thing by her back then. Her anger was justified, but... with her mind being like this... her temper is worse than I've ever seen. This was the second time today that she snapped and growled and threatened me. By the time we got back to the car, she only remembered that she'd been mad, but not why. This... volatile memory mixed with violent mood swings is dangerous. When we encounter a wolf like this, the Westford's usually isolate them and put them over until they calm down.

Susan: Oh, I know the Westford's! They're a nice pack. We get together sometimes for blood moon hunts! They're super nice. Ya know, I actually found my mate from their pack. They often want to see the pups. B... but I digress. What they're doing in a case like that is asserting dominance over a wolf that they believe is out of control and needs supervision. I... from what I've seen of your sister today... I am uncertain if that is the right thing for you to attempt. Doing so would likely evoke the ire of her partner, and she's not likely to give in to you. She'll let you keep her there, calm down and might even agree to your terms, but as soon as you let her up, she'll come at you with the full force of her jaws, and her partner will join in. Trying to tame her might cost you your life. I'm advising against it.

Leevi: You really think she's that dangerous?

Susan: The wolves have shown no remorse for the pair of attacks they've initiated since their return. It's becoming rare for them, as they are learning not to behave in such a manner in public, but what Kenji has suggested he do would take place in their den. Their territory. The outcome is more likely to be like the repairman, than the elk elder. They may be members of society, but they are just as much a wolf as I am. I'm... kind of proud of that, honestly. Ericka has a person's body count over 100 in the last 20 years. Rebecca shares in that, plus one recently. Kenji, You've met them, would you look at Rebecca and think that she has ever harmed a person, had I not told you?

Kenji: No... no she seems really sweet and gentle.

Susan: I suppose that's my point, then. Every wolf in a situation like theirs is dangerous if they feel threatened or cornered.

Kenji: So, at the refuge, we'd take a pack like this, establish dominance over it, then prove that we're kind and friendly by gently coaxing them to trust us. We'd provide toys and food, and lightly play with them until they come near us voluntarily. No touching, no petting, unless they initiate it. There's always one or two that are ambivalent, but even after asserting dominance they tend to see us as outsiders.

Susan: You are never part of their pack because you are not of their kin. That may be different for your sister. Anyone who is a wolf can be made their kin, given the mutatio lectin. If they take an interest in you being a member, they might try to find a way to change you. I doubt it, though. Siblings can sometimes see one another as a threat to their dominance. My advice to you is this: Play along, do what she says, understand that you are last in their social rank and are only elevated by Amy when she allows it. Avoid challenging her authority, but find ways to gently steer her. You'll be threading a needle, but... that's all I can really say. Your sister, as a young alpha is extremely aggressive. She will defend herself, and her pack. She will resort to violence, and don't let her short stature and thin frame fool you, in those moments, she'll fight like her life depends on it. She'll hold nothing back.

Kenji: [Dismissively] I see. Well I'll-

Susan: Kenji... this isn't like your refuge wolves. There are similarities, but... you're in over your head. I recommend you go back home.

Leevi: What? Where did-

Susan: Understand... you've seen her rage twice now, but your casualness to the situation tells me that you do not see the danger before you. I don't want you getting hurt.

Leevi: From two words?? He has training in this! Director, we can't just keep them in limbo, they need help!

Susan: They need help from someone like me. Maybe... I can reach out to my pack, or the Westfords. They are carving their own path. They are a stable family. Trying to force it as you seem to be planning will be met with resistance. If you insist on not heeding my words, I suggest you leave. Nothing good will come of a heavy hand.

Kenji: I... can't leave my sister like this. I already let her down once. I've got to bring her back.

Susan: Then do as I said. Keep your distance, let her do her own thing. Don't try to intervene. We have guards outside, but chances are they won't be able to save you if you're attacked. I should've spoken to you before my person agreed to let you intervene. I knew it was wrong when I heard it, but I didn't assert myself. Today's outburst in the medical ward only confirmed my worry.

Kenji: Don't worry... I'll be careful.

Susan: Thank you for your time today, Kenji, please stay in touch.

Kenji: I will, thank you.

[Kenji hangs up, but Director Nombs and I stay on the line.]

Susan: The wolf isn't going to listen. He's going to get hurt. You have to prepare.

Leevi: What do we do? With the pack, I mean. If they attack him... it'll be the mall incident all over again. We've already given them multiple chances. We've been playing with fire this- Dr. Saynurs was infected... and Dr. Hwen... because of the leeway that we've given them.

Susan: Well then what's your goal? Perhaps you're facing this the wrong way. You want to reintegrate them because of the threat you see in the D.Mutatio lectin. You feel that it's taking your people for Kalu, and you want to find a way to circumvent this with medication. These wolves are your test subjects, no? That is why you've kept them from their new nature?

Leevi: Yes, that's been the goal. The plant's growing in larger regions due to our long term industrialization. We need an edge on it. We can't have people just going feral all over the world without some way to mitigate it. These four have offered us information and limited success. That's why... that's why they've been given a pass so far. There's also medical benefits to the lectin itself, if we can find a way to circumvent this.

Susan: You gave them a pass that has cost your kind two lives thus far, and nearly a third. How many lives are worth it? That is up to you to determine. Your kind are many, so I would say... quite a few, but I don't look at this the same way my counterpart does. I can tell she has a differing opinion.

Leevi: Just to be clear, since I'm not dealing with Director Nombs right now... do your decisions carry any weight?

Susan: She is aware of this conversation. I cannot speak but through her. I know nothing of your world but through her. I am no more intelligent than any other wolf. I draw on instinct, and Kalu's will, and that is processed through her intelligence and her mouth. If... you can understand this. We must confer on any actions taken to your pack of wolves. I personally am of the opinion that they should stop resisting Kalu's will, return to the wilds, and join the Westford's refuge, but I know that my counterpart has a different opinion. In the end the loss of their person's cognition would be mourned but only for a moment. They do not need it. She disagrees with me on this, too however. Simply put, should Kenji make a mistake and cost himself his life and/or limb, we will deliberate on the actions that must be taken in the wake of the event. It will depend entirely on the scenario itself.

Leevi: Can you give me any suggestions on that?

Susan: If the event occurs within the den, it is an attack that was provoked, regardless of his intention to do so. If it occurs within the wilds of your society, that is... a different matter.

Leevi: Well, I'll keep an eye on them, and keep you informed.

Susan: Thank you doctor, have a good evening. I'm going to change and rest with my pack.

-Dr. Ahonen's note: The director's apathy toward Kenji's well being is on par with what I've observed with the pack. This is most certainly the case where we're dealing with intelligent animals, it tracks far too well.

-The fact that she announced her intentions somehow gave me chills. The idea that, after our call, the feline woman that I know from our meetings stripped out of her clothes, became an animal and willfully joined over animals to... sleep? Hunt? Almost makes me question myself. I've known about werewolves for ages, but they've always been foreign to me, The duality of their existence somehow... bothers me. I suppose I should learn more.

- POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT: Mr. Kenji Hwen's personal journal

2/18/24

What a fucking mess. I bring dad out here to be near her, thinking that it might finally be okay, and the one thing she remembers?? Zeke's rape. She's not herself at all. I mean, I get being upset with a memory like that flooding back to her after 9 years, but that doesn't... I dunno.

I don't recognize this woman in my sister's body. There's shadows of her, but they're so easy to miss... one minute she might move or act in a way that she did in the past, and then the next she's threatening to 'rip my throat out' if I... I dunno... play my music too loud or something. I have training with feral wolves, I work with the in the refuge, but I guess I just... didn't think about applying it to my sister. She seemed so much more normal on the phone. She'd laugh and tell me stories about her day... the pack, den, and prey language was a bit of an adjustment, but it was fine. Now that I'm here, I'm this... tolerated outsider.

I lied this morning and told them I'd already had breakfast. Her answer was just to deny me lunch too. She softened up later though, and Ericka made a nice dinner. Godsdamn but that woman can cook. How does a wolf-brain in a person's body cook like that?? Who knows... trying to have a conversation at the table was like a babbling infant trying to join the adults. They ignored me, and only paid attention when I interjected in a way that annoyed them.

I don't feel welcome here at all. I could probably just leave, but the lab's asked me to stay and try to help them on the condition that dad get the best treatment they can provide. Their director's a werewolf and the wolf side of her told me to just stay back and let them do their thing. Aren't they just going to keep abusing me if I do that, though? I've got to find a way to get through to them. I am Amy's little brother, but I work out. I'm much bigger than her, and much stronger, I'm sure. Standard procedure for new wolves in the refuge is to try to show dominance. She's given me a good fight. She's very, very aggressive, but is that bluster? Usually the noisiest wolves are the ones that are the most anxious. Knowing Amy's personality before this, she was the anxious type. Maybe that's all this is.

I think... I'm going to push on her a little bit, just to see where it goes. I'll back off as I need to, but the key to being welcomed in this pack of hers and to helping them integrate, is going to be to get past her desire to push me out.

- END POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT-

Part 13

POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT:

Agent Yvonne Jeers report:

On The 24th of February 2024, beginning at 18:23hrs, an altercation occurred in the established dwelling of I-232, R-44,45, and 46. Below is a transcript of the video.

For context, prior to the beginning of this transcript, I-232 had been discussing with R-44-46 their evening plans, when the idea of watching a movie with popcorn was floated. The idea was benign within itself, and the subjects agreed to partake. Prior to this event, Kenji Hwen, I-232's biological brother, had been instigating her for several days, trying to find ways to assert dominance over her. This included many small activities such as insisting to enter a doorway first, eating before her, taking her preferred position on the couch, and taking the first shower. By themselves, none of these events are problematic. When combined, and coupled with his previous personal journal entry noting his intention to push on her in this way however, it becomes more clear that he is desiring a specific reaction. Multiple events, diaries, and transcripts have been included in this document to show I-232's mental decline, coupled with the personal entries of R44-46. This includes a warning from Director Nombs's wolf about this behavior.

Video Transcript – I-232's home: 2/24/2024 18:23hrs

[Amy gets up from the couch after discussing popcorn, then enters the kitchen, after doing so, Kenji quickly shifts positions so that he's taking her seat.]

Ericka: [Now sitting next to Kenji, scowling.] What are you doing?

Kenji: Taking a more comfortable seat.

Ericka: That's Amy's seat. You need to move.

Kenji: If she wants me to move, she'll have to move me.

Amy: [Returning from the kitchen.] Okay so the popcorns in the m... why are you in my seat?

Kenji: It's more comfortable, and you moved. So I took it.

Amy: This is my den, that is my seat. I don't have time for your childishness, Kevin. Move.

Kenji: Stop calling me Kevin. My name is Kenji. I see no reason to move from this spot. You should sit somewhere else. This one is warm.

Amy: Get up. Now. [She puts her hands on her hips.]

Rebecca: Move Kenji. Stop acting like a naughty pup.

Kenji: Make me.

Amy: [Wrinkling her nose sightly.] You've been doing this for days. Getting in my way, forcing your way in front of me, eating first, taking food from my plate... what the fuck are you trying to do? You are a guest! You are not part of this pack and you most certainly do not do these things to me in my den. Rebecca is right, you're acting like a troublesome pup, and it's tiring. Now GET. UP.

Kenji: You're only alpha because no one's challenged you. I'm here to change that. You want me to get up, you're gonna have to make me.

Amy: *You're challenging me?* You're not even part of my pack! Who are you to challenge me??

Ericka: And right now, of all times. We're about to watch a movie, we just made popcorn and until now... you were going to be able to have some. What's your problem, *wolf*?

Kenji: I've seen enough of you pushing them around. You need a leader that can teach you how to survive in society and you're not capable of doing it anymore. Your mind is gone. So I'm taking over. I'm alpha now.

[Amy reaches down and grabs him by the collar, attempting to snatch him off the couch. She's too weak to do so.]

Amy: GET! UP!

[He smiles at her smugly.]

Kenji: You can't even lift me. How can you call yourself alp-

[She lunges at him, landing in his lap and biting him lightly on the shoulder. He screams and stands up, throwing her off of him. She stands on her hands and feet, her legs spread apart, growling at him, then lunges again, this time grabbing his pant leg.]

Kenji: Amy! No! What the fuck is- No! Let go of my!

[He slaps her muzzle repeatedly, eventually hard enough for her to let go, but she simply goes in again, biting his calf muscle this time. He screams and falls to one knee, then changes his position, wrestling her to the ground and pinning her on her chest. He applies pressure to her back, holding her head down. She kicks and growls, fighting him as he holds her there. At this point, no blood has been drawn. She's not actively been trying to injure him.]

Kenji: Calm down. You lost. It's over... calm down and accept defeat. Okay? [She continues to snarl and bite at him.]

Ericka: [Rising to her feet.] GET OFF OF HER!

Kenji: As soon as she calms down. C'mon Amy... you lost. You're not alpha anymore. Just calm down for me, alright? Calm down and then we can enjoy a nice movie.

Ericka: [Menacing him.] I wasn't asking. I said GET OFF!

Kenji: [Snapping at her.] *You're* not in charge here *either!* I'm the alpha now. Amy lost! She's on the floor. She just needs to calm down and admit it. Amy... please don't make this difficult. You need this. You need someone to lead you. You can't do it yourself anymore. You just attacked me! This isn't how a person behaves.

Ericka: Last warning... GET OFF OF HER!

[Amy continues to squirm, fight and growl against his weight.]

Kenji: Ericka, sit down. This doesn't concern you.

[Ericka growls and tackles him, knocking him off of Amy as she bites into his shoulder where Amy had already attacked. The motion is too quick to discern if blood is drawn, but judging from his reaction, this is a heavy bite. Seeing her opening, Amy joins in, biting him as well, tearing at his flesh as he screams and struggles. David and Rebecca jump off the couch and begin to join in, tearing at his legs as the two others go for his throat and shoulders. His screams become weaker and gurgled pleas as he tries to fight them off. Amy is seen ripping a large piece of meat from his throat. They aren't just trying to kill him, but appear to be actively eating him.]

[Guards outside are alerted by Dr. Ahonen at 18:35hrs. They force their way into the structure and tranquilize all four subjects, then bind their hands and feet. Mr. Kenji Hwen is in critical condition. An NRP medical dispatch is called. Mr. Hwen dies of his injuries before arriving at the NRP emergency ward. He sustained massive critical lacerations to the throat, shoulders, arms, legs and severe scratches on his abdomen. Further autopsy is pending.]

-End video transcript.

Small gestures to aggressive wolves can mean many things and can rapidly escalate a situation. Mr. Hwen's antagonistic behavior ultimately lead to an altercation that he could have turned away from at many times before Ericka initiated her retaliation. He was not just attacking the pack alpha, but her mate.

