

Chapter 7 : Acceptance and Loss

The short stop at Greeneries was quick, Judy had gotten a walnut, with pecan, and cherry salad the dressing of which, held a tangy, sweet scent. Nick's nose twitching as it flooded his senses until the take away was closed. He picked up a cricket burger with lettuce, tomato, and onions with carrot fries. He knew Judy would end up stealing half of them, but the scent of the burger almost had him drooling on the spot.

Snuggling the coat, he was wearing tighter about his form, Nick brought his paws to his muzzle and blew across them. Glancing to the grey furred rabbit walking beside him, equally bundled up in her puffed up looking green jacket, the orange carrot colored scarf bundled about her neck, she seemed slightly lost in her own world, seemingly, oblivious to Nick's eyes watching her.

The walk back to Judy's apartment went relatively quick given the circumstances, it hadn't been far to the train station after Greeneries, and the warmth of the train was welcome, almost to the point that Nick did not want to step back to the cold, snow covered ground when they stepped off. Luckily enough, that final walk was quick, reaching Judy's apartment rather quickly, despite the silence between them.

The entire way Nick had remained oblivious to the cold, snowy, wet city around him, let alone, the other mammals that were mostly bundled up, save for a few from Tundratown, that felt more comfortable in the colder weather. His attention was pulled entirely to the upcoming conversation. The odd sensation of feeling like things were great, while another side of his mind felt far darker, with the current silence.

A quick shake of his head brought his attention back to Judy once more, a soft hustler smile on his face as the two passed the apartments lobby and off to the stairs. Climbing them one by one, Nick's mind wandering to the imaginary knife, pressed firmly to his heart and ready to finish him, if things went south with his bunny.

As they reached Judy's apartment, her keys jingling with the sound of metal on metal, a soft click when the lock was undone and the door opened. Nick following her inside, though his steps were more hesitant as his mind rolled the thought of 'His Bunny' around. When had he considered her as *his* exactly, and why had he done such.

"Nick, are you ok?" Judy's voice breaking through his concentration, and pulling him back to reality.

"Yeah, I'm alright Fluff." The noncommittal answer passed his lips, he hadn't really registered the concern in Judy's voice. Turning to nudge her door shut, he moved to the bar-top and set the food down. Quickly turning to open the fridge, he'd grab some juice for her as well as himself a drink, the bottle of apple juice set on the bar-top with the food as he quickly fetched a pair of glasses.

Taking his seat at the bar-top while she changed, Nick set out the meals and filled their glasses. The scent of the dressing on Judy's salad stole his attention a moment, as he stole just a bit of it, the sweet part of the dressing had been blueberry, the tangy part he couldn't quite place though.

"Hey! That's mine, you sneak!" Judy had finished changing, stepping out to catch Nick with a bite of her salad. Moving over to the seat beside Nick, she'd climb up and took her fork back from him.

Nick paused midway through the bite, glancing back when he heard her, before finishing it. He grinned and acted like he was gonna steal another bite, vowing not to do so in his head, as she sat and took her fork back. "It's not bad, got some blueberry in it, right?"

Judy's deep amethyst eyes watched Nick, a small smile creeping onto her muzzle before she took a bite of her own salad. Her eyes following Nick as he picked up his burger and began to eat, she waited to start the conversation till they'd both eaten at least half of their meal. She could tell that the silence was getting to Nick, the way his tail seemed to flick, just a little, from time to time enough of a giveaway.

Setting her fork down, Judy took a slow breath before speaking. "Nick, I'm going to talk first." Her eyes looking up to catch his own, making it clear that she didn't want to be interrupted, taking note of his understanding nod.

"I would like to know, more about why you left like you did. You just cut off everyone, Finnick, Your mother, ME!" Her paws clenching against her legs, she took another slow breath before letting it out again.

"The night we were attacked, was something that had been planned, at least from what was found out during the investigation and interrogation" Judy's eyes looking to Nick's as she took note of his slower pace while eating, every so often taking a fry to munch.

"Woolter isn't the mastermind, we know that, but he was working for someone still. It wasn't Dawn Bellwether though, we know that for certain, since she's dead and from the interrogation." Judy's eyes glanced down for a moment, taking her fork as she took another bite of her salad.

"I don't blame you, for that night, in the least. You know that though, and I'm still not afraid of you after what happened." She noticed Nick had stopped eating, his gaze seeming distant, as his ears were back and his tail limp.