Following the events, all four were taken to the NRP observation wing, stripped of their clothing, given medical scrubs and placed into separate rooms pending interviews via Dr. Ahonen and Dr. Beyer. Director Nombs is also involved.

- END POST-INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM INSERT-

Dr. Beyer – Post event interview – I232/Dr. Amy Hwen

2/25/2024 04:51hrs

-Amy is pacing the room when I arrive. At the time, the privacy glass is enabled, so she cannot see me. She does not appear remorseful or anxious, simply restless. I turn off the privacy filter on the glass and she freezes, quickly sitting on the cot in the corner of her room.

Dr. Beyer: Amy... how are you feeling?

-She stared back at me as I spoke to her, but didn't respond. Her eyes were piercing like that of a wild animal.

Dr. Beyer: I can't help you unless you speak to me.

Amy: What *help*?

Dr. Beyer: What help? What do you mean?

Amy: How help? What... can you do for me? I attacked. I defended. He challenged me. Not part of the pack. Not challenge.

Dr. Beyer: Have you had your injection? Can you speak more coherently for me?

Amy: No injection yet. Feels early. Late. Tired. Groggy from tranquilizer. Maybe that's why... speech is impaired.

Dr. Beyer: Do you remember what happened?

Amy: I... defending... he was challenging me for days. Instigating. I bit. Warning bite, no break the skin. He retaliates, I defend. We fight, he pins me. Ericka pushes him off, we kill, we eat.

Dr. Beyer: And... *why* did you kill him?

Amy: Did not think he would let up. No stop. Insist on alpha. I'm alpha. Ignored warnings. No second chance. He is lesser, he is prey. Food.

Dr. Beyer: What made you believe that?

Amy: Persistence. He looked for ways to push. He wanted to challenge.

Dr. Beyer: Do you know who he was?

Amy: Kevin.

Dr. Beyer: He was your brother, Kenji Hwen.

-Amy hesitated at this revelation, tilting her head at me as if she was trying to think. It didn't seem to pain her at all that this was the fact.

Dr. Beyer: Can I have someone give you an injection of 551? It's a bit early, I know, but I think it will be helpful.

Amy: No brother. 551 yes. I'm groggy. Speech is not ok.

-I called Dr. Ahonen over to the room. He donned a bite suit and entered the room. Amy didn't like the suit, tensing up and shying away from him, but upon hearing his voice from inside, she calmed. She didn't seem to understand what she was looking at.

-Following the injection, Dr. Ahonen left the room, and she began to calm further. She looked back at me once more with a personal, rather than animalistic gaze.

Dr. Beyer: Better?

Amy: Yea, that's better. Thanks for that. Like I said I'm... really groggy from the tranquilizer darts. I... I've never been shot by that stuff before.

Dr. Beyer: How do you know?

Amy: [Pausing.] Well, I guess I don't. You said that man was my brother? I guess that might explain why he was trying to claim alpha.

Dr. Beyer: Does that make you feel anything? The fact that you just killed your brother?

Amy: [Pausing again, her ears splaying.] I'm supposed to.

Dr. Beyer: You're *supposed* to, but *do* you...? Be honest.

Amy: No. I don't. [She sighs.] I'm just like them now, aren't I? I didn't realize it'd progressed this far.

Dr. Beyer: Over the last several weeks your memory has become critically impaired. Your social interaction with your pack has remained nominal, and regular outings have proven to be stable, but... events like this challenge that paradigm. Moreso, I think internally it's that you all exist harmoniously because you're all in the same situation. Kenji was a wildcard introduced to your pack.

Amy: And he would've gotten along with us just fine if he wouldn't have been an instigator. We were preparing popcorn to watch a movie! It was going to be a cozy movie night, he was allowed to partake as well. Then he has to go and do something stupid and challenge me out of the blue. I'm not backing down just because some outsider thinks he can simply step in and assert dominance. There was no reason for it!

Dr. Beyer: Was that a valid reason to kill him?

Amy: [Shouting.] I didn't kill him because he was instigating! I killed him because he was trying to take over! Because he was fighting me. *He* was attacking *me*! I was defending my pack from a foreign invader!

-She felt that she was defending her pack, because she didn't trust that his leadership would've been appropriate for them. That's what I gather from this statement. So she wasn't just defending herself from her own loss of power.

Dr. Beyer: Do you think you're the best leader for the pack? No one can be trusted to lead but you?

Amy: I didn't say that. Ericka is a good leader. She led them before I came along. I trust her to lead in my absence.

Dr. Beyer: You realize your pack is very small right? There's only four of you.

Amy: I'd like there to be more. We discussed bringing Kevin into it, but he wasn't a good choice. Two more would go a long way. Then we could have pups and it would see our pack grow. They would spit off and form their own... we would have a community of packs. It would be good for us. The pack is small but good. We get along well. Kevin did not get along.

Dr. Beyer: Kenji. No, it doesn't seem like he did. In full disclosure, Director Nombs warned him not to do what he did.

Amy: So, what happens now?

Dr. Beyer: Well, Director Nombs wants to speak to you to determine that. She should be along shortly.

Amy: Did... what happened to the others? Are they safe?

-I'd already started to leave, but I turned back to face her briefly. Her ears were splayed, and she seemed genuinely worried.

Dr. Beyer: They're in similar situations as you. I'm going to speak to them.

Dr. Ahonen – Post event video transcript with I-232/Dr. Amy Hwen, and Director Nombs

25/Feb/2024 09:03hrs

-Director Nombs took no extra effort to come to the office early. She arrived at 08:00 as she always does, had her morning coffee, and reviewed her email. I sat in her presence in her office, as she'd called me to do so, waiting for her to address me. It was nearly half an hour before she did.

Susan: I'm going to let my wolf do the talking in all of this. I apologize for the silence thus far. I've been finishing up what I need to do in the morning before she takes over.

Dr. Ahonen: Yes ma'am. That... that's fine.

Susan: [Standing up from her desk, then taking off her jacket.] When she says that I'll be talking, I'm going to be addressing her in a more... direct manner. If you're modest, I suggest you look away. I'm going to undress.

-I did as she asked, looking away until she was undressed and had changed her form. I've never actually seen Director Nombs in her wolf form. I wasn't sure quite what to expect. Like her calico feline fur pattern, her wolf was mostly white, with splotches of black, brown and deep gray mixed across her body. She sat beside her desk, looking up at me with her head gently tilted to the side.

Susan: Didn't I tell you this would happen? Had I made a bet with my person, she would owe me a steak dinner.

-Seeing a feral shaped animal talk like this channeled memories of Dr. Saynurs. She spoke completely clearly in common tongue, with no sign that she lacked intelligence like I'd seen in those that were afflicted by the fern.

Dr. Ahonen: You were correct, I'm sad to say.

Susan: Don't be. The wolf received his warning, and he chose not to heed it. The problem we have today is directly the result of his actions.

Dr. Ahonen: You don't believe that Amy had a hand in it? At least being somewhat responsible? She didn't *have* to engage. He was being obstinate and childish. She even addressed it as such.

Susan: From what I saw, the issue did not occur as a result of her engagement, but from his misinterpretation of her warning bite. He did not realize that it hadn't broken the skin. He over-reacted and threw her off, she again attacked without biting him, using his pant leg to make the point. He retaliated by slapping her, and that's when she got more serious. [She stood up and walked around me, sitting on the other side, close enough for me to pet her.] She was trying to get him to relent. Even the third bite didn't break the skin. All she wanted him to do was to stop, and she couldn't find another way to tell him in that moment. He kept escalating until her mate felt she had to intervene. I'm surprised really. As a caretaker, you would think he could recognize this behavior. I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't have hands, and most wolves... are limited in their ability to vocalize. We use what we have at our disposal, or what our mind *thinks* we have... which for her at that time... was her maw.

Dr. Ahonen: That's not how I saw it. I saw her attempt to move him, fail, then bite him to make him move. He threw her off, she bit his leg and missed, getting the pant leg instead. He kept trying to stop her, but she kept coming after him. Even after she was pinned, she wouldn't stop.

Susan: She was pinned in a submission hold. Wolves do this to enforce dominance. At that point, he was a threat to her pack, in her eyes. Had she been alone, she likely would've relinquished at that point, but with her pack there, she felt that his attempt to dominate her was also an attempt to dominate them, and she wouldn't allow it. [She forced her nose under my hand, prompting me to pet her.] You are not a wolf, nor are you trained in wolves, so you would not understand.

Dr. Ahonen: [Still petting her. She seems to enjoy it.] So, what do we do?

Susan: Originally, my thought was to allow them to return to the wild. However, my person has a different perspective that I think might work well for them. I believe we should give them the option to be taken in by our pack elder.

Dr. Ahonen: Won't she see that as a challenge to her authority?

Susan: At first, very likely, yes. She'll come to understand in time, though, that a pack elder is different from a pack alpha. She will still be the leader of her own pack. The elder will simply oversee the coordination between all the packs that live in my community. They may not be able to change, or hunt with us, but I believe it would do them well to exist in a community that has the capacity to think as they do. We are wolves, we know how to handle wolves. We would not act so foolish as Kenji.

[She stands up and walks to the door, looking up at the doorknob.]

Susan: Come, let me speak with her.

Dr. Ahonen: What if they reject both options?

Susan: I would assume, that my counterpart would assign them a new caretaker. It will ultimately fail, though. Their place is with their own kind, or in the wilds.

-I let her out, and we walked together down the hall. Security found her presence to be of interest. Many of them knew of her status, or had heard it, but seeing her as they did seemed to surprise them. I have to say I was much the same when this all became relevant.

-We entered the room at 09:23hrs and she waited outside, allowing Amy to see her before she attempted to enter the room. Amy's response was one of confusion and alarm. Another wolf seemed to cause her stress, but Susan's (I don't know that I should call the wolf Director Nombs) calm demeanor seemed to be helping her.

Susan: Amy, might I come in so that we can speak? I wish you no harm.

Amy: Who-

Susan: I am the wolf of Director Susan Nombs. Just call me Susan, or... Sue, if it makes you feel more comfortable. May I enter?

-Amy nods, and I open the door, allowing Susan to walk in. The wolf sits calmly just inside the door as it slides closed, her tail at her side and her legs close together. She almost looks regal, like a prized show dog. ~~(She might not like me calling her a dog.)~~ wolf. She remains there as Amy slowly gets off her cot and approaches her, sniffing at her curiously. Susan allows her to do this, then sniffs back at her, almost like an unusual greeting.

Susan: So, you had a bit of an incident last night, didn't you?

Amy: I did what I felt I had to do. If... if you think I should be punished I-

Susan: [Walking over to her as Amy returns to her cot.] A guest tried to usurp your position, misinterpreted your warning bite and retaliated. Is that right?

Amy: I... guess so.

Susan: [Tilting her head.] You *guess* so? What other answer could there be?

Amy: I... didn't think like a person, I reacted like an animal, and it cost him his life.

Susan: [Jumping onto the cot and laying down beside her.] Amy, you may not like me to say this, but I am of the opinion that you are no longer a person. You are a wolf in a person's body. You are Kalu's child, dreamer of the hunt, and... of my kin. Trying to think like a person is difficult, if not impossible to do if you insist on being something that you're not.

Amy: But I'm *not* a wolf... I... I'm a person. [She wiggles her fingers as a gesture of proof.] How do I-?

Susan: I have a proposal for you, and you're welcome to say no, but I think it would be useful for your pack. As you... obviously know, I am a werewolf, and like you, I have a pack, though I am not our alpha. My proposal to you is to join our community. You would not be under another alpha, and could still lead your pack, but you would be under an elder that oversees our community.

Amy: [Hesitates.] How... would that work?

Susan: Your pack would be given a home in our community. You could participate in our community meetings, gatherings and feasts. There may be some that dislike this since you would not be able to participate in our hunts, but... I think they would come to understand. The important thing is that you would be surrounded by those who think like you and understand you. We could guide you through challenges, attend social outings with you, and help discuss the ins and outs of being a wolf. It may not be perfect, but... in the wake of Kenji's death, I do not believe... you have many other options.

Amy: [Sighs and begins to pet Susan without being asked.] What a mess this is... [She realizes what she's doing and stops.] Oh... sorry. I'm used to having Ericka by my side and-

Susan: It feels good, please do. Most are not welcome to do so without asking but... well... I laid beside you for a reason. [She chuckles.]

[Amy begins to pet her again, the wolf closing her eyes and resting her head between her paws.]

Susan: I am sorry that you find yourself in this position. It is a failure of our safety protocols that you and Dr. Saynurs were exposed. Ericka's release was not without merit, but it was an error so early on in her reintegration.

Amy: In a way... I'm kinda glad it happened. I... know I'm supposed to feel bad about Kenji. It's such a strange thing. It's like... it's like if you run over a squirrel or something. You might feel bad for a moment but then you get over it. You did it, it happened but... it's just a squirrel at the end of the day. It feels no different for it to be him. I care deeply about my pack, but... but people? I don't care at all! And I don't understand that.

Susan: [Nuzzling her thigh.] It's difficult, I'm sure. Empathy for others that are not of your kin, it... seems to have fallen away. I don't know that it's a wolf thing, but I can tell you in my youth I felt much the same. It wasn't until my person felt the pain of loss that I truly began to understand. Even still, time tends to make wounds grow distant, and memories fade. I can't say that I'd feel any different than you right now.

Amy: What... happened to Directory Nombs? If... I can ask.

Susan: Back then we were at odds. I insisted that we find a mate that was... compatible, if that makes any sense. She didn't want it. She wanted to date a cat. I reminded her that dating and mating with someone like us would come at a cost, but she ignored me. Lycanthropy is easily spread. We learn this at an early age, and have bite dolls to teach us just how easy it can be to infect another. She was seeing a cat, she... mated with him... and didn't realize that fluid transfer means fluid... transfer. It did not simply mean saliva in blood. He turned on the next full moon and was killed by a hunter defending a group of individuals in a diner. They were lucky he was there. Even still... I felt the pain of her loss, even though he never truly became our kin.

Amy: It's really that easy? Like... if you licked me-

Susan: [Laughing] I would need to lick a wound, or lick you on the face. Or we would need to do... other things. I don't think that there'll be an issue there. It is important to be aware of, though. You are vulnerable to this. I do not know what would happen should you be infected in your current state. You are already a child of Kalu. Perhaps you are immune?

Amy: Let's... not find out.

Susan: [Chuckling.] Agreed. The elder will tell you about this and show you how it works. I cannot speak for her, but if you wish, I can bring you to our community and introduce you. I'm confident you'll be welcomed with open arms.