Grey ears twitching to droop along her back, Judy worried a bit more seeing the way Nick looked now. "N..Nick look, I do want to know what you were up to the last couple of months. B..but Look I know you're probably confused by what I said in that warehouse." Fidgeting somewhat as she grew more nervous herself.

"Look N..N-Nick, I know I told you that I would spend my life with you. I meant that the other night, I have no reason to ever doubt how I feel about you" Judy took a deeper sigh, collecting herself slightly. "I was oblivious to what having you in my life meant, what having you as my partner, my friend meant. But, I do know that I care about you as more than just a friend, or partner, and that I want you to be a bigger part of my life, as much as I hope to be a far bigger part of yours as well."

Shifting on her seat, Judy stood up and grabbed Nick's muzzle in her paws, pulling his face up as she looked to those beautiful green eyes. "I knew when I was so worried about you, when I couldn't find anything out and no one would let me see you. I had plenty of time to think, to sort my own thoughts on YOU. The Sly, Dumb, Caring, Intelligent, Goofball Fox that has taught me to never underestimate the world and especially other mammals."

The tears forming in her eyes couldn't be stopped easily, as her paws shook a little. Rubbing her digits along the side of Nick's muzzle, feeling his soft shorter fur, she took in the features on his face. "I know things will never be what most may call perfect, but I love the imperfection, that when we come together, makes it perfect for us. I, Judith Lavern Hopps, know that I love you, Nicholas Piberius Wilde."

Nick, to his credit, did exactly as asked when Judy returned. Telling him directly to keep quiet so she could talk first, he gave a soft, knowing nod to the Bunny next to himself. Bringing his burger to his lips, he munched slowly listening to every word she spoke.

He had time to think as well, though a bit less considering how long he'd been under the effects of some new Nighthowler serum. Nick sat in silence though, his tail going still and his ears falling back, he had indeed cut everyone off as much as he could. He'd left everything in Zootopia behind, and it was all because of how he felt.

Nick felt as though he sunk lower, her forgiveness for what had happened, even if while under the serum. For telling him that she still wasn't afraid of him, trying to wrap his mind around those words, how she felt still even.

Taking another few bites from his burger, Nick tried to hide how he felt from her, even if he didn't realize the position of his tail and ears currently. Taking a few fries to munch slowly, savoring Judy's words though more than the food they had bought.

Those words of hers as she mentioned loving how they were together, it wasn't lost on him how things had changed since he met Judy. This headstrong, over-optimistic Bunny that had changed his world even when he was against her.

Having finished his burger, Nick poked at what was left of his fries. Judy having gone quiet as he turned to look at her, catching only the slightest bit of deep purple from her eyes. Bringing his right paw up, he scratched lightly at his neck, fighting the urge to wipe at his damp eyes.

"Judy, I... I'm sorry for how I left, not keeping in touch and worrying you like I did. I'm sorry for thinking the worst, thinking of how you might look at me when you saw me next. I guess I was the one this time, that put on a label, even if it was on myself and how I may be viewed." Munching the fry, he had been poking at, he tried to relax a little, his eyes still on her looking for a reaction.

"I guess, I kind of understand how you may have felt. Before you came back during the case, thinking I ruined something so great. But..." He paused looking away finally, collecting the rest of his thoughts. Attempting to keep his voice calm, especially after how shaky Judy's had been.

"I knew I cared for you as more than just a partner, or even more than just a friend... When you came back and found me at the bridge, I knew as you apologized, with tears in your eyes, that I had fallen for you. I just couldn't bring myself to admit it. I couldn't tell you how I felt before, because I was terrified that it would ruin what we had." Nick hung his head, much the same as she had moments before. But she was still quiet, he hadn't even noticed her watching him with more than just worry or concern.

"The Late nights on stakeout, the days' worth of patrols, taking down a criminal mastermind. All of that I would do it over, and over, if a certain, Gorgeous, Grey Furred beauty was by my side. She pulled me out of the dark path my life was headed down, and drew me into a far better place. I Love You Judy, but I didn't think I was worth your love" he finally let the tears flow, washing down his cheeks.

Rubbing his paws over his tear-filled eyes, his breathing coming a bit more ragged until he felt a paw on his shoulder. Turning his head just a bit, he looked to Judy, to see her own tear filled eyes looking back with love of her own.

"I'm sorry I ran away Carrots, I'm sorry that I didn't wait longer, get the answer I needed from you directly. You were right, I am a Dumb Fox" His tears slowly drying, he would reach a paw out to run

along Judy's cheek. Brushing a thumb pad over her left eye to help dry her tears, not enjoying the sight of his bunny crying.

He was entirely caught off guard though, when her warm, sweet, soft lips met his own. Judy's muzzle pressing somehow both firmly, and gently against him in a soft deep kiss. Nick froze stunned at the feel of her, not just her warmth. But how she felt for him, so clearly broadcast in the soft shake her body had. The nervous twitch in her form, the subtle hesitation as he returned the warmth, even his own movements lost to his senses as he pulled his bunny to his lap.

Nick's ears drew a slightly darker tint, hearing the soft sound of her voice as he realized their lips had parted. "I Love you too Slick" The new warmth he felt through his body, he couldn't deny how he felt for her, any more than she could him it seemed.

"Y..ou wanted to know, what I've been up to the past few months. Well when I had Fin sell my stuff from the apartment, I took a chunk of my savings and bought a little carrot farm out in Podunk." Taking in her gorgeous deep amethyst eyes, he could see the smile creeping onto her features.

: February 18th - Two weeks Later :

Wednesday 9:00 am

Stopping by a local florist, Wolfard stood looking over the many, many different variations of flowers to choose from. His left forepaw on his muzzle, he let out a low hrmm. Trying his hardest to pick a bouquet of flowers, he wasn't sure what they liked or even, what might be appropriate given the circumstances.

"Now what about tulips? Do those work as a get well soon?" Turning his eyes to the gazelle standing at the counter behind him, he had hoped that working in a floral shop, she might have understood some meaning to different flowers. Instead, he had concluded, that she was just a simple worker, passing her days away.

"Well That really depends on why they would need get well flowers to begin with, are they sick? Were they hurt?" The voice of the gazelle was a bit raspy, having just gotten over a cold.

"Well they were injured, doing their job. But I don't know for sure if they even like flowers, I figured they are a better bet than candy though" His right ear giving a few twitches in minor irritation, he didn't need to lean in to smell the different choices. Wolfard had one of the best noses on the force, and he could easily discern each flower without burying it against his schnozz.

Blue eyes paused in their flowery search, catching on some pink and purple looking tiger lilies of all things. They were out of season at the moment, but Wolfard had to admire their tiger like appearance somewhat. Gathering up a small bouquet, he turned to the cashier so he could pay and be free of the place. "These should do I think"

For some reason, it seemed to take forever ringing them up, but once paid for he gave a smile and a nod to the Gazelle, his purchase wrapped neatly and in paw he moved. Heading from the store Wolfard walked

to the cruiser parked nearby, the tiger in the driver's seat slipping his phone away when his partner climbed into the passenger seat. "I don't think, I'll be purchasing flowers again anytime soon, hopefully" Wolfard set the flowers in his lap, buckling up before looking to Fangmeyer.

"Alright, how about we get to the hospital. I'm sure Olivia could use a pair of friendly faces today, and hopefully she likes flowers." Fidgeting with them a bit, oblivious to the grin from Fangmeyer himself.

"You know, if we weren't together. I'd almost think you like Agent Winters, more than just a friend" Wolfard reached over and slugged his partner in the shoulder for that little comment, laughing lightly when the larger tiger rubbed his shoulder from the hit.

"Maybe I will trade you in, for a smaller, sleeker model with comments like that, hmmm?" Wolfard felt the pull of the cruiser, Fangmeyer purposefully tapping the gas harder than was needed. Grabbing onto the door a moment, he collected himself as the car headed down the road. The slight lurch in his stomach all too familiar, car rides tended to throw him off, for some reason that he could never place.

The hospital was boring, terribly boring, mind numbingly terribly...BORING. Olivia hated the hospital, checkups were one thing, being stuck in one for weeks on end from surgery and to heal was an entirely different scenario. Sitting up in the medical bed, the TV mounted in the corner of the room playing some strange game show, the cool air somehow leaving her chilly and warm at the same time.

"Ughh Why won't they let me leave yet!" her groan wasn't going unnoticed by the nurses in the hall, she had taken up a habit of vocalizing her dissatisfaction with the current environment.

Shifting a bit on the bed, Olivia turned her attention to the large window. Her view let her see a portion of Zootopia, as well the large palm tree hotel in the far distance. Her large ears giving a soft twitch from their perked high position, one swiveling to the sound of feet entering her room.