-This is the calmest I've seen Amy since her exposure. It's also the most personable I've seen Director Nombs. Though, I believe there is a reason for that. They obviously have a connection that she does not feel with most of our staff.

Amy: I'll... I'd be interested to discuss it in person. I want to see what the others say, too.

[Susan stands up and hops off the cot, shaking her fur.]

Susan: Of course! Dr. Beyer is speaking to them now, then I will talk to them, then you will be allowed to spend the night in a room here together. You can... imagine... there is some cleaning to do at your Den. A body needs to be disposed of, blood needs to be cleaned up, that sort of thing.

Amy: Perhaps I should tell my dad?

Susan: That you killed his son? I don't know that it's... the best, given your lack of empathy, that you be the one to break the news to him.

Amy: [Sighs.] I suppose you're right. I feel bad for him. He's lost his entire family and he himself is on his deathbed.

Susan: [Sitting down at the door to be let out.] One day, death will come for us all. It is an inevitability.

-I let Susan out of the observation room, then took her down the hall to speak to the others. I was surprised at her behavior. She was calm and... charming, yet at the same time, cold and unsympathetic. Her tail swayed gently as she walked, and she seemed to carry a smile on her maw the entire time we spoke. Her words though, like Amys, often carried the same disregard for the value of "persons." Honestly, it confused me. Normally Director Nombs was a kind and caring, yet firm handed woman. She was fair and analytical, but often stressed the importance of mental health and work life balance above profits and productivity. This wolf was... different. Not that she was uncaring, but that she was... selective.

Dr. Ahonen – Post event video transcript with R-44/Ericka Saunders, and Director Nombs

25/Feb/2024 09:55hrs

-Like before, Susan arrived in the observation area outside of R-44's room and sat so that she could be seen. She tilted her head and showed no aggression. Ericka stared back at her, having no idea who she was, almost with a look of contempt, her ears splayed in a silent challenge.

-After a time, Susan asked that I turn on the intercom so that she might initiate, since Ericka was not doing so.

Susan: May we speak in person, Ericka?

Ericka: Who the fuck are you? Where's Amy?? Where's our pack??

Susan: [Tilting her head, troubled.] Did... Dr. Beyer not explain that to you?

Ericka: He did, but he said a cat was coming to talk to me. Not... you. How is your common so good if you've been exposed?

-Off the top of my head, I cannot recall if Ericka has ever been informed of Director Nombs's status as a werewolf. Even still, if she'd been told, it's obvious that she does not remember.

Susan: I have not been exposed to D.Mutatio. I am a werewolf. My name is Susan Nombs. My person is the director of this facility. I'm surprised that Dr. Beyer did not inform you of this.

Ericka: [Looking away.] Maybe he did. I dunno. I just wanna be with my pack. I'm tired of you separating us like this every time we're bad in your eyes.

Susan: Can I come in? Speak to you in person? I think it will make things easier for us both.

-I was concerned, after what Susan had told Amy about the contagion of her condition. If Ericka was... activated... she might lash out, and that could cause fluid exchange. With Amy, she was almost always calm or... easy to calm. Without her, she seemed perpetually agitated.

Ericka: Yea, fine.

-Against my better judgement, I opened the door to let Susan enter the room. She did so gracefully, then sat down, keeping her distance from Ericka as the door closed.

Susan: Thank you for letting me speak with you in your personal space. I do not mean to intrude.

Ericka: Whattya want? Amy's in trouble, isn't she? You know that asshole had it coming! He was a guest in our den! He tried to put her over! She wouldn't have it. She put up a good fight. I don't regret a thing!

Susan: I'm sure you don't. You both fought quite well. This form makes it harder, I'm sure.

-Ericka seemed a little perplexed by Susan's agreement. She's trying to process what it means, looking at her with skepticism.

Ericka: Yea... yea I spent... 20 years as a larger version of you. My fur wasn't... that pretty, though. Hunting like this is fundamentally different, but a trespasser like him is still easy enough to take down.

Susan: [Wagging her tail.] Thank you! My mother was very surprised to see my fur grow in like this as a pup. She started to name me Callie, but thought that it might be a bit too cliché. Your fur is beautiful as it is, though. Your eyes are vibrant, too. Even as a wolf like me you had them, if I recall.

Ericka: Cut it with the flattery, please? How do we fix this?

Susan: Well, what has taken place here has been a terrible misunderstanding by one who claimed to understand us, but clearly did not. I have spoken with Amy, and in my opinion as a wolf, her actions, though aggressive, were rational for someone that is... wolf minded. Though the people see it as wrong, it was... an inevitability. He misinterpreted her warning bite and retaliated, rather than backing down. This is on *him* in that sense.

Ericka: Right? I mean, I get it if some random person in public doesn't understand. People don't bite like that... except during sex... but he claimed to be a wolf expert.

Susan: Part of the problem is not just his misunderstanding, but the complexity of the situation at large. You are a wolf, as am I... but you and I are separate from one who has been and always will be a wolf. We have intelligence, and time in the social world. That alters our experience, and as a result, alters our behavior. I warned him against this very thing.

Ericka: Well, what's happened has happened. So what do we do now?

Susan: [Wagging her tail once more.] Precisely. I have a proposal. I've offered it to Amy and I will offer it to you as well. Since you are both... leadership minded, I felt that it'd be more important to speak to you two, than to David and Rebecca.

-She went on to explain the same things to Ericka that she did to Amy. R-44 was silent during the entire discussion, but her ears were pointed forward in interest, seeming to greatly like the idea. Her only concern was that Amy remain in charge of the pack, and they maintain their autonomy. Susan reassured her, and explained that they would have an opportunity to meet the community and its leaders, including the elder, before making any decisions. When Ericka asked her of the alternative, she essentially answered that she did not have one. She simply reiterated her opinion about returning to the wilds. For whatever reason, she did not mention a new caretaker, as she'd done with Amy.

-After Susan was done talking to the wolves, she returned to her office, changed her form and picked back up with her day as if the morning hadn't even occurred. I met her a few hours later in the cafeteria and asked for her thoughts. She had little to say on the matter, simply telling me to put them all together in one room. She continues to be an enigma to me.

Video Transcript Observation room 322 – I-232, R44-46.

13:15hrs

[David is introduced to the room last, escorted by two guards. He walks in with the others, then quickly takes a seat on the floor near Rebecca. The room has cots, but they aren't using them. Ericka and Amy are already together beside Rebecca.]

Ericka: I'm assuming Susan spoke to you all?

David: Director Nombs? No. Just Dr. Beyer.

Rebecca: She didn't speak to me either, what'd she say? If... if I can ask that.

Amy: She gave us a proposal. She thinks we should live with her werewolf community. I'm... not sure what to think of it.

Ericka: She framed it to me as if they may not accept us. She's no alpha. She doesn't have the authority to give us what she's promised.

David: Well, what's the alternative? Go back to the den? Clean up the usurper's blood? Act like it never happened?

Rebecca: I've been thinking... and... you can rebuke me, you have that authority. So long as we stay here... struggling to bridge our world with theirs... we're going to have issues like this. I mean... this is the third time. The second one that's died. How many more are they going to throw at us? How many more do we have to... eventually they're going to see us as a threat. I mean, we already are seen as a threat, that's... why we're in this room. Maybe it's better if we just... stop resisting.

Ericka: You mean go back? That was... one of her options, actually. They won't let us go back to the tunnel, though. That place is too busy with hiker prey now. Besides, they've already gone through our waste. They recovered bones. It'll be a mess. We moved so much dirt around to bury all that and they just went and dug it all up.

Rebecca: Maybe not there, but... there has to be somewhere we can live?

Amy: Hold on... you're talking about just walking away from our personhood? Just giving it up because they can't figure it out? She told me that we could get a new caretaker and keep trying!

David: I think she means... to stop hurting them. We can function in their world, but only amongst ourselves. A movie and popcorn... a perfectly normal person thing to do... then he has to do something weird... he has to instigate. He has to challenge you. When will it stop? They'll keep attacking us and we'll keep defending ourselves. They'll never make sense! Every time something happens, they separate us and put us in these awful rooms. They take us from our den... we just need to find a way to avoid the and be... people so that we can stop hurting them. Maybe a small persons community would work, if the werewolves would not take us?

Ericka: They're not gonna just let us move to some small town. They need us nearby so that they can punish us when we fuck up again. The wilds or the werewolves are the only options I see.

Amy: But... we're doing well! David's driving, he's found a love for building things... Rebecca can... can hopefully start teaching soon... You... you can work here! With me!

Ericka: Honey, I really don't think they'll ever trust any of us with their pups. Rebecca might get limited exposure but there'll always be a person with a rifle right behind her. One wrong move and she's right back in one of these rooms,

Rebecca: [Whines.]

David: There's also the possibility that they'll stop giving us more chances. Instead of trying to help, they'll just put us to sleep.

Amy: Guys... you're completely discounting Susan's proposal! You can't just assume it won't work because she's not alpha. It's entirely possible that her pack will agree! I would!

[Ericka sighs and leans her head on Amy's shoulder.]

David: Well... when will we know? I hate this room, and I know you do, too.

[I interject to inform them that it will be later this evening. Directory Nombs will bring them to the community, and they will speak to the elder. I also inform them that in the meantime, I've asked the security team to bring them some fresh clothing that is... free of blood.]

Part 14

Official Activity Log: Director Susan Nombs – NRP Buffalo

2/26/2024 08:05hrs

I'm writing this log before I inspect the results of last night's deliberations. I have to say that I do not know what to expect, but, I will detail what I find after my explanation.

After work yesterday, about 17:30hrs, I took Dr. Amy Hwen, Ms. Ericka Saunders, Ms. Rebecca Gnead, and Mr. David Tanibard to my community. I had given them the option, or at least I had hoped, to meet with our community elder, and opt to join us as one of the packs that live within our family. I was confident that Kira would accept them with open arms, even if I did have to grovel a little. My wolf did not agree, but her unilateral approach to return them to the wilds was one that I wanted to avoid. The idea of losing myself to the wilds is a horror. I don't want to subject them to such a thing unless I have no other option.

To fully disclose my position within my community... though I am director here at NRP Buffalo, in my pack I am simply one among many. I am a member of the Nombs pack. My mother is one of three daughters of our pack alpha, Lirian, who has known Kira, our pack elder for nearly a century. Lirian was not born as a wolf, but was given Kalu's gift many centuries ago while touring the Norwegian wilderness. After his change, he was a lone wolf for quite some time, before encountering Kira, who brought him into her pack. Ultimately, he mated, and our own pack began to emerge. As you can imagine, this long, storied history shows just how low I am in rank, there are times I am grateful that I am even recognized. Despite this, however, Kira knows all of us, and cares deeply for her community. I was sure that she would hear my proposal.

It took some time to navigate afternoon traffic, but we arrived at our community at 19:45 or so. My arrival normally garners no fanfare, I simply pull into the garage, come home to find my daughter texting, my husband cooking, and my youngest playing games. A perfectly normal 'persons' family. Today, however, I was greeted by the council.

I had called ahead and informed them of my desire to speak, but I didn't realize they would meet me in the street as they did. I have to say it was quite alarming for myself, and for the pack that I'd taken with me. Kira stood before the others in her silver wolf form, looking on as the other pack leaders stood about her in their person's forms. As we got out of the car, she approached Amy first, sniffing at her before walking to the others.

Lirian, my alpha, asked me why I hadn't cleared this with him before bringing it up to the council. His tone was not harsh or scolding, but I could tell that he had desired that I would have handled this differently. I told him, lowering my head, that I had hoped to bring them directly to the elder, since they were their own pack, and were not seeking to integrate into our own. He simply frowned at me in response.

After Kira had finished her inspection, she returned to the front of the council, then nodded over her shoulder toward her den. It's the largest home in the community. Without a word, we followed her, feeling scolding gazes from all the pack leaders around me as the others followed behind.

I have to say, I was quite impressed by Amy. Her ears did not splay, nor did her tail curl. In the face of our community leaders, she held her own, walking confidently with Ericka at her side. I wish that I could say the same for her subordinates, though. Rebecca and David were obviously intimidated. Even those who rank below me do not quiver in fear at such a thing... why are they so submissive?

After we arrived at the home, Kira spoke to them, easily discerning that Amy was the alpha, and that Ericka was her mate. She complimented her on her resilience in the face of so many new wolves, and asked... me... to explain myself. I did my best, but I admit, I felt anxious. I stuttered several times. I explained the situation as plainly as I could. They were children of Kalu, taken not by werewolves, but by D.Mutatio, and but for a daily injection, were feral wolves in mind and body, save for Amy. I started to explain my goal to integrate them into our community, but Kira interrupted me,

"Why resist?" she asked simply. "You are children of Kalu, why fight his will?" I tried to explain to her that they'd not been taken by choice, that they didn't realize what the lectin had done, and that with 551, it was entirely possible to keep them in their current, semi-stable state. I was then grilled by every alpha in the community, slowly prying everything out of me until the true state of things was laid bare. Kenji, the maintenance man, the elk, the hundreds of bodies found at Wolf's Howl Pass... I admit, my professionalism had faded. I was nearly in tears. The same point kept coming up again and again. Not every child of Kalu is given his gift by choice. Many of them... in... including my ex... had it forced upon them. In that sense, the alphas seemed to think that Amy and her pack were no different.

Kira instructed me to wait, then lead the wolves deeper into the house. While she did, Lirian scolded me, outwardly and openly, for bringing such 'dangerous and uncontrolled animals' to our community, stating unequivocally that in his opinion, such people had no place here. He even floated that I might be punished for attempting to bring them here without going through him first.

The others returned some time later. Ericka seemed ambivalent, while Rebecca was nearly in tears. Amy was worried, and David... well he seemed depressed. I would later learn that that Kira had given them a tour and spoken to them on what it meant to be a wolf. Rebecca had met Maybelle and her pups. (Maybelle is a new mother wolf. When we give birth we have to be wolves for the duration of our nursing period, whether our person's mind is present or not.) Seeing them made her long for it, and had upset her that she couldn't hold one of our young. (Kira informed her that there was risk of contagion, and she would not allow them to become werewolves on top of what they already were.)

By the end, the council pushed us back outside, and Kira stood before us, telling us in no uncertain terms... "You are children of Kalu. You were chosen, and you fight him with science. You will never be what you once were, and though you may be of our kin, you are not our family. You are welcome here as guests, but you can never be here as family. I recommend that you stop fighting. Accept his gift and return to the wilds where he has called you home."