"Ready to get the bandage off your face, bet it's been terribly itchy since that's healed" The voice of a nurse came, he was a larger grizzly bear named George, but had been one of her favorite nurses so far. Olivia's green eyes looking him over some, she gave a nod with a soft smile.

"How about the other bandages?" Motioning at her side, she didn't expect a quick response. Closing her eyes when he came over with a little spray bottle, the sanitized water inside she knew was to help release the tape her bandage was held on with.

She felt the soft spritz from the bottle, a skilled pair of paws working, his skilled claws peeling at one edge of the bandage. The side of Olivia's face more wet than damp, but she felt the glues loosening as he rubbed it just at the edges of the bandages. Bit by bit pulling them away, she'd wince a few times where the glue held firmly still.

"Your bandages on your side, we'll get to in a bit. It's not everyday someone takes a blast from a shotgun, I believe it was called?" Her ears twitching to lay back against her head, Olivia gave a soft nod in response. Being quiet with her answers, she couldn't help but notice when the larger mammal had paused to look her in the eyes.

“What... what’s wrong?” Fidgeting a moment, she wanted to reach up and check the wound on her face. George let her panic a moment, brushing the spots where the shotgun blast had torn her fur away. He gave a toothy smile, nodding gently to her panicking eyes.

“Ahah It’s alright their Ms.Winters, your fur is slowly growing back in. Although it’s coming in a bit whiter than the darker grey and black, safe to assume that’s due to your genetics. Now let me see those teeth” She gave a playful growl, baring her sharper far more predatory teeth to the bear. Olivia’s own smile as she reached up to brush over her cheek, her wound mostly healed was calming though.

“You know I don’t enjoy showing them off, hybrids may be more common these days. But most mammals get unnerved, thinking I’m a rabbit only to find a predator’s smile” Glancing down a little, she let out a slow sigh as her smile faded.

“Well they don’t know what they’re missing, you have a beautiful smile. Should really show it off more, but! Let’s get the bandages on your side changed” Another smile crept to her features, Olivia didn’t get told often that she had a beautiful smile. And to George’s credit, he was genuine with his words, but even he was a bit sadistic at times, usually with bandages as she recalled.

Yelping out in pain, Olivia twitched as bandages were peeled away without the assistance of water. She was sure she lost more fur from the tape, and she wasn’t mistaken, seeing him toss it in the trash. “I’d almost thi-OW, that you were try-OW!, to pee-OUCH!!!!-I, my fur away..”

“I have to get you back, if the other Nurses didn’t hear some form of complaint while I’m in here. Well... they would think I’m playing favorites” This got George a stern glare, even as she looked down to the larger scab that was on her side. The scar she would have from this was at least somewhat worth the story she’d get to tell, but if her face was anything to tell, her fur wouldn’t grow back the same still.

A new scent on the air drew her attention away from George or her wound, the twitching her nose did, most might have called cute. Soon enough though the scent of flowers became clear, Wolfard and Fangmeyer appearing in the doorway to her room. “Hey! How are you two doing?” Olivia’s smile enough to tell them she was far better, at least more than a week previous.

Friday

To his credit Finnick had been keeping himself clean, he’d not spoken to Nick for nearly a month at least. Didn’t even know he was back in Zootopia yet, but that didn’t seem to deter the fact that he found himself tied to a chair. This chair being bolted to the concrete floor under it, his feet dangling some as he tried to see into the darkness around himself. A single light kept him and a circle around himself lit, but anything beyond that light was lost to himself.

Struggling some as he grunted, trying to free himself in any ways. His muzzle having been stuffed with a rag and tied shut, the only thoughts that kept coming to mind though, were what had Nick done, or what had he done to piss someone off recently.

He froze though, the sound of growling coming from the darkness. The sound itself of a growl wasn’t off putting, but the tone and strangely enough feral sound was worrisome. It wasn’t just one growl, but

multiple, from different spots around the room. It sent a chill up the small Fennec's spine, something that he didn't like in the least.

"Oh do please calm down Mr.Finnick, you have got quite the future ahead of yourself." Finnick tried to turn, to look towards the sound of the feminine voice. The voice that probably sent a chill up his spine more than the growls, the voice that was equally enticing as it was venomous.

"Now, I am certain you're wondering why you are here. Or even where is here? But I assure you that doesn't matter, you won't be here very long after all" The sound of her snapping her claws caught the air, the lights suddenly turning on. It took a minute for his eyes to adjust, but when they did Finnick went stiff at what his eyes could see.

The large warehouse he was in, was at least somewhat of a giveaway that he was not in Zootopia at current. The place seemed more military, private sector almost but the glass containment cages. Lined up in rows before himself, and he gathered behind as well were not cheap. Even with his years of work hustling, sometimes working with the mob, this was another level entirely.

"You see Mr.Finnick I've brought you here, because you and I have a mutual interest so to speak. In the name of a Nicholas P. Wilde, though yours is friendship, mine... is anything but" His hackles stood on end a bit, the terror crawling in every bone in his body. The sudden feel of warm near him, a breath on his ears caused him to growl and struggle more suddenly.

"Ah, do calm down please. I'd hate for you to injure yourself, especially before we get to why you're here" The feel of a paw, slipping along the back of his neck, then up to grab his ears. He felt their warmth, even as a set of claws trailed to the exposed flesh inside each ear. Drawing a pleasure filled shiver through his body, he tried to pull away with eyes closed at the unwelcome touch.

Opening his eyes after the feeling of those paws left his ears, he nearly jumped back in the chair at what was before his eyes. The deep nearly crimson red fur, offset by a creamy white under her muzzle, and the nearly blood red eyes that peered at him. Her muzzle just inches from his own, Finnick's ears fell back as a new fear crossed his thoughts.

His light brown eyes taking on actual fear, the vixen before him he had only heard rumors of. All they had been were rumors at least until that moment, when Finnick felt the truth of a hundred stories sink in. He didn't know her name, just her nickname that managed to get out every so often. Vivian Blood, and it wasn't just due to her fur coloring that she had that name.

"The name isn't Vivian Blood, it's actually Victoria I'll have you know" he received a telling scowl with those words, she must have known what he was thinking. Or so he hoped, the truth being she'd seen the searching look he'd given her many times.

"Anyways let's get to the point, your friend and former partner has... injured and taken one of my employees, well the ZPD have him. But I need to send a message to him, since he is back in Zootopia. Well... what better way to do that, than using his dearest friend" Finnick tried shaking his head, tried tugging again at his bindings with little luck. He could handle himself in most situations, but this one, and this vixen were too far beyond what he could get into or out of.

"Parker my associate, will see to the details of your soon to be... condition, do be well Mr.Finnick" His light brown eyes followed her turn, the very business-like suit she wore seemed almost tactical. And he could tell she was carrying weapons of some sort, though her tail swayed with the movement of her hips.

His eyes took notice of the large panther that stepped near, he pressed a foot on a lever under the chair. Picking it up off the floor with the fennec still attached, he made his way between the glass cages.

So many mammals, of different species were inside. Most cubs and kits, and every single one of them were pacing. The growls from before had come from these, and the feral creatures in each one. Tears forming in even his eyes, how could they have little ones feral, savage or whatever. Finnick had nothing but care for Kits and Cubs, never hustling them and always looking out for the ones he saw on the streets.

The sudden look that caught him though, as it clicked from the news stories recently. Since just before the explosions quite a few mammals had gone missing, many of them were young and barely in 3rd grade. But these had to be them, and in such a state of being. The Growl that left his muzzle though, as he tried to struggle more was cut off quickly.

Glancing down as he felt a sudden sharp pain, a large dark paw holding a syringe into his side. He looked back up to the panther, questioning what the hell just happened as his vision began to blur. Finnick tried to fight the darkness consuming his mind, his struggling coming to a stop as the chair was set down. Trying to fight the sudden sleep overtaking his body, he felt the chair settle and latch in place once more.

Parker finished latching the chair in the helicopter, having entered the hangar when he injected the new serum into the small fox. He shut the door on the side of the vehicle, moving to climb into the pilots' seat and firing up the engine. The roof above them sliding open as the turbines kicked on, whirring to life before he gave a tug on the flight wheel. Within minutes, the copter was in the air leaving a facility that was roughly a hundred miles outside of Zootopia.

"This is Parker, en-route to Zootopia. Sand Crawler has been dosed, will be free range within the hour. Target is in old happy-town district, hold on standby for further casualties than planned" His voice gruff as he spoke into the radio, holding no emotion within his words. Glancing to the ground as it passed by quickly, it wouldn't take too long to reach his destination.