..... The car ride back to the lab was quiet and uneasy. I felt like a fool. I started to apologize, but, I couldn't find an appropriate way to do so. Hardly a word was said, but... deliberation had already started on Kira's recommendation. Could they return to the wild? Should they? Where would they go? Would I, as Director, even give them this option? My wolf certainly had. I swear I could feel her smugly smirking at me as we drove.

We arrived back at the lab at 21:15, and I took them inside, giving them one of the hotel-style rooms we had for anomalies that were of minimal threat. I explained to them that they could have another chance. I would allow them to return to their den, a new person would be assigned to help them with reintegration, and all would be the same. When Ericka balked at the idea, questioning the cycle of death that seemed to follow them all. She asked in exasperation if Kira's, and my wolf's alternate proposal would still be possible. With great hesitation, I told her it would.

I hadn't disclosed this to Dr. Ahonen, but there are several hectares of land to the north of the New York region that would be ripe for their inhabitation. It was something that I was considering as a sort of... last contingency for them, and for Dr. Saynurs should they... ultimately fail to integrate.

I left the room for a moment, then returned with five injectors. I placed them on the table in front of one of the beds, four of them together, and one to the side. "These are your daily 551 injectors. And this one, Amy... would finish what Ericka already started for you. It would... push you over the edge. It would change you physically. I'm going to leave these here for you tonight. When I come in in the morning, if you've taken the 551, we can get your den cleaned up and get you back home, assign a new person to care for you, and life will go on. If however, you choose not to take the 551, and instead take the other injector... I'll arrange for your transport while you still have your forms and cognition, and let you... return to the wilds. I'll help you find a place to call your den, tag you, and then... the this'll all be over. You can live the rest of your days as Kalu's four legged children. There'll be no judgement, no matter what you decide." They thanked me, but gave me no indication as to what decision they might make.

I left the office that evening with tears in my eyes. So badly I wanted them to be happy and to achieve their goals, but... without my pack and my community supporting them, more of the same, or the wilderness are all that I can offer. I want to say that I have no opinion, or that I at least agree with my counterpart, but... they've been doing so well! I certainly hope they choose to stay. Call me callous, heartless... whatever... the truth of it is that to me, the lives they've taken are a small part of the work we need to see in rejuvenating people afflicted by this plant. ~~And... honestly... in only this short amount of time watching them in their most intimate moments... I've admittedly become attached.~~ Regardless of their choice, however, I will respect it.

Video Transcript – ‘Hotel’ observation room 12 – I-232, R44-46 – Dr. Ahonen observing.

22:45 hrs

Ericka: [Sitting down heavily on the edge of one of the beds.] So, what do we do?

David: We take the 551. We go back to our den. Why even debate this? She told us they'd give us someone new. It's simple. More of the same.

Rebecca: They're never gonna let me have pups like this. Giving it up is the only way.

David: We'll find a way to live with it. Do we really need pups? We're people! Why go to the wilds when we have the option not to?

Amy: You and I have no experience in the wild, save for the dream. I think... perhaps that's why it's easy for us to skew toward taking the 551 and remaining as we are. However... a lot of valid points were raised today.

David: Like what? *Oh, we're chosen by Kalu so we should just give up, drop our lives and leave it all behind to become dumb animals??* None of us asked for this!

Ericka: Watch your tongue when you speak to our alpha like that.

Amy: No, it's okay. We all need to speak freely right now... as equals. This is... this is a major decision. [She sits down beside Ericka and nuzzles her.] Everyone needs to have their say without fear of reprisal.

Ericka: Well, I mean... you heard what she said. If we stay like this, they'll just give us another person to try to control us and question your authority. I... I don't want to...

Amy: Give us your opinion. Don't hold back on my account.

Ericka: The wilds were good to us. I aged... a lot... in the 20 years that I was there, but... I was free to hunt and kill, eat, sleep, fuck... as I wished. The hiker prey was the only problem, and honestly, the only problem that it served was that it was too easy to hunt. People are shamefully bad at running. I.... obviously missed a lot; movies, music, technology, driving, seeing the sights of the person's world... but I also didn't have to deal with jobs or money. Something like Deacon was so far away from me that it almost didn't matter. It was just a lingering memory. I... I guess I'm saying... I... I want to... I dunno. I don't want to walk away from what we have here. I love cooking, I love being with you and all the kinky shit we get to do in bed... the things we can do with fingers and toys and collars and leashes... we can't do that in the wild. Our sex would be... difficult. Rebecca already knows this.

[Rebecca blushes and nods.]

Rebecca: That... doesn't mean it's not enjoyable, though. You guys are into the whole dom/sub thing. I know... but... wolves can do that, too. It'd just be... different. You'd probably get used to it.

David: Never driving my car again... never having a hot meal or a warm fireplace, a cozy couch, a nice movie... a soft bed... never holding a hammer again, never building anything... all this just because a few people died? We can learn to live with them! We just have to keep trying. It's stupid to walk away now. We've been making major progress!

Amy: What happens when the next guy tries to put me over? Or he misunderstands a warning? Tries to question my authority? Should I just roll over and let him have it? Just give in and let a person be our alpha? What happens when a trespasser enters our den? What if it's someone's actually malicious and they start trying to steal things? It's our instinct to fight back. This will happen again and again and again. I... I'm with you, David. I've never lived in the wild. I'm a person! Or at least, I used to be. I want to work! I just... I don't know if it will.

Ericka: How many chances will we get? What happens when they've had enough, and they put us to sleep? Or maybe they return us to the wilds anyway? Maybe we delay our inevitable...

David: So, you're saying that we can't learn to moderate our responses? I'm kind of surprised by that, Amy. You're our alpha. All three of us look to you for direction, and you're telling us that you can't find a way to deal with adversity? If someone tries to take over, we let them! Then, if they run against our values or our instincts, we get rid of them. Amy is in charge whether their new caretaker is or not.

Ericka: What do you want out of life, David? You want to wake up in the morning like a person, have your shower, comb your hair and go to work? Do your job, come home to all of us and your pups? Go have a beer with your friends or whatever? Go to ... sports... games? Never have anyone looking over your shoulder with a tranquilizer ready to drag you off to an observation room? You think that's a life we can achieve?? So long as we're like this, they're going to be involved in our lives. There'll be an interloper, someone to tell us what to do, to follow us around, to threaten us... there'll be challenges to our sovereignty, orders not to reproduce, refusal to let us grow our pack... we'll... we'll never be free in the person's world.

David: All we have to do is let them have their way! We cede a little ground, and we gain the world! How can you not see that?? Compromise! That's what I'm calling for!

[Amy whimpers, her ears splaying as Ericka comforts her.]

Ericka: I don't suppose I should be surprised that being submissive would be your take on this, David. You want those things, but you can't have them. We'll always have someone trying to put a square peg in a round hole until they either get fed up with us and punish us, or we hurt them.

David: Well, who says we all have to make the same choice? What if you and Rebecca go back and Amy and I stay here?

Rebecca: How can I have pups if you just leave me behind? I can't have pups like this, I can't have them like that... You're my mate! You'd just leave me behind?! You're supposed to father my cubs!

David: Why? Because I'm the only male in the pack? Or because you actually want that from me?

Ericka: David!

David: I'm serious! If we're allowed to speak freely here, I'm speaking freely. You killed my team and dragged me off to the tunnel to force me to be Rebecca's mate. I never had any say in the matter. Moreover, even she herself admitted the other day that she saw evidence that her former self didn't even want to have pups!

Rebecca: I'm not her! And... okay sure, you were forced to join, just like me... but... I took a liking to you early on! And even when we started to... person again... we stayed together. We're right for each other, David!

David: Then stay with me. Be a person with me. We don't all have to make the same decision here!

Amy: Whatever decision we make, it should be unanimous. I don't... I don't wanna split up the pack.

David: Why? You're afraid of losing power? You'd condemn us to a life in the wilds just to hold onto your status as alpha?? Ericka's not gonna leave you! All you need is her! Why force us to go along?

Amy: Because I'm our alpha and that's what I want for us. I want us to make a decision as a group. You talk about ceding ground... why don't you cede ground to me? Or you could step up and challenge me. I promise I won't kill you, or let Ericka step in.

David: [His ears splaying submissively as he recoils slightly, almost using Rebecca as a shield.] You... you want me to challenge you to be alpha? Just... just so that we can stay people?? You've really made your mind up already? Then why are we debating!?

Amy: No! That's not what I'm saying at all! I'm... David, I'm saying that our decision should be unanimous, and if you want to change that, you need to take my seat. *You* want to allow the pack to break up, so *you* need to be the one in charge. Are you willing to try? Like I said, Ericka won't intervene, so long as it doesn't draw blood.

[He seems frustrated and panicked, struggling to find his words.]

Amy: Put up or shut up. I haven't thrown my hand in for either decision right now, but for the good of the pack, we have to stay together. Therefore, this has to be unanimous.

David: Then you may as well make the decision and force us. Because... if you won't let the pack break up, you're not giving us a real choice.

[Amy stands up calmly from her bed, walks over to him, then grabs him by the wrist with her left hand, using her right to push his head into the mattress. She holds him there, waiting for him to struggle.]

Amy: This is what you wanted, right? You wanted a challenge? Here I am. Fight back. Come on... challenge me. Do it! [He continues not to resist.] C'mon David! What's' wrong with you? Don't you have any fight? Gods... you're fucking pathetic.

[Finally, he kicks at her, trying to push her off, but she dodges it and only leans in harder, wrinkling her nose and showing her top fangs as she buries his face deeper into the mattress.]

Amy: There it is. There's that fight! Come on! You wanna take me you go ahead! You little fuck! Ya know what? I should fuck your mate in front of you and make you watch. Would you like that? Huh?? [He struggles again.] Oh! Oh did I strike a nerve? I guess you really do care about Becky then, huh??

David: I give! Okay?? Stop... stop pushing... this mattress stinks.

Amy: That's the smell of your nose being rubbed in your own shit, subby. [She snatches her hands away, letting him sit up.] I told you could challenge me. You still can! You wanna do it?? Come on! Assert that dominance! Put me in my place and let the pack break up!

-This entire exchange is a marvel to behold. Her aggressive demeanor is so far anathema to what we normally see in her day to day presentation that I have a hard time even believing that this is Dr. Hwen.

-Her stance is an interesting one, too. She's basically confirming what he said. She refuses to let anyone leave. They either all stay, or all go. Effectively, this means that the role of the pack is just to convince *her* of what option *she* should choose.

Rebecca: [Looking at Amy, her ears splaying.] Would... you really make me do that?

Amy: Normally, no. But you know I could give you an enjoyable experience, and if it helped him realize that he actually did care about you then... what would be lost?

David: I do care about her! I... I was out of line before, I just...

-How quickly he backtracks. He gets 'out of line' and she puts him in his place, now he's compliant. Interesting, considering that at the start of this deliberation she said that she wanted everyone to speak freely. She didn't change his mind by pushing him into the mattress. As a person, this would be bullying and... cuckholding, apparently. It wouldn't be tolerated by any caretaker.

Rebecca: Can I... say something? What just happened is normal for us, I mean... it's never happened before because it's never been needed, but... I expect that if I'm out of line with you... with my alpha, that I'd be put back into my place. People... at least... adult people... don't do this. They would consider it unacceptable. If we tried to keep being people, our caretaker would punish... punish you... for trying to assert dominance.

Ericka: So, she'd basically have no way to control us, except our compliance...

Amy: I'm glad that this hasn't been a problem until now, but... that's a valid concern. How can I... I don't even want to think- listen, you guys are the best pack I could ever ask for. The fact that I've never had to do that is... amazing, but I don't know that agreement alone is enough. If we get a new caretaker, they have to allow me to do my job.

Ericka: Or we just... don't get a new one. You can do your job in the wilds, and no one will bat an eye.

David: Believe me, I'd rather follow you into a raging inferno than to go back to the wilds.

Amy: How do you it'll be that bad?

David: You saw us when we were rescued right? After I'd... finished my change? So, you know what we'll look like. What you don't know, is what the den was like.

Ericka: A little breezy, some cold fresh water dripped deeper in the tunnel, was a refreshing drink in the summer, but froze in the winter. A rail ran through it that you had to step over...

David: There were animal carcasses and shreds of clothing, peoples smashed phones and bags... I thought for sure that I'd die when I was taken there.

Rebecca: David, moving hiker prey's collection bags was hard to do. Some of them were really heavy. Others had shiny things in them. They had warm in them, too. We could warm ourselves in the winter with their stuff. It was good to keep around.

Ericka: You're trying to appeal to Amy's personhood as if you have any yourself. We don't. We're just acting out a part for them. Rebecca's right, that stuff was kept near the den to be used. The carcasses... I mean... we bring them to our den, we eat them, then we take the remains to waste. You ate from those carcasses. Don't be ungrateful.

David: Ungrateful? Ericka, I would still be a person that could cook his own meals and provide for himself if you hadn't taken me. I don't' need to be grateful to you for doing this to me! If anything, I resent it!

-I expected Ericka to retort, but she didn't. They sat in silence, their ears splaying back as they all seemed to avoid eye contact.

Amy: I don't think we're really getting anywhere here. You think she'll give us more time? It's... been a long day. We... we really need to process this.

Ericka: Give? We'll take more time. The only thing we really have to worry about here is the 551. Which, we don't need until mid-morning. This... other injector here, there's no time limit. I say we sleep on it, and we can continue in the morning.

[The other wolves agree and despite David's misgivings, Rebecca cuddles up to him. They make themselves comfortable, stripping out of their clothes, and sleep in their beds, with Ericka and Amy in one, and David and Rebecca in the other.]

[On 26/Feb/24 at 03:20hrs, Amy abruptly awakes. She gasps audibly and sits up, waking the others, who also look at her in alarm.]

Ericka: [Nuzzling her with concern.] Bad hunt?

Amy: N... no I... I met him. He spoke to me.

Rebecca: Who? In the dream?

Amy: [Nodding.] Kalu. I... spoke to him in my dream.! [She jumps up from the bed, eyeing her hands shakily, then fumbles through drawers until she finds a pen and a notepad in the 2nd

drawer between the 2 beds. She grabs it and sits down on her bed, feverishly beginning to write.]

Ericka: [Whimpering.] What's wrong honey?

Amy: I need to write this down before I forget. I'll... read it to you when I'm done.

[She writes for several minutes, going through page after page as she frantically plots it out. Once she's satisfied, she begins to read. The others sit in silence until it's complete.]

I-232's note:

[Scribbled hastily onto a hotel-style notepad in blue ink. Some words are difficult to discern.]

I was hunting in my dream, as I always do, when I came across hiker prey. I stalked it, paying no mind that it was a person. Right before I was ready to strike, it turned to face me. It was my brother, Kenji. I didn't hesitate. I lunged at him and tore him open, feasting on my reward like I always do. While doing so, I looked up and saw another standing on a hill nearby, watching me feed. He was not like the other. He wore a tribal cloth and wielded a spear. He was wolf, and he seemed to be beckoning me.

I looked back down, satisfied to ignore him, but my prey was gone. Even the viscera I'd been chewing was gone from my mouth. I looked back, but found myself, suddenly a person, standing before him. He was much taller than me, brown in fur, with gold tribal markings that were gently glowing. He called me his child, and outstretched his hand, gesturing for me to take it, and welcomed me to his pack.

I asked who he was and took his hand, but instead of my hand touching his, my paw touched the ground. Confused, I looked up to see a great wolf, twice my size, with enormous fangs standing before me with golden glowing claws and eyes. He said that he was Kalu, god of the hunt, and father to all those who dream it.

We walked through a lush forest, teeming with prey that scattered in every direction, warm golden sunlight filtered through the trees, and it felt... peaceful. I asked why he was there, and he told me that I needed... clarity. He pointed out as we hopped over a small stream, that the memories that we forget, are not random. They're specific, and relate heavily to the person's world. Something to the effect of 'a wolf doesn't remember what a wolf doesn't need.' Things like... last names, jobs, administrative tasks, fashion, schooling, mathematics, science... all of it was needless to a wolf, and despite our efforts with 551, ultimately, all of it would be taken from us.

I begged to understand why, but he simply repeated himself. 'A wolf doesn't remember, what a wolf doesn't need.' He explained, kindly, that we'd been chosen, whether by our own will or without, to join his family, and that we were no longer children of Soth. We were wolves. Animals of the wilds, mind body and soul. When we die, we will return as hunters under his guidance, never again will we be... people.

I told him that I liked being a person, and I protested the idea of losing all the hard work that I'd put into my life that he was simply taking away because of one small mistake. I... I became angry at a god! I growled at him and barked my protests, but he simply stood there and waited for me to finish.

He sat down and told me that he felt no sympathy for the person that I'd been before. I was his child now, and that was all that mattered. He explained that he bridged the gap between the animal world and the world of people, and as a god, saw both sides of the world. It was of his opinion that people were corrupted animals, living a life not suited for their kind, and said that I should be proud that I'd found the healing fern. It'd healed my soul, and returned me to what I once was. I was... purified.

I continued to mourn my personhood, and he comforted me, telling me that it was okay to let it go. I need not be afraid. Still, I fought him, and argued for myself, but no matter what argument I had, he simply ignored it and continued on.

We walked to a clearing and he stopped at its edge. A great elk stood, grazing, with a doe and fawn at its side. The great wolf looked at me, then at the three and told me to choose. I asked him what he meant but he simply repeated himself. I chose the buck, arguing that it would feed my pack, because it was larger. The female could have more fawns, and the fawn, which was male, could mate with more does in its older age. He agreed with a nod, and we split, circling the clearing to find the best vantage.

The more I focused on the buck, the less I remembered of my life. Names and faces began to blur, memories became muddled and unclear... context was missing. But my resolve was growing. My senses were heightened, and when we were both in position, he waited for my mark.

We moved on the beasts, and they scattered. I trailed the buck, cutting to flank it on its left as he moved to the right. No matter which way the buck would steer, we would have him. Knowing the grove better than I, Kalu kited him around to a heavy ledge, cornering the beast at its base. It stopped and tried to climb, its hooves scraping against the rocks before it turned to defend itself with its massive antlers. My mind was clear. I wasn't Dr. Amy Hwen anymore. I was a wolf, a pack alpha, and this elk was our prize.

I dodged its attack and went behind its jaw, pinning my teeth to its neck. Kalu did the same, using his weight, combined with mine, to drag it to its side. We quickly finished it, terminating the beast before claiming our prize.

It was somewhere in that feast of victory that I saw you all join me, helping to strip the beast, and feeding the pups that trotted alongside you. Kalu looked at me and without moving his mouth, told me... 'finish what you've started, and come home.'

I woke up right after, and I had to write this down.

Resume Video Transcript – 'Hotel' observation room 12 – I-232, R44-46 – Dr. Ahonen observing.

03:21 hrs

-The subjects seemed to buy her story, taking it as the absolute truth. Personally, I'm skeptical of any such thing. The gods don't just come and speak to some random nobody. That's not how this works. Our gods are much too busy for such things. This is just my opinion, though.

[The wolves obviously believed it, sitting in silence until she was done writing. After she'd finished reading her own note, she looked up. Rebecca had started crying when she heard about the pups. David's ears were splayed, and Ericka looked at her with curious uncertainty.]

David: So... we're really gone huh?

Amy: I think the key takeaway is that our memories aren't even at their worst, yet. The 551 is slowing the decay, but it's happening, and ultimately he's going to take anything that we don't need as wolves.

David: How do we know that? We can still talk. We can still... I still know how to drive. I need math to build things, we need science to understand what we are. We're just gonna lose that?

Amy: [shaking her head.] I don't know, but... I can tell you that since I've stopped driving... I have no idea how to do so anymore. C...can you tell me Ericka's last name?

[He thinks for a moment, cocking his head slightly as he looks at her, then at Amy, then Rebecca. A look of panic starts to wash over him.]

David: Mine is Tanibard. I'm... I'm David Tanibard. I was born in... um... the 1980s? I think? I'm uh... I live... no no... this isn't okay. I don't know anything!

Rebecca: [Nuzzling him for comfort.] I don't know our last names, either, except my own. It's Gnead. I don't know when I was born or where we are either. Honey, try not to panic.

David: [Pushing her away and standing up.] We can't just let him win like this! We earned the right to be people!

Ericka: Then challenge him for alpha! Go on, challenge the god of the hunt himself for his position. See how that works out for you.

Amy: We don't have to stop taking the 551. It just sounds like... ultimately... we're fighting a losing battle. He's offering us a chance to live under his eye and we're rejecting it, but we're still fighting a losing battle.

David: So how long do we have, then?? A week? A month? A year? Five years?

Ericka: How many days are in a year, David?

David: Stop it! Don't ask me things like that!

Amy: It's.. uh... 300? Something? There's seasons. Those are more important. Cold, warm, hot, cool. Uh... winter, spring, summer, autumn.

Rebecca: 324, I think? I don't know for sure.

[David backs up away from them all, still panicking until he feels the wall behind him. He gasps slightly, then slides down it until he's in the fetal position on the floor.]

David: [Muttering in panic as he pants.] Don't make me do this, don't make me... please! Don't make me do this...

[Amy walks to the row of injectors and looks down at her own, staring at it for nearly a minute before returning her gaze to the others. Rebecca and Ericka are clearly in agreement, but David shakes his head, pleading now silently for her to change her mind. She tilts her head at him and splays her ears in sympathy, then sighs. Looking back at the injectors, she reaches down, and picks it up.]

Part 15

Director Nombs personal log

2/27/24 8:10hrs

I arrived back at the office this morning with a shiver in my fur. My family had welcomed me home, as they always did, but not before I had a multi-hour lecturing by the council about my decision to bring the subjects to community without asking. They accused me of giving them false hope and said that regardless of their condition, they were not, and would never be werewolves like us. I hate to see it this way, but I suppose they are right.

Werewolves have two souls. Two minds, and two (technically three) forms. We can switch between which one of us controls the body, and what form the body takes. Our subjects can do... none of this. They are single souls, single minds, and single forms. They can only change or be changed by medication. Without our attempts to reverse the process, Kalu would claim them, and, according to Kira, this is what should've been allowed to happen.

I admit, I am not a fan of giving the gods everything they want. We have science for a reason. We are not at the mercy at largely inactive deities, but the elder has spoken, and if I wish to remain in good standing, I have to agree.

I discussed the video transcript form last night with Dr. Ahonen over coffee. Both of us are exhausted trying to keep up with these subjects. I have to say, I feel... bad for them. They have to make a choice I've never had to make. Yes, we can continue to help them, provide them with C.Mut-551, and work toward better solutions, but their failure to... integrate has cost two lives, and I am under pressure to make this stop. I'm lucky that the CEO hasn't gotten involved. She'd shut this entire office down.

Upon entering the observation area, we found that the wolves were still sleeping, but things had changed from where Dr. Ahonen had left them during his transcription. The beds were a mess, one of them stained with blood. David was asleep, curled up away from the others, with Amy, Ericka, and Rebecca on the far, still pristine bed, sleeping three under the covers. There were bite marks on David's neck and shoulder; nothing serious, but enough to draw blood. In the corner of the room, the four C.Mut-551 injectors lay broken and unused. The fifth injector, however, was nowhere to be seen.

Part of me felt a pit in my stomach. They'd made their choice, it seemed, but something else had happened after Dr. Ahonen had left. We rolled back the tape, then listened to the struggle. David had stood up for himself, rushing to the 551 injectors and struggling to inject himself with one of them. Amy tackled him onto the bed, but he continued to fight her. The struggle lasted nearly 10 minutes, with neither of the other wolves getting involved. When it was over, Amy banished him to the far corner of the room. She stormed to the table and grabbed the 551 pens, breaking them all and throwing them into the corner. Finally, she grabbed the pen I'd left for her and primed it. 'As people, our lives are forfeit. You have to accept that! You don't want to be with my pack, that's fine, but I'm not letting you leave unless you can best me!' With that, she pressed the injector to her neck, then depressed the button.

Ericka seemed to cringe, her ears splaying. Even though they knew it had to be, they still disliked the idea. With a ragged sigh, Amy threw the pen into the trashcan just below the window, then walked to her bed, giving Ericka a sobbing embrace. She'd really done it. Someone free of the physical effects of Kalu's claim had willfully given herself the rest of it... forever cursing or... blessing herself to lose the form that she bore when she came from her mother's womb. I started to tear up as I thought of my own pups. Even though they were born as wolves, I knew that in time they would find their true forms. I am a cat, my husband is a racoon. Our children are a mix of racoons and cats, but as wolves... we are all the same. It felt like... Amy had thrown her life away... if I am honest.

I know that Kalu's message in her dream made sense to her. I know that... they interpreted it as true... but was it really? Kalu has ever spoken to me in my dreams. He's never hunted with me in the grove. Why is she so important that he would do this for her? I suppose I don't want to know. He's taken her body, mind, and soul as his own. She'll never be a person again. Perhaps... one day she'll be reborn with one of us? But as a wolf, she'll never know of this life. In fact, I doubt that she'll remember any of this by next winter.

I stood for a moment, gathering myself, then left the room to knock on their door. Much to my surprise, Amy was the one to answer, she was nude, with traces of dried blood on her maw, and tear marks in her fur. She looked at me with a stressed and saddened gaze, silently telling me what she'd done. I will... use a transcript for the rest of this interaction.

Video Transcript – ‘Hotel’ observation room 12 – I-232, R44-46 – Director Nombs commenting.

2/27/24 10:02hrs

[I stand in the doorway, looking Dr. Amy Hwen in the eye. Her pack is awake. Ericka and Rebecca are still in bed, under the covers nude, looking at me, while David shivers in the corner, his eyes pleading with me for help.]

Susan: So... you made your choice, I see.

Amy: Kalu spoke. Said we're all forfeit. It made sense. What we forget... A wolf doesn't remember what a wolf doesn't need. I'm an animal now. As... hard as that is to accept.

Susan: You still have some time. You'll all slowly decline over a period of about a month, from what I can tell. That should give you time to acclimate to your new territory, and make preparations for yourselves while you still have hands.

-I hated saying this. David's pleading eyes, Amy's mournful gaze... I felt as if I was turning a knife.

Amy: [Looking down.] Yea... [Looks back up.] I took the... uh... thing... a back ago. Um...? Before sleep. I don't really feel any different yet, though.

Susan: Like I said, it'll be gradual.

Ericka: Our minds will go with our bodies, they'll adjust at the same time. That way we won't feel... ya know... existential dread.

David: Speak for yourself. Director, please help me. I don't want this. I-

Amy: [Snapping at him.] The choice has been made. She will not intervene. [She glares back at me.] Will you?

-It was such a simple question, but so very difficult to answer. They hadn't suffered any major physical or mental changes at that point. I could've easily made the decision to keep them as they are, force inject them with 551, and separate David from the pack. I knew that if I did this, though... not only would they never cooperate again, but I'd go against Kalu, one of the gods that oversees my... existence. I have no idea what he could... or would do to me. If he truly spoke to her directly... I am not enough to intervene.

Susan: I will not. Sorry, David. This isn't for me to decide.

David: You locked us in here and forced us to debate this! You DID decide this! You can FORCE her to release me! I'll be good! I promise! I'll do everything a person should do! There's still time. You can still save me!

Susan: I heard what she said about her dream, David. My wolf is a child of Kalu as well. He's never spoken to me, but... if I go against Amy on this, I go against his wishes.

David: Then Amy is your alpha and you're a coward for not fighting her!

[Amy whirls around and growls furiously at him, clenching her fists.]

Amy: If you want to live, you'll shut your mouth!

David: I don't want to live if it means living like that!

Susan: Okay... if he's going to self-harm, I need to change things up here.

[Amy whirls back around to me and gets in my face. I'm a little bit taller than her so she has to look up. Her nose comes to my chin. I was caught off guard, but quickly splayed back my ears I defiance.]

Susan: I am not going against you. I have to make sure he doesn't hurt himself.

Amy: You have no say! Back! You challenge me??

Susan: You need him for pups, do you not?

-Admittedly, I let my wolf take over here. Her demeanor was better suited for this.

Amy: [starting to calm slightly.] I-

Susan: Then he needs to live until Rebecca reaches her heat again. His mental state is critical. I'm going to have him sedated. He will be calm for several hours. Is that alright?

[Amy adjusts her posture, then nods.]

Amy: That is acceptable. [She pauses.] Wait, how do we... what if he does this when we get to the den?

David: You're condemning me to die a slow death. You're forcing my soul to die! You're forcing my memories to fade! What is *wrong* with you??

-His presence of mind concerns me, even in retrospect. He was so coherent... so... personable in this moment... perhaps Kalu hadn't captured the at all? Was Amy even telling the truth about meeting her god? I had a way to find out... sort of, but I needed to contact another department.

Susan: Let me... make a few phonecalls, okay? We'll try to get you out to your new home today or tomorrow. For now, I'm going to get someone to come in with a bite suit to calm him down.

Amy: [Tilting her head.] Bite... suit?

Ericka: A skin that keeps us from hurting them.

Amy: Oh. Oh right... right a bite... okay. Sorry, kind of... forgot. Hey, how is um... uh... fox? If he is like us, he should return to the wilds, too.

Susan: We're working on this on a case-by-case basis.

-Truthfully, Dr. Ahonen had been reporting positive results with Dr. Saynurs. He's difficult to work with but as long as he's on task, he's viable. The only issue we're having with him is... well... the same thing we're having with Amy and her pack. Mentally, he's torn between 2 worlds. He expresses agony to Dr. Beyer about his life and his memory. He still lives on site in an observation room. He sleeps in a tent he's fashioned into a den with bedding materials we've provided, and... well ultimately, I think he'll take the same path as the others. I just... hate to see it.

Susan: I'm going to lock you guys in for a moment. Feel free to get dressed. I'll have someone along shortly.

Amy: [Looking down at her body.] Oh... right. I guess we should wear clothes while we can.

Ericka: You sure? I kinda like you like this. You look good in your fur.

Amy: [Giggling, she turns to her mate and embraces her, nuzzling her gently.] Well, let's hope you still think so when I'm all fours. [She becomes serious for a moment.] I... have to admit... I'm going to miss our toys.

Ericka: [Nodding.] Fingers can do many things as well, but... well... so can a tongue. I've said this before. Rebecca knows very well just how much fun we can have.

-I turned to leave the room. As I did, David got to his feet and started to rush toward it in a desperate attempt to escape. I've never seen someone so afraid of his fate. I have to make sure that Amy's... dream... was right before I truly let this happen. I caught him as he pressed on. I don't think he realized that werewolves are slightly stronger than average for our size. It caught him off guard, and with Amy and Dr. Ahonen's help, we managed to secure him in the room.

-Once the door closed, I sighed and watched from the observation window. Amy again had him pinned to the bed, almost mounting him with her crotch pressed against his backside. I commented to Dr. Ahonen that this level of alpha domination would even be considered excessive to the werewolf community, and questioned if we were doing the right thing by allowing her to act this way. He responded by asking if wild wolves were so dominant, and asking how werewolves asserted influence over their packs.

-While it is true that a werewolf alpha can become physical with a pack member, it's unusual, especially for those of us who are born into the condition. Those given Kalu's gift later in life are more likely to engage in this sort of behavior. I explained this to him, but replied honestly, that I knew very little of wild wolf pack behavior, nor how it would apply to intelligent persons.

End Video Transcript

Director Nombs personal log cont.

2/27/24 10:21hrs

To make sure that I was on the right track, I enlisted the help of our anomalous teams expert. They don't work here in Buffalo, but thankfully we do have one of their "soul detection devices." These are exceptionally expensive, so we generally don't use it without direction.

The person's name I... can't disclose in any logs or even describe them. Not really for any particular security reason, but for the simple fact that... they themselves are an anomaly. Any mention of them is generalized. Their gender identity, presentation, species, name... it simply can't be recorded. You know them when you see them, but... such is their life. It's actually a form of curse, as I understand it. Imagine having a FedGov or company ID that basically says nothing about you no matter how hard you try.

They directed me on how to use the machine, and I was able to attach it to a video feed, allowing them to see. The device looks like a sort of... steampunk VR headset. It has many odd cables and dongles that... as far as I can tell, do nothing? All I needed was the video feed connector and to set the device to "lélek."

I did as I was directed, and they studied the footage. I waited patiently through what felt like an eternal silence, then finally inquired what they were seeing. They replied with distressed confusion, stating that they could see the outline of person's bodies, but the souls were clearly not people. They asked if we'd been experimenting with turning animals into people again. (Yes... again...) I denied it, stating that the company had long since shuttered that initiative. They almost didn't accept my answer, but after pressing for more information, conceded that what they were seeing made sense. All four of them had the souls of feral wolves. Or rather... 'werewolves whose mortal souls have been consumed.' Which... is another way to say feral wolves, really.

So that confirmed it. Even David was a wolf. A wolf that was afraid of his own mind and body. I can't say I feel... any better about leaving him with that pack... Amy's brutality is- I would've never hired her had I known she had this side of her. Though, I do wonder just how much of this is *her*... and how much of it is the wolf that's sort of... replaced her.

With all this in mind I am... torn. On one hand, this was unavoidable. Kalu took them as his children, and we're wrong to keep fighting him. On the other... I can't help but see this as the death of four people. Am I wrong to see it that way? My counterpart certainly thinks so. She's celebrating it. Even now I have that smug grin in my mind's eye. Either way... I gave them the key to this door. I let them think about this option, and it's possible that in doing so I handed them to Kalu. What if I would've kept pushing them to integrate? What if I had forced them to take on a new caretaker? What if I do that now? What if I take David from them, let them change here, then drop the three girls in the wilds? They won't even remember that I did it. At least then, there'd be a subject that'd get to keep what he wants to keep of himself.

I've been the director of this facility for nearly three decades. I might appear to be in my late twenties, but I'm closer to my Seventies. (A benefit of being a werewolf. We age MUCH slower than

others once we reach adulthood.) I've seen experiments that've caused me to seek therapy multiple times. I've looked dying, pained people in the eye and turned away their outstretched hands... I even participated many years ago in a study on lycanthropy by intentionally infecting someone in the lab and letting the wolf consume his soul. After... all of this, I just can't keep going. Consider this log my resignation as director of New Realms Pharmaceuticals, Buffalo. I am not qualified, nor capable of making these types of decisions anymore. Once we're done with these subjects, I'm... stepping down. We have a decent nest egg. Maybe the pack elder will let me retire.

After confirming my fears with... them... I spoke with Dr. Ahonen, and we put in the call for the helicopter. It's the same one we used to rescue them from the wilds, in... perhaps a twist of irony. We took them out, and now we put them back with the same method. It'll be ready tomorrow, which is perfect considering David's obvious anxiety over the issue. He's calmed now that he's been partially tranquilized, but I'm deeply concerned that I'm allowing abuse that I should be preventing. Even in his drugged up state, he expresses distaste and pleads with Amy to change her mind. She's ignoring him for now, but I'm concerned that her continuation of the D.mutatio exposure might make her even more aggressive. If he dies on my watch... I'll never forgive myself.

By the time we finished sorting everything out, it was well past noon, and I'd missed several meetings. I don't suppose it's all that relevant, if I'm truly resigning, though. I talked to Leevi over a late lunch or... early dinner about it. He doesn't want me to leave, and doesn't believe that I've taken any action incongruent with NRP's values. That may be the case, but I have taken actions against *my own* values. Letting David join this pack in the wilderness against his will is eating me alive.

I ended my day a little early today. I need a break and Dr. Ahonen needs his rest. For now, I've instructed security to monitor the wolves and only interfere should the threat of life or limb be plainly evident. They've been relegated to their room for now, but seem to be extremely bored. I offered them books, they have movies on the television, but Amy won't let them partake, saying that it's all 'person stuff.' I hate this. I'm disgusted. Goodnight.

Director Nombs personal

2/28/24 04:21hrs

The elder accepted my request to retire, provided that I spend some of my time in said retirement educating community pups on how properly navigate the pack hierarchy. I know this is reparations for what's been going on at the office, but I'll take it with open arms. In between, my husband and kids and I can finally take that world tour trip we've been planning since the pups were born. It may be of small note, but despite my age, my children are fairly recent developments. I suppose, after your previous partner is killed by a hunter because you couldn't control your sexual urges... you learn rather quickly to take life more seriously, but I digress.

The events of the last few days have left me restless. Insomnia has driven me back to the office early this morning to tie up loose ends and to prepare for the... delivery of our subjects to the wilds. The spot we've picked out for them is an old coal mining site from ages ago. There's a number of ruins there, but... it's very deep within the forest now, and it's designated as a protected wildlife preserve, so there won't be any hunters, and should be few, if any hikers in the region. If they decide to go into the wilds this far, they know the risks they're taking. We'll be taking them by helicopter about four hours from now. The flight shouldn't be all that long, I just hope they're ready.

I looked in on them and checked with security on their behavior. They're sleeping soundly, all four of them on one bed, bundled up on top of one another. It's wolf behavior, I know it very well. I can't tell you how many times I've spent the late evenings laying on the front porch with my family on a heated blanket, only to wake up in the middle of the night and realize that we never changed back and it was a workday. I don't suppose any of our subjects need to worry about workdays anymore, though. Security reported that Amy had been slightly aggressive for a time, but as the evening wore on, she started to become more... quiet. She spoke less, and spoke fewer words when she did. When they brought the pack dinner, she divided the food up first, then began to eat, which they quickly followed. He said that she actually thanked them when the food was brought. I'm not sure what to make of this, but what I'm hearing is a change in demeanor.

I woke them about an hour later. I wanted to give them time to speak with us before the helicopter arrived, and to assess their mental state. They didn't seem all that bothered. I simply turned up the lights to emulate a quick sunrise over a period of a few minutes. They opened their eyes and stretched crawling out of the bed before looking around, almost seeming lost.

Video Transcript – 'Hotel' observation room 12 – I-232, R44-46 – Director Nombs commenting.

2/28/24 5:25hrs

Susan: [Over the intercom, the observation mirror is still turned on.] Good morning, I hope you slept well?

[The subjects look around, noticing that my voice came from a speaker.]

Rebecca: It speaks.

Amy: Who? Who's speaking?

[I turn off the double sided mirror to allow them to see me and wave.]

Susan: Me. Sorry about that. I know it's a little early, but I have the helicopter coming in a few hours to take you to the uh... to your new homes, so I wanted to get started so that we could talk first.

[Amy sits on the edge of the bed. She's naked again. All of them are. She looks at me curiously with her head tilted slightly.]

Amy: Ssss... susan... right? I know your face and your voice, but your name blurs.

Susan: [Nodding.] That's right. Director Susan Nombs. The werewolf? I took you to meet my pack, remember?

Amy: [Nodding slowly.] Some.

Susan: How are you feeling?

Amy: Good. Calmer somehow. The fear is fading. Uncertainty doesn't feel so daunting anymore. I... do have a request for you, if you are willing to hear?

Susan: Of course!

Amy: I still remember him, but not the detail. He is ill. My dad. Can you please tell him that I forgive him, love him, and will do my best to remember him? Also, tell him I regret killing his son. I do not know what I forgive him for, but gesture likely matters more than sincerity.

-She wants me to give her father an insincere apology and forgiveness? That's... probably a good idea, honestly. The man's lost everything now. At least this will give him some closure on her.

Susan: I will do that. You have my word. Anything else?

David: I want you to use my SUV as a company vehicle. Take care of it, treat it well. I don't need it anymore.

Susan: How are you feeling today, David? Better?

David: [He seems confused.] Better than what?

Susan: Yesterday you were desperate to... escape.

David: Oh.

-I waited nearly a full minute for him to continue.

Susan: That's it? Just... oh?

[He nod, not expanding on the comment further.]

-I was informed later that Dr. Saynurs observed this sort of behavior in him when he was first rescued. This is clearly the beginning of the cognitive breakdown. I'm amazed at how fast that was. It's only been 24 hours since they missed a dose.

Susan: Oohhkayy.. so, how about the others? How are we feeling today?

Ericka: You've selected our den for us? Who are you to do that?

Susan: I... you can move it if you want. I just thought that it'd be the best place for you. You can avoid hikers and other packs that might intrude, it's hard for people to reach, and the wildlife is plentiful.

Amy: We will inspect it when we arrive. You've tried to help, you are kin, just not family. Thank you.

Susan: Um, you're welcome, but... seriously, how are you all feeling?

Rebecca: [To Amy] Why does it keep asking that?

-At this point, my wolf communicated to me that they were likely not answering my question because they didn't understand it. It hadn't really occurred to me, but for people, this is a general greeting, with an expected response. They seem fine, so I'm going to assume they're fine and ask this a different way.

Susan: Are you looking forward to the wilds?

Ericka: Many things will happen to us over the next few months. Some of it may prove difficult, but overall, I am, yes.

Amy: My missings dwindle. I still feel them, but they are less than. Soon they'll be gone, and we can live new. Well, new for me. What will happen to my old den?

Susan: Well, the company took over your payments when you... when you fell out of... we have power of attorney. It'll likely be repaired and sold.

Amy: May I ask for an object? I remind, and I believe it's more important than to simply fade it.

-I had to stat filtering some of this through my counterpart. Her speech seems to be the only one that's been altered in any substantive way, but it sounds like...

Susan: You want me to get an item out of your house for you? Sure. Describe it for me.

Amy: In the living room to the right of the television on the third bookshelf from the bottom there's a wood carving. It has me, my father, mother, and brother carved and burned into it, with our names below each one. I'd like to bring that with us so that we can have memorial for the dead.

Ericka: [rubbing her back while looking at her questioningly.] Why? It reminds. Shouldn't we fade reminds? No missings if no reminds.

Amy: I know, but... I want to know that Amy existed. I also want book. Like Ericka had. Keep up with fade and missings.

Ericka: Why? Amy, these things will only delay. We cannot let the missings get too far.

-I think Ericka's simply using her words here. I don't think she's this far along. Do simpler words work better for her?

Amy: [Shrugging.] I don't know. I have a diary, but it's digital. I don't guess... [Sighs.] She truly fades, doesn't she?

Ericka: See? No missings, it's bad. It'll just make letting go that much harder for you. This isn't an easy thing to do

Amy: Okay... no book, but... I do want the wood carving. I just want something of me to remain.

[Erica nuzzles her as Rebecca seems to be thinking along the same lines. Her ears splay.]

Rebecca: I left the person's world once already. I came back with nothing. Now I have nothing to take with me.

Ericka: Yea, oh! Actually, I should probably make... a recipe book. (I wonder if I can still read...) Uh... wolfperson... Susan, right? Can I have access to a holotablet? I'll try to write down my recipes.

Susan: I can send someone to get Amy's wood carving, but, Ericka, we're leaving in just a few hours. Do you really think you have time?

Ericka: [Her ears splaying.] Oh... W-well... I guess the person's world will lose some of the best tasting food its ever had, then. The loss will be yours, truly.

[Rebecca and Amy chuckle sadly, with Amy nuzzling Ericka back. There's a lingering sadness in all of their eyes.]

-I just don't feel like this is fair of Kalu. I've always considered him in high regard... the god of the hunt, something our people almost hold sacred, yet here we are. So much is lost. Perhaps it's just the knowledge they themselves possess about what's going to happen to them that's troubling them so much.

Susan: Why don't you all go ahead and get showered and dressed?' It's important that your fur be clean. You don't want to start in your new home with matted fur.

Ericka: I will help. [She puts her hand on Amy's shoulder, then walks her to the bathroom.]

-I watch them leave, and my wolf chides me for being attached. The person that they appear to be is an artificial shell, made by twisting an animal back into a person when it had no business being one. I disagree with her. A person is what they make of themselves, no matter the soul. I am, however, not one who should question the gods. I have no right to do so.

End Video Transcript

2/28/24 5:25hrs

Director Nombs personal cont.

2/28/24

The helicopter arrived and was prepped by about 08:00. The wolves had all had their showers, but it's only now that I realize while Ericka insisted on helping Amy get ready. Much of her hair has begun to fall out. She appears extremely stressed by the fact. All of them have lost some, but she's lost the most. It could be that she's changing faster, or that there's simply more... work to do? I'm no scientist. In the end it makes sense. My wolf does not have hair as I do, but during our change my hair grows and disappears. It's really quite fascinating. We even have a hybrid form where I can be an anthro wolf and still have my hair, though it's usually not me that's in charge of that form.

As perhaps an aside, most werewolves, especially those my age, do not consider their wolf to be a separate entity, but simply another side of themselves. Their souls are so well intertwined that their thoughts are seamless. Perhaps it's my nature, but I've always found myself to be slightly at odds with her. In my teens she manifested as a sort of... voice in my head that provided another perspective of the person's world, and I became one to her. There was even a time where we'd considered using different names, but when the elder found out that I was experimenting with such a thing, she punished me, very publicly. I was forced to wear a collar and walk around on a leash for a month. I got called a "good dog" and was treated exactly like a pet. I was even humiliated by being taken to the local dog park to... intermingle with ferals. Her point was that my wolf and I were the same person, because without my intelligence, this was all the wolf would be. It taught us both to value our cooperation, and appreciate that we live as we do. Perhaps that's why I mourn what I'm seeing.

As we climbed into the helicopter, I handed Amy the wood carving that I'd sent someone to retrieve. I also showed David that his SUV had been driven back to the facility. Seeing its faded red paint made his tail wag, and he nuzzled me in appreciation. They got strapped in, with the help of the crew and we began to take off. It didn't seem like they knew how to use the safety harnesses. I don't know if that's because they've just never had to, or if they couldn't figure it out. It's still very early on for all of them. Seeing physical changes in the form of hair loss frankly baffles me. Perhaps Kalu sees what we're doing and speeds it up for them to prevent... to prevent us from helping.

The ride was quiet, none of the wolves had anything to say. They didn't even look out the windows. We touched down about 11:45hrs in a clearing near the old mine, and I began to help them out of their harnesses as the blades spun down. There were no audio or video recording devices here, but I will use a transcript to repeat, to the best of my ability, the events that transpired.

Below is my personal recollection of the conversation.

Susan: Okay guys first thing I need is for you to line up for me. I'm going to chip you before I take you to the site I proposed for your den.

Amy: Chip... us?

David: Microchip. In case we're encountered in person territory, or we get attacked by hikers here.

Amy: [Seeming not to know what that means.] Oh. What... does it do?

David: It just helps them identify us. They wave a little stick above our necks, and it will tell them who we are.

Ericka: If we let them.

Amy: Right. Why would a person get so close to us?

David: We'd be incapacitated in some way. I doubt they'd come to our territory to just wave sticks at us.

Susan: We wouldn't, you're right. This area is your territory. Anyone who hikes out here understands the risks. I would exercise caution, though. Because of those risks, some hikers will be armed to protect themselves.

[They line up, and I start giving them the chips. Amy goes first. She yelps slightly, then tries to scratch at the spot as I press the chip under her skin. I quickly tell her not to touch it, but she looks offended. She didn't think it would hurt, I suppose.]

Rebecca: [looking around as she waits.] This area seems plentiful, but I smell no other pack by here recently. Why?

Susan: [Giving Ericka her chip, she reacts much more calmly to the machine.] This area was over-hunted during the mining era. We're trying to build it back up. You'll be a part of that process.

Ericka: We have a lot of marking to do.

Amy: You'll have to teach me.

Ericka: [Chuckling.] You'll learn on your own. Give it a week or two.

David: Is that really all we have, you think? It took a lot longer the first time. [He winces at the chip, but doesn't react otherwise.] Anything we need to do, we should prioritize while we still have our hands.

Amy: [Nodding.] I need to place this remind somewhere safe. [She looks down at it, her ears splaying.] I know what the speeches say, but I can't read them anymore. [She looks back to Ericka.] How long will speech?

Ericka: Superfluous words will fall away first. Like... that one. Superfluous. Oh I'll miss that one. We'll communicate more basically, until we don't need words to truly express ourselves.

Rebecca: [Whining and jumping as she gets chipped.] Ericka and I barely talked after my first month. Like she said, it wasn't necessary most of the time. Our speech came back for David, really. People don't understand silent speech.

Susan: Body language. I agree. So... you're all chipped. Do you want to undress now? Or-

Amy: Keep. Make into warm bedding. Cold will still be here for a while.

Rebecca: Does this mean... we're allowed to have pups now?

Susan: You're cleared on my side. Suppose the rest of that is up to Amy.

Amy: I won't stop you. The pack needs them.

Ericka: More mouths. I'll have to teach you to hunt right away.

Susan: Oh! That reminds me, I brought some emergency rations, just in case you can't find anything. [I turned around to the helicopter to grab them, then handed them to Amy. She hesitantly took them.] They include water, but, well there's a nice clear lake just over that ridge, and it's near the mine's entrance. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to change forms, and lead you out to the mine. When we get there, you can tell me your thoughts.

Amy: Yes. Thank you.

[I undressed and changed my form, leaving my clothing at the helicopter. They knew to wait. From there, we headed out of the ruins of the old town and down the hill into the valley. It was even more lush than I expected. Most of the snow showed many tracks. Boar, deer, squirrel, mice, possum, rabbit... I picked up the scent of foxes and racoons, as well as stoats, martens and other smaller predators. The place seemed to be a haven.]

[Once we reached the bottom, I found the lake, then followed the edge, picking up the scent of ducks, geese, and beavers. My wolf felt a little jealous of the prey around here. It was so varied and plentiful. We've never had beaver before. The elder won't let us. I'm not sure why.]

[About an hour or so into my search, I came upon it, the entrance large, but partially blocked by snow. I dug it out with my paws, being accompanied by Amy and Ericka who joined in with their hands.]

Ericka: So this is our new home? Quite the view. We can see far.

[Amy inspects it looking around slowly. After a moment, her tail wags and she turns to Ericka with a smile.]

Amy: Den. Home.

Rebecca: It goes deep. No scent of bears. Shall we explore?

David: I sure hope our eyesight improves.

Ericka: It will. I had no trouble seeing in our last wilds den.

[Rebecca enters first, but Amy quickly rushes in front of her, more seeming to want to protect her from any pitfalls than to insist on being first. Or at least, that's what I interpreted of it.]

David: [Following us all into the cave,] I wonder... if we'd have had our pups while on uh... the... stuff we were being given... Would they be born people, or animals?

Ericka: If our souls are animals, it's likely theirs would be too.

David: Do we... ngh... know that, though? Watch that beam, Amy, it's cracked. See it on the right?

Amy: [Touching it gently.] Is it a worry? We need safety in our den.

[David steps forward to inspect it. It seems his... structural engineering brain has somehow kicked into high gear. He studies it for a moment, then shakes his head.]

David: Nah, the crack is old. See this? [Pointing to a metal reinforcement.] They patched. We're safe.

[Amy wags her tail, nuzzles him, then we proceed deeper.]

[After a time, the mine opened into a large antechamber, with decently high ceilings. In the center there was a track switcher that allowed carts to go in may directions. It seemed, though, that the cave ended here. Every path deeper had been blocked.]

Amy: This looks good. Is it safe, David?

[David inspects the chamber, looking at the overhead beams and supports. Finally, he nods.]

David: Very strong room. Important. Entrance and room most strong. I think we'll be okay.

[Amy wags her tail in satisfaction again, then looks around. She finds an old rusty lantern holder jutting out from one of the supports and uses it to hang the wood carving. She steps back and tilts her head, her tail wagging as she seems proud of her work.]

Amy: My only remind. Not missings, but... respect, I guess.

David: Hey, uh... can we... [He pulls a cellphone from his pocket.] We probably shouldn't keep these. Spotted wolf, can you... take a remind of us? For yourself? If you want. We won't be here as this for long.

Susan: Can't say I've ever been called spotted wolf before. Do any of you have any other effects like that I should take with me?

[Amy fished through her pockets, shaking her head. Ericka found a key, presumably to the Amy's home. She tried to hand it to me. The others had nothing.]

Susan: I can't... take the key. Or hold the phone with... I just had to come out here like this. I'll be walking back naked now. [I went ahead and changed back to my feline form, then took the phone and key. We went outside into the light, and I asked them to bunch up for the picture. After taking it, I showed them all. Amy seemed dissatisfied with her hair, but from the loss she'd experienced in the shower, it looked the best it could.]

Susan: So... are you... satisfied? Ready to make this your new home? Live your new life?

[There was hesitation in them all, but ultimately, Amy started to nod.]

Amy: It's... what we have to do.

Ericka: Changing is stressful, but we'll be right here by your side. [She looks her over closely, then caresses her ear, some more hair falls out. She tries to shake it away so that Amy doesn't notice.] When it's done, you'll figure out just how wonderful it is.

Susan: Well... I guess... I guess that's it, huh?

[Amy rushed forward and hugged me abruptly. I admittedly yelped a little at the sudden movement. I was quickly engulfed by the others in a group hug, their tails all wagging as they nuzzled me. Being naked, it felt... awkward. Even after all these years, I still feel that my mind reflects my early 20s. I never got used to this kind of thing.]

Amy: [Finally stepping back as they all let go.] Thank you, Susan. It has been wonderful to know you. If your pack needs to come through, you are welcome as guests.

Susan: I... doubt we'll come through here, but I very much appreciate the gesture. It's... been great knowing you too, Dr. Hwen. [She tilted her head at the name, it seemed that she didn't remember it.] Amy. Great knowing you, Amy. So... uh... if that's all... I'll uhm... just be on my way, then.

Ericka: [Looking at the others.] Let's scout around. We need to learn the terrain. We'll also want to fashion some basic spears and knives. We'll need them before we're done changing. Once changed, no need, but need now to hunt.

-Just like that... they'd already moved on.

-I left the group behind, intentionally moving slowly as I returned to the helicopter. I just... kept hoping that they'd call me back, change their minds... join the person's world. For the life of me, I can't really answer why, though. Why do I want that for them? And who am I to even choose it? I don't guess it's any of my business, anymore.

For now... this is me finalizing my reports, and handing them in. To the new director of New Realms Pharmaceuticals Buffalo... welcome to the company... please do right by others... do better than I did.

Part 16

Director Sean Bennig, personal log

June 3rd 2024 - midday

I'm finally getting settled in here at NRP Buffalo and reviewing the old case notes that've come across my desk. A few names that've come up very often around here are Dr. Amy Hwen, and Dr. Bradley Saynurs. Apparently both of them were deeply tied to the C.Mut-552 predecessor, and the D.Mutatio fern lectin projects that... cost a few people their lives. I have to admit I've not given it much thought, save for overseeing 552 production and testing, but now that I've found the notes and journals all tied to this event, I've found myself glued to them like a child to a comic book.

I... truly cannot believe the events that transpired here, and... honestly, I'm compelled to try to find a way to follow up on this. We have the cure they were seeking, we can bring them back! C.Mut-552 has been everything that Dr. Ahonen had hoped it to be. Testing started in early March on William Hwen, a magic resistant lung cancer patient here in our medical wing. He's since made a full recovery! I wonder if Director Nombs ever told him about his daughter's fate? Perhaps I should follow up on that.

For now, I've spent most of my day today combing through Dr. Bradley Saynur's notes, trying to find out what ultimately happened to him. From what I understand, his work with 551 and 552 was absolutely instrumental in bringing "Rejuviprene" to market, but... right after it was tested... he disappeared.

June 3rd 2024 – Evening

Okay, so this has been an interesting day. I spoke at length with Dr. Ahonen, trying to fully grasp the events contained within this document. I spoke to the expedition team leader, the post-incident team, Dr. Beyer, and even the security guards. I'm sure they're all sick of me by now. Through it all, though, I've learned a few interesting facts.

First, D.Mutatio in its native form when applied topically directly as fronds to the fur or exposed skin can cause instant pain relief and healing. Subsequent uses over several weeks, however, can cause the mutations and the... claiming of your mind and body by Kalu, god of the hunt. What happens to someone like me I wonder? (I'm a buck.) I wouldn't become a hunter deer... I'd become... prey, I guess? That's rather terrifying.

Second, D.Mutatio when dried and powdered is extremely powerful when applied topically. It can heal nearly instantly, but only two uses will cause changes. When ingested... even the smallest amount will cause mental changes, with only a nudge to carry it over into the physical.

Third, when an individual ingests D.Mutatio in this way, they are... ultimately unable to beat it. The journals and documents here suggest major improvements for David Tanibard and Rebecca Gnead during their 551 treatments, but Dr. Hwen and especially Dr. Saynurs were ultimately too far gone. According to Dr. Beyer and Dr. Ahonen, Bradley Saynurs was a deeply troubled, stressed man after his exposure, and the continued dreams of the hunt eventually drove him to join the wolves in the preserve. Somewhere out there is a fox that's much larger than the others. I wonder if he can mate and produce kits like his feral counterparts? It's interesting to think about... the idea that we have two doctors and one surprisingly intelligent individual living as animals in the woods, thanks to the bastardization of a few medicinal plants.

Regardless of the cause, I want to see how these five are doing in the wake of 552. I want to see if... well... I want to know more, and I think I know just the man to do it. I'm going to call him this evening.

Bill's log:

6/4/24

So, this new guy, Bennig, out at NRP reached out to me about midday. I got a lotta respect for NRP in saving my life, ya know, so I wanted to hear what he had to say. I got... a lot more than I bargained for.

It turns out, that werewolf lady was a bit of a liar. She told me Amy had left town, didn't wanna see me anymore, but wanted me to know that she loved me and forgave me. Maybe now that I know the truth... that she... gave up in her fight against this stuff that was messing with her mind... I dunno.

Maybe it's a bit of justice for me in a way. I kept what happened to her a secret. I buried it, denied her the justice she deserved when Zeke... had his way with her. Now I find out she... was not only the one that took my son from me, but also one of the major reasons I'm still alive to see the world healthy... and alone.

I bet that's how she felt, ya know? Her family gaslighting her, lying to everyone around her about what happened... her brother keeping his lips sealed about it despite witnessing it firsthand... she must've felt so alone. She didn't talk to me for 9 years, and when she finally did, she was afflicted with this horrible shit that kept erasing her memory... that kept repeatedly taking my little girl away from me.

The little girl that was a young woman that I abandoned when she needed me most... all because I needed money.

And of sorts... in her... dying breath so to speak... her exposure to this stuff gives them the research tools they need to figure out the cure that saves my life! I'm a terrible father. How she could ever forgive me I just... don't know.

Now Bennig reaches out and says he can help me find her. Gives me a set of coordinates... tells me to take a camera and a journal and... go find her. If she's given into the wilds... I'm not sure I wanna see her like that. I'd rather remember her as that young woman in the lab coat, not some... four legged fuzzball. I told him as much, and he even went so far as to offer me money. Yea... the same thing that got me into this mess to begin with.

Ya know, maybe if I woulda stood up for her and came out against Zeke... maybe she'd... still be with me. Kenji'd be alive, Amy wouldn't've rejected me... I deserve this.

I told him he could shove his money up his ass, but, if he wanted to provide me with a tent and some hiking gear, the camera and all that... I'd... I'd risk the trek.

Maybe I got some kinda death wish. Maybe her taking Kenji from me was punishment for letting Zeke take... well... I mean she was 18. I highly doubt she was a virgin. She never liked guys though. She woulda never let a man do to her what he did.

So yea, maybe I go up there and I die in the wilderness? Maybe I find her and she kills me and her little pack or whatever eats me... at least then I'd be helping her in some way. I'd be doing something right.

I don't wanna walk this earth alone anymore. I resigned myself to death when the docs gave me my diagnosis. When they told me Amy and Kenji were gone... I gave up and begged Soth to take me. Yet here I am. Cancer free and on my feet.

I'm gonna go find her.

6/8/24

Four days and a backpack stuffed with equipment. I had to drive to Buffalo to get all the gear they wanted me to carry, then backtrack through Oswego around lake Ontario to this place they left her. Kawartha? Something like that. As I write this, I'm camping my first night in the place. It's amazing. No lights from civilization, the sky is so clear! I mean, Oswego isn't exactly New York City, but I had no idea you could see so much! Is this the sky she gazes into every night? Does she even remember that it's the sky? Stars, planets, all that stuff? How much do you lose when you change like this? I guess maybe I'll find out.

My job out here isn't to coax her back to the world or run experiments or anything like that. It's really just to see her, talk to her if I can and... if she'll let me, take some photos of her and her pack. Then I can either backtrack, or they can send a helicopter to pick me up. Guess it depends how rough this trip is on my body.

I might've been cured of a terminal illness, but I'm no pup. I'm just over 60, and despite being in relatively good shape... this place is really taking a toll on me. Steep hills up and down, rapid rivers, ponds I have to walk around... the weather's good this time of year, though. Thank the gods he didn't send me out in the dead of winter.

I'm gonna get some rest. Long hike tomorrow, and maybe the next day. If I don't have anything, I won't write anything. This little head-light thing he gave me probably doesn't last forever. Best not waste it with junk.

6/10/24

Almost there. It's slow going. I'm walking in circles a little bit because of the difficult underbrush. Maybe I'll run into the fern myself and wind up meeting her on four legs... wouldn't that be something? Eh, she'd probably hate me for it.

I know I'm getting close. I found the foundation of an old cabin out here. The whole area used to be dotted with mining and logging towns years ago. Kinda interesting to sit here beside this old hearth. Makes ya wonder how many meals were cooked in it. What kinda conversations did they have? Ya know, a house isn't just a home, it's a place of memories. Whoever lived here though... all those memories are lost.

It's got me thinkin... even though I never met them, I can tell they were here. The footprint of this cabin proves that to me. Even if I find Amy and there's nothing left... looking into her eyes... maybe it'll be like this old foundation? A footprint of what used to be. A lost memory. I dunno. Never ask an old pipefitter from Oswego to go all philosophical. I aint got it in me. It's just hard not to look at this and see a footprint of the past... and think that if and when I do finally meet her again... that it'll be the same sorta thing.

Makes me sad. No one's left to remember this old place. After I die, will there be anyone left to remember her? She deserves better than this.

6/12/24

I think I found them, maybe? Or at least I reached their territory. I was coming up an old funicular track, using the cable supports as an aid, when I spotted a pair of wolf pups playing at the top of the hill. I stopped moving when I saw them, but I guess I'd already gotten too close. They looked at me curiously, tilting their heads. One of them gave me a short bark. I tried not to smile or give it anything that might scare it away, but... I didn't have to worry about that. Before I could move a muscle the biggest wolf I've ever seen rushed up and scooped one of them up by the nape of its neck, looked me right in the eye, then rushed off, with the other pup rushing after. It was female, and had vibrant green eyes. That wasn't just some wild animal. I finished climbing the hill and took a moment to look around. There's a bit of a clearing here. Turns out, this is the evac point if I want to call in the helicopter to pick me up. I've got to be close.

I decided to set up here for the night and look around the area in the morning. I've heard some howling, but it's off in the distance a bit. I'm not sure if that's because they're out hunting and this is their home, or if I'm still that far away. Guess we'll see.

6/13/24

I found her. Oh gods I can't just...

6/14/24

Couldn't write in this yesterday. Emotions were running high and I woulda drown the page in tears if I had kept trying. Just like I said, I found her. Not far from the clearing there was an outcropping of stone, down in the valley by the lake, and the remnants of an old mine. As soon as I started to get close to the place, a person-sized wolf rushed out of the entrance barking and growling furiously at me. She had pale blue eyes that pierced into me, almost freezing me in place. I'm not sure if it's what calmed her down, but after standing there for a second, one of those wolf pups waddled out of the opening and brushed against her leg. It fell over playfully, kicking its legs and yipping at her. She lowered her head to nuzzle its belly, refusing to take her eyes off of me. She wagged her tail at it gently, then rolled it back onto its feet then... much to my surprise... spoke to it. 'Not now.' It was the voice of that young woman... Ericka, the one that Amy had told me was her partner. As soon as I heard it, I called her by name.

She looked up at me with scornful confusion, tilting her head slightly, then stepping toward me. Her sheer size was intimidating. I found myself nearly stumbling backward. She stopped a few steps from me, she stared me in the eye. 'who?' she demanded, seemingly wanting me to identify myself. I told her that I was Bill... Amy's dad... and that I'd come to see her.

Her response was strange. She growled and started pacing, using the word rescue repeatedly. I interjected, telling her that I wasn't part of some kind of rescue, I wasn't there to interfere. I just wanted to see my daughter. In response, she approached me again, her common becoming surprisingly clear. 'After abandon from rape?? Now come? Why??' Her memory was certainly good.

From the darkness of the mine, another wolf emerged, one that I instantly recognized. Brown eyes are common, but, those weren't just any brown eyes, they were the eyes of my Amy. She walked straight up to Ericka and forcibly nuzzled her, making the agitated wolf calm down. Once she did, she looked back at me. I stood silently, waiting for her to speak to me, but she didn't. Instead, Ericka spoke once more. 'Tell,' she commanded. I obliged, fighting back tears the best I could to explain to Amy who I was and why I was there. She started to tilt her head, the more I spoke, till it was almost cocked completely sideways. It changed my tears to a chuckle. I couldn't help it. After staring at me for a moment, she turned and started to walk toward the mine entrance, almost reaching it before looking over her shoulder at me. 'Come.' It was her voice!

I followed her into the mine, ducking to clear the entrance beams as I made my way inside. Amy was in front of me, and Ericka was to my back. It was like I was being transported as a prisoner. I didn't feel threatened by Amy, though. Finally, we made it to a sort of atrium. It was just barely lit by an air pipe in the ceiling, which had long given to letting a small pool of water form, with a stream that ran down deeper into the collapsed portion of the mine. After my eyes adjusted, I could see wolf pups standing in the corner near their mother, the one with the green eyes. Her ears were splayed and her head low as she watched me, but calmed when Amy approached and nuzzled her. 'Dad,' she said. She turned back to me, her tail now wagging gently. 'Rebecca. Pups. Ericka, mate. David hunts.'

I didn't know what to do, so I sat down on the dirt floor. As I did, the wolf pups rushed to me and started to sniff and lick me. I was inundated with the surprisingly friendly little critters. I counted 4, but there was at least one still lagging behind near the mine entrance. I started to laugh and play with the pups but quieted myself as Rebecca walked near. Her gaze was more one of concern than anything else. She looked me directly in the eye, glancing up only for a moment as Ericka trotted back with the 5th pup, then spoke to me. 'Why here? You leave!'

'Guest.' Amy said, prompting Rebecca to whine. 'Leaves set.'

'Set long. Sun east.' Ericka protested. 'Leave high.'

I didn't quite get what they were saying at the time, but, I realize in retrospect that they were arguing about when I should leave.

'No. Leave set,' Amy insisted. 'Dad.'

She walked to me and whined, nuzzling me before sitting down to face me. Like this, she was actually a little bit taller than me. 'Love, sorry, forgive. Cat tell?' she asked. I told her that she had, though, she'd not told me what'd happened. She'd lied instead, saying that she'd simply moved away and didn't want to see me. She seemed annoyed at the sentiment, then nodded to a wood carving hanging from an old lantern post. I remember when we got that thing. It was a roadside tourist trap in Tennessee. I couldn't help but tear up. 'Memorial. You, mom, Kenji, Amy. Remind. No lose.'

That's... when things went bad. I stood up and made my way to the memorial. I looked up at it, then back at Amy, who had stayed right by my side, and I asked her why she'd kept it, and why she called it a memorial. 'Amy gone. No back,' she told me. I said that it wasn't true. I started to talk about Rejuviprene and how it'd restored my health, how 552 could bring them back and how we could be a family again! The idea made me happy!

Ericka interjected, baring her fangs and growling at me as she forced me to back away from the memorial. 'No. Back. Pups here. We can't just abandon them because you want to drag us back!' Her sudden lucidity caught me off guard, and seemed to catch her as well, causing her to tilt her head and assess. Nevertheless, it didn't change her opinion. 'We came out here to leave it behind. We keep what we remind. The rest no need. You come, you stay till mid, then you go. No set. That clear enough for you? Or need think harder to speech?'

One of the pups walked up beside us and put its pawns on top of mine.

Amy shook her head and gently nosed it away. 'No play. Dad guest, leaving at mid.' The pup wandered away from her defeated, and she looked up at me. She paused for a long time, seeming to struggle a little before she spoke. 'How'd you find us?' she asked. 'Susan... take here for away. No hiker prey safe. You live because Rebecca busy before. Pups above prey. You shouldn't be here, dad.' She walked to the entrance of the mine, then stopped. 'Come.'

I followed her outside, squinting at the sun as she walked me away from the entrance and down a small hill. There, hung on a tree were some intricate shapes made of twisted tiny tree limbs and vines from the area. They were effigies of people, coupled with those shaped like wolves, 8 in all, hanging with the wolves higher than the people. 'Rebecca made when still hands. Memorial of us. Person beneath wolf. Tree gods, branch Kalu.' She stopped herself for a moment. 'This most I've spoken since winter. You drag it out of me.'

I squatted down beside her and petted her without asking. It was... probably a bad idea, but she tolerated it, her tail wagging very slightly. I asked her... 'Honey, is this really what you want? With 552, you can come back! You can learn to reintegrate. Your pups can come too! They can learn to speak!' She nuzzled into my hand as she shook her head.

'Your world will never be ours again. Kalu takes us and keeps us. I miss much, but... there is no back,' she replied. I pressured her a little, urging her to at least consider it, but she turned her nose up and looked away from me. At first, I thought she might be angry, then a tear rolled from the corner of her eye. 'Please don't tempt me, dad,' she said, looking back at me with sadness. 'Let... Amy... Die.'

That's when I broke down. I started to sob, grabbing onto her around her neck and just letting the tears roll off my cheeks and onto her back. I don't know how she responded, but in that moment I didn't care. I'd lost everyone in my life but her. She could come back! But... she didn't want to. Through my sobs, I didn't hear her approach, but Ericka made her way out to the effigies to... stand guard. She was there in silence for I don't know how long, but as I began to run out of tears, I looked up and saw her standing there. 'She forgave you,' she said. 'Forgive her back. Let her live her life.'

'I can't!' I cried. 'She's right here! She can come back! All of you can!' I looked back up at that branch that represented Kalu with so much hate. How dare he take my daughter from me! As soon as the thought crossed my mind I heard growling. I thought for sure I'd invoked his wrath. I looked up to see a wolf, a male this time, standing with a dead racoon in his maw. As his eyes met mine and he saw the tears he stopped growling and his ears perked up.

'David, take food to pups. This is my dad. He's leaving at mid.' Amy said. 'We are fine.'

The wolf started to walk away, but he stopped. Laying the racoon on the ground, he turned to look at me. 'Here to bring back?' he asked.

'No!' Ericka barked. 'No! No back!'

So then... it wasn't all harmony. Amy mourned her loss, David longed to return... Ericka and Rebecca did not. I didn't know what to make of that. After David left, I looked Amy in the eye and gave her the most serious expression that I could. 'Are... you... happy?' I asked slowly. Her answer didn't come right away.

'Dad, look around you. There's beautiful nature as far as the eye can see. The hunt is plentiful, the weather calm and relaxing, there's a lake nearby where we can drink, play and bathe. Kalu takes as a child of his own, he cares as you care. Are there reminds that pain? Yes. Here is family and kin; pups, mates, Ericka... my love. Is perfect? No. Am I happy? Yes, dad... yes I am.'

She nuzzled me and wagged her tail, adding 'I will never forget. Please go to your den, be happy for me. Do not try to change us. Ericka looked at the sky, then back at me. 'Is mid. You go.' She ordered.

I didn't really fear her as much as I probably should. Amy was there, and even though Ericka was more vocal, I could somehow tell my daughter was in charge. I dried my tears, gave Amy one last hug, then started to head back. They followed me, all the way to the LZ where my camp had been set up, then watched as I broke it down and called in the helicopter. As I was waiting, Ericka approached and stood close enough to me to speak candidly. 'Never return. Our pups will never know your world. You return, you try to take them, you will die as prey. You are *not* kin, you are *not* family. You and people are not welcome here. Warn your kin. Stay away from us,'

So... that's what I did. I'm back at NRP Buffalo now, waiting on them to give me a check over before they send me on home to Oswego. They told me the fact that they could still talk this far in was interesting data, but that they'd very likely lose that speech in the coming years.

Funny thing... ya know the whole time I was out there... after about the first day... I started having this really weird... dream. I'm sure it's nothing to worry about, it's just that it never stopped. I wonder if I'll dream it tonight. I'm kind of looking forward to the hunt.